

Co-creating Schools of the Future:

Approaching Change in a Canadian Public School System

Through Appreciative Inquiry

“Proefschrift ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit van Tilburg, op gezag van de rector magnificus, prof.dr. Ph. Eijlander, in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties aangewezen commissie in de Ruth First zaal van de Universiteit op maandag 8 februari 2010 om 14.15 uur door Lesley Denise Lahaye, geboren op 9 april 1952 te North Vancouver BC, Canada en om 15.15 uur door Larry Edward Espe, geboren op 24 februari 1958 te Fort St. John BC, Canada”.

Lesley Lahaye

Larry Espe

ABSTRACT

This dissertation questions if our traditions in public education are continuing to serve us well. It explores how asset based conversations made possible through a process of Appreciative Inquiry might help a community to examine its schools, determine what is of greatest value to continue doing, and generate possibilities for action and innovation in order to better prepare students for a future world. At the same time this dissertation explores how the thinking and daily work of two school district administrators is influenced by their experience as co-researchers engaged in a study of Appreciate Inquiry and systems change. It is based on evidence gathered from one school district located in the Province of British Columbia, Canada.

The methodology employed is one of action research with a blend of cooperative and collaborative inquiry. The study begins with a review of the history of a prior change initiative in the school district, through examination of documents and interviews with representative members of the stakeholder groups who were involved with the process at the time. A 4-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry is then implemented with a total of 270 participants, including staff, students, parents and community members. Established protocols for generating data in an Appreciative Inquiry are followed. The researchers and participants collect and reflect on data continuously throughout each of the four stages. Action initiatives arising from the formal Appreciative Inquiry process and from improvisational applications of appreciative thinking and leading are reported. All were found to have potential for positive change, some incremental and some transformational.

Findings suggest that Appreciative Inquiry differs significantly from traditional approaches to change in educational organizations. It is generative rather than prescriptive and involves designing initiatives by people within the community rather than adopting initiatives prescribed by central office. In a public school system where we are in need of innovative practices designed by practitioners in collaboration with their colleagues and stakeholders, the researchers find Appreciative Inquiry to hold promise, both as a framework for change and a philosophy or way of being. The Appreciative Inquiry process has the capacity to create strong community, gain broad participation of staff and stakeholder groups, and initiate inspired actions on behalf of the system.

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PREFACE

A somewhat unique feature of this dissertation is that it is co-authored. It is rare to find two school district central office administrators engaged in collaborative study for doctoral research. Yet, from a social constructionist viewpoint, this makes absolute sense - meaning is socially constructed and understanding is developed through relationship. We have found that this experience has both deepened and accelerated our learning.

Our primary motivation has been to make a difference, not to earn a PhD. By introducing a new process and contributing to the district's repertoire of skills and strategies for facilitating change we hoped to nurture a culture of capacity building through continuous cycles of inquiry. We saw our engagement in the PhD program as an opportunity for more focused learning that would help us to be more effective in this work. Through working together, we have been able to survey a much wider range of literature than we could ever have done working individually. Simply the volume of work required to organize and facilitate a large-scale Appreciative Inquiry process was made more manageable with two co-facilitators. Even the writing has seemed more "doable" when the responsibility was shared by two. We held ourselves accountable to each other and motivated each other to stay on task. Most important though, was the opportunity to work with a thinking partner. We reflected on our readings and observations as the Appreciative Inquiry process unfolded. We had dozens of conversations regarding our philosophy, vision, successes and challenges. We frequently asked questions of ourselves and of each other as we attempted to uncover our assumptions. Individually we made connections to other texts and experiences which, when shared in our research partnership, added richness and new dimensions to our learning.

Communication has been a major goal for us as we attempt to build a culture of trust and transparency in the school district. To keep our seven Board of Education

trustees informed on a regular basis a “Superintendent’s Blog” was developed in April 2007. Of the 125 entries over one third (54) have pertained to our district’s change efforts, the power of words and the importance of relationships. Some entries are simply updates and announcements; others are reflections and musings based on conversations and readings. There have been almost 8000 visits to the blog site at this point with an average of 32 visits per day. The blog can be found at www.leadership.prn.

We have included samples of our reflections, some of the connections we made to other texts, and excerpts from the Superintendent’s Blog entries in the writing of this dissertation. We have attempted to ease the reader in making transitions through the use of text features. The central theme of this action research, approaching change in a public school system through Appreciative Inquiry, is developed through the body of the paper following standard conventions for research writing. Samples of our reflections, illustrating changes in our thinking and personal growth, are presented in italics with an open border. Connections we made to other texts and excerpts from the Superintendent’s Blog entries are presented as shaded print with a closed border.

Chapter One presents the context in which this action research project takes place. It describes the background and experience that we, as two school district administrators working in the public school system, bring to our role as co-researchers. It provides an introduction to the history and culture of public education in our country and province, as well as the school district and surrounding community. Chapter Two provides a review of the current literature on Social Construction and how it relates to education and social change. It also reviews the literature on Appreciative Inquiry, it’s underlying principles and generic processes, and surveys examples of Appreciative Inquiry applied to school settings. Chapter Three presents the dissertation framework with a description of the epistemological orientation, methodology and theoretical perspective underlying it, techniques and procedures for collecting and analyzing data and the steps taken to ensure research quality. Chapter Four reviews the history of a prior attempt to systems change in our school district and how insights from that experience inform our current work. Chapter Five documents implementation of the formal Appreciative Inquiry process and

how the 4-D cycle was adapted to meet the constraints of a school district setting. It includes the presentation and interpretation of data collected, as well as the reflections of the researchers throughout the process. Chapter Six reviews examples of the improvisational application of appreciative thinking and leading in a variety of school district events. Chapter Seven, summary and conclusions, discusses the impact of Appreciative Inquiry on district-wide change in our school system and how engagement in the process has influenced our work as senior administrators.

We wish to acknowledge the many school district staff, students, parents and community members who participated so fully throughout the Appreciative Inquiry process and volunteered to become members of action teams to begin the implementation of new initiatives. Without them, this action research project would not be possible and the exciting work to co-create schools for the future would not be under way. We wish to thank Joanne Daykin and Tony Silbert for co-facilitating our Summit Session and assisting us on our learning journey. We express our sincere gratitude to our families who tolerated the invasion of research work into family time and offered their support and encouragement toward the completion of this project.

About The Cover

The image chosen for the cover is a picture of the graphic recording depicting the root causes of success identified at the Discovery Session of our Appreciative Inquiry process. It serves as a reminder of what is important and why in our schools, as expressed by the many voices representing all of the stakeholders in our community. It provides direction for our work together in shaping schools of the future. We thank Elaine McEachern for the time and creative skills she devoted to the creation of this meaningful graphic.

Chapter 1

CONTEXT

Public Education has not changed significantly in the past one hundred years. Many reforms and initiatives have produced varying degrees of success for certain groups of students. However, the structures and paradigms of the overall system have changed little and many students do not survive, let alone thrive, within it. Educators have spent significant time ‘thinking outside the box’. Inevitably, however, the products of such thinking are generally stuffed back into the box. Our goal is take a look at the root causes of success as described by a variety of learners, and then question the structures that may be in the way. We felt it was time to ask if, in fact, God really did invent the ‘8 x 5’ secondary school timetable and the ‘9:00 to 3:00’ school day.

Stephen Covey refers to the small part of a ship’s rudder known as the ‘trim tab.’ It is the ‘trim tab’ that helps the main rudder begin to move and ultimately turn the ship. Metaphorically speaking, Public Education is a big ship, and we all know that big ships take time to turn. We believe that it is important for us to act as the ‘trim tab’ so that the turning can begin. To be a voice of influence one needs to “be a trim-tab” (Covey, 2004: 126)

By questioning the traditional paradigms of public education we are entering a “brave new dialogue”. A post-modern dialogue that Ken Gergen (1999:19) says is “...dangerous yes, but one both exciting and profound in consequence.” The process described in this dissertation is that of involving students, staff, parents and community

members in asset based conversations about systemic and cultural change in our school district.

1.1 Researcher Biography: Larry Espe

I was born in a northern British Columbia community in the late fifties not long after oil and gas exploration began, the railroad arrived, and the small town began to grow. Before that, my grand parents had emigrated from Norway to British Columbia in 1930 when less than five hundred residents inhabited the same community. They farmed in a valley about fifteen miles north of town. Although my father spent three years in central Alberta going to a Lutheran college, he returned home after graduation. My parents owned and operated a small general store in my father's home village. I attended the two room school there through Grade 7 and then rode the bus in to town for secondary school. At age fifteen I moved away from home to play hockey and, although I returned for Grade 12 and graduation, I never really lived at home again until I returned as a teacher eight years later.

Twenty-eight years ago I started teaching in my hometown. I spent three years teaching intermediate students at an elementary school. Interestingly, my father had purchased his first property from the very man for whom the school was named. For the next ten years I was a teacher and vice-principal at one of the district's two junior secondary schools (this school had been named for the kind country doctor who had removed my dad's ruptured appendix when dad was seven years old). Since that time I was principal at a small rural school for two years, at an in-town elementary school for two more, and finally at the district's other junior secondary school for five years. In

2003 I became the District Assistant Superintendent. In the fall of 2006 I was appointed Superintendent.

Two of my three children graduated from the same secondary school that I did. My youngest daughter is currently in Grade 6 and enrolled in the district's French Immersion Program.

With no real life plan for it to happen this way, I have seen this district from almost every educational perspective including student, parent, teacher, school administrator, and district administrator. As I reflect on the different perspectives from which I've been allowed to view the system, it seems that by definition I would most certainly be considered an 'insider' in terms of Action Research. According to Herr and Anderson's *Continuum and Implications of Positionality*, the work that we are doing would be considered that of researchers studying our own practice and our own practice setting. (Herr and Anderson, 2005: 31-33)

There have been many life experiences that have led me to feel how I do about the possibility that a Social Constructionist intervention such as Appreciative Inquiry has the capacity to create much needed change in public education. Recently, through personal reflection and through reflective dialogue with Lesley Lahaye, my colleague and co-researcher, I have singled out some aspects of my background that I believe might have pointed me in this direction.

Until I was fifteen years old I lived in the back of a small country store with my parents and younger sister. Although I never formally worked for wages, from the time I could see over the counter I served customers, selling everything from soda pop and cigarettes to blue jeans and evaporated milk. I knew that I had to smile even if I didn't

particularly feel like it and that I should look customers in the eye. If possible, I was to call them by name. Recently I spoke to a group of student teachers and suggested to them that by choosing to work with children as teachers they would be on stage every day. Sometimes, I said, you will have to smile even if you don't particularly feel like it. I also said that I believed learning students names on the first day of school was a critical first step toward the establishment of relationships. I could hear my mom's voice behind me.

Perhaps the most powerful professional and personal learning experience took place for me while I was a junior secondary school vice-principal. At thirty years of age, I was considered a relatively young administrator. I had been a teacher at the same school for four years prior and had the reputation with students and staff of being personable and fun loving, and for not taking things too seriously. As vice-principal my job was almost entirely about student discipline. Teachers sent me the 'bad kids'. I inherited a management system based on *Assertive Discipline* that the school had been using for some years. This system was based on the 'talk to the hand' strategy, writing student names on the black board, and office referrals filled out in triplicate. Teachers were to use the 'broken record' or 'talk to the hand' strategy to shut down any student challenge or negative comment during class time. Student names were written on the black board to warn them that they'd been caught doing something wrong. A tick mark by a student's name meant a detention and subsequent ticks resulted in escalating discipline measures. The office referral outlined a series of steps from Step 1, which was basically a warning to the very serious Step 5, which meant referral to the School Board's Student Conduct Committee. Technically, five trips to the office could put a student in

front of an external committee that had the capacity to expel or exclude him or her from our school indefinitely. For severe infractions, such as fighting, the errant student skipped Steps 1 through 3 and was placed immediately at Step 4: a formal, three-day, out of school suspension. Drug and alcohol use was severe enough to warrant Step 5 immediately. The system was quick and relatively easy, “What did you do wrong?... let me check the cook book... ah, yes, you have a 3 day in-school suspension. Next!”

It wasn't long before my conscience was getting the best of me. Although most students (about eighty percent) never had more than one or two referrals in a year, there were others who could go through all five before the end of September. I believed these were the students who needed us most and yet our system seemed to be pushing them away. Through consultation and almost daily dialogue with the school's principal, I began to look at what I felt would be more effective (versus efficient) and, at the same time, be more fair. I happened on Richard Curwin and Allen Mendler's book *Discipline with Dignity* (1988). I've often told people that it was the first work related book that I could not put down. It was a 'page turner' for me. I would read for while, set the book on my lap and think to myself, “I do that... good for me” and then I'd reach a page that made me think, “I did that... I wish I could take it back.”

The book basically gave me the confidence to move toward being pro-active and preventative instead of reactive and punitive. It reminded me of the difference between punishment and a logical consequence. For example, it might make sense for a student who is late to make up the missed time but standing with his nose against the black board might seem less than logical. It challenged me to be thoughtful and to choose the course of action most suited to the student and the situation. Most importantly, it reaffirmed my

instinctive sense that I needed to listen to students. The traditionally monologic vice-principal – student interactions had not proven effective for me.

As hard as I tried, I couldn't win them all. Some students did end up leaving our school but I had made it my goal to shake their hands and let them know that I would welcome them back.

1.2 Researcher Biography: Lesley Lahaye

I was born in the same decade as Larry Espe, my colleague and co-researcher, but was raised near the city in a suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia. I spent the first twenty-two years of my life living in the same home with my family, and attended the neighborhood elementary schools and the local university. Elementary school was very challenging for me. I suffered from recurring middle ear infections and was deaf during most of my first years of instruction. I struggled with reading and writing. I was fortunate to have caring teachers who never gave up on me and, with their help and expertise, I managed to overcome my difficulties. My mother has been a significant role model in my life. Shortly after my birth she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a progressive disease that attacks the central nervous system impacting mobility and sensory skills. Throughout her battle with this disease, she has been a constant example of the power of positive thinking and appreciative living.

Upon receiving my teaching certificate I moved away from home to find a job. I experienced a great deal of satisfaction teaching in small town environments where there is a real sense of community. I spent two years teaching in a remote Inuit village in the Central Arctic. Shortly after arriving, I recall sliding my new key into the book-room

door and turning the lock. My nostrils were instantly filled with the smell of new books. The shelves were stacked to the ceiling with shiny new texts, all showing no signs of use. All new teachers had ordered their favorite texts but, sadly, none had been effective with the Inuit children. It was then that I began to question the value of prescribed curriculum and to search in earnest for ways to build relevance and help connect the strengths and background experiences of students with their new learning.

I moved to this community in 1981 and worked for several years in special education, as a teacher and as an administrator. I am fiercely dedicated to a philosophy of inclusion. One of my most moving experiences in special education was with a deaf-blind child. When he entered Kindergarten in our school district, my colleagues and I seriously doubted that we could ever begin to meet his needs and wondered what we could possibly offer him. I was constantly amazed at what took place when a team of educators, parents and consultants worked collaboratively to design and implement his program. Time after time, we found innovative ways to support his learning and the learning of his peers. I was also very fortunate to experience training in Reading Recovery, an early literacy intervention for students having difficulty in their first year of instruction. Marie Clay, founder of the program, states that if a child is not experiencing success in early reading, we must assume that the teacher has not yet found the right way to teach. Several teachers have benefited from the in depth program of professional development in Reading Recovery, significantly impacting their instructional practice and contributing to the on-going reading success for many students.

However, I am perplexed. How is it that our system and teachers can be so innovative and flexible in these last two examples, but in many others fall short of

serving our students well? There is so much potential, but each year we lose some very capable and talented students. They withdraw because they just cannot seem to connect; they don't 'fit' at school. Is it time to question our traditional approaches to education? How might we do things differently? Is it time to think about a system that fits for kids instead of making kids fit the system? These are questions that I brought with me to my new posting as a district administrator.

When Larry and I moved to the district office and were directed by the Board of Education to begin an initiative on the future of our schools, we became excited. Living in a growing community, we were confronted by the need to find or build new learning space for students. Could the challenge of finding this space also be an opportunity to rethink how to best serve our students? Should we build a school just like any other school? In educating our children, how might we engage our community in a review of what is important and why?

About this time, there was talk of Appreciative Inquiry as a focus for professional development with the British Columbia Superintendents Association. Larry and I were curious about this process for facilitating change and wanted to learn more. We attended foundations training when it was offered in a neighboring province. We participated in the workshop sessions facilitated by Frank Barrett when the association hosted him. I was immediately drawn to this approach. This came at a time when I was facing significant change in both my personal and professional life. The founding principles of Appreciative Inquiry resonated with me. I began applying elements of Appreciative Inquiry at home and at work.

It seemed that Appreciative Inquiry could provide a framework for approaching change in our school district, one that supported the multi-stakeholder involvement that Larry and I felt was so important. It was a fresh approach that offered an alternative to the deficit discourse that we have been so accustomed to in public education.

What would we want our legacy to be? It isn't really about us or how we might be remembered. It's about having made a significant contribution to the school district. If we provide an introduction to Appreciative Inquiry, is it possible that it could become embedded in the culture of the district and continue to be used as a tool for building capacity and promoting positive change, long after we are gone?

Larry and I have often talked about what we want our legacy to be and how we can contribute to our school district. How can we best prepare our students for a future that we will not see and can scarcely predict? Could Appreciative Inquiry help us with this? Could we plant a seed that will grow a tree, the shade of which we will never sit under? Lofty perhaps, but this is our learning journey.

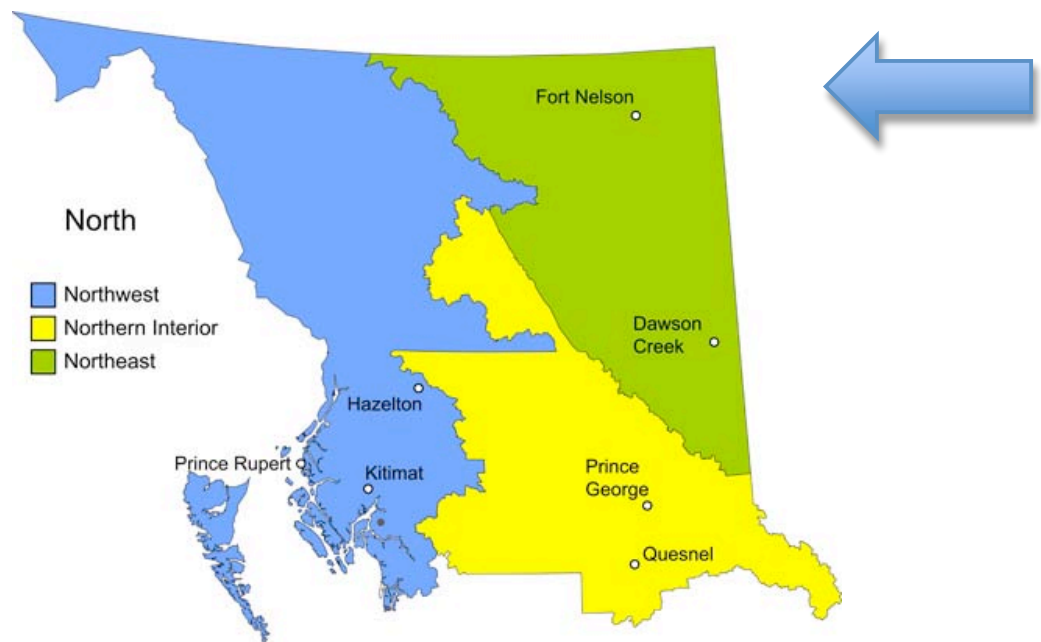
1.3 Regional and District Context

Our district is located in northern British Columbia. To the north, the world famous Alaska Highway winds through miles of forest, mountains and muskeg. Travel east and you will be in British Columbia's version of the Canadian Prairies with its flat farmland stretching to the horizon. Visible to the west are Canada's Rocky Mountains which angle to the southeast below our region to form the bottom half of the British Columbia – Alberta boundary. The Rockies literally, and figuratively, cut us off from the rest of the province.

Map of Canada:



Map of Northern British Columbia:



Because of our location, the culture, economy, industries and attitude of the region more closely resemble that of Alberta than it does the more populous, and temperate, southern and coastal regions of British Columbia. The region is characterized by energy and growth and for several years has enjoyed a positive economic outlook due to rapid development taking place in the petro-chemical, energy, forestry, agricultural and service industries. Thirty-five percent of the labour force is employed in these areas compared to the provincial average of sixteen percent. The population in the area is relatively young with seventy-six percent being under forty-five years of age (the provincial average is sixty-one percent). The average family income (based on the 2006 census) indicates that families in the region earn just over \$7000 more per year than the provincial average, although less than four percent collect a pension compared to the twelve percent provincial average. For the last two years the region's population has grown by three percent, a rate that is double the rest of the province.

The district's largest community has a population of almost 20,000 people. It is home to ten of the district's twenty schools and to the administration office. There are elementary schools in three nearby villages, as well as community schools in four centers that are approximately 100 kilometers from the city. Our Distance Education School serves most of northern British Columbia, the Yukon and parts of the Northwest Territories.

The district's student population has become more diverse in recent years. First Nations and Metis account for eighteen percent of our student population. Of that group,

only one in ten students reside on formal reservations. Our English as a Second Language (ESL) student population has been increasing steadily; however, at three percent it is still low in comparison to more southerly regions of the province. The character of the district is varied, blending rural and urban sensibilities as well as two distinct provincial perspectives in British Columbia and the neighboring province of Alberta.

Although the area is ‘full of people who came for two years but never left’, the reality is that the district’s educators are more transient than in most other regions of the province. The remoteness and extreme winter weather (minus forty degree temperatures) are factors that make both recruitment and retention of teachers a challenge. Educators in the district are younger by about four years and have three years less experience on average than educators in the rest of the province. As a result many orientation and professional development activities require constant replication. On the other hand, every year the district is able to welcome another cohort of youth, energy, fresh ideas and a willingness to try new things.

1.4 British Columbia Ministry of Education Directives

The Ministry of Education in British Columbia was guided by a very high profile Deputy Minister for the past six years until his resignation in January 2008. Ministers of Education are elected officials often with no background or experience in the field of education. The deputy, on the other hand, is required to be a liaison with the field and politicians, and is often chosen for his or her educational background. The outgoing

Deputy is literally in the “Who’s Who” of Canadian education. His consistent message on behalf of the current Liberal government has been to remind educators of the five goals designed to guide the direction of the province. All five goals have major implications for public education; however, the first goal of making British Columbia the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent puts the role of educators front and center. The other goals include:

- leading the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness
- having the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors
- leading the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management, bar none
- to create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada

The deputy minister repeatedly referred to the ‘main thing’ being student achievement. He repeatedly spoke of the “**alls**” and the “**anys**”. It is about **all** students, **all** learning and **all** achievements, and that learning must take place at **any** time, at **any** place and at **any** pace. He felt that as a province we have the opportunity to do things differently and to make a greater difference in the life chances of every student.

During the past two years, the Ministry of Education has acted in an attempt to reach the above goals. There has been increased accountability designed to improve student achievement. Boards are responsible to submit yearly Achievement Contracts to the ministry that outline the specific goals, objectives, performance indicators, and targets for the year. Results must be reported and strategies considered to be ‘high yield’ are also to be included.

Schools in the province of British Columbia are expected to elect School Planning Councils each year. These councils, consisting of the school principal, a teacher and three elected parents, are responsible for the development of their schools' yearly School Improvement Plan. Although the goal of these councils is to increase parental involvement beyond that of more traditional parent groups (i.e. Parent Advisory Councils, Parent Teacher Associations) there have been some challenges. Some schools are unable to attract three committed parents and some schools do not have a teacher member because the British Columbia Teacher's Federation does not support the concept.

Until two years ago each district's elected trustees were referred to as "School Boards". They are now called "Boards of Education". The name change has significant ramifications. The implications are that the mandate for these "Boards" has broadened to include more than just the students in Kindergarten through Grade 12. The Board's new mandate now includes programs such as *ReadNowBC* which consists of components including early learning success in young children, reading success in schools, reading success for adults and reading success for Aboriginal people.

Recent findings regarding childhood obesity and reduced life expectancy have prompted the provincial government to charge Boards of Education with the improvement of student health and wellbeing. Daily physical activity is now a requirement in schools. Junk food was to be eliminated by September 2008 and be replaced by healthy snack programs. Smoking has been banned on all school property and enforcement is an expectation.

The newly appointed Deputy Minister of Education, at a recent meeting with superintendents, outlined the government's priorities and the expanded mandate for

Boards of Education. These priorities include: Achievement, Accountability, Autonomy, Choice, Parental Involvement, and Building Relationships with Aboriginal Peoples and Communities. Specifically acknowledged in the mandate are: Early Learning, Life-long Learning, Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap, Healthy Living, Safe Schools, and Climate Change. His message is consistent with that of his predecessor.

1.5 District History

Our community is a relatively young city in northern British Columbia. To many of those living in the southern part of the province closer to Vancouver the city is considered a frontier town populated by oil field workers and lumberjacks. It surprises most people to hear that the city is one of the oldest non-native settlements in British Columbia, as well as one of the oldest native settlements. Seven kilometers north of the city, archaeologists uncovered artifacts from a native settlement that was active there more than 10,500 years ago. The Hudson's Bay Company established a fur trading post in the area only two years after Captain George Vancouver explored the southern coast of the province in 1791.

In 1913, the first settlers arrived to take up farmland in the Peace River area but it wasn't until the Second World War, and the building of the Alaska-Canada Military Highway (the Alaska Highway or Alcan), that the village started to grow. In 1939 the local weekly newspaper described the town as a cluster of granaries, rude cabins and dirt trails. Thanks to the highway, between 1942 and 1950 the population grew from 700 to 1600 residents. In 1951, after a drilling crew discovered natural gas in the region, transportation improved rapidly. In 1952, a highway was cut through the Rocky

Mountains and finally connected the region to the rest of British Columbia. The Pacific Great Eastern Railway arrived in 1958. That ease of transportation allowed the region's agricultural and forest industries to compete in distant markets. The city now has a population nearing 20,000 and serves a regional population of around 60,000.

In 1934 an Educational Administrative Area was created. Prior to that there had been more than sixty “single-school” school districts in the region. Most of these were one-room schools.

In the 1940's the city itself had only one school. There are now six elementary schools (Grades K-7), two junior secondary schools (Grades 8-10), and one senior secondary school (Grades 11-12) within the city limits. The decision to build junior secondary schools was made in the early 1960's. Space was the apparent driving force. In fact, the first junior secondary school was forced to operate a half-day shift system only six years after it was built. This was necessary to accommodate student overflow while the second junior secondary school was being constructed. The current grade configuration for city schools has been in place for over forty years.

As mentioned earlier, the Rocky Mountains provide a psychological, as well as physical, barrier between the region and the southern part of the province. It is challenging for northern districts to overcome the stigma and/or mythology that is often in the minds of our southern neighbours. Stories of living in igloos and living solely on moose meat are far too easy to sell. The southern perception is illustrated well in a 1970 article in the local newspaper. The article captures some of the uniqueness of the district. The headline reads, “Atta boy, Jack! Give ‘em hell.” The article repeats a letter to the editor of one of Vancouver's daily newspapers, the *Vancouver Province*, written by the

chairman of the school board at the time. His letter had been written in response to two articles published in the *Province*, which described the district as fifty years behind Vancouver in the realm of education. Following are some excerpts from the article:

I have read with some astonishment two consecutive articles in your paper written by your staff reporter in which he pictures the bitterness of life in our land. One of these articles even made your front page, - you must be pretty hard up for material. It makes me wonder how much credence can be placed in the average newspaper story... We, in the north, don't mind a bit of friendly ribbing from you fellows down in your little smog-bound corner of the province. We should cut off your gas to smarten you up every now and then but we tolerate you. So what if our weather is a little brisk in the middle of January! Our sky is blue, the sun is bright, the air is clean and fresh, and that's the way we like it. Maybe we did have one mean grizzly bear but he was an exception – in general our bears are just as polite as yours. Your reporter feels we are 50 years and 100 degrees Fahrenheit behind Vancouver – the 50 years being in the realm of education. This observation seems to be based mainly on the fact that a few of our outlying schools are without 'modern facilities'. Now, Mr. Editor, our school district comprises almost 15,000 square miles of area. It is one of the last regions in Canada where settlers are able to stake Crown land for farming or ranching... In spite of our 'backwardness' we have some of the top schools in the province. The last

thing we need here is a bunch of crybabies. If young men can't stand the north (though some seem to enjoy it), we'll have to look to our young women. They're probably tougher anyway.

Many residents of the area have developed what is generally considered this 'can-do spirit' and make a conscious effort not to be out done by cousins to the south. Recent prosperity in the region, particularly due to oil and gas production, has fueled the region's desire to be on the cutting edge. It is common to hear that 'we don't wait around for Vancouver's hand-me-downs up here'.

In 1998 and 1999 the district initiated a move to restructure grade configurations at the secondary level. The ultimate goal of the Board was to change the two city Grade 8 to 10 junior secondary schools and the existing Grade 11 and 12 senior high school into three separate Grade 8 to 12 secondary schools. Committees were struck, public meetings were held, and written feedback was invited. Unable to garner sufficient public and staff support, the district eventually tabled the proposal. This prior attempt to systems change is reviewed in more detail in Chapter 4.

In 2004 the school board charged the new superintendent and district staff with the task of once again considering whether or not the current grade configuration was educationally optimal. While some informal conversations took place, and some administrators attended conferences specifically pertaining to the concept of middle school, it was not until early in 2007 that any real discussion or planning took place at the district level.

There is an old saying that ‘hindsight is 20/20’. However, looking back on the process, it seems to correspond closely with Barrett and Fry’s (2005) description of change that is decided upon by a small group of people who are privy to pertinent information and who have time to analyze it. The same group of people become advocates for the proposed change and then defend their position. The “Decide-Advocate-Defend” (D.A.D) cycle is one that our team hopes to avoid.

The list of reasons for needing to change was entirely focused on the system’s problems. Focusing on poor exam scores, limited program options, parents opting for private schools, student withdrawal rates and increasingly challenging student behavior seemed to give some people the impression that the organization was beyond repair while putting others, especially teachers and administrators, on the defensive.

In June 2006, almost seven years after the Reconfiguration Discussion had been tabled, the district was on the verge of another senior administrative change. With the superintendent’s announced retirement the traditional speculation regarding who would replace him began in earnest. These conversations also included discussion of a possible personnel shuffle if the Board decided to hire an internal candidate. Board deliberation regarding the process dragged into a third week. As members of the senior administrative team, we, the co-researchers, were both asking ourselves the same questions; “Will the Board offer me the job?” and “Will I accept it should they offer?” During a long drive to and from a meeting with other northern colleagues, we contemplated the change. We spoke for seven hours each way about what the district direction should look like if, in fact, we were given the opportunity to lead it.

We agreed that building a culture of respect at all levels, and rethinking how we operated as a district staff would be priorities. We felt that we would need to create a district team made up of people who possessed complimentary strengths. We talked about delineating mandates and portfolios based on those strengths and passions. We talked about what we felt we needed to model as a team. This included collaboration and group skills that would value input from all stakeholder groups and that would allow their voices to be heard. Although it may sound trite, we felt strongly that we must model trustworthiness and transparency. Interestingly, though neither of us had heard of Appreciative Inquiry at the time, we talked at length about the importance of being positive and of recognizing the strengths in our community. We also talked about perpetual optimism being a ‘force multiplier’. We agreed that the words ‘horrendous’ and ‘nightmare’ should not be used at meetings because of their tendency to literally suck the energy out of a room. The other goal for us as models would be to treat everyone with dignity and respect. In general, with education being the most ‘people’ of the ‘people businesses’, we felt that we needed to consider how we treated one another.

We reflected on the challenges presented to us by John Abbott of the 21st Century Learning Initiative. We had heard him speak at a conference in Victoria two years previous and he had since visited our district on two occasions to talk with students, parents and staff about the need for a sea change in public education. According to Abbott (2008), “the 21st Century Learning Initiative's essential purpose is to facilitate the emergence of new approaches to learning that draw upon a range of insights into the human brain, the functioning of human societies, and learning as a self-organizing activity. We believe this will release human potential in ways that nurture and form

democratic communities worldwide, and will help reclaim and sustain a world supportive of human endeavour.” John Abbott inspired some incredibly exciting ‘outside the box’ conversations in our district; so much so that we couldn’t help but feel that we may not need the box at all. A poem by A. R. Ammons (1965) expresses the same frustrations:

*Don't establish the
boundaries
first,
the squares, triangles,
boxes
of preconceived
possibility,
and then
pour
life into them, trimming
off left-over edges,
ending potential.*

1.6 Expanding our View of Social Responsibility

Since 2001, when British Columbia’s Ministry of Education updated its Accountability Framework, almost every district and school in the province has stated the same three yearly goals in their District Accountability Contracts and School Improvement Plans. The goals are: Literacy, Numeracy and Social Responsibility. Our

district followed suit until 2005 when some thoughtful conversations changed the order and put Social Responsibility at the top of the list.

A district committee made up of teachers and administrators had been meeting regularly to discuss Social Responsibility concerns and possibilities. Generally the topic of discussion was student discipline and classroom management. A paradigm shift from being reactive and punitive to being pro-active and preventative was spreading in pockets from school to school. Concepts such as discipline with dignity and positive behaviour interventions and support were beginning to be recognized as an attitude, or way of being rather than systems or cookie cutter strategies. Safe and friendly schools, where positive relationships exist, were being recognized as foundational to student achievement in academic areas. Social Responsibility could not be taken for granted.

Further discussion led us to a much broader view of what Social Responsibility actually is. Ultimately, it is much more than classroom or schoolyard behaviour. John Abbott's presentations regarding the sustainability of the planet, and the urgency for us to become thoughtful and collaborative citizens on its behalf, prompted serious discussions regarding the importance of Social Responsibility. In the words of Ken Gergen (1999: 50), "If we are to build together toward a more viable future then we must be prepared to doubt everything we have accepted as real, true, right, necessary or essential." John Abbott challenged us to stop buying our kids so much 'stuff' and to consider that our generation has been 'eating the earth's seed corn.'

“Sustainability”

I grew up in a small village. My parents owned and operated a general store. The freight truck came on Wednesdays. It was my job to display the weekly “specials.” I would stack cans of creamed corn, pork and beans, tomato soup etc. into pyramid formations and make cute signs that said “3 for \$1.00” (or something appropriate for things on “special”).

I was in a big box store in a few weeks ago. At the front door the weekly “special” was stacked in a pyramid formation. The difference was that this modern pyramid was made up of 45” big screen televisions and the sign said something like “No Payments Until 2011!” I couldn’t help but wonder how many people went into that store simply shopping for dog food or toothpaste only to come out with yet another TV and two or three thousand more dollars debt.

John Abbott, who visited our district three times in the past three years, said that we needed to stop buying our kids “stuff.” Are we setting a good example?

In a recent “letter to the editor” a lady from Chemainus, B.C. suggests that the best gift we can give to our children is the future. Her article mentioned a website called www.storyofstuff.com... I watched it tonight. It’s about 20 minutes long and it is from a U.S. perspective, but if you have time click here to watch it.

I wonder if the video includes some things to consider as we talk about the future of our schools and our community?

In 2005, our district became the first in the province to list Social Responsibility as its Number One goal on the year's Accountability Contract. To some it may have seemed to be simply semantics; however, we felt that listing it first was critical. Just as the items farther down on a Saturday morning 'to-do' list are often never done, we felt that we couldn't take that risk with Social Responsibility.

The outside the box thinking that John Abbott inspired, also had us talking about cognitive apprenticeships as a learning style. If the apprenticeship model was working for trades such as welding, electrical and carpentry why couldn't it work for courses pertaining to health care, teacher training, geomatics and more? We started to question traditional North American secondary school structures. Abbot presented work from Thomas Hine's *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* which suggests that secondary schools are more convenient than they are effective.

Are Teenagers Necessary? Modern society seems to have moved, without skipping a beat, from blaming our parents for the ills of society, to blaming our children. For most of our history, the labors of young people in their teens was too important to be sacrificed – 'schooling' for teenagers remained a minority activity until well into the twentieth century. In fact teenagers can be seen to be an invention of the Machine Age. It was Roosevelt's solution to the Depression years to take teenagers out of the jobs that could be done by formerly unemployed family men by requiring all early teenagers to attend High School. But, for very many youngsters, High School, which virtually defines the rise of the teenagers, is hardly an exalted place (Hine, 1999: 1-9).

These ideas prompt us to question traditional school timetables, school days, school calendars and prescribed curriculum.

At present there are differences of opinion ... for all peoples do not agree as to the things that the young ought to learn, either with a view to virtue or with a view to the best life, nor is it clear whether their studies should be regulated more with regard to intellect or with regard to character.

Aristotle

Is it possible that because, since Aristotle's time, public education seems to have dealt with its seemingly unending issues and concerns by using a problem centered approach, we have committed ourselves to generation after generation of debate, argument and change for change's sake? Is it possible that with a different strategy we could approach our own issues in a way that would help us to make transformative change happen for the sake of our children, our communities and, in fact, the world?

"We are not blind! We are men and women with eyes and brains... and we don't have to be driven hither and thither by the blind workings of The Market, or of History, or of Progress, or of any other abstraction."

Fritz Schumacher (1973)

It was while we were in this questioning frame of mind that we discovered the concept of Appreciative Inquiry and the theory upon which it is based, Social Constructionism.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Construction: An Overview

We begin with a review of the literature on social constructionism, which provides the theoretical underpinnings for the current project. Social constructionism refers to a body of thought and practice which has emerged from scholars working within some social science and natural science disciplines over the past twenty five years. It is represented by an umbrella of terms and approaches such as post-Enlightenment, poststructuralism, postmodernism, contemporary hermeneutics, and discursive psychology, to mention a few.

Social construction by its' nature, defies a single definition. "While social construction is neither authored by any single individual or group, nor singular and unified, there is substantial sharing across communities" (Gergen & Gergen, 2004: 7). The common thread that ties these communities together is the basic idea that "we construct the world" and that language is the primary vehicle through which we make sense of it (Gergen & Gergen, 2004: 8). Embedded in this idea are some key assumptions, one or more of which are shared within the social constructionist community (Burr, 2003: 2 – 5);

- A critical stance toward taken-for-granted
- Historical and cultural specificity
- Knowledge is sustained by social processes

- Knowledge and social action go together

Social constructionism calls for a questioning perspective of traditional truths and assumptions, which we tend to passively accept in our day-to-day lives, and the foundations on which they are based. It invites us to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective observation of the world. It is critical of the Western tradition of individualism, where the individual is seen as an autonomous knower who can create or discover knowledge to be passed on to others (Anderson, 2007). Instead, it suggests that for any state of affairs a potentially unlimited number of descriptions and explanations are possible, any one of which may be ruled superior (Gergen, 1999).

From a social construction perspective, our knowledge of the world is tied specifically to history and culture. In other words, our ways of understanding are actually products of a culture and period of history, dependent upon prevailing conditions at a particular time. Vivian Burr states, “the particular forms of knowledge that abound in any culture are therefore artifacts of it, and we should not assume that our ways of understanding are necessarily any better, in terms of being any nearer the truth, than other ways (Burr, 2003, p. 4).” Social constructionists do not believe in the existence of universal truths, also referred to as Truth with a capital T or Transcendental Truth. Instead, they embrace truth with a small t, or truths that find expression through the traditions, values, and ways of being of a particular group (Gergen & Gergen, 2004). Social constructionist thought invites a kind of radical pluralism (Gergen & Gergen, 2004: 21).

Because there is no foundation for claiming superiority of one’s own tradition,

one is invited into a posture of curiosity and respect for others. What do other traditions offer that are not contained in one's own, what can be shared of our own that may be of value to others?

Social Constructionists are not likely to enter an argument over determining right from wrong with the intent of eliminating what is bad. They are more likely to enter a dialogue where there is potential for a new form of reality to emerge.

Another key assumption of social constructionists is that shared versions of knowledge become fabricated through the daily interactions between people in their social lives. Common understanding or meaning is not derived from the individual mind, or objective observations of the world, but built through relationship. Gergen elaborates (Gergen, 1999: 48):

The individual mind (thought, experience) does not originate meaning, create language, or discover the nature of the world. Meanings are born of coordinations among persons – agreements, negotiations, affirmations. From this standpoint, relationships stand prior to all that is intelligible. Nothing exists for us – as an intelligible world of objects and persons – until there are relationships.

This relational knowledge may also be called local or participatory knowledge. Harleen Anderson suggests that relational knowledge is neither static nor developed through a

passive process. The knowledge created with each other is “fluid, continually evolving, shifting, broadening, and changing”, and has no finality (Anderson, 2007: 9).

Understandings developed by a community of persons and relationships may take on many different forms, making it possible for numerous social constructions of the world to exist. Each different social construction invites a different kind of action (Burr, 2003). In this sense, knowledge and action are inseparable. An idea cannot exist by itself inside one’s head. It is not until it is communicated and responded to by another that it begins to acquire meaning. Gergen suggests, “To sustain our traditions – including those of self, truth, morality, education, and so on – depends on a continuous process of generating meaning together. If we wish to maintain our traditions in a world of rapid global change, we confront the everyday task of sustaining intelligibility” (Gergen, 1999: 49). In maintaining our traditions, we rely on words and actions from our past. Yet, we are not bound or limited by our history. This is where social constructionism offers a bold invitation. At the same time as we address the challenge of maintaining valued traditions, we have the potential to build new futures, to offer new possibilities for action.

Some would argue that social constructionism threatens our very existence by challenging all that we believe as true and good, leaving us in a state of uncertainty and chaos. Social constructionists, however, are united by a sense of hope and promise. While we need to be cautious and critical of what we have come to believe, we have the opportunity to reconstruct in a better way. “Standing before us is a vast spectrum of possibility, an endless invitation to innovation” (Gergen & Gergen, 2004: 12). We can explore “new spaces of understanding from which a more promising world can emerge” (Gergen, 1999: vi).

2.2 Social Construction and Language

Since social constructionists view language as the primary vehicle through which the reality of our shared world is constructed, they give it very serious regard. Much has been written about the nature of language and the importance of narrative. Social constructionists propose that words are much more than utterances containing information; they are resources that actually shape how people experience their world. Frank Barrett and Ron Fry (2005: 42) explain, “In conversations together we create the organizational world that we then experience as normal and real, and we create the world through the words we have available to us”.

Pioneer work on the influence of language in shaping our experience is credited to German philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein (2001) used the metaphor of ‘language games’ to show how the words we use are governed by systems of rules or conventions. These rules include not just grammar, but also content. To make sense, one must participate in the local convention, which essentially limits freedom of speech.

Wittgenstein viewed ‘language games’ as embedded in ‘forms of life’, or broader patterns of activity in human relationships. Different professional or social groups engage in different forms of life, each with their own specific vocabulary. The focus of conversation is shaped by the words available and family of terms deemed appropriate. As Barrett and Fry (2005: 43) suggest, “a single word is never a single word, but rather a link to a world view”, so changing the vocabulary in a community could have powerful consequences. For example, in public education we talk about school readiness and

concern ourselves with children ‘at-risk’. We administer diagnostic tests and attempt to remediate identified deficiencies. Instead, what if we were to reframe children ‘at-risk’ as children ‘at-promise’? Rather than identifying deficiencies, we could be uncovering strengths. How might our responses be different if our focus was to nurture and expand a child’s strengths so that their weaknesses became irrelevant? For example, Paul Houston (2007) suggests that we bring the inherent talents that many of our underperforming children demonstrate during out-of-school activities into the classroom, by helping teachers focus on the children’s assets.

The important point is that we cannot underestimate the power of language. It has the potential to limit or to expand our thinking and to close or to open doors to action. The words we use influence what we notice and how we interpret our experiences, and even have the ability to transform us. “When we create new stories, new metaphors, and new language, we are changing the very fabric of an organization” (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 43).

In acknowledging the power of language, social constructionists point to the importance of narrative and stories as a medium for constructing our world. “Stories form, inform, and reform our sources of knowledge and views of reality. Narrative and story become the way we imagine alternatives and create possibilities” (Anderson, 2007: 16). The tradition of story telling has been with us for hundreds of years and has long been recognized as an effective means of learning for both children and adults. We find ourselves drawn to good stories and we learn things at different levels through hearing and telling stories. Jane Watkins and Bernard Mohr (2001: 77) acknowledge Laura Simms eloquent description of the levels of learning made possible through stories:

Storytelling has the capacity to directly engage the heart and imagination in such a way that a deeper level of listening is activated, which opens the eyes of perception. The greatest value that arises from a story does not arise from the content of the story text. That is the apparent value. The deepest learning happens in the unspoken story that is generated by the mind mixing images called forth during the telling, and, the space of timeless sacredness experienced in the process. The thinking mind is kept entranced by the content, while the images dip down and uncover and awaken the dreaming imagination and intuitive intelligence of the listener.

Stories can give shape to our hopes, dreams and fears and remind us of important values. Stories provide a sense of coherence. “The past, present, and future are not separate unconnected stages, but rather beginnings, middles, and endings – parts, in other words, of a story in progress” (Barrett & Fry, 2005:50). Stories often connect with our emotions and remain very vivid in our memories. Personal stories tend to generate acceptance as opposed to resistance.

If it is “your story, your experience,” then I can scarcely say “you are wrong.” However, if you confront me with an abstract principle our common traditions of argumentation prepare me for resistance. By flogging me a principle you set yourself up as a mini-god, issuing commandments from on high. My resentment

will trigger a counter attack that you will find equally offensive (Gergen, 1999: 159)

The act of sharing stories builds bonds and contributes to the development of positive relationships.

Social constructionist thought has impacted professional practices in a wide variety of disciplines. Of particular interest to the current project, are examples of social constructionism applied to education and organizational development.

2.3 Social Construction and Education

Few would argue that the future of our world rests with our children. Western culture takes the education of its' youth very seriously and sees the provision of a strong public education system, with open access to all children, as an important goal. But do we want to prepare our children to be the best *in* the world, or the best *for* the world? Social constructionists point out that current teaching practice has changed little from traditional education, where teaching and learning “remain within the dominant individualist discourse of our culture” (McNamee, 2007: 315). The focus is on individual students to whom teachers convey knowledge and then assess for mastery. This kind of system will likely only create young adults who fit into our already existing world and who may be ill prepared for a future that we can scarcely predict.

Paulo Friere (1985) regards traditional education as a “nutritionist model”. In such a model experts (scholars and researchers) dispense truths or knowledge as healthy food for students. Curriculum designers package the knowledge into units. Educational administrators select units. Teachers serve the educational nutrients to the students who

are expected to consume the knowledge. If we take this metaphor one step further, students are then required to regurgitate the knowledge they have consumed onto a system-wide test. In this kind of system, there is little room for creativity and innovation. Yet these are the qualities that are receiving more and more attention as necessary prerequisites for survival in our future world.

In advocating for more effective education, Friere saw dialogue as a type of classroom pedagogy. He believed that dialogue permitted students and teachers to learn from each other in environments of respect and equality. Furthermore, he believed that dialogue could not only deepen understanding, it could lead to transformational change - making the world a better place.

Jerome Bruner (2000) argues that education should shift its' focus to helping students become "better architects and better builders" so that they can not only thrive in a future world, but help to shape it. He states that education must be conceived as aiding young humans in learning to use the tools of meaning making and reality construction, to better adapt to the world and to help in the process of changing it as required. He recognizes that this is particularly challenging when our educational system essentially de-contextualizes learning. Unlike any other species, human beings choose to teach in settings outside the ones in which the knowledge being taught will be used (Bruner, 2000).

Bruner (2000) suggests that one way to make a shift from a transmission model of education is to recognize that a classroom is a community of learners, where students can be actively involved in helping each other learn, according to their strengths and abilities. In this kind of environment students have the opportunity to learn not just content but

other important life skills such as good judgment, self-reliance, and how to work well with others. These life skills are unlikely to be developed in a system where knowledge is spoon fed to students. Bruner (2000) goes on to say that in classrooms operating as a community of learners, the role and authority of the teacher is not reduced but expanded to encouraging others to share it.

Like Bruner, Sheila McNamee speaks to the need for education to shift from a model of transmission to one of transformation. “We should educate children so that they can learn not only how to live in the world but how to create the future. We should educate adults so they can provide children with resources for engaged citizenship” (McNamee, 2007: 316). In writing on relational practices in education, McNamee explores how to approach teaching as a form of practice, activity and conversation, rather than a technique for conveying knowledge. As a university professor, McNamee talks about changes she has made in her own teaching practice. In moving from a lecture to a conversational model of teaching, she finds a higher level of enthusiasm and engagement experienced by her students and herself. She has become less focused on course content and the best way to teach it, and more attentive to the process of teaching and the development of a teaching relationship with the students. She advocates for the use of improvisation in teaching. “Emphasizing the teaching relationship and the multiplicity of voices, relations, communities, and experiences present in any learning context highlights not only the variation in what counts as excellence and what counts as knowledge, but also highlights the need for improvisation in education” (McNamee, 2007: 320). In order to be responsive to the needs of students, a teacher cannot rely on following a script prepared in advance. While planning is important, there must be room to use some of the

material, discard some, and acknowledge what is developed in collaboration with the students.

McNamee (2007: 326) goes on to suggest four resources for collaborative educational conversation and relational learning: (a) avoiding abstract principles, (b) privileging narrative forms, (c) fostering community, and (d) blurring the boundaries between the classroom and life. She finds it helpful to enter an area of study by initiating inquiry among students into their own experiences and understandings of the subject matter. She also invites students to explore concepts through situated activities rather than abstract discussion. McNamee suggests another way to avoid abstractions is through the use of personal narrative. When teachers and students explore a topic of learning through personal stories, a rich variety of perspectives can be uncovered and curiosities indulged. Observations made and questions posed in response to stories shared, may provoke new understandings. The sharing of personal narratives also furthers the development of a learning community and fosters a collaborative culture. McNamee sees this kind of learning environment build the relational resources that help students connect their education with their lives outside of school. Ultimately we want students to have the opportunity to engage in projects and activities that permit them to illustrate how what they are learning has meaning beyond the classroom and is relevant to contemporary society (McNamee, 2007: 329). Educators have developed ways to link school with community through a variety of opportunities such as work experience, community service, apprenticeship programs, inter-generational learning projects, and learning communities networked via technology, to name a few.

Gergen advocates a shift from monologue to dialogue as the primary form of teaching. He says “the classroom is no longer my ship; I am no longer its commander. I have shed the traditional vision of individual minds, of the knowing teacher and ignorant student, of teaching as a cause of learning” (Gergen, 2009: 322). He favours a dialogic orientation to teaching over “canned lectures” and power-point presentations where teachers abandon their status as ultimate knowers and enter into dialogue among students as their equal. Such dialogue results in higher levels of engagement and the generation of new ideas.

Kenneth Bruffee (1999) sees education from the view of social constructionism. He proposes that knowledge is grounded in conversations among members of knowledge communities. As such, knowledge is the common property of a culture or a sub-culture. These knowledge communities are not static; they are constantly changing and evolving. Learning begins as initiation into the culture represented by a child’s family, and education is a process of re-acculturation into a growing network of increasingly sophisticated knowledge communities. This theory of knowledge challenges the traditional roles of teachers and students. Teachers are seen not as the deliverers of information, but as agents of cultural change who foster re-acculturation by encouraging interdependence among students. Bruffee maintains that students and teachers must learn collaboratively. Learning collaboratively is more thorough, deep and efficient than learning alone. Collaborative learning involves joint intellectual effort by students or students and teachers. Learners engage in a common task in which each individual depends on and is accountable to each other. The teacher takes on the role of facilitator or co-learner. Students learn to depend on one another rather than depending exclusively on

the authority and expertise of teachers.

Collaborative learning is as relevant to adults as it is to students. Strong teachers are often those cited as demonstrating a life-long commitment to on-going learning. Some of the most powerful learning for practicing teachers is reported to take place in Professional Learning Communities. Professional Learning Communities are defined as “educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (Dufour, Dufour & Eaker, 2008: 14). Teachers in professional learning communities do not work in isolation and are not dependent on prescribed system changes. By examining student work with their colleagues and engaging in professional dialogue, they seek answers to their most pressing questions and adjust their teaching practices accordingly. Teachers in professional learning communities “grow, develop, adapt and take charge of change so that they can control their own futures” (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003: 131). With the advent of technology it has now become possible for learning communities to be networked and for collaboration to take place virtually. Opportunities for collaborative learning have expanded exponentially.

If meaning is socially constructed and collaborative learning is an effective model for the education of students and the professional development of teachers, then it makes sense that a joint dissertation completed by co-researchers in a doctoral program is both a natural and scholarly process.

2.4 Social Construction and Organizational Development

Two specific areas of organizational development where social constructionism is particularly relevant are leadership and change management. Much has been written about the importance of effective leadership in contributing to the successes of organizations. How does social constructionism relate to effective leadership? The same criticism that social constructionists have of the Western tradition of individualism can be applied to leadership. The typical view of organizational leadership is one where “leaders exert an influence over their followers, and effective leaders are those who inspire and direct in ways that bring about organizational success” (Gergen and Gergen, 2004: 53). This view of leadership does not consider that meaning is socially constructed. Instead, leadership should be regarded as a relational process. The Gergens refer to the work of Wilfred Drath and describe relational leadership as what emerges “when people in dialogue create leadership roles and leadership activities among themselves” (Gergen & Gergen, 2004: 54). Leadership is considered an aspect of the community, not possessed by an individual but distributed among participants. When leadership is distributed, different individuals in an organization step into a leadership role when they have expertise, special skills or resources that are helpful for the task at hand. There is the potential for less resistance among members of the organization because they have a personal investment in the practices. Praise and blame may also be more evenly distributed (Gergen & Gergen, 2004: 55). Distributed leadership fosters collaborative decision-making. Information is more likely to be shared, rather than hoarded or

manipulated, creating the potential for a climate of trustworthiness and honesty to flourish.

Change management has been widely studied in the field of organizational development. Successful organizations are those which carefully monitor measures of output, productivity, and customer satisfaction and are open to implementing both small and wide scale changes found necessary in order to improve performance and remain competitive. Typically, however, organizational development techniques utilize a deficit orientation in their approach to change management. The focus is on problem solving, in order to get better. Barrett and Fry refer to these techniques as “problem-centric” (2005: 19). The process involves discovering a symptom, diagnosing a cause, analyzing the problems, developing possible solutions, and then prescribing a treatment. “The underlying metaphor is that the organization is ill and that the manager or consultant is a physician whose purpose is to generate a healing prescription” (Barrett and Fry, 2005: 19).

A constructionist perspective suggests that this kind of problem talk is “optional”. The Gergens (2004: 57) remind us, “There are only problems if we construct the world this way. And because problem talk often leads us away from our goals, we can ask whether there are other forms of talk more effective for the organization.” Constructionists view organizational change as relational, a process best implemented through the development of shared meaning rather than problem solving. Members of an organization have the ability to build capacity by generating new understandings, which provide the basis for new action. As the Gergens state, “the challenge of change, then, is the challenge of generating new conversations” (2003: 160).

Appreciative inquiry offers an exciting alternative to a problem solving approach to organizational change, one that consciously shifts from a deficit to a positive orientation. Diane Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom (2003: 2) explain that appreciative inquiry is based on the following important premises:

- People individually and collectively have unique gifts, skills, and contributions to bring to life.
- Organizations are human social systems, sources of unlimited relational capacity, created and lived in language.
- The images we hold of the future are socially created and, once articulated, serve to guide individual and collective actions.
- Through human communication (inquiry and dialogue) people can shift their attention and action away from problem analysis to lift up worthy ideals and productive possibilities for the future.

Appreciative inquiry originated approximately twenty years ago through the work of David Cooperrider and colleagues at Case Western Reserve University. Several years of field research have contributed to its continued growth and development. Implementation of Appreciative Inquiry typically involves working through a series of stages, known as the “4-D cycle” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1998). The cycle begins by

inviting members of an organization (involving as many voices as possible) to share their personal narratives or stories of what is good and what has worked well in the past. This sharing of stories of success creates a positive relational space. It is from this context that participants are then asked to talk about their hopes and dreams for the future of the organization. Once a shared vision is articulated based on common values, plans are made for actions that will help to put this vision into practice.

As the Gergens summarize, “transformation takes place in an atmosphere of excitement and mutual caring” (2003:160). Barrett and Fry (2005) suggest that there is little opportunity for creativity and innovation when the focus is on removing or repairing deficits, and organizations using this approach can at best move from low to average performance. Appreciative Inquiry, however, focuses on generating dynamics that have the potential to move organizations from good to exceptional. “Capacity building, for us, is the process of elaborating and expanding on a system’s strengths – usually closely tied to cooperative acts – in order to move that system from good to great, from doing well to always winning, from constantly correcting to forever innovating” (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 19).

Since Appreciative Inquiry is a key component of this research project, it will be reviewed more thoroughly in the next section. What is important to note at this point is that Appreciative Inquiry is much more than a tool for organizational change or a method for building cooperative capacity; it is a philosophy, “a way of seeing and being” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001: xxvii). It has grown in popularity and use across the world and has been applied in a variety of forms in a range of contexts.

An optimal venue for the application of appreciative thought and practice is the domain of leadership. Schiller, Holland, and Riley (2002) explore this topic in their book, *Appreciative Leaders: In the Eye of the Beholder*. Schiller et al studied the qualities and attributes of appreciative leaders through surveys and written interviews. Cooperrider suggests that the stories in this book are stories of leaders “who lead by valuing, not evaluating, and who create change by synthesizing or combining capacities (not breaking apart the problematic) and by imagining the new, the better, the possible in ways that compel, transcend and uplift” (Cooperrider in Schiller, Holland & Riely, 2002: x). These leaders embody what Peter Druker (2007) talked about when he said that the task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths that make people’s weaknesses irrelevant. More specifically, Schiller et al (2002: 162) report that five key themes emerged from integrating interview and survey information that capture the characteristics of appreciative leaders:

- Appreciative leaders are belief-based, with an explicit spiritual orientation and practice.
- Leadership lives in the group and not in any one person.
- Multiple truths exist in ways of thinking, doing, and being.
- Appreciative leaders have an unwavering commitment to bringing out the best in themselves and others.
- Appreciative leaders find generative forces in their many circumstances and multiple systems.

This work provides a pathway for leaders seeking to develop an appreciative approach and offers inspiration for future endeavors.

2.5 Appreciative Inquiry

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) note that in the process of Appreciative Inquiry, principles and practice are tightly wound. Practice is informed by a series of principles that continue to evolve as experience shapes our understandings of how positive change works. These authors report that the principles of Appreciative Inquiry are derived from three generalized streams of thought. Along with social constructionism they see image theory and grounded research as having an important influence (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 51).

Image theory is attributed to the work of Elsie and Kenneth Boulding and the earlier writings of Dutch sociologist Fred Pollack, and is summarized in the statement, “images we hold of the future influence the decisions and actions we take in the present” (Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 52). Appreciative Inquiry taps into the collective image, held in the stories and dreams of an organization’s members, as an important resource for organizational change.

Grounded research studies a culture through the eyes of the inhabitants and favors participant observation as an effective way to gather data. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003: 52) report that Appreciative Inquiry is built on the premise of grounded research by “engaging members of an organization in their own research – inquiry into the most life-giving forces in their organization, the root causes of their success, and discovery of their positive core”.

i) The Core Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom propose eight principles of Appreciative Inquiry. The first five are derived from the early work of Cooperrider and Srivastara. Three more have been added based on the authors' ongoing work applying Appreciative Inquiry to large-scale organization and community change. These eight principles are closely linked to the key assumptions shared by social constructionists as discussed earlier. They are summarized in Table 1 (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 53).

Table 1. Summary of the Eight Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

Principle:	Definition:
1. The Constructionist Principle	<i>Words Create Worlds</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reality, as we know it, is a subjective vs. objective state.• It is socially created, through language and conversations.
2. The Simultaneity Principle	<i>Inquiry Creates Change</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inquiry is intervention.• The moment we ask a question, we begin to create a change.
3. The Poetic Principle	<i>We Can Choose What We Study</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organizations, like open books, are endless sources of study and learning.• What we choose to study makes a difference. It describes - even creates - the world as we know it.
4. The Anticipatory Principle	<i>Image Inspires Action</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Human systems move in the direction of their images of the future.• The more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day action.
5. The Positive Principle	<i>Positive Questions Lead to Positive Change</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Momentum for large-scale change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding.• This momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core.

6. The Wholeness Principle	<i>Wholeness Brings Out the Best</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wholeness brings out the best in people and organizations. • Bringing all stakeholders together in large group forums stimulates creativity and builds collective capacity.
7. The Enactment Principle	<i>Acting “As If” Is Self-Fulfilling</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To really make a change, we must “be the change we want to be.” • Positive change occurs when the process used to create the change is a living model of the ideal future.
8. The Free Choice Principle	<i>Free Choice Liberates Power</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People perform better and are more committed when they have freedom to choose how and what they contribute. • Free choice stimulates organizational excellence and positive change.

The Constructionist Principle

This is the heart of social construction. Meaning is made through language, reality is created in communication, and knowledge is generated through social interaction. Joseph Jaworski (1996) summarizes this well in his reflection:

As I considered the importance of language and how human beings interact with the world, it struck me that in many ways the development of language was like the discovery of fire – it was such an incredible primordial force. I had always thought that we used language to describe the world – now I see this is not the case. To the contrary, it is through language that we create the world, because it’s nothing until we describe it. And when we describe it we create distinctions that govern our actions. To put it another way, we do not describe the world we see, we see the world we describe.

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to organizational change that brings people together to collaboratively discover, dream, design, and take action to build the organization they value.

The Simultaneity Principle

The simultaneity principle suggests that inquiry and change are not separate actions; rather, they occur at the same time. Barrett and Fry explain, “the questions we craft guide conversations, shape what people discover and pursue, and instill certain images/expectations of the future” (2005: 46). For example, they point out that if you ask members of an organization to talk about creative collaboration, they leave the conversation recalling successful examples from the past and noticing possibilities for better collaboration. As such, questions can “seed networks of conversations and create environments that bring positive attention to desired categories and behaviors” (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 46). The art of Appreciative Inquiry lies in the asking of questions that have the potential to elicit possibilities.

The Poetic Principle

The poetic principle suggests that we can study any topic related to human experience in any human system. Organizations are like open books. “The organization’s past, present and future are endless sources of learning, inspiration, or interpretation, just as a good poem is open to endless interpretations” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001: 38). Furthermore, the topics we choose to study are fateful. We must be thoughtful

and purposeful when choosing because what we focus our attention on will grow and expand. In appreciative inquiry, Barrett and Fry emphasize (2005: 44),

A bold choice of topics for further study is a move that can be generative, can challenge assumptions, and can open up new possibilities for action. More specifically, choosing a positive, hopeful topic for further inquiry will dislodge old patterns, interrupt taken-for-granted assumptions, provoke wonderment, and lead to capacity building.

So, nothing dictates what we must study but what we ask questions about should be guided by a shared vision of what we seek to create.

The Anticipatory Principle

The anticipatory principle in organizational life suggests that images of the future guide the current behaviors of members in the organization. This principle is directly linked to the earlier mentioned work on image theory. Frederick Polak (1973):

At every level of awareness, from the individual to the macro-societal, imagery is continuously generated about the ‘not-yet.’ Such imagery inspires our intentions, which then move us purposefully forward. Through their daily choices of action, individuals, families, enterprises, communities, and nations move toward what they imagine to be a

desirable tomorrow.

Cooperrider emphasizes that the power of positive imagery must not be underestimated. “To inquire in ways that serve to refashion anticipatory reality – especially the artful creation of positive imagery on a collective basis – may be the most prolific thing any inquiry can do” (Gergen & Gergen, 2003, p.178). It is the application of the anticipatory principle in appreciative inquiry that has the potential to unleash high energy levels.

The Positive Principle

The positive principle suggests that momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding. Years of experience with Appreciative Inquiry have found that the more positive the question asked, the more long lasting and successful the change effort (Cooperrider in Gergen & Gergen, 2003: 178). This observation is supported by Humanistic Psychology and the recognition that people are heliotropic. Barret and Fry (2005: 48) explain, “to grow toward the light of a positive anticipatory image suggests that conversations embedded in hope, joy, inspiration, and other positive affect are *key* contributors (not by-products) to lasting change and enduring health”. As such, carefully crafting and seeding the unconditional positive question is of utmost importance in Appreciative Inquiry. It is through this kind of questioning that the Appreciative Inquiry process seeks to actively uncover an organization’s positive core, the combined “wisdom, knowledge, successful strategies, positive attitudes and affect, best practices, skills, resources and capabilities of the organization” (Cooperrider & Whitney in Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 67). The positive core is what gives life to

an organization when it is at its best and it is what nourishes its members, extending their capacity to achieve extraordinary results.

The Wholeness Principle

The wholeness principle suggests that understanding is heightened when members of an organization are given the opportunity to hear, witness, and make sense of their different views, perspectives, and interpretations of shared events. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) point out that the experience of wholeness and health comes from understanding and accepting differences, rather than discovering similarities. It is this context that frees people to safely focus on higher purpose and greater good. The practice of Appreciative Inquiry brings the whole organization, or at least a subset of all of the stakeholders, together at the same time. It is this whole system dialogue that creates the context permitting false assumptions to fall away and respect for differences to grow (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 71).

The Enactment Principle

The enactment principle suggests that positive change is realized when images and visions of a more desired future are enacted in the present. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003: 72) report inspirational leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King as exemplifying the enactment principle. Gandhi asserted, “Be the change you want to be”. King reasserted the belief that “the only way to change the world is to live the difference”. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) stress that for organizational change to be effective, the ends and means of the process must be congruent. In

Appreciative Inquiry, opportunities are structured for members of an organization to enact their more desired cultures and leadership styles in an environment of high participation and commitment, where all voices are equal.

The Free Choice Principle

The free choice principle suggests that people and organizations excel when members are free to choose the nature and extent of their contribution. Free choice fosters high performance by naturally building enthusiasm and commitment. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom report, “the principle of free choice teaches us to consistently create opportunities for choice, to give people options, and to encourage them to choose their work based on their intuitions, interests, strengths, and highest callings” (2003: 77).

The practice of Appreciative Inquiry is different from other approaches to change by the degree of choice it offers. Members of an organization are granted freedom to choose if, how, and when they will engage in the process. Outcomes are not predetermined and plans of action are developed collaboratively based on the priorities that emerge from the combined voices and their expression of what is of greatest importance.

To summarize the eight principles underlying the process, Appreciative Inquiry practitioners have coined the term ‘conversations that matter’. This phrase refers to the power of Appreciative Inquiry to bring things to life or, to quite literally, make things matter. It also implies that the conversations ignited by Appreciative Inquiry are about what matters most to the people engaged in them. As Whitney and Trosten-Bloom state (2003: 79):

In . . . the practice of Appreciative Inquiry these conversations transform one-way, top-down, communication into open, whole system dialogue. It dramatically shifts who talks to whom about what, involves genuine, two-way inquiry and dialogue among improbable pairs of people (senior managers and machine operators, customers and employees, functional departments and their merging counterparts), and focuses people's energies and efforts on what they value. In doing so, Appreciative Inquiry expands the realm of positive possibilities.

ii) The Generic Processes of Appreciative Inquiry

Watkins and Mohr (2001: 39) identify five generic processes for applying Appreciative Inquiry as a framework for organizational change. They are:

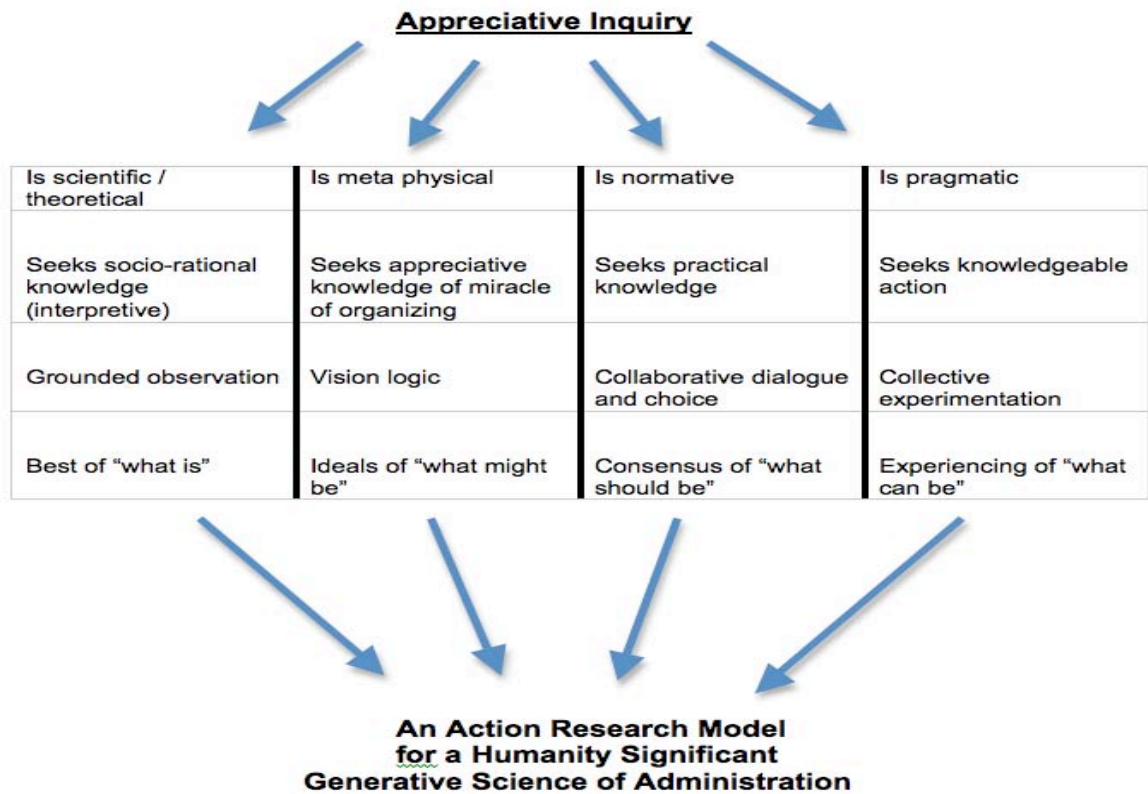
1. Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry
2. Inquire into stories of life-giving forces
3. Locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry
4. Create shared images for a preferred future
5. Find innovative ways to create that future

The authors point out that while these processes are presented in sequence, they do not necessarily play out that way in practice. They do not always begin and end neatly and

they may actually overlap and repeat themselves in some instances. Furthermore, while approaches to change labeled as Appreciative Inquiry have the five generic processes in common, some variation will exist according to the context of implementation. Each application is designed to meet the unique challenges of the organization or community involved.

The original model for Appreciative Inquiry is attributed to the early work of Cooperrider and Srivastara. Watkins and Mohr (2001) report that this model represented the transition from thinking about Appreciative Inquiry as purely an approach to the building of generative theory, to thinking about Appreciative Inquiry more generally as a process for facilitating change in organizations. In this early model, Cooperrider and Srivastara articulate four aspects of Appreciative Inquiry that make it robust as theory of management (Cooperrider & Srivastara, 1987). They suggest that Appreciative Inquiry is simultaneously scientific/theoretical (leading to an awareness of the “best of what is”), metaphysical (establishing ideals of “what might be”), normative (creating consensus on “what should be”), and pragmatic (leading to an experience of “what can be”). These four dimensions are mapped in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Dimensions of Appreciative Inquiry



Later Cooperrider and Srivastara went on to depict these four aspects of Appreciative Inquiry as a new paradigm for approaching change in organizations that contrasts with more traditional approaches. These two approaches are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Two Different Processes for Organizational Change

Paradigm 1: Action Research Assumption: <i>Organizing Is a Problem to Be Solved</i>	Paradigm 2: Appreciative Inquiry Action Research Assumption: <i>Organizing Is a Mystery to Be Embraced</i>
"Felt Need" Identification of the Problem	Appreciating "Valuing the Best of What Is"
Analysis of Causes	Envisioning What Might Be
Analysis of Possible Solutions	Dialoguing What Should Be
Action Planning	Innovating What Will Be

These early descriptions of the processes of Appreciative Inquiry are important in acknowledging its' complexity. On the surface, it appears as a fairly simple and straightforward set of steps to follow. In reality it is quite deep, touching on several different levels of thought and experience at the same time.

Cooperrider and Srivastara's earlier work gave way to the "4-D Cycle" as the most commonly used approach to Appreciative Inquiry. The cycle involves four phases of activity: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Each of the "Ds" represent a focused, task-oriented, collaborative conversation, all linked to an affirmative topic choice.

Barrett & Fry emphasize that the process is not a "forced march", but a "disciplined

choreography of conversation, reflection, analysis and imagination among various parties” (2005: 54).

Cooperrider & Whitney summarize the four phases of Appreciative Inquiry as follows (2005: 16):

Discovery: Mobilizing the whole system by engaging all stakeholders in the articulation of strengths and best practices. Identifying “The best of what has been and what is”.

Dream: Creating a clear results-oriented vision in relation to discovered potential and in relation to questions of higher purpose, such as “What is the world calling us to become?”

Design: Creating possibility propositions of the ideal organization, articulating an organization design that people feel is capable of drawing upon and magnifying the positive core to realize the newly expressed dream.

Destiny: Strengthening the affirmative capability of the whole system, enabling it to build hope and sustain momentum for ongoing positive change and high performance.

They point out that Appreciative Inquiry can be used for a variety of purposes, from guiding a conversation to facilitating large group meetings or system wide changes. It can be applied to a variety of situations, from personal coaching or therapeutic relationships to community or organizational development. Whatever the purpose, the 4-D cycle remains the foundation.

Affirmative Topic Choice

Affirmative topic choice is at the center of the 4-D cycle. This is where the cycle begins and represents the most important strategic aspect of the process. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003: 131) stress that careful and thoughtful topic choice is critically important because it sets the direction of the change process and lays the foundation for the work to follow. Since human systems move in the direction of what they most deeply and persistently talk and ask questions about, topic choice is fateful. What we initially choose to work on and learn about predetermines what we will or will not achieve (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 75). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003: 136) suggest that affirmative topics should focus on what people want to see grow and flourish and should evoke conversations of the desired future. They see good affirmative topics as sharing the following key characteristics:

- Topics are positive. They are stated in the affirmative.
- Topics are desirable. The organization wants to grow, develop, and enhance them.
- Topics stimulate learning. The organization is genuinely curious about

them, and wants to become more knowledgeable and proficient in them.

- Topics stimulate conversations about desired futures. They take the organization where it wants to go. They link to the organization's change agenda.

The goal is to identify three to five compelling, inspirational topics that will serve as the focus for in-depth inquiry, learning, and transformation.

Discovery

Cooperrider and Whitney report that the key discovery task is disclosing positive capacity (2005: 25). As such, the discovery phase focuses on inquiry into the best of the past. Using a carefully developed intentional protocol, questions are asked to uncover stories and experiences of when an organization was most effective. Stories of 'high point experiences' are shared and studied for common themes and underlying meaning. Barrett and Fry suggest that storytelling is an essential component of the discovery phase because it gives everyone a voice in the process, "suspending evaluation and criticism while valuing something in each and every response" (2005: 56).

The appreciative interview is at the heart of the discovery phase (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005: 25). One of the unique features of Appreciative Inquiry is that all of the questions are positive. The use of positive questions often reminds people of accomplishments and experiences that were surprising and elevating. Participants are requested to listen carefully to these stories and to search for the underlying causes or factors for success (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 56). The process of sharing root causes of

success identifies the “positive core” of an organization. The outcome is that participants “build relationships, organizational wisdom expands, useful and innovative knowledge is shared, and hope grows” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005: 26).

Dream

Dream is the visioning phase of Appreciative Inquiry. When the best of what is, or what has been, has been discovered, there is a natural move to imagining new possibilities (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 59). Ludema et al (2003: 145) report that “The purpose of the Dream phase of Appreciative Inquiry is to engage a whole system in moving beyond the status quo to envision valued and vital futures. It is an invitation to people to lift their sights, exercise their imagination, and discuss what their organization could look like if it were fully aligned around its strengths and aspirations”.

Here again, the questions or conversation starters chosen are fateful. Barrett and Fry (2005) emphasize a story or narrative is solicited rather than asking direct questions. A typical dream question would be to ask participants to imagine awakening from a long sleep and going to work to find a miracle had happened – everything is just as you had always wished for. Participants are invited to describe what they see and hear as if they are in the future right now. The purpose of such a question, Barrett and Fry report, is to “elicit images and stories first – openings for others to supplement or complement – not lists or opinions” (2005: 60). The authors go on to suggest that participants are often encouraged to present their images of the ideal future using skits, songs, or poetry. This prevents them from falling into the more common meeting norms of sharing lists, phrases, and opinions that invite evaluation or criticism (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 60).

Design

Design is the transformative action phase of Appreciative Inquiry (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 63). Participants explore the question, “What would our organization look like if it were designed in every way possible to maximize the qualities of the positive core and enable the accelerated realization of our dreams” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005: 29)? Stories and dreams of the ideal organization are then translated into actions and projects. Participants are given the opportunity to choose which of the ideas from the Dream stage are most compelling to them to work toward making a reality. One of the benefits of the Appreciative Inquiry process is that participants by this point are beginning to see the organization as a whole. Since they have been interacting with a diverse group, they tend to speak less out of personal self interest. “As more and more common threads and factors are discovered through Discovery and Dream work, the dialogue begins to take the entire system into account” (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 63).

Work at the design phase is centered around developing “provocative propositions” or “aspiration statements”. “Participants draw on discoveries and dreams to select high-impact design elements, and then craft a set of provocative statements that list the organizational qualities they most desire” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 9). Provocative propositions are written in the positive and provide clear and compelling statements of how things will be when the positive core is alive in all of the organization’s “strategies, processes, systems, decisions, and collaborations” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 9)

Choice and ownership are important characteristics of the Design phase. Barrett and Fry explain (2005: 67):

The actions being imagined and then planned at this stage and in the Destiny phase are self-organized – the group takes on the responsibility and task of organizing for action. These self-selected, multi-functional, and multi-stakeholder groups are taking ownership for their work; their conversations are setting change in motion because they are discovering and choosing together what *they* will do beyond this meeting to make their provocative proposition become their reality.

Destiny

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003: 217) suggest that Destiny, the final phase of the 4-D cycle, has three dimensions. The first dimension addresses recognition and celebration of what has been learned in the process to date. It acknowledges that just the act of initiating an inquiry itself, has the potential to influence change. In the Destiny phase, time is made available for participants to reflect on what has happened since the process began, and to identify and communicate new learning, insights, or positive changes that have come about.

The second dimension involves “the initiation of cross-functional, cross-level projects and innovation teams which launch a wide range of goal-driven, action-oriented changes” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 217). Here participants engage in specific action planning or scenario building, and identify roles and responsibilities enabling them

to take the next steps toward implementation. Innovation teams (also called action teams, or project teams) are composed of groups of highly committed people who *volunteer* to work towards a goal on behalf of the organization (Ludema et al, 2003). At this time, the action orientation is specified for participants. Ludema et al (2003: 193) stress, “We are very clear that people should only initiate actions that they are willing to carry to fruition. This is not a time for recommendations. It is a call for people to commit to specific actions and results”. At times, innovation teams may be provided with a planning template to support them in the process. The scope and size of selected projects often varies.

The third dimension involves on-going, systematic application of Appreciative Inquiry throughout the organization (Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 217). Ludema et al (2003) suggest that outcomes of the Appreciative Inquiry process are like “two sides of a coin”. On one side there is the strategic change initiated by innovation teams focused on specific projects. On the other side there is improvisation, the unplanned emergence of initiatives that spring up during and after an Appreciative Inquiry event. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005: 34) describe these different kinds of actions that are realized through the Appreciative Inquiry process:

In our early years of Appreciative Inquiry work, we called the fourth D “delivery,” not Destiny. We emphasized action planning, developing implementation strategies, and dealing with conventional challenges of sustainability. But the word *delivery* simply did not go far enough. What we discovered . . . was that momentum for change and long-term sustainability

increased the more we abandoned delivery ideas of action planning, monitoring progress, and building implementation strategies. What we did instead in several of the most exciting cases, was to focus on giving away to everyone and then stepping back and letting the transformation emerge. Our experience suggests that organizational change needs to look a lot more like an inspired movement than a neatly packaged or engineered project.

What is important then, for an organization engaged in the Appreciative Inquiry process, is to find the right balance between strategic initiatives and improvisational activities and to look for ways to nurture and support both.

iii) The Appreciative Interview

Appreciative interviews are reported to be the essential success factor for any Appreciative Inquiry process. Acknowledging the positive principle, Appreciative Inquiry practitioners take the art and practice of crafting positive questions very seriously. Carefully constructed questions intentionally placed in a well designed interview protocol support an organization's capacity "to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential" (Barrett & Fry, 2005: 36). They lay the groundwork for the organization's growth and change.

Questions always begin with a positive preface and have two parts, A and B. The preface introduces what is to be studied, part A makes a personal connection to the best of what is, and part B encourages envisioning the best of what could be. Cooperrider et al describe (2008: 107):

Part A: The question must evoke a real personal experience and narrative story that helps participants see and draw on the best learnings from the past (and present).

Part B: This part of the question allows the participant to go beyond the past to envision the best possibility of the future.

The interview guide clusters questions into three main sections: opening questions, topic questions, and concluding questions. The guide also includes a general introduction and summary sheets for collecting interview data.

Introduction.

The introduction sets the stage for participants, offering an overview of Appreciative Inquiry and describing what will take place. The significance of an appreciative interview, the value of sharing stories, and description of how the stories and information will be used are explained (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

Opening Questions.

One or two opening questions are crafted to capture the tone, energy, and direction for what is to follow. These questions help to build rapport and generate information about participants. Cooperrider et al provide an example for an opening question (2008: 108):

Let's start with something about you and your work – and a larger sense of purpose. What is it that you do now and what most attracted you to your present work that you find most meaningful, valuable, challenging or exciting?

Topic Questions.

The next set of questions are written specifically about the three to five affirmative topics that have been previously selected. They are in-depth questions that allow participants to gather the kind of data that will help them to achieve desired outcomes. Topic questions include lead-ins and sub-questions (Cooperrider et al, 2008: 109). Lead-ins introduce the topic and describe it at its best. They suggest the benefit of the topic and the positive outcomes possible when it is significantly present in the organization. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) add that good lead-ins appeal to people by exploring topics from a human perspective. “They highlight the connection between good thinking and good feeling – a connection that must be internalized by the interviewee, if he or she is to offer the fullest, most creative, most meaningful response possible” (2003: 152). A lead-in is followed by a set of two to four sub-questions that explore different aspects of the topic. Sub-questions usually fall into different time frames with a kind of “flow”. *Backward* questions come first, inviting participants to recall times when the topic was most alive and present in the organization or elsewhere. *Inward* questions come next, asking participants to make meaning of high-point experiences by determining their “root causes of success”. *Forward* questions come

last, encouraging participants to imagine a future where the topic is thriving as the best it could be.

Concluding Questions.

These questions wrap up the interview process. They tend to be more generic and invite action. Cooperrider offers two examples of a concluding question (et al, 2008: 110):

Looking toward the future, what are we being called to become?

What three wishes do you have for changing the organization?

It is clear in reviewing literature regarding Appreciative Interviews, that careful thought is required when crafting questions. Good questions are critical to the success of the 4-D process.

iv) Appreciative Inquiry in School Settings

In reviewing the literature, few studies report the use of Appreciative Inquiry in school settings. In the examples that could be found, Appreciative Inquiry has been applied at three different levels, the classroom, school, or multiple schools/system levels. Positive outcomes were reported in all cases, ranging from an increase in student engagement and achievement, to improved school climates characterized by high levels of collaboration, open mindedness and innovation.

Classroom Level Implementation.

At the individual classroom level, Appreciative Inquiry has been used primarily as a tool to improve social skills and build a stronger sense of community through appreciative questions and interviews. Published examples are from elementary classrooms, ranging from Kindergarten to Grade 6.

At Ringshaug Primary School in Tonsberg, Norway, a Grade 3 class was experiencing difficulty with bullying and social interaction (Wigestrang and Hauger, 2007). In 2005, the classroom teacher initiated a project applying the principles of Appreciative Inquiry with the hopes of developing a more positive learning environment. Instead of focusing on negative behavior, which had become common place in the class, the teacher invited students and parents to look for *golden moments*. Descriptions of positive behavior were charted and a star was placed beside the description each time it took place. Students then took part in a series of small group interviews. During interviews, students translated problems into wishes or dreams and then told stories about when the class was at its' best. They began to talk about new ways they might contribute to the classroom community. A *memory-hunting project* was initiated, where the teacher, children, and parents looked for situations where the children took care of themselves and each other in a good way. Every child received a *memory-catcher book* and individual examples of positive behavior contributing to the class dream were recorded. The authors report that slowly the bullying behaviors and focus on conflict seemed to be replaced by a growing interest in cooperation and friendship. An unexpected outcome was the development of the children's vocabulary. In describing *golden moments*, complementing

others, and exploring friendly conversations, the children started using words previously unknown or at least unused. Questions which remained unanswered after this project included (Wigestrang and Hauger, 2007):

Will the children's improved behavior follow them when they go home after school? Will the new social skills learned in the classroom transfer to technology environments (cell phone and internet)? Is it possible to gain the same results with older children?

As the use of Appreciative Inquiry in classrooms grows, these and many other questions may be answered.

School Level Implementation.

Heathside School is described as a large high-achieving community secondary school located on the outskirts of London, England. It enrolls approximately 1350 students between the ages of eleven and eighteen years, and employs over 100 staff. Heathside School has been using Appreciative Inquiry since 2001, when the school community engaged in a formal process to 'Imagine Heathside' and began to shape the future of their school. Since that time, Appreciative Inquiry continues to play a crucial role at the school "in school review and planning, particularly for change management, capacity building, student voice, distributed leadership and participative means of school improvement". (Willoughby, 2006). Through Appreciative Inquiry, the school community is able to gather information on relevant areas such as the hopes and aspirations of students and how well these are being met, the professional fulfillment of staff, and the quality of relationships which can either promote or inhibit learning. This

kind of information provides insight on the extent to which the school is providing the appropriate environment to enhance student learning. Through continuous cycles of inquiry, the school is engaged in an on-going process of self-evaluation from which improvement initiatives are generated. The school has benefited in a number of ways including (Willoughby, 2006: 41):

- enhanced confidence and self-esteem for all involved
- individuals (students, parents, and staff) feeling that their contribution, concerns and ideas are valued
- increased capacity for improvement
- the energy and satisfaction created by the process has a positive impact on the organization and those involved resulting in a ‘we can do this!’ culture.

In conclusion, staff at Heathside School report that “Appreciative Inquiry has excellent potential to enable schools to not only meet government inspection requirements but also to encourage a culture of action research to pervade the organization. In an environment where the spirit of inquiry and positive change is embraced and not seen as threatening, we are becoming aware of Appreciative Inquiry projects ‘self-sown’ by members of our community” (Price, Scully & Willoughby, 2007: 47).

Gervase Bushe is a consultant in organizational change and development for a Vancouver based firm, and Associate Professor of Management and Organization Studies in the Segal Graduate School of Business at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia. He has provided consulting services to a large metropolitan school district and studied school sites engaged in appreciative inquiries into learning. In his

work, Bushe (2007) studied the factors affecting the degree of change observed in the different school sites. He reported that half of the sites studied showed transformational outcomes that he believed would show up in hard measures of student learning and school success. A quarter of the sites showed positive incremental changes, doing more of the same and where there was little expectation of significant impact on hard outcomes. Another quarter of the sites showed no impact.

At a closer look, there appeared to be no relationship between how “positive” the participants rated their experience of Appreciative Inquiry, the Summit, nor how positively they felt afterwards, with the degree of change at their site. However, evidence was found that generativity significantly differentiated the degree of change. Stories from the Discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry that provided new perspectives and where insights emerged, were characteristic of the transformational change sites. Incremental change sites were lacking in provocative ideas. The second finding was that in each of the transformational change sites there were widely acknowledged problems or concerns that the Appreciative Inquiry helped them to address. Bushe suggests that this finding challenges a widely held myth about Appreciative Inquiry – that it ignores problems and focuses on strengths. “AI is just as concerned with eliminating problems as any other change process, but it does so through generativity rather than problem-solving. AI is interested in changing the ‘deficit discourse’ to a more affirmative one, but again that does not preclude being concerned with problems. It just requires that we deal with them differently” (Bushe, 2007: 6). School sites where staffs feel a strong sense of identity and membership to the group, and where there is a perception that the school is performing at a high level may have more difficulty generating new and innovative ideas. Bushe

suggests that such sites usually need to include stakeholders from outside the group to be effective.

The nature of questions asked and level of involvement in the interviews can positively impact generativity. Bushe suggests that generative questions have four qualities; they are surprising, they touch peoples' heart and spirit, talking about and listening to the stories and answers build relationships which support open-mindedness, and the questions force us to look at reality a little differently. Having a small number of people doing all of the interviews reduces the generativity of the Discovery phase. More interest, engagement, relationship building and on-going conversation takes place when more people are involved in interviewing as well as being interviewed. (Bushe, 2007: 8)

Bushe suggests that in order to maintain generativity, it is important to know how to manage negativity when it arises during an inquiry. Sometimes, people may want to talk about what they don't like in their organization. Telling them that they can't, because this is an *Appreciative Inquiry*, will likely just turn them off. Asking them to explore what they don't like and why might be informative, but not very helpful in generating a better future. Instead, Bushe recommends reframing questions to ask them "what is missing, what they want more of, what their image of what the organization ought to be is that is creating this gap between what they want and what they see" (Bushe, 2007: 9). These kinds of questions have the potential to produce new ideas and images that point toward a better future.

Bushe finds that when the first three phases of an *Appreciative Inquiry* are generative, and people are encouraged to take personal action, they will step forward to

champion parts of the design. He highlights four ways to maintain generativity during the Destiny phase: (2007: 11)

- create collective agreement on what you are trying to accomplish
- ensure that people believe they are authorized to take actions that will move the organization in the direction of the Design
- get commitments from everyone to take some kind of initial action
- rather than planning and controlling, leadership is more generative when it looks for any and all acts that move the organization in the desired direction and finds ways to support and amplify those efforts

Transformational change sites did not always use formal action teams developed at the district level, but adopted an “improvisational approach”. Leaders looked for where people were innovating to move toward dreams and designs, and helped them along when they could. This approach proved effective – more change occurred more quickly.

In conclusion, in studying the use of Appreciative Inquiry in school settings, Bushe has emphasized the importance of generativity as the critical element in the process leading to change in student learning and school success. “I propose that the power of appreciative inquiry, one of the few methods that can actually lead to “planned” transformational change, only happens when the positive is used in the service of the generative” (Bushe, 2007: 12).

System Level Implementation.

Vestfold County schools in Norway, used a process of Appreciative Inquiry and Solution Focused Questioning to seek ways to improve student participation in a new

Information Communication Technology (ICT) project and other more student-oriented learning methods. Six schools ranging from primary to upper secondary were involved. The process resulted in the identification of new ideas for student participation and flexible learning. “The project improved collaboration between students and teachers, and empowered students by training them, showing trust and giving them major responsibilities for their own issues” (Nesje & Nesje, 2007: 17). Schools went on to implement these new ideas and continued to explore the topic by conducting yearly student-lead conferences, inviting parents, teachers, and other interested parties. The surprise finding in this work was the emphasis that students placed on the teacher/student relationship as the key factor for improving learning.

When giving the students open questions regarding what they needed to make their schooldays a positive learning environment, almost all of them (and there were thousands) said that the most important thing was that their teacher showed genuine interest and related more to them personally than they do today! . . . Many of the teachers thought that students and pupils would come up with demanding and impossible ideas. But the wish they all agreed on was for teachers to relate better to them as human beings. This was the number one priority from all students at all levels (Nesje & Nesje, 2007: 18).

Work using Appreciative Inquiry as an approach to developing schools in Norway has grown steadily over a six-year period since it began in a few school sites in 2001. This work has been supported by Sareptas AS, a Norwegian

consultancy which has been using strengths based processes in educational organizations. As reported in the February 2007 edition of *AI Practitioner*, on-going work with Appreciative Inquiry has been established in four municipalities involving thirty-five schools. Parents, teachers, and school leaders find that participating schools have a “changed atmosphere”. Teachers describe the school environment as more positive, where staff are energized and have a high level of involvement. School leaders observe that teacher/student relationships are significantly improved. Through the Appreciative Inquiry process, “teachers are learning new skills, improving the learning culture for the children and connecting them better to their teacher” (Luth-Hanssen, Hauger & Nesje, 2007: 42). In addition, school leaders say that they have “changed from a problem focused culture towards a solution focused and appreciative way of management” (Luth-Hanssen, Hauger & Nesje, 2007: 42). They describe the development of a common management vision. Where they were once only concerned with their own schools, they are now more interested in what the other schools are achieving and reaching out on a regular basis to learn from each other. Perhaps most important, participants in the process report that positive outcomes will continue to impact their work, far beyond the initial experience.

“We know that far too many change processes and well-meaning developmental plans in the school system lead to almost nothing... Staff members have not just had a positive experience, but they believe the experiences will have a lasting impact on their school” (Luth-Hanssen, Hauger & Nesje, 2007: 41). For example, some schools

in the municipalities involved are now spontaneously using Appreciative Inquiry in their work with students and parents as a result of the original training.

Fosteria Public Schools in Ohio, USA, adopted Appreciative Inquiry as an approach to systems change beginning in the 2005/2006 school year (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). The hope was that Appreciative Inquiry might renew hope, energy, and vitality in a system marked by negative publicity over poor school performance ratings. The main purpose of the initiative was to determine if a focus on strengths through Appreciative Inquiry would result in measurable changes in school climate and trust. Underlying the interest in school climate, was the growing body of literature cited as linking school climate to improved student achievement.

The process began with a series of introductory training sessions building to a Summit experience which focused on three themes or areas of inquiry; student achievement and success, trust and respect, and community pride and involvement. Established during the Summit, six self-organized innovation teams (two for each of the themes) went on to refine and implement their plans. Following the Summit, training on appreciative approaches to supervision and conflict resolution was provided to all administrators and teacher leaders. A longitudinal study was conducted over two years, where changes in school climate and trust were measured by separate faculty surveys completed twelve months before and twelve months after the Summit.

The study showed measurable gains in several of the school climate variables and in the level of teachers' trust in other adults they worked with over the two years of the study. More specifically, faculty trust in the principal, teacher perceptions of collegial leadership, and faculty trust in colleagues all showed significant improvement. An area

that did not show much improvement was faculty trust in students and parents. Teacher perceptions of community engagement remained essentially unchanged. This remained an area of concern since trust in students/parents, and parent involvement has been closely linked to student achievement. Despite this one shortcoming, the Appreciative Inquiry process resulted in positive change for the struggling Fostoria Public Schools. In reflecting on the experience, the authors report,

Even people who do not trust each other can have honest conversations with each other about their best experiences, core values, generative conditions, and heartfelt wishes. It is disarming to see how this works. There is no reason to play games with such stories, principles, and aspirations. As the conversations change a new social reality is constructed. The cycle of positive energy builds as people encourage one another to live from their values and do their best. As the search for scapegoats subsides, the safety required for innovation, risk-taking, and learning grows as well. By getting people to have open, honest, and benevolent conversations with each other, Appreciative Inquiry often proves to be transformational. The generation of provocative propositions reconnects people with their passion and, in the process, shifts attention away from the wounds of the past to the possibilities for a desired future. It awakens hope. It quickens the imagination and ignites the possibility of working together for the common good. In the small city of Fostoria Ohio, it gave a downtrodden school system and community new reason to look up, to reach out to one another,

to celebrate the best of the present, and to dream even brighter dreams for the future. It created a culture of learning that continues to spiral upward and evoke positive change (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2008: 18).

The Toronto District School Board in Ontario, Canada embarked upon a large scale change effort entitled *Imagine Student Success* beginning in the 2004/2005 school year. Students from 115 schools created a vision of their preferred educational future and developed action plans to achieve it using an Appreciative Inquiry process. Goals for the Toronto District School Board project were to:

- identify student success from a student perspective;
- broaden understanding of what constitutes student success; and
- support the student success advisory committee in its overall development of a TDSB vision. (Anderson & McKenna, 2006: 36).

Groups of students from Grades 7 to 10 were trained to conduct appreciative interviews. They worked with a teacher/coach to interview a selection of students, parents, school staff, and community members on what success meant to them. Information from interviews was shared at a Summit where 1000 students, teachers and guests from the system and the community together created images of their desired future for education. From the Summit, recommendations were taken to the Board and five *Imagine Student Success* committees were formed to coordinate on-going work around the following mandates:

- student advisory process to Trustees, and co-curricular activities

- positive teacher-student relationships
- pilot programs around flexible timetables
- professional development for teachers
- student voice/student surveys ((Anderson & McKenna, 2006: 36)

Committee work began in 2006 and has carried on, continuing to have a positive impact on student success. In addition, the Summit experience has had a ripple effect where individuals touched by the process of Appreciative Inquiry have gone on to apply it in different ways. For example, one teacher who was involved in the *Imagine Student Success* project initiated the development of a new program for at-risk students, called *jPod*. The program provides opportunities for self-directed learning through a curriculum designed by students for students, democratic decision-making, a rulebook developed and monitored by a student-run judicial committee, and timelines in sync with individual learning goals. One student, after experiencing success in *jPod*, introduced Appreciative Inquiry to a group of Toronto youths interested in helping young children to avoid guns and gangs in the wake of increased gun violence. The result was the formation of a not-for-profit organization called *iDREAM* (Individuals Driven to Respect, Educate, Achieve and Motivate), with a mission to:

- strive to reduce violence in the Greater Toronto Area
- secure a promising future for today's youth
- aid youth in realizing their potential, in the arts, music and athletics (Anderson & McKenna, 2006: 38)

iDREAM's key project became a mentoring program for youth in an at-risk neighborhood.

In summary, Appreciative Inquiry has been applied to public education at classroom, individual school and at school district levels. While the literature sites several examples at the classroom and school levels, there are few examples that have involved entire school districts or systems. The current study seeks to investigate educational change at the systems level.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to revisit the traditional paradigms of public education and to engage the voices of multiple stakeholders in helping to shape the future of schools in their community. The study explores how asset based conversations, made possible through a process of appreciative inquiry, contribute to the development of a common vision and impact systemic and cultural change in one school district.

At the same time, the study explores how the work of two school district administrators acting in the role of co-researchers to implement an action research project on Appreciative Inquiry influences their thinking and daily work.

3.2 Research Questions

What is the potential impact of Appreciative Inquiry on district-wide educational change in a public school system?

How does Appreciative Inquiry differ from more traditional approaches to change in public education?

What level of stakeholder participation is sufficient to make a difference?

Will spreading the stages of the 4-D cycle over a two-month period sustain and build engagement in the process?

What action initiatives will emerge from the formal process and from improvisational application?

Will the action initiatives show potential for incremental or transformational change that challenge the status quo?

How might experience with Appreciative Inquiry influence the daily work of the two school district administrators acting in the role of co-researchers?

3.3 Epistemological Orientation

Our investigation of Appreciative Inquiry and the change process is influenced by our social constructionist orientation. Constructionism attests that common understanding is not derived from the individual mind, or objective observations of the world, but built through relationship. Relational knowledge is continually evolving and developed through an active process. Since knowledge is not static, constructionism invites a questioning perspective of traditional truths and assumptions which we tend to passively accept. The hope and promise in social construction is that, while we need to be cautious and critical of what we have come to believe, we have the opportunity to reconstruct in a better way.

Are our traditions in education continuing to serve us well? We are interested in exploring how Appreciative Inquiry might help a community to examine its schools, determine what is of greatest value to continue doing, and generate possibilities for action and innovation in order to better prepare students for a future world. Does approaching change from a strengths based orientation engage stakeholders in questioning the status quo?

3.4 Theoretical Perspective

Postmodern refers to a family of concepts that have developed among scholars that dispense the notion of absolute truth and take a position of plurality. A postmodern perspective suggests that knowledge is embedded in history, context, culture, language, experience and understanding. Postmodern emphasizes the importance of knowledge developed within a community of people in which they actively engage in its development, thus having relevance and utility for its participants.

Traditional research places an emphasis on the researcher observing and studying the subject, looking for similarities and patterns from which theoretical knowledge is individually created. Postmodern shifts the emphasis to joint inquiry, where research is conducted *with, by* and *for* people rather than *on* people. The outcomes of the research process are “grounded in the perspective and interests of those immediately concerned, and not filtered through an outside researcher’s preconceptions and interests” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: 4). The intent of such research is not to produce theory but to revision our understanding of the world and transform practice within it.

3.5 Methodology

This study employs a methodology of action research and a blend of cooperative and collaborative inquiry. For the purposes of our work, Reason and Bradbury’s (2006: 1) definition of action research best matches our intentions,

Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

Reason and Bradbury see action research as a practice for the systematic development of knowing and knowledge, but based in a different form from traditional academic research. While the field of action research is broad and includes a variety of practices, they report that it shares five distinctive features (Reason & Bradbury, 2006: 2):

- a primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives
- a wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being of persons and communities
- action research is about creating new forms of understanding
- action research is participative, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sense-making that informs the research, *and* in the action which is its focus

- action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process, as individuals develop skills of inquiry and as communities of inquiry develop within communities of practice – as such, the process is as important as outcomes

This study aims to engage a representative voice of all stakeholders in collaboratively developing a vision for the future of schools in our community and in identifying and prioritizing the actions we will take to make that vision a reality. We are using a highly participative process to identify practical steps to help shape our schools to better serve our students. Through this process we seek to develop new levels of understanding about what is important and why in public education, as well as to practice and deepen our skills and experience in continuous cycles of inquiry.

We have chosen to blend elements of cooperative and collaborative inquiry as a methodology because they align well with the foundations and purposes of our study. John Heron (1996) describes cooperative inquiry as a way of working with other people who share similar concerns and interests in order to understand their world and develop new ways of looking at things. The process leads people to learn how to change the things they want to change, and discover how to do things better. Heron reports that cooperative inquiry differs from traditional research in two important ways. In traditional research the roles of researcher and subjects are mutually exclusive. There is often little connection between the researcher's thinking and the concerns and experiences of the people involved in the study. In addition, the kind of thinking done by researchers tends

to be theoretical rather than practical. Cooperative inquiry is characterized by cooperative relationships, where everyone involved works together as co-researchers and co-subjects. “Everyone is involved in the design and management of the inquiry; everyone gets into the experience and action that is being explored; everyone is involved in making sense and drawing conclusions; thus everyone involved can take initiative and exert influence on the process” (Heron & Reason, 2001: 144).

Heron (1996) reports that there are many different types of cooperative inquiry and that it is important for researchers to identify at the outset the particular type of inquiry they will be using in their study. In our study, the inquiry was convened by the two co-researchers, who chose the inquiry topic and invited others to join in. As senior administrators for the school district and members of the community, the researchers are internal to the setting and the organization under study. Early on in the inquiry, the researchers acted in the role of facilitators and later as co-subjects. This creates some unique challenges for maintaining quality in the study, and will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Since the study involves participants from all stakeholder groups (students, parents, teachers, administrators, support staff and community members), it can be regarded as a mixed role inquiry. Our inquiry can also be distinguished as having closed boundaries. Data and feedback were collected only from participants who were present for the action and reflection phases of the process, and not from others who may have interacted with participants but were not a part of the inquiry.

As co-researchers writing a joint dissertation, we are engaged in cooperative inquiry. Together we design and manage the inquiry, and are involved in the action and reflection cycles. We share the role of researcher and subject. Our participants join us for

the action and reflection cycles. However, they are not individually contributing to the design of the process. This is difficult to manage with a large and expanding group. However, we have collaborated with our participants at the design level through planning and steering committees, whose membership represents all of our stakeholders. Riel (2007) explains, “while the design of action research can originate with an individual, social actions taken without the collaborative participation of others are often less effective. To be successful, the action researchers have to plan in such a way as to draw an everwidening group of stakeholders into the arena of action. The goal is to work towards a better understanding of their situation in order to affect a positive personal and social change.”

i) Participants

We began our study by reviewing the history of a prior change initiative in our school district. Our rationale was that there was likely much to be learned about the process and outcomes from that event that might give us some insights into the new work that we were about to explore. Our historical review included examination of documents and interviews with representative members of the stakeholder groups who were involved with the process at the time. We conducted ten interviews. Participants included two board members, two district administrators, two school administrators, two teachers and two parent/community members. Interestingly, there was no recorded student involvement in the process. Participants were chosen on the basis of availability and willingness to devote an hour of their time to the study.

Once the history review was completed we initiated the Appreciative Inquiry. We followed the 4-D cycle of implementation with a total of 270 participants (fifty-three percent were school district staff, thirty-one percent were parent and/or community members, and sixteen percent were students. Adult participants volunteered to enroll in the process following an invitation made through public advertising and a series of information sessions held at school sites. Student participants from three secondary schools were nominated by their principals. Principals were requested to consider a wide range of criteria when making student nominations, including those in both academic and trades programs and those demonstrating different levels of achievement. The emphasis was on students whom they thought would be comfortable enough to share their thinking in large and small group activities. Forty-two nominees joined the student forum, including nineteen boys and twenty-three girls. Eight of the students were of Aboriginal descent.

A four-member steering committee was established. These members all had role authority in the school district, including the Board Chair, President of the Teacher's Association, President of the Administrator's Association, and President of the Support Staff Union. The role of the steering committee was to provide input at all stages of the inquiry and to ensure that actions respected established contracts for all employee groups. A twelve-member planning committee was also established. Members represented all stakeholder groups including two school administrators, two teachers, two students, two parents, and two community members. The planning committee met regularly and worked collaboratively with the researchers to develop topic choice, interview guides, session agendas, data management and data review processes, as well as participating

fully in the action and reflection stages of the inquiry. All committee members received individual invitations from the researchers and were requested to represent their stakeholder groups throughout the process. Committee members were chosen on the basis of demonstrated credibility and respect in the school and community, as well as circle of influence.

ii) Methods for Collecting and Making Sense of Data

The focus of this study is the application of Appreciative Inquiry as an intervention tool for systems change in an educational context. How might Appreciative Inquiry provide a framework for multiple stakeholders to collaboratively rethink schools for the future?

For the historical review of the previous school district change initiative, we collected data through a study of artifacts and documents, and transcripts from semi-structured interviews. Artifacts and documents included newspaper clippings, minutes from public meetings, written submissions from the public responding to the proposed restructuring initiative, and school district reports on the process. The two researchers conducted six interviews each, with individuals who had participated in the prior change process. Interviews were taped and researchers kept written notes on the interview protocols. All of the data were reviewed in order to develop an understanding of the district's approach to change at the time, and outcomes of the process used.

Appreciative Inquiry has established protocols for generating data throughout the 4D cycle. The cycle has been explained in detail in chapter two. For our application of

Appreciative Inquiry, we followed these protocols, collecting and reflecting on data continuously throughout each of the stages.

Discovery. We used semi-structured paired participant interviews, group discussions, video taped story presentations and participant produced group summary charts to collect data for discovery sessions. Interviews took place as participants were paired and took turns interviewing each other. Participants followed the interview protocols developed collaboratively by the researchers and planning team. Interviewers made written notes of their partner's responses on the interview protocols, which were collected by the researchers at the end of the session.

Following interviews, paired participants gathered into small working groups to discuss the stories of powerful learning and passionate teaching that emerged from their interview sessions. Working groups chose the story that they connected most with to report out to the whole group. These stories were videotaped. Working groups then recorded on chart paper, factors contributing to success in learning (root causes of success) that were uncovered during the discovery activities. They prioritized these factors using sticky dots and a dot-mocracy process. Participant charts were collected at the end of each discovery session. Prioritized root causes of success from each discovery session group were transcribed onto large sticky notes. The planning team used the affinity process to organize the information into key themes. In an affinity diagram, large amounts of language data are organized into groupings based on their natural relationships (Brassard, 1989). Team members sorted the sticky notes into related groups and created header cards identifying the theme for each group. Information was then transcribed into a diagram using *Inspiration* software. Affinity diagrams for the adult

session, student session, and First Nations Education Council session were then compared for noted similarities and differences.

A graphic facilitator reviewed the data to create a large, wall sized graphic representation for the key themes and big ideas that were generated at the discovery stage. The graphic representation was displayed throughout each of the remaining stages in the 4-D cycle as a record of the work captured and a basis for continued reflection.

Dream. We used group discussions, videotape of the dream session representations, and participant produced macro provocative propositions, or dream statements to collect data for the dream sessions. Following a whole group guided imagery activity, participants broke into small group discussions to share and process their ideas. Each group recorded key ideas on chart paper and referred to their charts as they developed representations to express their collaborative vision for the future of schools.

Small group dream representations were presented to the whole group and captured on videotape. The representations were varied, including diagrams, metaphors, skits, songs and dances. Following the dream representations small groups worked to draft a macro provocative proposition, or a written statement of a shared vision on chart paper. Charts were collected at the end of each dream session. The planning team then worked with the charts in subsequent meetings to condense the many statements into four versions of a draft vision statement for the district.

Again, our graphic facilitator reviewed the data to create a second large wall sized graphic representation for the key themes and big ideas that were generated at the dream

stage. It was displayed, along with the graphic representation for the discovery session, at the Summit for Design in early June.

Design. We used group discussions, and participant produced group charts to collect data for the design sessions. Participants worked in small groups to discuss the four draft vision statements for the district. They charted feedback on powerful words and phrases, and one wish for improving the vision statements. Participants were then asked to focus their discussion on comments and questions regarding the anticipated restructuring process, again charting their feedback. Finally, participants worked on revising and developing focus areas for action to help move the district forward from its existing state to its desired state. The planning team had identified a list of focus areas for action based on review of the data collected to date. The list was presented to participants for review, with an opportunity to add any focus areas that might have been missed. We used an open space format, where participants chose which of the focus areas they wanted to work on. Small groups then assembled at their chosen focus areas and continued work to determine next steps in moving to action. Each group used a charted template to record its planning ideas. All charts from the design session were collected by the researchers.

Destiny. The researchers met with members of the Steering and Planning Committees to determine which of the focus areas for action should be prioritized for district support. Action teams were established. Membership included volunteers from the Summit session who had been involved in the first steps to developing an action plan. Once the action teams began to work, new members were welcomed based on their

interest in the initiative and their ability to contribute. The researchers developed a communication network to help disseminate information gathered from the 4-D process and to keep the school district informed about the ongoing work of action teams.

3.6 Research Quality

In considering the criteria for the quality of research, positivists use the term validity where naturalistic researchers prefer trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Kathryn Herr and Gary Anderson (2005) suggest that neither term is adequate for action research since neither acknowledges action-oriented outcomes, or outcomes that go beyond knowledge generation. They suggest rigor is important, but a different definition of rigor is required. They have developed a new set of quality criteria out of their work with insider action research. We have referenced our work with Herr and Anderson's (2005: 55) five quality criteria: outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity.

Outcome Validity. Outcome validity is the extent to which actions occur and change takes place. At each stage of the Appreciative Inquiry cycle, we have monitored outcomes by collecting and publishing the products of our work. For action initiatives that have emerged out of the formal Appreciative Inquiry process, we have formed action teams and developed governance structures to support their on-going work. We have also made an effort to pay attention to improvisational outcomes, examples of how elements of the formal Appreciative Inquiry process might have been used in the field.

Process Validity. Process validity refers to the steps taken by researchers to ensure that findings are not superficial or flawed. At the discovery and dream stages of

the Appreciative Inquiry cycle, we practiced triangulation by collecting data from a variety of sources (interviews, group discussions, and participant produced documents). We reported back to our participants through print, video, and graphic representation, each time looking for confirmation that we had recorded their thoughts and ideas accurately. At each step of the process we engaged in cycles of action and reflection, both as co-researchers and as co-participants with our planning team. As co-researchers we kept an audit trail, documenting our process and recording our thinking over time.

Democratic Validity. Democratic validity is the extent to which research is done in collaboration with all parties who have an invested interest in the topic of study. We have attempted to involve all stakeholder groups in our study, issuing an open invitation to administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and community members. These stakeholder groups were represented in the Appreciative Inquiry sessions and in membership on the planning team. Our purpose has been to increase voice in shaping the future of schools in order for us to more sensitively meet the needs and the unique context of our community.

Catalytic Validity. Catalytic validity is the degree to which the research process is open to and supportive of the potential for transformation. We chose Appreciative Inquiry as an intervention tool precisely because of its reputation for being a generative process that promotes innovation. Through the Appreciative Inquiry process, we engaged participants in activities designed to help them question and deepen their understanding of powerful learning and inspirational teaching. We then recorded the aspects of our educational system for which their support has been reaffirmed, and others where they have become energized to take action to change. In addition, as co-researchers, we have each

kept a personal journal to monitor our own changes in thinking and how participation in the process has impacted our work.

Dialogic Validity. Dialogic validity refers to how researchers challenge and test their own assumptions and interpretations of what is happening so that their familiarity and closeness with the focus of study is exposed to critique. This is best done through continuous reflective dialogue. As co-researchers, we engaged in continuous cycles of reflective dialogue with each other, frequently challenging each other's thinking. We requested our district administrative team to act as critical friends, and we tested our assumptions with our planning committee. In addition, we hired a shadow consultant from outside of our organization to help us with our process, uncover our assumptions and make sense of our experience.

In addition to Herr and Anderson's five quality criteria, Patti Lather suggests new forms of validity to legitimize social constructionist inquiries. She argues against a singular notion of validity and reframes validity as "multiple, partial, endlessly deferred" (Lather, 1994). Under the broad category of transgressive validity she poses four new forms of validity. Of the four forms, Derridean rigour/rhizomatic validity relates to the focus of our work.

Rhizomatic validity refers metaphorically to a form of bulb or tuber. Lather explains, "To function rhizomatically is to act via relay, circuit, multiple openings . . . Rhizomatics are about the move from hierarchies to networks . . . rhizomatics is a journey among intersections, nodes and regionalizations through a multi-centered complexity. As a metaphor, rhizomes work against the constraints of authority, regularity, and commonsense, and open thought up to creative constructions" (Lather, 1993, 680).

Lather suggests that rhizomatics are not simply connected to the validity question, but also to the action question, asking how research can catalyze movement into uncharted territory, to create transforming social movement.

In our study we have attempted to demonstrate rhizomatic validity by engaging multiple voices and perspectives in redefining what is important and why in public education. We have made a conscious effort *not* to exercise positional power in determining or prioritizing actions for change, where our voice as senior administrators is louder or more privileged.

By consciously addressing these six types of quality criteria we have endeavored to be mindful of the challenges inherent to insider action research and to maintain credibility.

Chapter 4

A REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF RESTRUCTURING IN OUR DISTRICT

“This is a very noisy era. I believe the volume is directly related to our need to be listened to. In public places, in the media, we reward the loudest and most outrageous. People are literally clamoring for attention, and they’ll do whatever it takes to be noticed. Things will only get louder until we figure out how to sit down and listen.” (Wheatley, 2002: 90)

By the mid 90’s, junior secondary schools like those in our district (which serve students in Grades 8 through 10) had become virtually obsolete in the province of British Columbia. With that in mind, and the steady growth of our community, the School Board began to consider new grade configurations.

In February of 1997 the Board accepted the Education Committee Report which included the recommendation, “that a steering committee be established to investigate ways that secondary schools might be restructured to better address the needs of secondary students”. By April 1998, in a report to the Education Committee, the

following “internal indicators” of the need for secondary school restructuring were outlined:

- the district’s limited alternative program options
- the number of parents opting for other forms of education for their children
- secondary student withdrawal rates
- low provincial exam results
- the growing number of students with special needs
- the needs of aboriginal students
- increasing challenges with inappropriate student behavior

It was made clear that the report listing these concerns was not intending to be critical and, in fact, it expressed appreciation for, and pride in, the district, its programs, teachers, administrators and support staff. However, it was felt that some students were still falling through the cracks and many of the marks assigned by teachers at the school level did not correspond with provincial standardized assessments. Members of the district staff felt that a specific focus on secondary student success was required. Concern was also expressed that the political agenda of the day would see private enterprise involved in the rating and ranking of secondary schools in the province, and that the window of opportunity to make positive change might indeed be briefer than we think.

The report then referred to creating a common vision for the district which might effect changes to enhance student opportunity for success. When the goal of creating the

common vision among the educators was not met, it became the task of district leaders to become change agents who worked to motivate those who were not on board.

It is time for all of us, working in concert with the Board, to provide the leadership necessary to generate the discussion necessary and commitment, both within the district and the community at large to effect the changes that are deemed necessary. Change does bring opportunity that can be exciting for both students and teachers. As change agents focusing on student success, we need to motivate those who resist change.

While to provide the opportunity for the discussion was important, it is time to move forward. Everyone needs to know that this district is deadly serious about pursuing ways to maximize the opportunity for every student to be successful (Superintendent's Report to Board, 1998).

The report recognized that the job of "improving an organization is difficult, frustrating and, sometimes, disenchanting work."

On April 15, nine days later, the same report was made to the Board; however, there was an additional paragraph added which acknowledged that the move from the discussion of student success may have moved too quickly toward a focus on Grade 8 to 12 schools. It was stated that "with the exception of a brief discussion on middle schools, other models were not proposed".

At that regular meeting of the board's Education Committee the same day, the following motion was passed: "The Education Committee recommends that the Board

proceed with public discussion and detailed planning with the *intent* of phasing in three Grade 8 to 12 schools beginning in September, 1999”. The recommendation was subject to revision following further staff and public debate, the approval of a structural addition to one of the existing junior secondary schools, and the district’s ability to resource elements of the plan.

The district’s administrative officers received a memorandum the same evening letting them know that the “plan for implementation of the Grade 8 to 12 model will begin in earnest; however, final approval will wait until the Board has heard from the public”.

In early June 1998, a press release was issued that asked for public feedback in written form to be submitted prior to a public meeting to be held later the same month. The submissions were to include a brief statement of the problem, a proposal of solution, how to measure success and the name and address of the presenter. This feedback was varied and in most cases based on an individual opinion, and on personal memory or experience with a specific school or with schools in general.

The following section highlights some of the diverse feedback that was submitted in writing by parents and community members. Most were in opposition to the concept of grade reconfiguration; however, their reasons were often diametrically opposed to one another.

Some people felt that schools just needed to get back to the basics:

“We need to go back to the basics concept of reading, writing and arithmetic and if you complete these skills, then you can carry on and get the extras... computers, drama,

band, sports, etc. Are we trying to get too fancy and are our kids suffering because of this?"

Some felt that schools were not producing enough labourers or salesmen:

"There is a corresponding shortfall of available graduates for most job descriptions and an oversupply of graduates that fall into an unneeded basic labour position."

"We have been steadily producing graduates who are functionally illiterate, they lack in public speaking skills and lack the ability to sell a product, an idea or themselves (...a required textbook, or one of similar content, should be Dale Carnegie's 'How to Win Friends and Influence People')".

Some felt teachers and teaching were the problem:

"I see that the problem now is that we do not have a lot of qualified teachers. A lot of them can't teach or get their points across to students."

"...(this city) simply does not have an overabundance of capable teachers for the proposed restructuring."

"The time spent teaching in the classroom has to be reorganized and better spent."

Some felt that "top end children" needed more attention while others felt that

"bright kids" were favoured:

“We need to spend more time with top end children.”

“Everything that was spoken about at the meeting seemed to be about bright kids. What about the rest of the kids?”

“There should be some alternative instruction for non-academic students. Not all students go to university. Why not help them realize their goals with some sort of apprenticeship in conjunction with applicable high school classes?”

Some shared their ideas regarding student behavior concerns:

“Students who have known violent tendencies, emotional problems and are substance abusers should have to see a doctor and/or psychologist before exposing teachers and the student population to them. The girl’s fights that my son has told me about, seem to indicate real mental problems.”

“The suspension of a disruptive student for a few days serves as no real deterrent. Do what the courts do, make them do community service in the school. They can wash toilets, clean the floors, pick up the garbage outside the school. The list is endless.”

“Segregation from the other students instead of a holiday would hit them where it counts and serve as a deterrent. Non-compliance would see them forced to home school. They could get their high school diplomas but miss out on the (possible) pre-apprenticeship program offered at the high school level.”

Others felt that home school was not the answer:

“I am not a fan of home school. Strong interpersonal skills are what most promotions and advancements are based upon. One may have higher marks, but if they are lacking in the interpersonal social skills, usually acquired during the high school years, they will be held back.”

Others thought that the system needed higher standards, more physical activity, more opportunity to acquire hands-on skills:

“Our standards of excellence are much too low.”

“There is a need for a stronger, more structured physical activity component to the school curriculum instead of physical education.”

“All students need the opportunity to practice and acquire hands-on skills.”

There were those who felt that the change process would only make an already bad situation worse. One lady felt that her children already had enough to deal with because she was a single parent:

“Why are we targeting one end of the system when there are problems throughout?”

“The solution to our problems is to leave the schools as they are and work on the problems within them before creating a bigger headache for all who are concerned.”

“My kids have come from what is classified as a broken home, because of divorce, been raised by myself for thirteen years and been categorized as a dysfunctional family. So odds are they have a few strikes against them already and then this Grade 8 to 12 thing comes along.”

Some parents felt that the process for gathering in-put and feedback left many parents out:

“The ‘requirement’ of presenting written proposals in order to voice objections to the 8-12 concept seems to me to be ‘setting up our parents for failure’. This does not mean that they do not have the intelligence to do it or do not care but rather that education is not their area of expertise.”

“The parents lack of support is usually traced to their own poor education and feeling of mental inadequacy. This leads to scorn for the education system, and the end result is more poorly educated future parents.”

Some had practical concerns about a new model:

“While 8-12 may have some very positive benefits to our students one of the most significant and concrete pieces of evidence that it would not serve our students well is the lack of numbers to provide viable programs.”

Some felt that the attitude and character of the community was the problem;

“It is difficult to convince students that it is worthwhile to not only stay in school, but to do well while they are there, when we compete with a mentality that accepts less academically in favor of more financially.”

“I moved to (here) three years ago. The first thing I noticed was the miserable way the streets were maintained. When I voice my opinion to long term residents they would often comment that this is a northern community and this is what is to be expected. The attitude seems to have infiltrated all aspects of the community.”

Some felt that the main stakeholders were left out of the process:

“No one is thinking of the kids, what do they need? It is a group of adults who think they know what is best but sometimes we need to listen and then act on what the kids have given us.”

Some just liked things the way they were:

“I would like to see the two junior high schools stay 8 to 10. The high school should have Grades 11 and 12 only.”

There were some novel ideas shared. Hands-on learning and apprenticeship opportunities, and the idea of involving students in planning are two examples. However, most feedback was problem centered. There was little or no mention of systemic strengths to be built upon. The town hall meeting format (where often it is only the loudest and/or the bravest who make themselves heard), as well as the insistence upon

individual written feedback did not allow for all stakeholder groups to partake in any real dialogue regarding the future of schools and the developmental needs of students.

When the dust had settled and the Board had heard from the public, the restructuring plan was tabled. An April 1999 report called “The Secondary School Restructuring Debate – What’s Been Happening Since”, outlined eight recommendations. Recommendation number three was “that in order to provide opportunity for other options to be considered, the Board table its motion that would see the phasing in of three Grade 8 to 12 schools begun in September 1999.” The report stated that “while everyone should know that the option to move to three Grade 8 to 12 schools is still out there, we have pointedly not focused on that issue. Instead, we have focused on the reality that while the status quo is addressing the needs of most of our students well, it is not doing so for all of our students. It is important to keep that discussion going.”

Since that time there have been several changes to the staff in both district and school administrative positions. In 2004 the School Board charged the new superintendent and district staff with the task of considering whether or not the current grade configuration was educationally optimal. While some informal conversations took place, and some administrators attended conferences specifically pertaining to the concept of middle school, it was not until early in 2007, that any real discussion or planning took place at the district level.

In the fall of 2007, the researchers contacted several stakeholders who had been a part of the since-tabled restructuring project that had been attempted in 1998-99. We interviewed district staff members, trustees, administrators, teachers and parents who had either been on district committees and/or had attended one of the public meetings during

the process. Parent comments referred to a “preordained plan” that had been “flowered up” to be sold without consultation. One parent told us that he “was more irritated by the way it was presented plus the fact that at the time I didn’t believe it was good to divide it up between the three [schools]. I didn’t even have kids in school anymore, but the one that got my hackles up was just the way it was sort of said to everybody. It wasn’t a community buy-in thing for sure.” A district staff member recalled how one parent stood up at one of the public meetings and referred to the three schools involved as the “barn, bungalow and mansion on the hill.” He said that that comment “was the final nail in the coffin.”

One parent admitted that he spoke out against the plan for purely personal reasons. His children no longer attended school but he was managing a local hockey team and felt that it would be more convenient if all of the players went to the same school. Another parent felt that there was a better way to prevent students from leaving school than by changing grade configurations. He felt that making education more relevant for all students, particularly those who were not university bound, would keep more students in school.

“You are telling us all that you’re losing kids from Grade 10 to 11 because they are not in one facility when in fact you should be looking at your belly button if all you’re trying to do is drive everyone into university. You tell us that it’s just because you’re not in the same facility from one year to the next year when in fact you’re not tickling the fancies of those who don’t want to go on to a higher education.”

“What was missing out of the whole process was to have some sort of consultation without a preordained system. In other words, go out and say we have to make some changes, and here are some options.”

“I wasn’t involved in any research or committee work. I had written some letters and I remember standing up in front of a meeting. I did a little research and wrote a letter and I started finding out about some of the arguments and I was in a combative mood.”

A trustee commented that they were advised to “tell” the community what it needed. She felt that “things got out of hand because there wasn’t a buy-in to having the discussion.” Although there was consultation that involved some good discussion, one trustee felt that the public meetings were negative; “The research involved four committees (curriculum, facilities, etc.) made up of educators, parents and students... about ten to twelve people. The committees met every two or three weeks. The committee work was really good; the public meetings were not!” In her description of the format at one of the public meetings, a trustee referred to being “hit at” by speakers: “The public meetings saw trustees and staff seated at a table in the middle of the room with the audience seated in bleachers. There was one speaker’s microphone with a line-up of people waiting to speak. The DPAC [District Parent Advisory Council] member and a local businessman hit at the Board about a preconceived decision.” One of the trustees stated simply that “the whole process was undermined by rumour. There seemed to be no trust.”

A district staff member admitted that the Board had lacked a plan for answering the

hard to answer questions, especially when they were brought up in the public meeting format. There was concern expressed that the Board had been put into a precarious and negative situation. It seemed that tabling the discussion was the only available alternative.

It seemed that a well meaning, well read, and hard working group of district leaders had become embroiled in the “Decide-Advocate-Defend” (DAD) cycle that Barrett and Fry describe (2005). This small group of people, who had already completed their learning journey, felt the need to defend their decision to those who had not. Their rationale for change, which had been predominantly based on drop-out rates, low exam scores and poor behaviour, put many key stakeholders into a defensive stance of their own. This deficit discourse served not only to stall reconfiguration efforts at that time, it would taint future discussions regarding the matter for years to follow.

“...the experiences of this D-A-D dynamic leads to social constructions that feed the ‘what’s wrong with the leadership?’ or ‘it’s just another power play’ kinds of stories. These quickly become strong memories that cause negative associations with any future change programs, strategic planning efforts, or visioning processes” (Barrett and Fry, 2005: 97).

With these memories in mind, it was our goal to avoid similar pitfalls when the concept of grade reconfiguration was once again opened for discussion. We were looking for a way to allow more students, staff, parents and community members to be heard and to be part of the visioning and planning process. We were looking for a way other than requiring written submissions which seemed to leave out those people who did not have

the confidence, skills or time to do so. We were looking for a way other than town-hall meetings which seemed to see only the bravest (and sometimes the loudest) people stand up to the microphone. We were looking for a way that would not see us dwell only on the problems that many people are only too happy to identify.

We were looking for a process that would give life to learning relationships and help us to build cooperative capacity. Our search led us to the generative and asset based strategy of Appreciative Inquiry.

Chapter 5

IMPLEMENTING THE 4-D CYCLE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

5.1 Preparation

Appreciative Inquiry emerged as a topic of interest in the professional dialogue of British Columbia School Superintendents during the 2005/2006 school year. A small number of district staff members from around the province traveled to the United States to participate in training opportunities with David Cooperrider and associates. There was a growing interest in exploring Appreciative Inquiry as a process that may have potential for advancing the work of the superintendent's association. A large metropolitan school district in southern British Columbia had also hired a consultant and had initiated work with in their system.

The current researchers were curious to learn more about this process. What exactly is Appreciative Inquiry and how might it be applied in different organizational contexts? We registered for the Appreciative Inquiry Foundations Workshop in Regina, Saskatchewan in November, 2006. The four-day session was co-facilitated by Tony Silbert and Joanne Daykin of *Innovation Partners International*. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce Appreciative Inquiry as a process for applying positive, strength-based, collaborative approaches to change, and to give participants first-hand experience in applying facilitation skills. There was much to learn. We studied the principles, research and theory base of Appreciative Inquiry. We experienced each phase of the approach and explored case studies. We received support in the planning and

design of change implementation in our own unique organizations. Interestingly, only three other participants were from educational organizations. Yet this did not detract from the relevance of the learning experience. The underlying principles are common and it was not difficult to make connections between different organizational contexts.

We were both immediately drawn to Appreciative Inquiry. Here was a process that clearly aligned with our desire to honor the experience and work with the strengths of our teachers and school administrators. Here was a process that provided the structure for bringing together the diverse voices of staff, students, parents, and community members. Here was a process that could not only help us to clarify a common vision for the future of schools, but to identify the very practical next steps we could take to move us in that direction.

We were energized by the training experience and eager to learn more. We were still confused by some of the academic discourse of Appreciative Inquiry (i.e. What are the important considerations when crafting an interview guide? What is the difference between a macro and a micro provocative proposition statement?). We enrolled in the Appreciative Inquiry List and subscribed to the *AI Practitioner* journal. We began to sample the professional literature listed in the bibliography of the training manual.

In April, 2007, the British Columbia Superintendent's Association invited Frank Barrett to facilitate the annual spring forum held in Vancouver, B.C. The two-day session was entitled, *Working as a Collaborative Learning Community: System Transformation through Appreciative Inquiry*. The researchers, along with a group of twelve other trustees, administrators, and teachers from the school district joined teams from other districts in attending the session. Appreciative Inquiry was presented as a model of

change leadership that has the potential to maximize learning and innovation by creating forums for dialogue among diverse participants. Barrett provided an overview of an Appreciative Inquiry organizational summit with a focus on learning about the process. He engaged participants in exercises illustrating the first two stages of the 4-D Cycle.

These exercises included:

- Discovery: Opening Conversations in Pairs
- Discovering the Resources in our Community
- Articulating the “Positive Core” of our Schools and School Systems
- Dreams and Visions of the Future: Ideal Future Scenario of Collaborative Learning Cultures in our Schools

The exercises gave us the opportunity to learn more about the Appreciative Inquiry process using topics of inquiry directly related to the educational context. By attending as a team, we were able to begin conversations about how we might apply the process to our work with educational partners at home in our own district.

A key observation we made from the spring forum with Barrett, was that the 4-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry cannot be rushed. There was not time in the two-day format to take participants through the Design stage. Some people left feeling frustrated that Appreciative Inquiry is all about dreaming and has little to do with action. Without experiencing the Design stage, it is difficult to imagine how you get a large and diverse group engaged in planning the very practical next steps needed to move toward the desired future. For Appreciative Inquiry to be effective, there must be time to work

through all of the stages. It appears that one cannot “hurry up” or omit any part of the process.

In August 2007, the British Columbia Superintendent’s Association once again invited Frank Barrett to the province for the summer leadership academy. Barrett facilitated an Appreciative Inquiry Summit on *Enhancing Learning*, an initiative on student success mandated in British Columbia by the Ministry of Education. The focus for this session with Barrett was on applying Appreciative Inquiry to a specific topic of high importance on the work agenda of superintendents. The outcome was to design a change project supporting student success in each of the association’s regions of the province, to be submitted to the Ministry of Education for an implementation grant. This was to be a three-day session, with time provided to work through all stages of the process. However, disruptions to the agenda again left us short on time. While we touched on Design and Destiny, some groups were not able to complete their plans for moving to action. Some people left the session feeling discouraged that the next steps for their group were still unclear and that broader participation was required to develop a project proposal.

We made two important observations from the Appreciative Inquiry Summit with Frank Barrett, one about participation and one about energy levels. For the Appreciative Inquiry Summit at the summer leadership academy, attendance was limited to members of the superintendent’s association. It was difficult to plan an initiative to improve student success when only the voices of superintendents were present. In order to be truly creative and innovative, and to encourage ownership of action plans, we needed the voices of our educational partners, teachers, school administrators, students and parents.

Superintendents planning actions that educational staff must carry out is not a truly collaborative process. In order for Appreciative Inquiry to be most effective, broad participation is essential.

Our second observation was that we experienced a noticeable drop in energy levels when we began to transition from the design to destiny stages of the Appreciative Inquiry process. It is highly energizing and engaging to share stories of peak experiences, to discover what is common in those experiences, to dream about positive futures, and to identify design elements that might help us to move in the direction of our dreams. It is a different kind of energy and engagement that is required to prioritize design elements and to find the cheapest, quickest and lowest-risk ways to put those elements into action. There seems to be a period of chaos where groups tussle with a myriad of possibilities until they identify the most promising action initiatives and the practical next steps to get started. How to structure the working environment at this stage seems very important in order to help participants work through this struggle. It was clear that we would have to pay attention to these details if we were to be successful in implementing the 4-D Cycle in our district.

Following three training experiences over a ten month period, and the opportunity to read and discuss several of the primary print resources on Appreciative Inquiry, the researchers felt prepared to introduce the process to the school administrators and Board of Trustees for the school district. In August 2007, at the annual meeting of school administrators prior to the opening of the new school year, we used a power point presentation to introduce the foundations of Appreciative Inquiry and an overview of the process. The five administrators who had attended the Frank Barrett training session

reflected on their experience and shared their insights with the group. We invited the administrators to give us feedback on how we might use this process to engage the broader staff and community in dialogue about shaping the future of schools in our district. While they could see potential in the process and were supportive of moving forward with this kind of inquiry, it was very difficult for them to give us more specific feedback. They were confused by our request. In hindsight, we should have given them the opportunity to sample the process. Having experienced it first hand, they might have been better equipped to give us suggestions on how to move forward with a district-wide inquiry.

In October 2007, we introduced Appreciative Inquiry to the Board of Trustees, the governing body for the school district, at the annual trustee retreat. Three trustees had attended the Frank Barrett training session. The remaining four trustees had no direct experience with Appreciative Inquiry. This time, in introducing the concept, we wanted to make sure participants had the opportunity to sample the process as well as to learn about the foundations. In addition to working through the power point presentation, we invited the trustees to participate in partner interviews and to engage in activities representing the Discovery and Dream stages of the Appreciative Inquiry process. The interview guide and worksheet for the Board Retreat are presented in Appendix A. Outcomes for the session included:

- discovering resources in the district
- identifying factors contributing to student success
- sharing dreams and clarifying our district vision
- revising our action plan for reconfiguration and engaging our community to

help shape the future of schools

- gaining a deeper understanding of Appreciative Inquiry and how it might be used as a model for system change

The session closed with the Board of Trustees unanimously approving plans to move ahead with the implementation of a large-scale inquiry on the future of schools, involving all stakeholder groups. They were eager to begin as soon as possible.

5.2 Event Planning

Committees. Steering and Planning Committees were established. Members of the Steering Committee included the Board Chair, the President of the Teachers' Association, the President of the Administrators' Association, and the President of the Support Staff Union. All members of the Steering Committee, along with the two researchers, had role authority in the school district. They met every two to three weeks, providing input at all stages of the inquiry and ensuring that action initiatives arising out of the process respected established contract language for all employee groups.

There were twelve members on the Planning Committee. Members represented all stakeholder groups including two school administrators, two teachers, two students, two parents, and two community members. The Planning Committee met on an as needed basis and worked collaboratively with the researchers to develop topic choice, interview guides, session agendas, data management and data review processes, as well as participating fully in the action and reflection stages of the inquiry. All committee members received individual invitations from the researchers and were requested to represent their stakeholder groups throughout the process. Committee members were

chosen on the basis of demonstrated credibility and respect in the school and community, as well as circle of influence.

Consultant. We enlisted a consultant to guide us in planning the inquiry and in developing resources. Careful consideration was given to the extent to which, as researchers, we could act in the role of facilitator. In some instances, facilitators with role authority within an organization find that their position negatively impacts participation and influences data. Participants might be reluctant to speak honestly if they perceive a lack of trust in the environment. In this case, the researchers had many years of experience working at different levels within the district. The Superintendent had been born and raised in the community and had a deep understanding of local history. He had several well-established positive relationships in the community. He had spoken publicly about the need for a culture of trust and collaboration in the school district and was working hard, along with senior administrators, to demonstrate trustworthiness. The school staff members were somewhat skeptical of outside experts and wanted to be recognized for their skills, experience and contributions. As researchers and district administrators, we wanted to demonstrate fiscal responsibility and to ensure that the costs of the inquiry process were not so excessive as to limit funding available for the action initiatives that arose from it. For all of the above reasons, we felt justified as researchers stepping into the role of facilitator for the Appreciative Inquiry events and not hiring a consultant to do all of the facilitation for us.

In addition, the consultant played an important role as our “outside talking partner”. We communicated regularly with her throughout the process, via email and

conference calls. She asked us many questions to challenge our thinking, to help us uncover our assumptions and to make sense of our experience.

Appreciative Inquiry Cycle. Implementing an Appreciative Inquiry Summit, where a large group of multiple stakeholders in the educational system work through all stages of the 4-D cycle together, presents many challenges for a school district. An Appreciative Inquiry Summit takes a minimum of three consecutive days. Some organizations may slow down or suspend operations temporarily to make a summit a priority. The *School Act* prevents us from closing schools for this purpose. To hire teachers-on-call or supply teachers to release teachers from their classroom responsibilities in order to participate in a summit would be very costly. Even if we had the funding to support such an endeavor, our teacher-on-call list is so limited that we would not be able to find enough staff to make it possible. We would have to schedule our event outside of regular working hours and rely on our staff members to volunteer their time to participate.

What if no one comes? I suppose we would have to figure out why and try again in a different way. What if only our friends come, and tell us just what they think we want to hear? We will have to structure the interview questions and the activities carefully so that participants are drawn to reflect on their personal experiences and share their stories. Hopefully, in listening to the stories of others, participants will get a bigger picture of what's important and why for the future of schools in our community.

Our hope was that, given an invitation to provide genuine input into shaping the future of our schools, teachers would be motivated to become involved. It must be emphasized that this was a very different kind of experience for teachers. Large-scale change has typically

been dictated from the top down, from the Ministry of Education or District Office. This was an invitation to work with colleagues and the broader community to develop a common understanding of how to best serve our young people and align our structures and practices accordingly.

Since we were not able to schedule three consecutive days for the event, we had to find a way to work through the 4-D cycle in a series of sessions. Sessions would have to be offered with some flexibility so as not to conflict with the variety of time commitments of participants. Sessions would have to be scheduled close enough to provide continuity and maintain momentum, but not too close for the time required to be unreasonable. Scheduling was explored at length with the Steering and Planning Committees and with the Consultant, with all approving the final plan.

Students participated in a full-day forum, during which they worked through exercises for the Discovery and Dream stages of the inquiry. Adults (including staff, parents, and community members) attended two evening sessions, each lasting for three hours. In the first session they worked through the Discovery exercises and in the second they worked through the Dream exercises. Each session was repeated over three days, providing adults with a choice of dates for which to enroll. Discovery and Dream sessions were offered three weeks apart.

The inquiry culminated in a weekend summit focusing on the Design and Destiny stages. Students and adults came together for the summit, which took place on a Friday evening and Saturday. The summit was scheduled one month after the Dream sessions.

Development of the Interview Process and Guide. The key to collecting appropriate, useful, strength-based, and future-focused data is found in the Discovery

phase of an Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros, 2008). Data collection is made possible through appreciative interviews. Typically the steering and/or planning committee creates the interview guide and develops the interview architecture. An interview team then seeks out a diverse range of stakeholders and conducts the interviews. The interview team may consist of members of the committees, or a selected group of individuals from within the organization who are trained specifically for the task. In a summit, participants are coached on how to conduct paired interviews with each other. Interviews conducted in this manner are quicker and provide more immediate and broad access to information. In addition, there is a special kind of energy that is created and shared when partners interview each other in a large group setting. For these reasons, the researchers and committee members chose to use partner interviews in the current study.

The researchers and consultant drafted the interview guide jointly. The draft guide was presented to the Steering Committee for feedback. Members of the Planning Committee completed the interviews with each other and provided input for revisions. The researchers and consultant then completed final revisions.

Invitation. The researchers, in collaboration with the Steering and Planning Committees, developed a power point presentation to review the foundations of Appreciative Inquiry and district intentions with the process. The presentation concluded with an invitation to participate and details on how to register. The researchers used the presentation at a series of information sessions held at school sites. The presentation was also shared at school and district meetings of Parent Advisory Councils.

The invitation and registration information was also communicated through school newsletters, the local newspaper and radio stations, and the school district's web site.

Explaining an asset based strategy like Appreciative Inquiry to newspaper reporters proved to be a bit of a challenge. Bad news and problems seem to sell more papers. After being asked repeatedly to outline the problems that our "Today and Tomorrow" conversations would be addressing, I finally invited one reporter to my office for a one hour overview of the rationale behind AI. Subsequent reports on the progress of our Today and Tomorrow efforts seemed to be written from a more positive perspective.

Sessions were scheduled to take place at the local senior secondary school. Invitations were circulated throughout the five weeks prior to the first session.

We struggled in answering the question, should participants be required to attend all sessions? Would we turn people away if they wanted to attend the Dream session without having participated in the prior Discovery session? Would latecomers in the process negatively impact engagement of the group? While we strongly encouraged participants to attend all three sessions (Discovery, Dream, and Summit), we decided not to exclude them if they were unable to commit to all three. In addition, we welcomed newcomers who heard about the first session from others who had attended, and wanted to join in. This required that at the start of each new session, we carefully summarize what had taken place in the prior session and report out data collected to date. In our planning, we approached district technology department staff, and the teacher and students from the senior secondary school technology program to help us videotape and photograph each of the sessions. In addition, an itinerant special education teacher trained

in graphic facilitation volunteered to map the sessions, creating large visual representations of the big ideas and key information gathered.

5.3 Implementation and Findings

We hardly know anything about what students think about educational change because no one ever asks them. Yet, effective change in schools involves just as much cognitive and behavioral change on the part of students as it does for anyone else. . . . we should stop thinking of students just in terms of learning outcomes and start thinking of them as people who are also being asked to become involved in new activities. Involving students in effective change is not just a good idea it is essential. (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991: 189)

i) *Student Forum.* The student forum was held on April 2, 2008. The forty-two student participants from three high schools were nominated by their principals. Selection criteria are described in Chapter Three. This was a full-day session, with snacks and lunch provided on site. The researchers acted in the role of co-facilitators for the student forum.

We opted not to combine students with adults for the Discovery and Dream stages of the inquiry. We felt it best to introduce students to the Appreciative Inquiry process in

a group with their peers. Students on the Planning Committee suggested that students would be more comfortable working in a peer group to start, and that they would be more likely to speak out and their voices would be better heard than if they were working in a larger community group.

Students were seated at round tables with peers from the same school, in groups of six. After the introduction, students self selected a less known peer from another school for an interview partner. They remained seated in mixed school groups for the remainder of the exercises. Supporting documents for the student forum, including a facilitator's agenda, participation guide, and activity worksheets can be found in Appendix B. (Key slides from the facilitator's power-point presentations used during all of the 4-D Cycle sessions can be found in Appendix H.)

Although the agenda was tight, and we moved promptly through the activities, transitions ran smoothly and all of the exercises were completed as planned. The students remained highly engaged throughout the day. Some students were a little shy to identify an interview partner and initiate conversation, but they quickly warmed up once they got started. Even though they used the prompts provided in the interview guide, many students encountered some difficulty in eliciting stories from their interview partner. Partners were more inclined to reply to questions with short answers. They were not accustomed to telling stories in this context. When the facilitators and school principals circulated among tables and offered some coaching on how to draw out partner responses, they began to get the idea. Then they were reluctant to end their partner conversations.

Having observed that students had some difficulty with telling and recording stories during their partner interviews, we decided to revise the support materials for future sessions with adults. We added some slides for the power point presentation that summarized the literature on the importance of story as a medium for developing understanding and constructing our world. We each planned to share a personal example of telling the story in response to an interview question in the session introduction. We hoped that these steps would help participants to better understand what we were looking for and why.

After completing the partner interviews, the students had no difficulty sharing stories and looking for common themes. At table groups they charted and prioritized the factors leading to success (“root causes of success”) for each topic question: powerful learning, passionate teaching, and learning environments that provide choice and relevance. Table groups posted their charts around the room and students volunteered to synthesize the information and report out on the big ideas. Their comments were sensitive and insightful. Students were attentive and displayed active listening skills with their peers.

Students worked through the Dream exercises in the afternoon. They were comfortable with the guided imagery activity and were able to move quickly into writing about their images. They had time to chart their one best wish for the future of schools. They embraced the table group activity to represent their Dream without hesitation. Their representations took many different forms: skits, mock interviews, song and dance, metaphors, webs, and drawings. They worked hard to complete their representations in the given time frame and willingly stepped forward to share them with the whole group.

Their presentations were energizing and evoked a wide range of emotions, from tears to laughter.

At the end of the session, students were invited to reflect on their experience. They made a number of observations and comments. They enjoyed the opportunity to work with peers from a variety of grade levels and from different school sites. They found the day went by very quickly and they liked the different activities. They were surprised that in such a diverse group, they were able to identify common themes about what is important in schools. They especially liked being listened to by adults and were curious to know what would happen next. When we explained the up-coming adult forums, they doubted that adults would be as engaged as students in similar activities. Several of the student participants indicated an interest in developing a district student leadership team. We closed the session with an invitation and encouragement for the students to join the adults at the Summit to be held in eight weeks.

Individual interview notes, table group summary charts of root causes of success, and video taped story presentations were collected from the student forum Discovery activities. Prioritized factors contributing to student success, or root causes of success, from each table chart were transcribed onto large sticky notes. Members of the Planning Committee used the affinity process to identify key themes, and information was then transcribed into a web using *Inspiration* software.

In working through the affinity process members of the Planning Committee formed four groups, each group focusing on the data from one of the four main questions on the interview protocol. Key themes were identified in the responses for each question. Members of the Planning Committee then changed groups to reflect and provide

feedback on the work of their colleagues in a different question area. They challenged each other's thinking by asking questions such as, "What do you think is meant by this statement? Why did you group it here? Do you see another grouping where it might fit? Why did you choose these words to describe the theme? Can you think of any other words that might better capture the theme for this cluster of factors?" They continued to revise and reflect until they arrived at a representation that all could support. Table group summary charts of the most important elements of collective dreams for the future of schools, and videotaped dream representations were collected from the student forum Dream activities. Charts were stored for later use. They were combined with similar data collected from the adult Dream session and used to help draft a common vision statement for the district.

The technology team edited the video footage and added text frames to create a twenty minute movie, sampling key activities from the student forum. We shared the video with the participants and, with their permission, made it accessible to other students, parents and staff on the district website. We planned to use this video as part of the introduction for the adult sessions.

ii) *Adult Discovery Sessions.* The three adult Discovery sessions were held on April 8, 9, and 10, 2008. They were three-hour sessions, scheduled from 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM. Sessions were repeated, each with a different group of participants. Participants in each group represented a mix of stakeholders, including school district staff, parents and community members. A total of 144 participants attended the evening Discovery sessions.

Participants seated themselves at round tables in groups of six. After the introduction, the participants were asked to scan the room and find someone that they did not know well to be their interview partner. They remained seated in new table groups comprised of three interview pairs for the remainder of the exercises. Over the three sessions, four participants chose to leave immediately following the introduction. One of the facilitators met briefly with them on the way out. Two felt the session was not what they were expecting and did not want to continue. The facilitator offered information about the web site, where to find outcomes of the inquiry recorded, and how to submit questions or comments on-line. Two had limited English speaking skills and were not comfortable talking in groups. We did not have interpreters on site to assist.

The activities for the adult sessions were very similar to those used in the student session. Only one of the questions on the interview guide differed. Students had a question on choice and relevance, where adults had a question on teamwork and partnerships. We chose to use different questions because these were two different areas of interest that were expressed in the student and adult World Café sessions (a series of informal dialogues held prior to the Appreciative Inquiry process). Supporting documents for the adult Discovery sessions, including a facilitator's agenda, participation guide, and activity worksheets can be found in Appendix C.

We were continually amazed at the level and depth of engagement of participants throughout the Discovery activities. With our revised introduction, the adults quickly picked up on the idea of "telling the story" in their interviews. Interviewers listened intently and interviewees made strong emotional connections in retelling their

experiences. Participants remarked that initially, they felt an hour for partners to interview each other would be far too long. However, once they began, they easily filled the time.

The sharing of powerful learning stories was incredibly energizing. Some participants remarked that they had forgotten just how important those experiences were to them. Many suggested that they could easily relate to the stories and felt very connected with others, even though they had only just met them (examples of the Discovery stories can be found in Appendix I).

Participants identified, charted and prioritized root causes of success for each topic question in the interview guide. Charts were posted around the room for all to see. Common ideas quickly became apparent. Several participants reported on how remarkable it was to be in a room surrounded by positive statements about powerful learning experiences. An air of hopefulness permeated the space. How different from the town hall meeting where people step up to the microphone to advocate or argue.

As with the student forum, individual interview notes, table group summary charts of root causes of success, and video taped story presentations were collected from the adult Discovery activities. Members of the Planning Committee again used the affinity process to identify key themes, and information was transcribed into a web using *Inspiration* software. We then had two webs, one for student identified root causes of success and one for adult identified root causes of success. The webs have been transcribed into a linear format for the purposes of this research report and can be found in Appendix D. Our graphic artist viewed all of the documents from the student and

adult Discovery sessions and recorded the elements of our “positive core” in symbols and key words on a large wall chart.

iii) *Root Causes of Success.* There were remarkable similarities between the root causes of success identified by students and by adults. For the topic question on powerful learning experiences, both groups identified teacher, student/teacher relationship, student, and learning environment factors as contributing to success. Teacher factors included: teachers who are passionate and enthusiastic, teachers who are highly skilled, able to develop interest and build understanding, and teachers who can craft challenging learning experiences. Positive student/teacher relationships, characterized by genuine caring and mutual respect, were found to be important factors. Student factors included: students who have a desire to learn and are active participants, are willing to work hard and not give up, are open-minded and who are willing to take risks. The environment was characterized as one of authentic learning, where hands-on learning experience with real life application were important factors.

For the topic question on teachers you admire, both groups again pointed to developing positive student/teacher relationships as most important. Teachers who reach out to get to know students and build positive relationships, teachers who connect with students making them feel special and valued, and teachers who see the good in each student, encouraging them to do their best, were all identified as factors leading to success. Additional factors included teacher traits or styles: teachers who are creative and flexible – not just teaching from the textbook, teachers who are knowledgeable, efficient and organized, teachers who make learning meaningful and relevant, teachers who have a

sense of humor, and teachers who give extra time and support. Students talked about the importance of teachers who are responsible and set clear boundaries, whereas adults talked about teachers who are able to create safe environments.

Students responded to the topic question on choice and relevance. They identified more choice in courses as well as clubs and extra-curricular activities, more specialized courses that offer real experience in non-trade areas of study, and help in making good educational program choices as important factors contributing to success. In considering relevance, students identified teachers who can explain why one needs to know course content and how it applies to life, teachers who use “out-of-the-box” methods to motivate and develop deeper understanding, and less traditional more hands-on learning as important factors.

Adults responded to the topic question on collaboration and partnerships. They identified a number of factors contributing to effective teamwork:

- a willingness of all team members to work hard toward a common goal and commitment to action and getting things done
- a climate of trust, effective communication, positive relationships and mutual respect
- resources including time, shared leadership and opportunity for skill building when needed
- a sharing of ideas that generates new thinking and permits innovation.

In addition, adults talked about the value of engaging multiple stakeholders of differing ages when developing partnerships and collaborative groups.

In summary, the root cause of success data has provided us with rich and deep information. The strong common themes identified by a variety of stakeholders offers us insight as to what we need to nurture and grow that will better meet the needs of all students and our community.

iv) *Adult Dream Sessions.* The three adult Dream sessions were held on April 29, 30, and May 1, 2008. As with Discovery, they were three-hour sessions, each with a different group of participants. A total of 101 participants attended the Dream sessions. This represents a twenty nine percent drop in participation compared with the Discovery sessions.

The activities for the adult Dream sessions were very similar to those used in the student session. However, we took more time for the introduction and added a collaborative writing activity at the end to draft a vision statement. Supporting documents for the adult Dream sessions, including a facilitator's agenda, participation guide, and activity worksheets can be found in Appendix E.

The introduction to the Dream session was very important. We needed to reconnect participants to the work they had done in Discovery three weeks earlier and attempt to recapture some of the depth of feelings it generated. We carefully summarized all of our actions and findings to date in the power-point presentation. We shared the video of our student forum, which clearly illustrated the energy and emotion they experienced as the studnets worked through the Discovery and Dream activities. We

posted the table charts from the Discovery sessions around the room, along with the large graphic recording, and invited participants to take a gallery walk.

Table groups then examined the student and adult root causes of success charts, looking for similarities and differences. They had an opportunity to check for accuracy and provide feedback. We asked, “Does the adult root causes of success chart reflect what you remember from the process? Have we missed anything?”

Following the introduction, participants worked through the guided imagery and dream representation activities. Although somewhat reluctant at first, we were surprised to find how quickly and fully engaged they became. The dream representations of the adults were just as varied as the students, including skits, interviews, songs, metaphors, and diagrams. Given the option of presenting their dream representations to the whole group, all of the adult working groups chose to present. This was contrary to the prediction of the students.

One of the adult groups chose to write a song. The group was comprised of a school administrator, a teacher, and four parents. The session was held in the high school drama room where there happened to be a class set of guitars on hand. The school administrator picked up a guitar and began to strum a tune while the others worked on lyrics. Within thirty minutes, they had developed a song entitled “Dream Outside The Box”. They were so enthused by the project that they volunteered to stay after the session to record the song in the school’s recording studio. Within a week, two teachers added back-up instrumentals and the song was cut onto a CD. It has now become the “official theme song” for our district “Today and Tomorrow” inquiry.

May 1, 2008

Superintendent's Blog Entry

“Dream Outside the Box”

This is a song created by a small group of staff and parents during the “Dream” phase of our April 30th “Today & Tomorrow” conversation. Lyrics are below and the mp3 file is available at: <http://mu.prn.bc.ca/blog/category/cool-peaces/outside-the-box/>

I saw it in a dream, there were open spaces and happy faces

and everything was green

The kids were learning, they were interested too.

They were focused on the future and all that they knew.

The Schools of Tomorrow is the vision of Today.

Don't let the boundaries stop you, don't let them get in the way.

The Schools of Tomorrow is the vision of today, so dream, just dream

Just dream... dream outside the box.

Their minds were like sponges, just taking it all in.

Their happiness to be there came from within.

There were old people, young people, virtual people too.

There were couches and fountains and the sky above is blue.

The Schools of Tomorrow is the vision of Today

Don't let the boundaries stop you, don't let them get in the way.

The Schools of Tomorrow is the vision of today, so dream, just dream.

Just dream... dream outside the box.

Following the Dream presentations, participants completed a writing activity. Each table group drafted a “macro positive proposition”, or a statement describing the ideal schools of the future. These statements, along with videotaped dream representations were collected from the three adult Dream sessions.

The planning team brought together all of the charts from the student and adult Dream sessions and worked in small groups to synthesize the ideas into a common vision statement. They used key words and phrases from the charts and were careful to replicate the language of the participants in the common vision statement. The team was able to condense the ideas into four draft versions. These versions would be taken back to the participants in the summit for feedback and further revisions. They are presented in Appendix F.

Our technology team made a new movie, this one combining video footage from the student forum with footage from all of the adult Discovery and Dream sessions. This movie would be shared at the summit. Our graphic artist viewed all of the documents from the student and adult Dream sessions and recorded in symbols and key words on a large wall chart the elements of our common dreams for the future of schools.

v) *The Summit: Design and Destiny*. The weekend summit, which took place on a Friday night and Saturday, May 30 and 31, 2008 focused on the Design and Destiny stages of the 4-D Cycle. At the summit, we hoped to identify focus areas for action that would help us to move toward our shared vision for the future of schools, the organizational structures that would help get the work done, and the very practical next steps for getting started. Since this was a planning for action stage that we wanted to be inclusive and collaborative, we felt it important to combine the student and adult participant groups for the summit. We issued an open invitation for everyone who had attended any of the prior sessions to join us for the summit.

After much consideration, and with the support of the Steering and Planning Committees, the researchers chose to shift their role from co-facilitators to participants for the summit. This would be a larger group than any of the previous sessions, where pacing and organization of space and activities would be critical. Managing the process would be intensive and the researchers felt it more important to be able to listen and observe than to focus on following and adapting the agenda if needed. In addition, the researchers felt that by letting go of facilitation at this stage they might be perceived as having less influence on the planning outcomes. For these reasons, the consultant and an associate stepped into the co-facilitation role for the summit.

The consultants brought a draft agenda to a face-to-face meeting with the Steering and Planning Committee members two days before the scheduled summit. Interestingly, the planning team recommended a major change in the agenda. They felt very strongly that school district staff would not be willing to work on action plans for new and innovative practices if they did not have the opportunity to talk about and put forward

their questions regarding the upcoming grade reconfiguration process. They also felt that parents and students would want to be a part of this conversation. The researchers were concerned that the “Today and Tomorrow” inquiry was about reshaping schools of the future in a much deeper way than just changing grade configurations, and that placing restructuring on the agenda might narrow the thinking. The Planning Committee suggested that participants were preoccupied with the more immediate changes to be brought about by restructuring, and given the opportunity to be heard, would be better able to set this topic aside and consider other initiatives that would help to move us toward our vision for the future. After much discussion, it was agreed to revise the agenda for Saturday morning to include a one-hour segment on restructuring. This segment included two small group activities, one to identify the common hopes and dreams for a positive restructuring experience and a second to list the most important questions that needed to be answered in order to ensure a successful restructuring process.

The above noted challenge is mentioned because it is an important example of the collaborative nature of the Appreciative Inquiry process. Had the consultants and researchers been working in isolation, the agenda would not have been revised and participation may have been compromised. The Steering and Planning Committees play an important role in ensuring that all stake-holders are represented at every step of the inquiry, from planning the agenda and activities to reviewing and analyzing findings.

A total of ninety-four participants attended the Friday/Saturday summit sessions. This was less than expected. Several of the students holding part-time jobs were unable

to get time off for the event, and some of the others had team sports commitments. The sudden death of a well-known community member also impacted participation. Of the total participants, sixty three percent were staff members, twenty three percent were parents and community members, and fourteen percent were students.

We chose not to seat participants at tables because we wanted to provide freedom of movement and permit regrouping for different activities. Chairs were set in circles of eight, with a chart easel and recording tools in the center of each circle. Participants seated themselves to begin the session. Supporting documents for the Summit, including a facilitator's agenda, facilitator's power-point presentation, and activity worksheets can be found in Appendix G.

The introduction to the summit session was very important. We needed to reconnect participants to the work they had done in Discovery and Dream over the past six weeks, and attempt to recapture some of the energy and emotion that had been generated. We summarized our actions and findings from all of the previous sessions in an opening power-point presentation. We shared a new video sampling all of our work to date and celebrated the theme song created by our participants. We posted the two large graphic recordings representing our findings from the Discovery and Dream sessions, along with table charts from the Dream sessions, around the room and invited participants to take a gallery walk.

Following the introduction, participants completed a small group activity designed to gather feedback on the dream statements drafted by the Planning Committee. Each group was provided with a poster copy of the four draft statements. Groups were asked to discuss and record three things that they most connected with and one thing that

they would like to change or add, for each of the statements. Feedback charts were then collected for future work on editing the draft statements and synthesizing the key elements into one version.

To begin the Design stage of the inquiry, participants worked in their small groups to review the list of focus areas for innovation identified by the Planning Committee.

What if everyone just wants the status quo? I think we have to emphasize that what we are doing now isn't bad. In fact, schools in our community are better than they ever have been in so many ways. But we aren't keeping pace with the changes in society and the increasing demands on the educational system. Many students are not thriving and this behooves us to look at how we might do things differently.

What is different about AI is the element of choice. Change is not mandated or prescribed. Those who are motivated to make a change are encouraged and supported. If the change they make results in improved student success, others will take notice. Student success is near and dear to the hearts of teachers. When there is evidence of student improvement (especially with students right here in our own district) due to new practices, teachers might be more inclined to change accordingly.

In a prior working session, the Planning Committee had reviewed information collected from the Discovery and Dream stages of the inquiry to determine these areas. Participants had the opportunity to add any new areas to the list that might have been missed. Focus areas were then posted on charts around the room and participants were invited to regroup at the focus area of their choosing. In their new groups, participants were given the task of writing a success statement for their focus area and identifying action initiatives that would contribute to success. Throughout the Design stage and activities that followed, participants were invited to exercise mobility, one of the basic principles of Open Space (Owen, 1997). If, during the course of group work, people found themselves

in a situation where they were neither learning nor contributing, they must move to a more productive space.

Day two began with the restructuring activity. The participants engaged in small group dialogue about their wishes for successful restructuring and their most important questions about the process. Each group recorded information on charts and reported out to the whole group. This activity provided school and district administrators important input on the priorities of the staff and community regarding reconfiguration, and information to help guide their planning. Group charts were collected as a reference for future planning. Participants easily transitioned back to the Design and Destiny activities without any noticeable drop in energy level. The restructuring conversations did not appear to have a distractive influence on the overall summit process.

To return to the Design activity, participants moved back into their working groups from the previous evening. Each reported out on their focus area success statement and identified action initiatives. This gave everyone the opportunity to experience the passion and enthusiasm evident in all of the focus areas and to determine if there was a new area of interest they were drawn to for the afternoon work. In preparation for the next task, facilitators shared the *IDEO* video. This is a short video that gives an example of design principles for innovative product development. These general principles can be applied to teams seeking new and innovative approaches to desired outcomes in business, and in educational organizations.

Over the lunch break, the co-facilitators worked with volunteer participants to condense some of the overlapping ideas for action initiatives and to ensure they were represented in only one focus area. The revised focus area/action initiative charts were

placed in working stations around the room. After lunch, participants were invited to choose a focus area for the afternoon work. The afternoon activity involved small groups continuing the work on initiatives, adding outcomes and next steps for an action plan. Focus areas with the greatest number of participants included Citizenry, Mutual Relationships, Inclusive Learning, and Community Partnerships. Smaller groups worked on Healthy, Sustainable Environments and Innovative Practices in Teaching. No one chose to work in the focus area of Celebrating Success/Leading Practices. Each group kept a record of its work on a chart template. The collaborative planning activity was followed by paired or trio discussions on individually inspired actions. Participants had the opportunity to reflect on their summit experience and identify any new ideas upon which they were motivated to act. Individuals interested in becoming a member of an innovation team to continue the work initiated at the summit were invited to put their names and contact information on a sign-up sheet.

As researchers in the role of participant observers, we found the summit experience to be one of hard work. While Discovery and Dream activities were characterized by periods of emotional connectedness, inspired vision, and creation of energy, the Design activities were characterized by periods of tension, confusion, and consumption of energy. Participants were eager to dig into action planning. They really wanted to see what the outcomes of the whole process would be. However, they had to struggle through some chaos before their direction became clear. Action initiatives were brainstormed, explored and refined. Common ideas popped up in different working groups. There was some confusion as we reorganized action initiatives into focus areas and struggled to find the right words to describe these areas.

In the group work, participants cycled through moments of advocacy and inquiry. Sometimes there was disagreement. It was helpful at those moments, to be surrounded by the root causes of success and dream charts. Group members could go back and look. They could ask, “Does this action initiative align with what we found to be the factors contributing to success and our vision for schools of the future?” In this way, the work from Dream and Discovery provided a rich framework to help resolve conflict.

At the end of the day people were tired but satisfied with what they had produced. They were encouraged to see that their input was valued and that they had a very real opportunity to contribute to the on-going work to implement change. One parent, with tears in her eyes, said she hoped that her children would be proud of her for taking part in a session with the potential to create so much positive change on their behalf.

As district administrators, we found the summit experience to be a “leap of faith”. We had to step outside of our traditional management paradigm of power and control and believe that what ever emerged from the process would be the “right” direction to take. While at first glance this felt like a huge risk, it was not so frightening when we shared our conviction that the capacity to solve the biggest challenges for our school district exists here with the people in our own community. Rather than prescribing fixes, we were hoping to provide the conditions to make the co-creation of alternatives possible.

While we were prepared to relinquish power and control in the design of action initiatives and encourage innovation, we also had to acknowledge some basic constraints surrounding the work of teams. Action plans would have to honor the *School Act*, and contractual obligations. Financial resources needed to implement initiatives could not exceed the capacity of the school district budget. Immediately following the Summit, the

researchers worked with the Steering and Planning Committees to determine a process for establishing action team membership, reporting initiatives to the Board, and obtaining Board approval for funding.

vi) *Post-Summit: Destiny.* Immediately following the Summit, the researchers met with members of the Steering and Planning Committees to talk about communicating the outcomes of the Summit and supporting continued work on action initiatives. We brought both committees together to review all of the work from the Summit and to determine priorities for district support. Many ideas had been generated. We did not have the resources to support them all simultaneously. We did not want to have so many initiatives on the go that energy became too divided and the ability to sustain actions was threatened or lost.

The Steering and Planning Committees made the following recommendations for prioritizing areas for district support:

- community partnerships will help to make the work “doable”
- flexible schedules will maximize space
- innovative teaching practices can be supported through our existing professional development structure
- the mutual relationships focus area relates well to middle years development and supporting transitions
- the inclusive learning focus area will contribute to building student motivation and engagement

Some of the action initiatives were found to fit well within existing organizational structures in the district. Others represented a new focus area and would require a new team structure. A total of eight district action teams were named.

1. Social Responsibility Team

Action Initiatives:

- grow and sustain Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) systems in all schools
- develop a data collection process for district-wide use of the British Columbia Social Responsibility Performance Standards

2. Student Leadership Team

Action Initiatives:

- develop and implement a model for a district student advisory team
- review structures/strategies to promote student leadership at school sites

3. Mentorship Team

Action Initiatives:

- develop and implement peer mentoring programs to support student transitions from elementary to middle school, and from middle to high school
- research student advisory models
- complete an inventory of peer and cross-age tutoring programs currently operating at school sites; share promising practice and helpful resources
- develop a community mentor registry to help link subject/career experts with classes and individual students

4. Secondary School Success Team

Action Initiatives:

- collect and analyze student withdrawal and attendance data
- review models for different kinds of alternate or “store front” programs
- identify student target group and develop a proposal for a new program to be implemented in September 2009

5. Inclusive Learning Team

Action Initiatives:

- expand dual credit/apprenticeship programs
- investigate the potential for flexible timetables and implement a trial

- expand opportunities for hands-on, project based learning

6. Staffing

Action Initiatives:

- establish a process for the movement of teaching and support staff created by the restructuring process

7. Facilities/Transportation

Action Initiatives:

- determine the need for any facility adaptations or upgrades required to accommodate the movement of students in the restructuring process, and a timeline for implementation
- research and prepare for any adjustments to the transportation systems made necessary by restructuring

8. Curriculum and Learning Resources Team

Action Initiatives:

- identify the curriculum implementation models and timetables that are developmentally appropriate for the middle years and determine the preferred changes in preparation for restructuring
- develop a process for completing an inventory of learning

resources at the grades 7 and 10 levels, identifying what will be moved and how, and determining any new purchases that will be required

Participants from the Summit, who placed their names on the list indicating a desire to continue working on action initiatives, were invited to join an action team in the area of their interest. Information regarding action teams was circulated to all schools to recruit new members. Teams were established and ranged in size from five to eighteen members. Each team chose a chairperson. The district appointed an administrator to a new, part-time position entitled Action Team Liaison. This administrator is responsible for ensuring that teams do not work in isolation, that timelines for tasks are developed and honored, and that action plans and outcomes are communicated on an on-going basis to school district staff and to the community. Posters summarizing the “Today and Tomorrow” process, with updates on action team progress, have been placed in all schools. The large graphic representations of the Discovery and Dream sessions are displayed on the wall at the School Board Office. A website was established to house all of the documents from the Appreciative Inquiry process, minutes from action team meetings, and updates on progress. An interactive site was developed to permit on-going dialogue about schools of the future and, for those who were unable to participate in the Appreciative Inquiry sessions, an opportunity to join the conversation.

How do we keep the invitation for input regarding the future of schools in our district open? Perhaps we could embed appreciative interviews into the curriculum for the secondary student leadership course. Every year, students would interview peers and parents. What would they find as root causes of success? How would their findings compare to those of the “Today and Tomorrow” process? This information would help

us to stay current and in touch with our community. It would also help to ensure that student voice is more equitably represented.

A district fund has been established to help support meeting and travel costs for action team work. The work to sustain and implement the “Today and Tomorrow” initiatives continues in earnest.

Chapter 6

APPLICATIONS OF APPRECIATIVE THINKING AND LEADING

Appreciative Inquiry has been woven into the philosophical and cultural foundation upon which we intend to build the ongoing work in our district. We are trying to strengthen the foundation through modeling and dialogue. Appreciative Inquiry literature suggests that some of the most important innovations are those that occur spontaneously as a result of the application of appreciative principles in everyday work. In this chapter, we have included examples of improvisational applications of appreciative principles in our district.

6.1 Internal Review

At their best, conversations – inquiry, dialogue, discussion and debate – make real and tangible the highest potentials of an organization and its people. (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 78)

One aspect of the Ministry of Education's accountability framework for the past six years has been the External Review. Although modified slightly over the years, the basic premise is that teams of eight to ten people visit each of the province's sixty

districts once every three years. These teams consist of district and school administrators, teachers, ministry staff and at least one parent from a variety of districts. The team visits as many schools as possible over a three or four day period and asks the same series of questions. The information is then collated, combined and reported back to the district as a formal report. These reports are made public and posted on the ministry's web site. Although criticized for being somewhat inconsistent, and at times intimidating, most agree that the questions and conversations are a learning opportunity for all involved.

In our district we decided to create our own Internal Review process. Initially it was considered by most to be a practice session for the upcoming External Reviews. However, the process has been recognized as a positive learning experience and, although the province is considering modification and/or cancellation of the external team process, we plan to continue our own local review. It has also been refined based on the premise that we all like to tell and hear stories, and that “we delight in doing well in the eyes of those we care about and respect” (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 19).

Initially both our visiting and host teams were designed to mirror the provincial model. The visitors included at least one person from district staff, a school board trustee, at least one principal and a teacher. The host team was made up of the provincially mandated School Planning Council. This council included the principal, three parents, and a teacher representative (teacher representation on either team has been inconsistent because the teachers' association is opposed to the formal review process, particularly the provincial model). This is still the basic model for our local teams;

however, efforts are being made to include more parents, students and teachers in the process.

Gervase Bushe (2007) refers to the appreciative technique of “tracking and fanning”. Tracking is what Busch refers to as the ability to see what we want more of as already being there. It is seeing what is good when others find it hard to see. It is finding the likeable traits of a student or staff member who may be hard to like. Fanning is the process of magnifying what we want to see more of. Sincere praise and thanks are examples. Our Internal Review process is morphing from a search for weaknesses to celebrating and encouraging what is going well. The first question is designed to inspire stories filled with successes and things that a school is proud of. Jackie Bascobert-Kelm (2005: 70) supports our direction when she suggests that instead of adhering to the old saying “be careful what you ask for because you just might get it” we adopt this one, “be deliberate in what we ask for so that we can create it”. It is hoped that during the process both teams, visitors and hosts, will as Senge et al suggest, learn to listen and set aside negative reactions to “not getting it right.” The result may then be action that is shaped by the field of the future rather than by the patterns of the past (Senge et al, 2004).

November 22, 2007

Superintendent’s Blog Entry

“Peer Factor vs. Fear Factor”

Today we are starting our second round of “Internal Review” visits. As

formal as this might sound, the visits are simply an opportunity for all of us to have conversations about what is happening in our schools. Teams made up of a district staff member, a trustee, and an administrator from another school, will spend an hour or two hearing about each school's goals (and why they were chosen), progress being made, and the strategies that are working well. This is also a chance for schools to brag about, and celebrate, things that are often taken for granted.

The questions are meant to encourage reflection. There is no test at the end and you won't find schools ranked in the local news paper.

I believe we should be hungry for information that tells us whether or not we are making a difference.

6.2 Professional Growth Plans

Our district has an established process for performance appraisals of school administrators (principals and vice-principals). It includes a dialogue between the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent and individual school administrators, based on a set of pre-determined questions, and the development of a self-directed, individual professional growth plan. The professional growth plan involves self-assessment on a matrix of research based leadership skills, called dimensions of practice, thought to be characteristic of strong school administrators. Typically staff will look at the matrix and focus on personal areas of weakness. Professional growth plans then identify actions that administrators will take to in order to improve in these areas of weakness.

This year, we introduced administrators to the process of asset based thinking. Asset based thinking is derived from research in sociology and has shown that when people study problems and conflicts, the number and severity of the problems they identify actually *increase*. But when they study human ideals and achievements, peak experiences, and best practices, *these* things - not the conflicts - tend to flourish. Asset based thinking is aimed at identifying the strengths that are immediately available in oneself and others. When you decrease your focus on what is wrong and increase your focus on what is right, you build enthusiasm and energy, and move productivity to a new level.

With the principles of asset based thinking in mind, we gave permission to our administrators to consider their professional growth plan from a positive perspective. We invited them to identify their strengths, curiosities and passions. We were convinced that a growth plan developed from this perspective would more likely move to action than remain sitting on the shelf. We were curious to see if by focusing on their strengths administrators might actually improve in some of their areas of weakness at the same time.

6.3 “Positive Roll-call”

We meet bi-weekly with our thirty school administrators. Historically, our “leadership meetings” were very much a one-way conversation. The boardroom previously used for administrative meetings, had fixed desks and high backed chairs that were configured in a u-shape at one end, while rows of small chairs were set out at the other end of the room. When school administrators came into the room, they would sit in

the last rows of chairs leaving many empty ones between district staff and themselves. Side bar conversations, and sometimes even heckling, were the norm. Questions were often asked for the sole purpose of making one or all of the district staff team angry or uncomfortable. The “we versus they” atmosphere was palpable.

The addition of positive roll call at the beginning of our leadership meetings has been an interesting discovery. We were reluctant to make time for it. The agenda is always so full – would we be able to get everything done? Yet, when we take the time to do it, we seem to be able to work through the rest of the agenda more efficiently. Lately we have noticed that how we end the meeting is important too. When we end on a positive note, administrators return to their schools with a greater level of energy and enthusiasm.

The configuration of the boardroom has since changed. Portable tables and chairs allow for flexibility and for the use of different meeting strategies. Traditional presentation styles have given way to table group conversations. In an effort to incorporate a culture of celebration and asset based discussion at these Leadership Team Meetings, we decided to begin each of them with a question about what was going well in schools. Each administrator then answers the question, usually in the form of a story. For example, the first question we asked was, “Tell us about something a first year teacher did at your school in the month of September that most excited you?” Almost everyone told us about a young and enthusiastic teacher who was going out of his or her way to do a great job. A principal from a rural school talked about a teacher who rode a different bus home after school each day so that he could see where the students in his class lived. The stories are often humorous and many of them remind everyone of the importance of our work and why we chose education as a profession.

Just as the semantics of a question for an Appreciative Inquiry interview protocol are important, we are careful to ask questions in a way that will illicit stories that have the potential to uncover what we want more of. For example, when we asked administrators to tell us about a student who overcame obstacles in order to be successful, we heard several inspirational stories (some that brought tears to the eyes). However, had we asked them to tell us about the obstacles that students must overcome in order to be successful we may well have heard a litany of sad stories that would have had us all wondering if any of our efforts were actually worth it.

I have become so much more aware of the language we use. The vocabulary we choose and how we frame our conversations can make a world of difference. Speaking with positive intention invites a thoughtful response vs agreement or disagreement. It opens doors to understanding.

6.4 Achievement Contract

As part of the Ministry of Education's accountability framework, districts are expected to prepare a yearly Achievement Contract that includes a focus on literacy, programs to support early learning, and any other matters as determined by the Minister. The Achievement Contract is a public statement of commitment by a Board of Education to improve success for each student in the district. Each Contract is developed collaboratively, using evidence-based assessment of the needs and priorities of the students in the district. The Contract identifies areas of focus for the improvement of student success, describes strategic actions, and outlines processes to monitor progress and make adjustments intended to improve results. At the inception of the contracts eight

years ago, almost every school and every district had the same three goals. Literacy, numeracy and social responsibility... in that order.

In 2005 our district questioned the order of our goals and decided to make Social Responsibility number one. It was felt that in order for students to be successful in terms of literacy and numeracy, we needed to provide safe and caring schools. At one point it was mentioned that if academic learning was our only priority we might well end up with “a bunch of bullies who read really well”. We also decided that Social Responsibility was about more than just classroom and hallway behavior. John Abbott’s visit to the district had inspired us to think more about community and global responsibility. In other words, we were talking more about our need to take responsibility for one another and for our planet.

In “An Invitation to Social Construction,” Ken Gergen quotes Jean-Francois Lyotard, “The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one experience” (Gergen, 1999: 4). Gergen then goes on to say, “The search, then, is for fresh ideas and practices for a more promising millennium. To what, then, do we hold fast; what do we abandon; what is worth doing” (1999: 4)? In order to have the conversations about what to abandon and about what is worth doing, Social Responsibility, on a broader scale, has become a priority for our trustees and our district. Student forums have been held to talk about community and global issues. The traditional focus of secondary school leadership classes has gone from that of somewhat elitist groups who, with good intention, plan school spirit activities for a select group of students to leadership classes whose goals are peer mentorship, volunteerism and the

inclusion of all students. For example, the theme for one of our junior secondary school's leadership class last year was 'compassion' with a focus on the development of empathic relationships.

November 15, 2007

Superintendent's Blog Entry

Semantics

"Semantics" is "the branch of linguistics and logic concerned with meaning." Often we may think that too much time is spent quibbling about semantics and, in some cases, that is probably true. However, more and more I believe that language is incredibly important. I heard a quote the other day; "...there is an ocean of meaning in a drop of grammar". Language can be powerful.

It is no small thing that Social Responsibility is the number one goal in our district's Achievement Contract. At first glance someone might say; "its just semantics... it makes no difference what order the goals are in." My answer to that is to admit to how many things I don't get done when my wife Deb gives me my Saturday morning "to do" list. Once I finish the first couple of things I feel like I deserve a beverage break. I often don't get to the third and fourth things on the list. Social Responsibility... helping kids (and staff) feel safe, creating community, taking care of one another and the planet we live

on... is too important to put lower on the list. It is foundational. Student success in other areas depends on it.

In the spring of 2008, based on the root causes of success identified through our “Today and Tomorrow” Appreciative Inquiry Summit, we further modified our district’s Achievement Contract. Students and adults had told us that they were most engaged as learners when they had positive relationships with teachers and peers, when curriculum was relevant, and when multiple teaching and learning approaches were employed. Student Engagement became our second goal. It is our contention that if students are actively engaged in their learning the literacy and numeracy goals will take care of themselves. To this end we have been focusing much time and resources on the strategies of differentiated instruction and formative assessment. We are emphasizing pro-active and preventative strategies for dealing with student discipline rather those traditional strategies, which are reactive and punitive. Rather than complain about student readiness levels we are attempting to make our schools ready for students.

6.5 Stories versus Statistics

One of the accountability measures in British Columbia schools is referred to as the ‘Dogwood Completion Rate’. The Dogwood Diploma is a certificate presented to students who have met the graduation requirements of British Columbia’s Kindergarten through Grade 12 school system. The completion rate is based on the tracking of the proportion of students who graduated, with a Dogwood Diploma, within six years of starting Grade 8. The current rate for the province is eighty percent. Our district has

generally been under the provincial average most years. Traditionally, we would celebrate or commiserate percentage increases and decreases and then speculate about the reasons. If results were higher it may have been a ‘good crop’ that started Grade 8 six years previous. If the results were lower it may have been because the crop was a poor one. We also assume that many of the non-graduates may have been lured away from school by lucrative jobs in the thriving oil and gas industry. Our proximity to the Alberta border, and the transiency of our labor force, suggests that some students leave our province before they graduate. For some students we, as a system, were unable to meet their academic needs or keep them interested and engaged in their learning. In reality there are several reasons that might account for the yearly rise and fall of our local Dogwood Completion percentages.

Upon looking at our percentages from a slightly different perspective we realized that in our district there were approximately 450 students in each cohort group. This means that when twenty percent of students in the cohort do not graduate, we are actually talking about four or five students for every percentage point. These students have names and stories. We decided that it was time to hear their stories.

June 12, 2008

Superintendent’s Blog Entry

Stories vs. Statistics

Recently I heard someone say that “statistics are people with the tears wiped off.”

It made me think of the ministry’s efforts to find out about the roughly 20% of students who do not finish high school. I did the math... in our district 1% is equal

to 4 kids. These are 4 kids with names and stories. We decided to find out who the kids are that leave our schools and why they are leaving. As much as possible we want to get their stories.

Our tech department developed an on-line withdrawal form that allows schools to basically do an “exit interview” when students leave. Without being nosy we can find out if kids are leaving because their family moved to another country, because they took a job in the oil patch or because, at this point in their life, we could not meet their needs.

The system is set up so that I actually receive an e-mail every time a student leaves our district. The message tells me who, when and why. Not only will we have better information about individual kids we will also be able to look at trends over time.

This should help us to design appropriate interventions based on specific information.

We are currently working to make the collection and use of these stories as meaningful as possible. We believe this is the kind of information that will help us create programs to better engage students and ultimately keep them in school.

6.6 School Based Applications of Appreciative Inquiry

The “Today and Tomorrow Summit” that took place in the spring of 2008 illustrated the possibilities for using Appreciative Inquiry in other ways. Two administrators were involved in the summit planning process and almost all of the others were participants in the actual summit. As a result of their participation in the

Appreciative Inquiry Summit and the ensuing conversations, several teachers and administrators have spontaneously, and without our involvement, started working towards the implementation of some of the new strategies that were generated.

One veteran principal at one of our elementary schools facilitated her school's annual planning day in May 2008 using an Appreciative Inquiry protocol. She reported at a Leadership Team meeting that the day had been the "best ever" and that the majority of her staff felt the same way. The principal of Student Support Services, who is responsible for all of the special education itinerant teachers, used the 4-D Appreciative Inquiry cycle to help her staff rediscover and redefine their roles. Other administrators are now anxious to learn more. We are currently planning a series of Appreciative Inquiry "Dinner and Discussion" sessions for administrators.

6.7 Intergenerational Learning.

Intergenerational learning emerged as a root cause of success through our Appreciative Inquiry Discovery sessions and was prioritized as an area for action initiatives during the Design stage. While our action team was searching for examples of strong practice in our province and working with a consultant to learn more about Community Embedded Praxis, examples of intergenerational learning began to spring up.

The teacher in the Chef Training Program at a senior secondary school, whose students are working towards trades certification, linked his class with an elementary school principal whose students were working to set up a new school canteen. The secondary students taught the elementary students the basics of *Food Safe* (a provincial

certification requirement for food handlers), and helped to prepare them for their *Food Safe* exam.

A teacher/administrator team at a secondary school received approval from the province's *Aboriginal Network of Performance Based Schools* to implement a mentoring program for Aboriginal students. This program connects secondary Aboriginal students trained in peer helping with their elementary peers with the aim to increase a sense of belonging and to develop social skills. The program aims to help keep both elementary and secondary students in school.

A student teacher took her elementary class working on elements from the Health and Physical Fitness curriculum to a local Senior Citizen's Center. Elementary students were grouped with seniors who had recently won medals at the Seniors Games (a program to acknowledge excellence in sports). The young students conducted interviews with the seniors, to hear their stories of personal success and learn how they were able to meet their personal goals for physical fitness. This project helped to dispel myths that the seniors and students had of each other regarding health and fitness, and developed positive multi-age relationships.

The local newspaper published the following article describing yet another intergenerational program:

Local Newspaper Article:

“Intergenerational program brings seniors and students together”

Every Friday, when school is in session eight Grade 6 and 20 Grade 7

students from a local elementary school pack up and head to Heritage Manor II. The students use their classroom time to volunteer and make friends with the elderly at the residence.

Two things inspired the teacher to begin the program for her students – the thought of her 86 year old grandmother who still volunteers at elementary schools, and a class she took from Sharon MaKenzie called ‘Community Embedded Practice: Putting student’s learning back on the bus.’ She spent about a month and a half planning everything from bus schedules to academics and touching based with the senior home. She said she couldn’t be happier with how smoothly its been going, there have been two sessions so far, and she recalled the first one as something wonderful. “It was a dream really. It was like ‘wow, this is running so smoothly,’ there was none of the regular classroom management stuff that I normally have to deal with like ‘sit down, do your work, stop chatting with so and so’, they were very engaged all day,” she said.

Senior participation is on a volunteer basis, and (the teacher) said there was a group who tried to go around and take part in everything and some who had students go to their room to read or play bridge with them.

The school’s principal explains the program: “The students are not intrusive and they are helpful. It is voluntary for the seniors, they don’t have to join in but I think they are delighted, love the company, and love the noise and the kids,” she said. She also said that one student brought her fiddle to play with a senior who had mentioned he fancied the instrument on the

previous visit. “They are really making connections with people, even at the beginning of the second session, the seniors were waiting for them to come.” The kids have to design a program for the seniors to take part in. This could range from reading to a physical activity or to playing board games.

The intergenerational program has only just begun, and will run every Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Here are the comments from one Grade 6 student: *Birds eye view: I am one of the students who participated with this project. The first day was fun and yet strange in both ways. Although we made great friends in short time we could also see that in their eyes they were sort of, worried. I know they saw it in our eyes to. Some were too shy to come out. Others were there from the beginning to the end, like Ralph. He told us many stories, some sad and some happy, but the sad stories never seemed sad to us because he had an amazing sense of humor! In fact, all of them had a different sense of humor once we got to know them!*

6.8 Community Partnerships

Most districts in the province are faced with declining student enrolment and in many cases have been closing schools. Our district however, is projecting steady growth over the next ten years. All of our in-town schools are currently full requiring the use of eighteen portable classrooms. In order to create space at city elementary schools, and to provide developmentally appropriate middle years programs for our students, we will be

moving Grade 7 students to our two existing junior secondary schools. Grade 10 students will then move to the senior secondary school. The challenge is that the senior secondary school building will not accommodate the extra students. We believe this challenge is truly an opportunity.

Considering the current economic crisis we understand that it is unlikely that Ministry of Education capital funding will be available. This is one reason why we are not asking for additional school space in the traditional way. In fact, we believe that an opportunity would be lost if more traditional school space was to be allocated. Instead, we have been exploring community partnerships, particularly with the city administration. The Ministry of Education is currently encouraging districts to create “Neighborhoods of Learning” that would see several service agencies form partnerships with schools to occupy empty or excess school space. By being unique, creative and flexible, our district is suggesting that the concept operate in reverse. Six blocks from the senior secondary school, construction of an amazing community facility is under way. The complex will house an Olympic size speed skating oval, two full size ice rinks and a suspended running track. At this time there are 10,000 square feet of unspoken for space in the complex. That is the size of a small school.

We have met with city council and the region’s Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and they are excited by the concept of this partnership for many reasons. In addition to the obvious fiscally responsible use of space, we will also be able to use the facility to expand our already successful Career and Apprenticeship Programs for secondary students. While hockey and speed skating academies are obvious possibilities, we are also exploring the possibility of offering programs of study in

everything from Sports Therapy to Ice Making and Recreation Facility Management / Maintenance. For students, the content of required courses such as English and Math could be adapted to bear more relevance to these programs. We have also entered into conversations about adding classroom space in the region's planned new hospital, the soon to be empty old hospital, and the city's planned Oil and Gas Interpretive Center. The opportunities are endless.

The regional college and the University of Northern British Columbia are working with the district to develop dual credit programs in the areas of Health Science and Education. We believe that these cognitive apprenticeships will help our district to grow its own teachers and nurses and will greatly assist recruiting and retention efforts in the north. In addition, we have the opportunity to model the prudent use of resources, space and tax dollars. Shuttle busses, walking paths, and interior renovations are far less costly than building a mirror image of our senior secondary school.

These examples are small steps toward expanding learning opportunities that go beyond the walls of the school and connect learners of all ages. We hope to invite and excite more and more people to participate in implementing inquiry related innovations.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of Findings

The purpose of the current study was to explore the use of Appreciative Inquiry as a framework for supporting educational change. We began by asking, “How does Appreciative Inquiry differ from more traditional approaches to change in public education?” Traditionally, change has been legislated by the Ministry of Education or mandated by a School Board or District Office. It is most commonly a ‘top-down’ process. This is certainly how the historical approach to restructuring in our district was perceived, as reviewed in Chapter 4. At times change can be a ‘bottom-up’ process, where a group of teachers initiate a new practice and lobby for it to be adopted on a district-wide basis. With Appreciative Inquiry change is neither ‘top-down’ nor ‘bottom-up’, but rather co-created. All voices are heard. All stakeholders contribute to building a shared vision of what they want to see in schools of the future and in designing the action initiatives that will help to get there.

Traditional change practices are prescriptive. We look to research for evidence of effective practice. We train our staffs in what is currently believed to be best practice. Those who have the power to make decisions recommend the actions that others should take. Typically we find adopters and resisters on staff. With Appreciative Inquiry, change is generative rather than prescriptive. We look to the experience of our community to identify what is working well that we want to nurture and grow, and what

we might do differently to improve student success. Action initiatives are not designed by outside experts but come from within our own organization. The people who generate the ideas are the first to step forward in developing action teams and to take responsibility for implementation.

The participation question was an important one for us. We made the invitation as open and as inclusive as possible. The Discovery, Dream, and Summit sessions required a significant time commitment. Would enough people come? Participation was not as high as we had hoped. Staff who took part in the 4-D Appreciative Inquiry cycle represented about twenty five percent of our teacher/administrator employee group. Of the total participation group, fifty three percent were staff, thirty one percent were parents and community members, and sixteen percent were students. Teachers were disappointed that more parents hadn't become involved. Upon recognizing the value of student voice, we feel it is important to expand opportunities for more student involvement in shaping the future of schools.

We questioned how scheduling the stages of the 4-D cycle over a two-month period might impact participation. Would the inquiry be sustained and participation remain stable over time? Would it increase or decrease? We found that participation decreased over time. It dropped by twenty nine percent from Discovery to Dream sessions, and another six percent at the Summit. Most people reported conflicting commitments as the reason for not returning. Some indicated a frustration with the amount of time it was taking to get to action. With the arrival of spring, most families had become involved in a variety of sports, dance and recreation events. This is a typical

pattern for the community. People commonly express concern over how busy their lives have become and the frantic pace of their daily routines.

Although the number of people participating in the inquiry on the future of schools was less than we had hoped, it was significantly greater than any prior attempt the school district has made to gather input from stakeholders regarding changes to the system. It was also much higher than participation in a community visioning exercise organized by City Council, held earlier in the year. In addition, the level of engagement of those who attended the school district sessions consistently exceeded our expectations. People laughed and cried together, contributed to group activities, and demonstrated high levels of task commitment.

Most importantly, the desired outcome of the Summit has been achieved. Action teams have been established and work on a number of new initiatives has begun. It appears that there is no magic number that dictates how much participation is enough to make a difference. Margaret Wheatley states, “All change, even very large and powerful change, begins when a few people start talking with one another about something they care about” (2002: 9). More participation is good, but even a small group can be significant when the inquiry leads to inspired action.

Action initiatives that have emerged from the formal process of Appreciative Inquiry have been reported in Chapter 5. Other initiatives that have emerged from improvisational application of appreciative thinking have been discussed in Chapter 6. All have potential for positive change, some incremental and some transformational. Incremental change initiatives involve expanding or deepening identified areas of successful practice. Transformational change initiatives involve significant departures

from traditional practice. Action initiatives that have the potential for transformational change include:

- flexible time tables and schedules that blend face-to-face with on-line learning opportunities
- classes that spend large portions of their time in learning environments outside of the classroom
- a different kind of alternate program based on student leadership and personalized learning
- mentorships where students are connected with community members of all ages who can share their expertise in a specified area of learning
- new courses where students can gain experience and dual credit for training in career areas where the community is experiencing recruitment and retention challenges

Now the hard work begins. We must find ways to support and sustain the work of our action teams. We must determine what kinds of evidence we will collect to evaluate the impact of these initiatives on student success.

How has experience with Appreciative Inquiry influenced the work of the researchers as senior administrators in a school district? In the world of educational administration where it is easy to be consumed by government directives, reports and deadlines, and competing needs of stake holders, Appreciative Inquiry has been a breath of fresh air infusing energy and insight into our work. It has reaffirmed for us the

importance of listening deeply and intently to all members of our educational community and the capacity that exists among us to find solutions to our most pressing challenges.

We have been poignantly reminded of how sometimes, we have to go slow to go fast.

During a book study of Kouzes and Posner's "The Leadership Challenge", Lesley found an analogy related to driving too quickly in the fog. The analogy illustrates the importance of clarity of vision... especially when you are going fast (Kouzes and Posner, 2007: 124). When the decision was made to delay the reconfiguration of grade levels for one more year, we met with the staff and students who were to be involved. We recognized that many of them might have been feeling that we'd been driving too quickly in the fog. As passengers they were fearful regardless of whether or not they trusted our abilities.

Too often we present compelling information to our staffs and expect them to immediately act upon it. The concept of change means different things to different people and it is important that leaders keep that in mind.

No one can resolve the crisis of reintegration on behalf of another. Every attempt to pre-empt conflict, argument, protest by rational planning, can only be abortive; however reasonable the proposed changes, the process of implementing them must still allow the impulse of rejection to play itself out. When those who have the power to manipulate changes act as if they have only to explain, and when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own.

Peter Marris (1975: 155)

We know that meaning is socially constructed and we recognize the importance of dialogue in deepening understanding, and yet we seldom give our people time to engage in professional conversations. We have become much more conscious of how we structure our meeting time with all groups, school administrators, trustees, student leadership teams and the parent advisory council. We do less presenting and we build in time for dialogue. We craft questions carefully to help invite participants to engage in thoughtful conversation. We are experimenting with the use of technology to maintain communication and distribute information so that we can maximize our time together for more interaction. We are looking for creative ways to provide site based collaboration time for classroom teachers and resources to support them in continuous cycles of inquiry.

Our experience with Appreciative Inquiry has helped us to better understand the power of story. We watched in amazement during partner interviews in the Discovery stage of our Appreciative Inquiry process, as participants began to tell stories about their most powerful learning experiences. We witnessed how quickly strangers became deeply intent on listening, were able to make emotional connections and develop shared understanding. We could see quite vividly how the act of sharing stories contributes to the development of positive relationships. People can often relate to a story where they may feel alienated by data or overloaded by information. “Confidence blooms when people feel connected rather than isolated, when they are willing to engage and commit to one another, when they can act together to solve problems” (Canter, 2005: 23). As senior administrators we have become more reflective regarding our personal stories and

more thoughtful about when sharing a story might be helpful in making connections and illustrating a point of view. In our internal review process, when we visit schools to meet with the administrator, teacher and parent representatives we invite the team to tell us their story. We ask, “What is special about your school, what is it that makes this a place that people want to be?” We find we learn as much from the story shared as we do from the goals and objectives listed in the school plan.

As senior administrators engaged in a district-wide process of Appreciative Inquiry, we found that we had to be willing to take a risk and to step outside the traditional role of leaders as those in possession of power and control. We had to have faith that what emerged from the hearts and minds of our community would be a direction that we were prepared to support. This experience was both relieving and frightening at the same time. While we felt less pressure to personally provide the ‘right’ answers to pressing questions about the future of schools; ultimately, we still carried the responsibility for ensuring the success of our students. We were very fortunate to have the support of our School Trustees who are encouraging us to embark on this learning journey. Initially, there was some frustration expressed by our staff. They were accustomed to being told what to do. They were anxious to know what changes to expect and how they would be impacted. The invitation to be part of a multi-stakeholder dialogue, uncover our common values and help shape the future together, was a different approach to change. There was a period of tension and uncertainty as we entered a new process. Some chose to sit back and watch to see if the district administrators really meant what they said when they welcomed participation.

A struggle we face as senior administrators is balancing distributed leadership with abdication in the eyes of our educational community. Sometimes, when we withhold from making a decision or taking an action in order to hear/learn from our stakeholders or we defer responsibility to others stepping into a leadership role, we are seen as lacking competency and we lose the confidence of our staff. It's a precarious place. There is pressure to move in both directions. (Act now! Take charge!Listen to your staff, value their skills and expertise, never do for them what they can do for themselves, empower them!) We have to keep adjusting and learning as we go. Perhaps the key is communication and transparency.

We have found Appreciative Inquiry to be a process closely aligned with shared or distributed leadership. When we were first appointed to our current positions in school district administration three years ago, we took steps to flatten the traditional hierarchy of roles and responsibilities. We developed portfolios by reflecting on our strengths and interests and how we could best work as a team. We began to sample the literature on distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006 and Spillane & Diamond, 2007), collaborative teacher leadership (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006), and networked learning communities (Kayser & Halbert, 2006). We looked for structures and strategies to help nurture and support shared leadership. With the help of a committee of trustees, administrators and teachers, we developed a Leadership Academy, a two-year program of leadership development for practicing teachers interested in developing skills in this area. We have found that Appreciative Inquiry has given us a new perspective on shared leadership. Through the Appreciative Inquiry process, leaders spontaneously emerge. Those who have expertise in, and passion for, an identified initiative that will help the district to move toward a common vision will step forward to take action. People contribute to work for the school district in relationship, rather than in role. "Appreciative Inquiry doesn't just build relationships. It levels the playing field and builds bridges across boundaries of

power and authority” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 240). We see this as a fluid process, whereas groups move through cycles of inquiry, and action initiatives are identified, individuals move in and out of leadership responsibilities as they work collaboratively to make a difference. Leaders are not defined by role, but rather by how they contribute to the work being done.

We are attracted to, and see potential in shared leadership. In fact, we would go as far as to say that this kind of leadership is essential to help us to reshape schools of the future. In the Appreciative Inquiry literature, leaders of appreciative organizations are described as those who “are drawn to organizing philosophies and practices that are highly relational. They are attracted to approaches that unleash collective imagination and compel collective action. They are ‘gifted’ leaders - but their gifts aren’t necessarily in the areas of raw intelligence, creativity, financial acumen, or pure business sense. They are gifted, instead, with a certain trust . . . a certain willingness to stretch beyond the limits of their own capacities, and to enlist others’ strengths in first imagining, then achieving, compelling goals and dreams for the future” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003: 248-249). As school district administrators, this model of leadership matches what we seek to do and what we hope to be. While we do not see ourselves as ‘gifted’, this is a capacity we are committed to building.

In our busy lives as school district administrators, we have found our work with Appreciative Inquiry to be hugely energizing. Many times we dragged ourselves into the office after hours feeling tired and burdened, but as we became immersed in the material we experienced a palpable change. We have found the basic principles underlying Appreciative Inquiry to be compelling and powerful. As soon as we began to reflect on

our reading, share our thinking, plan and review the process, we became more alert and engaged. “There is plenty of research that shows the better we feel the better we think. When we experience positive emotion, our thinking becomes more expansive. We are more creative and better at problem solving, solution generation, and decision making.” (Kelm, 2008: 61). We never once left our working sessions without noticing how quickly the time had passed, how much we were able to get done, and how we seemed to have more energy than when we entered. This has inspired us to look at how we might apply the principles to different aspects of our work. Sometimes it is as simple as reframing a question or comment, or changing our language to reflect an asset rather than a deficit discourse. This is something we continue to explore and to share with our colleagues in administration.

I think we might have taken the fact that we are colleagues and co-researchers for granted. When we talk with others in our PhD cohort, they often remark on how difficult it is to work in isolation. Some are not able to find a colleague with an understanding of social constructionism to have a conversation with. It has been such a gift to have a research partner. Through professional collaboration we have been able to push each other's thinking and deepen our understanding.

7.2 Limitations

The project presented here is one example of Appreciative Inquiry applied to district wide change in a public education system. This project was successful in developing action initiatives that have the potential for both incremental and transformational change in the school system. Whether or not all of these changes are realized and how effective they are in positively impacting student achievement remains to be seen. We have put structures and resources in place to support the on-going work of

action teams. We will continue to track academic achievement, grade-to-grade transitions, and school completion rate data to monitor student success and watch for improvement over time.

We make no claim that the Appreciative Inquiry process used in this project, if replicated in another public education system, would produce change initiatives that challenge the status quo. The uniqueness of our local context must be considered. We had a Board Of Trustees unanimously in favor of engaging in the process of Appreciative Inquiry, and community partners who had indicated an interest in working collaboratively with the school district. We had two senior administrators, who had completed foundational training and were actively studying the Appreciative Inquiry process, interested in working in the role of co-facilitator. One administrator was a long-time member of the community, born and raised in the area, who was trusted as having a deep understanding of the local people. We had a common challenge that needed to be addressed; specifically, we had an increasing student population and lack of classroom space to accommodate it. As Bushe noted (2007), school sites where there were widely acknowledged problems or concerns, which Appreciative Inquiry helped to address, were more likely to achieve transformational change. We had a rural community with a pioneer, ‘can do’ spirit and relatively small student/staff populations that do not present the complexities of a large metropolitan school district. This project is one example of Appreciative Inquiry applied to public education and as such, offers only possibilities for future use.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, our participation rate was lower than we had hoped. We have asked ourselves, “How might we have done things differently that could

have increased participation?” We could have planned the events more carefully at a different time during the school year. However it is not always possible to predict conflicting events, and we are not certain this would have made a significant difference. We do feel that taking the time to extend personal invitations to more individuals with status and credibility in the community might have increased involvement in the process. We relied on media communication and the willingness of our school administrators to help distribute information and encourage participation. However, they did not all have the same knowledge of, passion for, and commitment to the process. Perhaps, had we ourselves engaged in more personal conversations with key individuals, we might have positively impacted participation.

We could have had more input at the Discovery stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process had we structured the interviews differently. It is possible to train a team of individuals who then conduct interviews with staff, students, parents and community members and bring the interview notes back to the group engaged directly in the process for analysis. While this gives broader input, it limits the quality of the experience. As mentioned in Chapter 5, there is a special kind of synergy created when partners interview each other in a large group setting. Strong connections are made that carry forward to the Dream activities. It was for this reason that we chose to use partner interviews. We had not, at the time, considered doing both. It would have been possible to add an activity during the Discovery stage of the inquiry where participants looked at archived interviews along with their on-site interviews to identify common themes for root causes of success. While this would be an ambitious undertaking and require a greater investment of time, it might increase confidence in the fact that more voices were

heard. This would also permit prior interviews to take place, facilitated by an interpreter, with parents and community members who have limited English language skills.

As we have moved forward with the work of action teams, we have encountered resistance from some individuals who did not participate in the Appreciative Inquiry process and who have not connected with the information published. Some of these individuals are staff members who are fearful of the different practices they see some of their colleagues choosing to engage in (i.e. offering to teach a block outside of the existing timetable, or to teach a class at an off-campus site). They are worried that they might be **required** to make similar changes to course delivery. Others are staff members or parents who feel that they had no opportunity for input in the Today and Tomorrow initiative.

What about the people who did not take part in either our World Café or the 4-D sessions? What about the people who were not part of any preliminary discussions... would they believe that decisions regarding change were not “top down”. Some weeks after the Summit, a teacher shared with us that certain people believed that we had simply “manufactured consent” for our preconceived plan. This was disappointing for two main reasons. On one hand, it pained us to think that anyone would feel manipulated or “used” by the process. On the other hand, we would not want anyone to think that we would take personal credit for the ideas (i.e. a community campus high school) that had percolated out of the group dream and design sessions. Is this to be expected when not everyone in the organization or community is involved in the process?

Even though we extended a wide and open invitation to participate and we have worked hard to keep all of our stake holders informed about what we are learning on an on-going basis through newsletters, posters, staff meetings, media and the school district website, we see that we can never stop working on communication. We must keep talking and sharing our stories. We must keep the invitation open and look for ways to build ‘on

ramps'. We must provide opportunities for those who were not able to attend the Today and Tomorrow sessions to engage in an appreciative interview, to learn about the work of action teams and to join as new members if they are motivated to do so.

7.3 Implications

In the introduction to this study we remarked on how the public education system has not changed significantly in over one hundred years. We pointed to the need for challenging the traditional structures and paradigms of our educational system if we are to better meet the needs of diverse learners in preparing them for the future. Paul Houston describes this dilemma well (2007: 2):

Today we find education stuck in place. Oh, certainly some progress has been made. Schools today are superior to any in our history. Yet there has never been more dissatisfaction with school. Quite simply, the problem is this:

Schools have been making incremental progress in an exponential environment.

We have gradually been improving education while the deteriorating social conditions surrounding families and children have confronted us with all sorts of new challenges, and the escalating demands of society and the workplace have forced upon education a much higher expectation. Therefore, if we continue to improve the way we have, in a few years we'll be better than we are today – and further behind. This calls for transformative leadership, and that can only come by thinking differently about our problems.

This need to move beyond incremental to transformational change in our education system is also recognized by the work of the *Innovation Unit for Schools*, established by the Department of Education and Skills in the United Kingdom.

The focus of the *Innovation Unit* is to identify and support the kind of shifts needed to transform the education system, not just improve it. This is made possible through an approach they have called *next practice*. *Next practice* is defined as a new approach to stimulating, incubating, and accelerating innovation, which is strongly driven by users' needs (Hannon, 2007:1). In next practice, teacher practitioners aware of the existing knowledge base, strengths and limitations of conventional 'best' practice, develop and employ new and innovative practices in carefully monitored field trials. Hannon acknowledges that innovation is not 'the only game in town'. "Thoughtful work is going on around how known good practice can be effectively disseminated and ineffective practice discontinued. However, this alone is insufficient. It has to be accompanied by the drive to invent and discover the new" (Hannon, 2007: 21).

In order to meet the challenges we face in reshaping schools for the future, Hannon emphasizes that the needed innovation must arise from the joint work of skilled and creative practitioners, co-creating with their learners, and actively engaging parents and caregivers. "If we want a powerful innovative culture in schools which is self-sustaining we have to empower system-aware practitioners, working ever more closely with the service users, to create it. And to avoid simply creating interesting but isolated pockets of experimentation we have to design in collaborative ways of learning and enquiry between professionals" (Hannon 2007: 9).

In a public school system where we are in need of innovative practices designed by practitioners in collaboration with their colleagues and stakeholders, Appreciative Inquiry holds promise, both as a framework for change and a philosophy or way of being. The Appreciative Inquiry process has the capacity to create strong community, gain broad participation of staff and stakeholder groups, and initiate inspired actions on behalf of the system. As administrators in a public school system we have never experienced, or are aware of any other process that is so effective in finding common threads among diverse perspectives. We had struggled for some time with the challenge of how to bring different stakeholders together and shift their focus from individual needs and wishes to consideration of the common good. Through appreciating the positive, sharing stories of past and current strengths in teaching and learning, and looking for common themes of success, people make connections and go beyond thinking of students as individuals to thinking of students as a community of learners. These connections, made through dialogue, set the foundation for a relational space and help to make truly collaborative work a possibility.

Discovery and Dream activities set the context to encourage collaboration. The push for new ideas and innovative practice is then supported through the Design and Delivery activities. At these stages of the Appreciative Inquiry process, groups focus on imagining possibilities and generating new ways of doing things. The shared vision created during the Dream stage challenges group members to stretch in new directions and go beyond familiar ways of thinking. It is this generating of new ideas that leads to innovative new practices.

When organizations continue to apply the skills developed in the Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny stages of the formal Appreciative Inquiry process to their every day work on an on-going basis, they demonstrate the potential to become “appreciative learning cultures”. Barrett (1995) suggests that such organizations demonstrate consistent strength in four key kinds of competence: affirmative, expansive, generative, and collaborative.

1. *Affirmative Competence.* The organization draws on the human capacity to appreciate positive possibilities by selectively focusing on current and past strengths, successes, and potentials.
2. *Expansive Competence.* The organization challenges habits and conventional practices, provoking members to experiment in the margins. It makes expansive promises that challenge them to stretch in new directions, and evokes a set of higher values and ideals that inspire them to passionate engagement.
3. *Generative Competence.* The organization constructs integrative systems that allow members to see the consequences of their actions, to recognize they are making a meaningful contribution, and to experience a sense of pride and progress.
4. *Collaborative Competence.* The organization creates forums in which

members engage in on-going dialogue and exchange diverse perspectives to transform systems.

It is our challenge now, as school district administrators, to support not only the action initiatives that came out of our Appreciative Inquiry process. We must also continue to build and nurture the key competencies that will help to establish and sustain our school district as a strength-based organization.

Houston (2007) reminds us that we become the stories we tell ourselves. He credits a friend for developing the idea of “rut stories” and “river stories”. If we tell rut stories, we may become trapped in old ways of thinking and doing. Rut stories travel well-worn neural pathways, reminding us of what we can’t do and can’t become. Instead, we are invited to tell river stories. River stories take us to new and different places. We like to think of this project as our river story. There is much to explore and our journey has only just begun.

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Appendix A

BOARD RETREAT (November 2007)

S.D. No.60 - Today & Tomorrow
Working Together for Student Success

- Strengthening relationships that lead to a sense of belonging and resiliency
- Building capacity through learning communities
- Valuing innovation and providing choice

Partner Interviews

(1). High Point Experience

As you consider your experience with our school district, there have been many ups and downs, peaks and valleys. Take a moment to reflect on one of the peaks, one of the high points. Can you remember a time when you felt very impressed, really proud to be involved with the district?

A. Please share the story. . . What happened? When? Where? Challenges? How were they overcome? Insights?

B. Based on this story and others like it, if you now had a conversation with people who know the district well and asked them to share: what are the three best qualities of the district, in what ways does the district best contribute to student success – what would they say?

(2) Magnetic Work Force

Recruitment and retention have become a focus for our school district, as we anticipate staff retirements and a predicted increase in student enrolment. Often we hear of teachers or support staff that has come to the district to work for a short time, but once here, have chosen to stay. Can you think of any staff that has shared this experience with you?

What do you believe are the reasons that staff would choose to stay in the employ of our district?

(3). Success for Every Learner

Can you think of a time when a student faced disadvantage or adversity and yet was able, against the odds, to achieve success beyond expectations? Tell the story of what happened.

What made it possible for this student to defy expectations and achieve success? What factors and forces supported this student to perform well? What was the nature of relationships, teaching, resources, learning climate etc.?

(4). Creating Supportive Learning Communities to Enhance Resilience

“Best practice” teaching and learning strategies emerge because of the qualities of relationships within healthy community. Supportive learning communities offer respectful, cooperative, and responsive relationships and a sense of belonging. Can you think of a learning community in which students and teachers felt encouraged to realize his/her full capacity? Can you think of a time when you participated in, or witnessed, a community of students and teachers respecting and caring for one another? Describe an incident that exemplifies this community. Describe this community, how it emerged and what makes (or made it) successful.

(5). Collaboration

Successful projects and innovations within schools require collaboration between multiple parties – parents, teachers, administrators, staff, and students need to work together to initiate innovations. Can you think of a time when you witnessed collaboration between different groups that benefited a school or our school system? Tell the story of the collaboration process. What made it possible for this collaboration to be successful?

(6) Innovations to Enhance Learning

We have had the wonderful opportunity to hear from and read about several writers and researchers presenting their ideas on how to best educate our young people for the future. They all suggest that our traditional educational system must make some changes in order to meet the mandate of success for all.

What initiatives, practices, or innovations stand out to you as most noteworthy – the things that have the most potential for helping us create a healthy and high

quality-learning environment? Name the innovation or change and describe its strengths and potential.

(7). Images of the Future

This is the “dream” question. Let’s assume that tonight we each fall into a sound sleep that lasts for 5 years. During these 5 years our school system has realized many positive innovations and changes. Teachers feel strongly supported and challenged in a healthy way. Students thrive because teachers, parents, and administrators continue to hold high expectations while providing support and encouragement. The district’s reputation in the community is outstanding.

A. You wake up and get a panoramic view of the system. What does it look like? What do you see that is new, different, changed, or better?

B. You have had the opportunity to engage in this activity last year. Since then, we have received input from 3 sessions of World Café and a community partner’s meeting; we have participated in conferences and networked with colleagues. We have had many conversations. How is your vision for the future of the school district changing as a result of these experiences?

C. If you could change our school system in three ways, what would you do to heighten its overall health and vitality?

Whole Group Activities

Exercise #1

Discovering the Resources in our School District

1. Share highlights from what you learned from the person *you interviewed*. Focus on questions 1 and 2.
2. Listen for and record patterns and common themes from the stories shared.

Exercise #2

Articulating the “Positive Core” of our school system

1. Share key stories and discoveries from questions 3 through 5 of your interview.

2. As stories are shared, identify the factors – strengths, special practices and values, capacities, and things that make possible success for every learner. Record these “root causes of success”.

Exercise #3

Dreams and Visions of the Future

1. Summarize your partner’s responses to questions 6 and 7.
2. Chart the important changes that will best help us to move toward our vision.

Exercise #4

Action Plan

1. Revisit our action plan. Clarify next steps. Provide a timeline.

Appendix B

DOCUMENTS FOR THE STUDENT FORUM

FACILITATOR'S AGENDA STUDENT FORUM – April 2, 2008

Part 1: Discovery

Time/Who	Step	Details
8:30 – 9:00 Larry/ Lesley	Welcome	Welcome students as they arrive Larry & Lesley introduce themselves, and other administrators/teachers
9:00 – 9:15 Larry	Opening	Keynote: background/history, what is AI, purpose, agenda Roles of active participants, guiding principles
9:15 – 9:30 Lesley	Intro Interviews, Activity #1	How to, tips, walk through the activity guide Show protocol, read questions aloud Process for finding a partner
9:30 – 10:30 Larry/Lesley/ Daniel	Interviews	Interview in pairs, 30 minutes each, use red/green cards to signal help needed Larry, Lesley, Daniel circulate to help, call time at 15 minute intervals
10:30 – 10:45	Break	
10:45 – 11:00 Lesley	Intro Positive Core, Activity #2	Walk through activity guide: introductions, leadership roles, Q 1-3 charting root causes of success & prioritizing, Q 4 charting wishes for future & prioritizing, share best story, report out,
11:00 – 11:20 Students	Table Introductions	Introduce partner by sharing most compelling story. Select leadership roles for table group and review activity guide to make sure steps and timelines are clear.
11:20 – 11:30 Students	Q 1 Root Causes of Success	Discuss responses to Q 1, chart/brainstorm root causes of success, common factors contributing to powerful learning experiences. Prioritize top three, use red dots. Larry/Lesley call time at 10 minutes.
11:30 – 11:40 Students	Q 2 Root Causes of Success	Discuss responses to Q 2, chart/brainstorm root causes of success, common factors contributing to inspired teaching that makes a difference. Prioritize top three, use green dots. Larry/Lesley call time at 10 minutes.
11:40 – 11:50 Students	Q 3 Root Causes of Success	Discuss responses to Q 3, chart/brainstorm root causes of success, common factors leading to ideal choice and relevance.

		Prioritize top three, use blue dots. Larry/Lesley call time at 10 minutes.
11:50 – 12:00 Students	Q 4 Three Wishes	Q 4, individually think about personal 3 wishes, choose top, most important wish from list of 3, write it on a sticky note and post in on the table chart for Q 4. If time permits, cluster the top wishes on the table chart by theme. Larry/Lesley call time at 10 minutes.
12:00 – 12:05 Students	Choose a story	Members of table group determine which compelling story heard from their interviews that they want to report out to the full group, and who will be the reporter.
12:05 – 12:25 Larry Moderates	Share story	Tables report out one story to the full group. Stories are recorded.
12:25 – 1:00 Larry	Lunch	While getting ready to eat, each table posts charts on the wall in four stations (Q 1, Q 2, Q 3, Q 4). Students are encouraged to make a gallery walk during lunch break.

Part 2: Dream

Time/Who	Step	Details
1:00 – 1:10 Lesley	Intro Dream for Future Schools, Activity #3	Walk through activity guide: Determine leadership roles at the table, do guided imagery, determine important common elements of dream, represent dream, do presentations, debrief.
1:10 – 1:15 Larry		Do guided imagery (insert key words from posted table charts completed during morning activities into the imagery template). Students write down what they imagined
1:15 – 1:25	Talk	Students share the images that came to mind and their one best wish for the future of schools. Determine the important elements of dream/ common vision.
1:25 – 1:55 Students	Represent	Table groups create a skit, make a visual representation (picture, diagram), or write a song/rap for their dream for the future of schools in our district that excites and energizes. Be prepared to report out to the full group.
1:55 – 2:05	Break	
2:05 – 2:35 Larry	Share	Presentations

Moderates		
2:35 – 2:50 Students	Debrief at table	Table groups debrief the dream presentations. What did you most connect with? What images most inspired or excited you?
2:50 – 3:00 Larry Moderates	Debrief with full group	Table groups report out to the full group.

Guided Imagery:

Close your eyes. Get comfortable in your chair become aware of your breath. Notice the air flowing in and out. Breathe slowly and deeply. Become aware of you feet on the floor. Relax them and let any tension flow out of them into the ground. Relax your legs, feel the tension flow down and out. Relax your hips. Feel your belly soften and relax, let tension release and flow down and out. Relax your shoulders, your arms, feel the tension flow out your fingers, leaving them peaceful. Become aware of your neck and your jaw. Release the tension, letting it flow down through your core and soak into the earth.

Now imagine that it is five years from now.... You find yourself walking the halls of a school that is truly extraordinary...it is all you dreamed it could become. The transformation of our district is reflected in what you see happening in this school. Things that were once positive exceptions to the rule are now flourishing. The positive core that you described 5 years ago is fully present.....(insert their positive core words here)

Shared purpose, learning, courage, confidence and compassion is expanded, nourished and thriving. All the strengths are fully utilized, resources are used wisely and abundant creativity opens new possibilities for positive change on a regular basis.

As you look around you, what do you see happening? As you walk down the halls what do you hear? As you look into the classrooms, how do you feel? Who is there? What are people doing differently? What kinds of results are being realized? What impact is this extraordinary school having on its students/the parents/community? What impact is it having in the world?

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

Student Forum
Wednesday, April 2, 2008

Today & Tomorrow Working Together for Student Success

- Strengthening relationships that lead to a sense of belonging and resiliency
- Building capacity through collaboration and partnerships
- Valuing innovation and providing choice

Purpose and Objectives

Purpose

The purpose of the Today and Tomorrow sessions is to involve a broad cross-section of staff, students, parents and community members in generating innovative ideas for the future of schools in Peace River North, and in updating our district vision statement.

Objectives

Specific objectives include identifying:

- what our strengths are and what we want to preserve as our school district grows and changes;
- what we value most and what our future priorities are;
- what our collective hopes and dreams are for our school district;
- how we can work together to ensure success for all students;
- what actions should we consider as the most important next steps in moving forward.

Self Management Leadership Roles

Each small group manages its own discussion, data, time, and reports. Here are useful roles for self-managing this work. Roles can be rotated. Divide up the work as you wish.

- Discussion Leader – Ensures that each person who wants to speak is heard within time available. Keeps group on task to finish on time.
- Recorder – writes group's output on flip charts, using speaker's words. Asks people to restate ideas for accuracy.
- Time Keeper – Keeps group aware of time left. Monitors report-outs and signals time remaining to person talking.
- Reporter – Delivers report to large group in time allotted.

Operating Assumptions

Facilitators will:

- structure & facilitate a process that will enable us to discover our best moments in teaching and learning
- keep us informed of the parameters for time and tasks
- support and facilitate large group discussions
- keep the purpose front and center
- create the environment that helps people to be at their best
- suggest and encourage new ways of thinking and doing
- keep us focused and on track
- start and stop on time

Participants will:

- participate actively and share opinions in the conversation
- tell stories, provide information, make meaning/action steps
- manage own small groups
- contribute to the creation of future scenarios
- listen actively and attentively
- demonstrate caring about learning and our dialogue
- take responsibility for the conversation and the ideas developed here
- be here for the entire process

We will be successful and have good conversation when:

- all voices are invited, respected and heard
- all experiences are treated as valid
- notes are captured in writing, on interview guides and flip charts
- we listen to each other

- we observe time frames
- we seek common ground and action
- differences and problems are honoured
- there is full and active attendance
- we make the time and space to connect with each other

Imagine what a harmonious world it could be if every single person, both young and old, shared a little of what he/she is good at doing.

Quincy Jones

Framework for S.D. No. 60, Today & Tomorrow Planning Sessions

How this session differs from other typical planning meetings:

- **Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**
 - To **appreciate** means to value, the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths and successes; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems; to increase in value.
 - To **inquire** means to ask questions; to explore; to discover; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.
AI is, therefore, a collaborative search to identify and understand the present strengths, potentials, the greatest opportunities, and people's hopes for the highest future.
- The **Whole System** participates – a cross section of as many interested parties as is practical. All stakeholders are represented, offering more diversity and a chance for each person to be heard and to learn other ways of looking at schools, programs, change, and the future.
- Future scenarios for our school district are put into **historical** and **global** perspective. That means thinking globally together before acting locally. This feature enhances shared understanding and greater commitment to act. It also increases the range of potential actions.
- People **self-manage** their work, and use **conversation** and **dialogue**, not problem-solving as the main tool. That means helping each other do the tasks and taking responsibility for our perceptions and actions.
- **Higher ground** is the frame of reference. That means honouring our differences rather than having to reconcile them. That means looking for the

exceptional in all of us and our work.

- **Commitment to action** – because the “whole system” is involved it is easier to make more rapid decisions, and to make commitments to action in a public way – in an open way that everyone can support and help make happen.

Appreciation is a wonderful thing;

It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.

Voltaire

ACTIVITY #1

Individual Appreciative Interviews

Outcome:

To discover, explore, and highlight teaching and learning at its' best.

Guidelines:

- Select an interview partner.
- Interview your partner using the interview guide on the separate handout. Each person will have 30 minutes to interview his or her partner.
- Encourage your partner to tell his/her story, draw out your partner with your positive energy and genuine interest.
- Take good notes and be listening for great quotes and stories. Be prepared to share the results of your interview in the next activity.
- The information you collect in this interview will be used in the follow up sessions to identify the school district's “positive core” and to chart the course for the future.

Tips for Conducting Interviews

- It is helpful to actually read the question paragraph aloud for your partner.
- Allow wait time for your partner to respond. If your partner doesn't want to, or can't answer one of the interview questions, that's okay. Let it go or come back later to that question.
- Sometimes the best learning experiences don't happen at school. Sometimes our best teachers are mentors, coaches, or family members who help to make learning exciting and memorable outside of the classroom. If your interview partner cannot think of a best teaching and learning story at school, invite them to think about a great learning experience that took place somewhere else.
- Help your partner to tell a very descriptive and detailed story by asking the "probing" questions listed on your interview handout. Here are some additional general probing questions that you might want to use;

Tell me more.

How were you feeling?

What was important to you?

What impact did that have on you?

What was it about the situation or the people around you that helped?

- Let your partner tell his/her story; don't tell yours or give your opinion about your partner's experiences. (You will get your turn.)
- Listen for quotes and take good notes while keeping the focus on the conversation.
- In order to respect the confidentiality of those involved, please do not record people by name when taking interview notes.
- Manage your time.
- Have fun!

ACTIVITY #2

Discovering the Positive Core of our School District

Outcome

To determine the common themes in the stories we have shared, and the factors contributing to student success.

Guidelines

Time	Step
15 minutes	Introduce your interview partner to your table group by sharing one story that you found most memorable.
5 minutes	Select the leadership roles for your table group; discussion leader, timekeeper, recorder, and reporter. Review the steps below to make sure everyone is clear on the tasks and the time frames.
10 minutes	Using a page of chart paper, record/brainstorm root causes of success from question #1 , (or common factors contributing to powerful learning experiences). Prioritize the top three. Use red dots.
10 minutes	Using a page of chart paper, record/brainstorm root causes of success from question #2 , (or common factors contributing to inspired teaching that makes a difference). Prioritize the top three. Use green dots.
10 minutes	Using a page of chart paper, record/brainstorm root causes of success from question #3 , (or common factors contributing to improved choices and relevance in school programs). Prioritize the top three. Use blue dots.
5 minutes	Recall your answer to question #4. What were your three wishes for the future of the school district? Choose your top wish, the one that is most important to you, and write it on a sticky note. Everyone post their top wish sticky note on a page of chart paper at your table. If there is time, cluster your stickies by common themes.
5 minutes	Be prepared to report out to the full group one best story shared by a member of your table group.
<i>60 minutes</i>	<i>TOTAL TIME</i>
20 minutes	Tables report out one story to the full group.

ACTIVITY #3

Dreaming about the Future of our School District

Outcome

Build a common vision for the preferred future of schools in our district.

Guidelines

Time	Step
5 minutes	Change leadership roles at your table. Have different group members take a turn as discussion leader, time keeper, recorder, and reporter. Review the steps below to make sure everyone is clear on the tasks and the time frames.
5 minutes	Participate in guided imagery.
10 minutes	Share with members of your table group, the images that came to mind and your one best wish for the future of schools. Determine the most important elements of your collective dreams for the future.
30 minutes	In your group, choose a creative way to present your dreams as if they were happening now. Your table group will give a 3 minute presentation of your vision for the future. Have fun, be creative and present a strong image of what's possible. Examples: a TV special, magazine cover story, skit, song, rap, dance, diagram or picture.
<i>50 Minutes</i>	<i>TOTAL TIME</i>
10 minutes	Break
30 minutes	Do presentations.
15 minutes	In your table groups, debrief the dream presentations. What did you most connect with? What images most inspired or excited you?
10 minutes	Table groups report out insights to the full group.

If you can dream it, you can do it.

Walt Disney

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Student Forum

Wednesday, April 2, 2008

Today & Tomorrow
Working Together for Student Success

- Strengthening relationships that lead to a sense of belonging and resiliency
- Building capacity through collaboration and partnerships
- Valuing innovation and providing choice

Partner Interviews

(1). Best Learning Experience

There is nothing quite like a really great learning experience. Sometimes our best learning experiences happen at school and sometimes they happen in other settings. Sometimes a great learning experience involves hard work, but you are willing to do the work because you see yourself improving and you are excited about your progress. Think about a time when you were learning something and it was so interesting that you loved it and just didn't want it to end. Tell the story of one of your very best learning experiences.

What made it possible for you to learn what you did?
What was different about that time that set it apart from other learning experiences?
What did you do to contribute to making the experience great?
Who else was there? What did those around you, at the time, do to make the learning experience so great?

(2). Teacher You Admire

Teachers can make a huge difference in people's lives. Inspired teaching brings out the best in people; it creates opportunities that draw out students' potential, challenges them, and help them to see in new ways.

Think about a teacher you have experienced or heard about that made a difference in your life or the life of another student. Tell the story about this teacher.

What is it about this teacher that you appreciated most? Why was this teacher so effective and memorable?

Time/Who	Step	Details
5:30 – 6:00 Student Volunteers	Registration Table	Distribute name tag, handout package.

(3). Choice and Relevance

Students are most likely to stay in school and to participate in their classes when they are offered choices and see their assigned work as relevant or having some use in their everyday lives. We often ask, “What do we have to learn this for?” Describe a learning situation where you never had to ask this question—where the relevance and the importance of what you were learning was clear and obvious.

What happened in the learning situation that helped to make the work seem most relevant? What choices have you appreciated or benefited most from at school?

What wishes do you have for choice or relevance that would help to make your learning more positive and encourage you to be at school?

(4). Images of the Future

This is the “dream” question. Imagine we are 5 years into the future. The newspaper is reporting that something remarkable has happened in SD 60. We have been able to take what we have learned about student success and magnified it to new proportions.

During these 5 years our school system has realized many positive innovations and changes. Teachers feel strongly supported and challenged in a healthy way. Students thrive because teachers, parents, and administrators continue to hold high expectations while providing support and encouragement. The district’s reputation in the community is outstanding.

Describe what is new, different, changed, or better. How have these changes impacted student learning?

With this vision of the future in mind, what three wishes do you have that would take our district to even greater heights?

6:00 – 6:06 Larry/ Lesley	Opening	Welcoming participants, post the agenda. Rules & Lesley participating themselves principles
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6:15 – 6:30 Lesley	Intro Interviews, Activity #1	How to, tips, walk through the activity guide Show protocol, read questions aloud Process for finding a partner
6:30 – 7:30 Larry/Lesley/	Interviews	Interview in pairs, 30 minutes each, Larry/Lesley, circulate to help, call time at 15 minute intervals
7:30 – 7:40	Break	
7:40 – 8:55 Lesley	Intro Positive Core, Activity #2	Walk through activity guide: introductions, leadership roles, Q 1-3 charting root causes of success & prioritizing, Q 4 charting wishes for future & prioritizing, share best story, report out
7:55 – 8:00 Participants	Table Introductions	Briefly introduce partner. Select leadership roles for table group and review activity guide to make sure steps and timelines are clear.
8:00 – 8:10 Participants	Q 1 Root Causes of Success	Discuss responses to Q 1, chart root causes of success, common factors contributing to powerful learning experiences. Prioritize top three. Larry/Lesley call time at 10 minutes.
8:10 – 8:20 Participants	Q 2 Root Causes of Success	Discuss responses to Q 2, chart root causes of success, common factors contributing to inspired teaching that makes a difference. Prioritize top three. Larry/Lesley call time at 10 minutes.
8:20 – 8:30 Participants	Q 3 Root Causes of Success	Discuss responses to Q 3, chart root causes of success, common factors leading to collaboration and partnerships supporting student success. Larry/Lesley call time at 10 minutes.

Appendix C

DOCUMENTS FOR THE ADULT DISCOVERY SESSIONS

Facilitator's Agenda – April 8,9 or 10, 2008

8:35 – 8:40 Participants	Choose a story	Members of table group determine which compelling story heard from their interviews that they want to report out to the full group, and who will be the reporter.
8:40 – 8:55 Larry Moderates	Share story	Tables report out one story to the full group. Stories are recorded.
8:55 – 9:00 Larry	Close	Thank-you, next steps.

Tips for Conducting Interviews

- It is helpful to actually read the question paragraph aloud for your partner.
- Allow wait time for your partner to respond. If your partner doesn't want to, or can't answer one of the interview questions, that's okay. Let it go or come back later to that question.
- Sometimes the best learning experiences don't happen at school. Sometimes our best teachers are mentors, coaches, or family members who help to make learning exciting and memorable outside of the classroom. If your interview partner cannot think of a best teaching and learning story at school, invite them to think about a great learning experience that took place somewhere else.
- Help your partner to tell a very descriptive and detailed story by asking the "probing" questions listed on your interview handout. Here are some additional general probing questions that you might want to use;

Tell me more.

How were you feeling?

What was important to you?

What impact did that have on you?

What was it about the situation or the people around you that helped?

- Let your partner tell his/her story; don't tell yours or give your opinion about your partner's experiences. (You will get your turn.)
- Listen for quotes and take good notes while keeping the focus on the conversation.
- In order to respect the confidentiality of those involved, please do not record people by name when taking interview notes.

Managing Negativity

- If someone wants to talk about something they didn't like, don't shut them down. Listen, and then try to redirect the conversation by asking;
 - What was missing in that experience?
 - What would you like to have seen more of?
 - Describe the gap between what happened and what you wanted. What could take place to close that gap?

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

Session One

Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday

April 8, 9, or 10, 2008

Today & Tomorrow Working Together for Student Success

- Strengthening relationships that lead to a sense of belonging and resiliency
- Building capacity through collaboration and partnerships
- Valuing innovation and providing choice

Purpose and Objectives

Purpose

The purpose of the Today and Tomorrow sessions is to involve a broad cross-section of staff, students, parents and community members in generating innovative ideas for the future of schools in Peace River North and in updating our district vision statement.

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- keep us informed of the parameters for time and tasks
- support and facilitate large group discussions
- keep the purpose front and center
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- keep us focused and on track
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- participate actively and share opinions in the conversation
- tell stories, provide information, make meaning/action steps
- manage own small groups
- contribute to the creation of future scenarios
- listen actively and attentively
- demonstrate caring about learning and our dialogue
- take responsibility for the conversation and the ideas developed here
- be here for the entire process

We will be successful and have good conversation when:

- all voices are invited, respected and heard
- all experiences are treated as valid
- notes are captured in writing, on interview guides and flip charts
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- we observe time frames
- we seek common ground and action
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Imagine what a harmonious world it could be if every single person, both young and old, shared a little of what he/she is good at doing.

Quincy Jones

Framework for S.D. No. 60, Today & Tomorrow Planning Sessions

How this session differs from other typical planning meetings:

- **Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**
 - To **appreciate** means to value, the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths and successes; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems; to increase in value.
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 - **Higher ground** is the frame of reference. That means honouring our differences rather than having to reconcile them. That means looking for the exceptional in all of us and our work.
 - **Commitment to action** – because the “whole system” is involved it is easier to make more rapid decisions, and to make commitments to action in a public way – in an open way that everyone can support and help make happen.
-

*Appreciation is a wonderful thing;
It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.*

Voltaire

ACTIVITY #1

Individual Appreciative Interviews

Outcome:

To discover, explore, and highlight teaching and learning at its' best.

Guidelines:

- Select an interview partner.
- Interview your partner using the interview guide on the separate handout. Each person will have 30 minutes to interview his or her partner.
- Encourage your partner to tell his/her story, draw out your partner with your positive energy and genuine interest.
- Take good notes and be listening for great quotes and stories. Be prepared to share the results of your interview in the next activity.
- The information you collect in this interview will be used in the follow up sessions to identify the school district's "positive core" and to chart the course for the future.

Tips for Conducting Interviews

- It is helpful to actually read the question paragraph aloud for your partner.
- Allow wait time for your partner to respond. If your partner doesn't want to, or can't answer one of the interview questions, that's okay. Let it go or come back later to that question.
- Sometimes the best learning experiences don't happen at school. Sometimes

our best teachers are mentors, coaches, or family members who help to make learning exciting and memorable outside of the classroom. If your interview partner cannot think of a best teaching and learning story at school, invite them to think about a great learning experience that took place somewhere else.

- Help your partner to tell a very descriptive and detailed story by asking the “probing” questions listed on your interview handout. Here are some additional general probing questions that you might want to use;

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How were you feeling?

What was important to you?

What impact did that have on you?

What was it about the situation or the people around you that helped?

- Let your partner tell his/her story; don’t tell yours or give your opinion about your partner’s experiences. (You will get your turn.)
- Listen for quotes and take good notes while keeping the focus on the conversation.
- In order to respect the confidentiality of those involved, please do not record people by name when taking interview notes.
- Manage your time.
- Have fun!

ACTIVITY #2

Discovering the Positive Core of our School District

Outcome

To determine the common themes in the stories we have shared, and the factors contributing to student success.

Guidelines

Time	Step
5 minutes	Introduce your interview partner to your table group. Select the leadership roles for your table group; discussion leader, timekeeper, recorder, and reporter. Review the steps below to make sure everyone is clear on the tasks and the time frames.
10 minutes	Discuss responses to question #1. Using a page of chart paper, record <i>root causes of success from question #1</i> , (common factors contributing to powerful learning experiences). Prioritize the top three.
10 minutes	Discuss responses to question #2. Using a page of chart paper, record <i>root causes of success from question #2</i> , (common factors contributing to inspired teaching that makes a difference). Prioritize the top three.
10 minutes	Discuss responses to question #3. Using a page of chart paper, record <i>root causes of success from question #3</i> , (common factors contributing to effective collaboration and partnerships). Prioritize the top three.
5 minutes	Recall your answer to question #4. What were your three wishes for the future of the school district? Choose your top wish, the one that is most important to you, and write it on a sticky note. Everyone post their top wish sticky note on a page of chart paper at your table. If there is time, cluster your stickies by common themes.
5 minutes	Members of your table group share a compelling story heard from their interview. Be prepared to report out to the full group one story shared by a member of your table group.
<i>45 minutes</i>	<i>TOTAL TIME</i>
15 minutes	Tables report out one story to the full group.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Session One: Discovery

Today & Tomorrow Working Together for Student Success

- Strengthening relationships that lead to a sense of belonging and resiliency

- Building capacity through collaboration and partnerships
- Valuing innovation and providing choice

Partner Interviews

(1). Best Learning Experience

There is nothing quite like a really great learning experience. Sometimes our best learning experiences happen at school and sometimes they happen in other settings. Think about a time when you were learning something and it was so interesting that you loved it and just didn't want it to end. Sometimes a great learning experience involves hard work, but you are willing to do the work because you see yourself improving and you are excited about your progress. Tell the story of one of your very best learning experiences.

What made it possible for you to learn what you did?

What was different about that time that set it apart from other learning experiences?

What did you do to contribute to making the experience great?

Who else was there? What did those around you, at the time, do to make the learning experience so great?

(2) Teacher You Admire

Teachers can make a huge difference in people's lives. Inspired teaching brings out the best in people; it creates opportunities that draw out students' potential, challenge them, and help them to see in new ways.

Think about a teacher you have experienced or heard about that made a difference in your life or the life of a child. Tell the story about this teacher.

Why was this teacher so effective and memorable?

What was it about this teacher that you appreciated most?

(3) Collaboration and Partnerships To Achieve Excellence In Our Schools

Sometimes a group of people working together can accomplish far greater things than they could if they were working alone.

Collaboration and partnerships have made it possible to develop some exciting opportunities and learning experiences for students in our district. Think of a time when you witnessed collaboration or partnerships at their best. (This could be teachers collaborating with colleagues, parents collaborating with school staff, community partners working together with school district staff, or students working together with teachers, all with a focus on improving student success.)

Who was involved? How did people make things happen?

What made it possible for this collaboration to be successful?

(4). Images of the Future

This is the “dream” question. Imagine we are 5 years into the future. The newspaper is reporting that something remarkable has happened in SD 60. We have been able to take what we have learned about student success and magnified it to new proportions.

During these 5 years our school system has realized many positive innovations and changes. Teachers feel strongly supported and challenged in a healthy way. Students thrive because teachers, parents, and administrators continue to hold high expectations while providing support and encouragement. The district’s reputation in the community is outstanding.

Describe what is new, different, changed, or better?
How have these changes impacted student learning?

With this vision of the future in mind, what three wishes do you have that would take our district to even greater heights?

Appendix D:

“Root Causes of Success” from the Student “Discovery” Session

- the number of responses per theme or idea

I. Teachers You Admire

- A. Student/Teacher Relationship / 71
 - 1. Respectful and Caring / 14
 - 2. Gets to Know Students as valued Individuals / 20
 - 3. Inspiring, Passionate and Dedicated / 19
 - 4. Encourages You To Do Your Best and is Willing To Give Extra Help / 18
- B. Teaching Style/Method / 34
 - 1. Knowledgeable, efficient and Organized / 11
 - 2. Sense of Humour, Makes Learning Fun / 10
 - 3. Creative, Not Always Textbook Teaching / 8
 - 4. Makes Learning Relevant, Meaningful, Useful / 2
 - 5. Responsible and Sets Boundaries / 2
 - 6. Hygienic / 1

II. Choice / Relevance

- A. Practical Hands-On Experience / 22
 - 1. Less Traditional, More Hands-On Specialized Courses / 15
 - 2. Specialized Courses to Give More Real Experience in Non-Trade Areas of Study / 7
- B. Student Choice / 32
 - 1. Help in Making Choices / 9
 - 2. More Choices (i.e., Trades, Academic, Sports, Clubs) / 18
 - 3. Choices That Result In Satisfied Well-Rounded Students / 5
- C. Teaching Relevance / 38
 - 1. Using Out-Of-The-Box and Abstract Activities to Motivate Deeper Learning / 15
 - 2. Showing Why You Need to Know Something and How it Applies to Life / 23

III. Powerful Learning

- A. Learning Environment / 35

1. Comfortable Learning Environment - Owned by Learner / 17
 2. Positive Peer Interaction / 6
 3. Learning Through Experience and Real Life Application / 7
 4. Having fun / 5
- B. Teacher Qualities / 55
1. Passionate, Enthusiastic Teacher Who Displays Creativity and Flexibility / 20
 2. Open and Honest Teacher Who Builds Positive Relationships / 10
 3. Skillful Teacher Who Develops Interest in Subject and Builds Understanding / 12
 4. Teacher Open to New Learning Topics and Unique Learning Situations / 13
- C. Student Qualities / 18
1. Desire to Learn / 5
 2. Keeping An Open Mind / 2
 3. Everyone Wiling to Participate, Work Hard and Not Give Up / 11

IV. Wishes for Future of Schools

- A. Safe, Healthy Environment Where Space is Welcoming and Attractive / 11
- B. More Variety in Courses and Clubs to Choose From (i.e. Arts, Technology, Sports) / 10
- C. Strong and Caring Teacher/Student Relationships / 3
- D. Practical Hands-On Courses / 4
- E. Teachers and Students Who Are Motivated and Want To Be There / 6
- F. Less Emphasis on Provincial Exams and Grad Requirements / 2
- G. More Supports (Funding) For Students of All Types Interested In Post Secondary Education / 2
- H. Learning That Goes Beyond Walls of Classroom (i.e., home, community, on-line learning) / 4

“Root Causes of Success” from the Adult “Discovery” Session

- the number of responses per theme or idea

- I. Teachers You Admire
 - A. Develops Positive Relationships With Students / 152
 - 1. Connects With, Makes Each Child Feel Special / 42
 - 2. Respectful and Caring / 54
 - 3. Believes In, Sees the Positive In All Students / 35
 - 4. Encourages, Motivates, Inspires / 21
 - B. Traits Of An "Ideal" Teacher / 107
 - 1. Passionate About Teaching, Knowledge In Subject Areas / 18
 - 2. Gives Extra Time / Support To Ensure Student Success / 17
 - 3. Flexible and Creative / 14
 - 4. Makes Learning Relevant / 14
 - 5. Models Positive Life Style and Interest In Learning / 14
 - 6. Sense of Humour / 10
 - 7. Individualizes Instruction / 9
 - 8. Creates Safe Environment / 8
 - 9. Uses Assessment For Learning / 3
 - C. Expectations For Students / 33
 - 1. Challenges, Supports Students To Reach High Expectations / 23
 - 2. Holds Students Accountable / 8
- II. Collaboration / Partnerships
 - A. Getting the Work Done / 88
 - 1. Willingness to Work Toward Common Goal / 61
 - 2. Follow-Through, Moving to Action / 27
 - B. Working Together / 84
 - 1. Effective Communication Among Partners / 43
 - 2. Includes Community Members / 19
 - 3. Involves Multiple Stakeholders Parents, Staff, Students, Cultures / 14

- 4. Involves Multi-age Groups / 8
- C. Foundations / 62
 - 1. Believing in the Process / 15
 - 2. Positive Relationships / 11
 - 3. Trust In Each Other / 16
 - 4. Respect / 8
 - 5. Willingness to Take Risks / 12
- D. Generates New Thinking / 80
 - 1. Valuing Input / 27
 - 2. Sharing Ideas / 35
 - 3. Innovation / 14
 - 4. Flexibility / 4
- E. Resources / 49
 - 1. Making the Time / 21
 - 2. Shared Leadership / 17
 - 3. Energy / 8
 - 4. Building Skills / 3
- III. Powerful Learning
 - A. Teacher Factors / 143
 - 1. Teachers Supported to Collaborate and Learn With / From Each Other / 3
 - 2. Makes It Safe to Take Risks In His/Her Classroom / 22
 - 3. Passionate About Teaching & Learning / 37
 - 4. Crafts Challenging, Provocative Learning Experiences / 43
 - 5. Teacher of ALL Students -- Differentiated Instruction / 28
 - 6. Provides Relevant Feedback and Reinforcement and Clear Expectations / 16
 - B. Authentic Learning / 132
 - 1. The Learning Is Relevant and Hands-On, Involves Real Life Experiences / 67
 - 2. The Learning Is Exciting and Challenging ... Innovative ... Creative ...

- "Outside the Box" / 39
- 3. Teaching and Learning Is Shared By All, "Community Of Learners" / 18
- 4. Choice, Options for Students / 8
- C. Student Factors / 60
 - 1. Self-Motivated and Willing to Work Hard / 20
 - 2. Developing Confidence and Self-Esteem / 20
 - 3. Actively Participating / 9
 - 4. Open To Taking Risks / 6
 - 5. Discovering Their Passions / 5
- D. Teacher / Student Relationships / 106
 - 1. Teacher Reaches Out, Builds Connections / 45
 - 2. Teacher Believes In, Values Students, "Nurtures Their Spirit" / 20
 - 3. Genuine Caring, and Mutual Respect / 41
- IV. Wishes for Future of Schools
 - A. Develop Citizenship ... Students Who Are Best for the World / 16
 - B. Differentiated Instruction To Meet Individual Student Needs / 12
 - C. Increased Choices / Options For Career Exploration and Real Life Application / 11
 - D. Increased Community Involvement / 10
 - E. All Students Graduate Prepared for the Future / 8
 - F. Alternate Programs / Space for Students Currently Not Successful In School / 7
 - G. Facilities Welcoming With a Variety of Spaces For Different Kinds of Learning / 6
 - H. More Inclusive Community Schools / 4
 - I. School Extends Beyond Walls of Classroom To Community / 7
 - J. Safe Environment Where There is a Positive Proactive Approach to Discipline / 7
 - K. Teacher Collaboration / 7
 - L. Smaller Class Size / 7

- M. Happy Students Engaged In positive Relationships / 6
- N. Parent / School Communication and Involvement / 5
- O. Sense of Belonging and Pride / 6
- P. Emotional Needs of Students Honoured / 3
- Q. Support Spiritual Development / 2
- R. Funds For Extra-Curricular Activities / 2
- S. Effective Reconfiguration / 5
- T. Student Directed Learning / 4

Appendix E

DOCUMENTS FOR THE ADULT DREAM SESSIONS

FACILITATOR'S AGENDA **ADULT SESSION TWO: DREAM - April 29, 30, or March 1, 200**

Time/Who	Step	Details
5:30 – 6:00 Student Volunteers	Registration Table	Distribute name tag, handout package. Explain seating guide.
5:45 – 6:00 Larry/ Lesley	Welcome	Welcome participants as they arrive. Larry & Lesley introduce themselves.
6:00 – 6:25 Larry	Opening	Keynote: purpose of dream and connection to positive core. Video of student forum.
6:25 – 6:30 Lesley	Intro Reconnect with Data	Table introductions, determine leadership roles at the table. Explain table chart activity.
6:30 – 6:45 Lesley		Explore charts from Discovery sessions with students and adults. Gallery walk, graphic recording.
6:45 – 6:55 Lesley	Intro Dream for Future Schools	Walk through activity guide. Explain guided imagery, sharing images/ideas, determine important common elements of dream, represent dream, do presentations, debrief.
6:55 – 7:00 Larry		Do guided imagery (insert key words from discovery activities and graphic record into the imagery template). Participants write down what they imagined.
7:00 – 7:10 Participants	Talk	Discuss responses to guided imagery. Determine the important common elements of dream/vision.
7:10 – 7:40	Represent	Table groups create a skit, make a

Participants		visual representation (picture, diagram), or write a song/rap for their dream for the future of schools in our district, that excites and energizes. Be ready for invitation to report out to the full group.
7:40 – 7:50	Break	
7:50 – 8:25 Larry Moderates	Share	Presentations
8:25 – 8:30 Participants	Debrief at table	Table groups debrief the dream presentations. What did you most connect with? What images most inspired or excited you?
8:30 – 8:55 Lesley	Draft	Table groups draft a vision statement.
8:50 – 9:00	Close	Thank-you, next steps

Guided Imagery:

Close your eyes. Get comfortable in your chair become aware of your breath. Notice the air flowing in and out. Breathe slowly and deeply. Become aware of you feet on the floor. Relax them and let any tension flow out of them into the ground. Relax your legs, feel the tension flow down and out. Relax your hips. Feel your belly soften and relax, let tension release and flow down and out. Relax your shoulders, your arms, feel the tension flow out your fingers, leaving them peaceful. Become aware of your neck and your jaw. Release the tension, letting if flow down through your core and soak into the earth.

Now imagine that it is five years from now.... You find yourself walking the halls of a school that is truly extraordinary...it is all you dreamed it could become. The transformation of our district is reflected in what you see happening in this school. Things that were once positive exceptions to the rule are now flourishing. The positive core that you described 5 years ago is fully present.....(insert their positive core words here)

Shared purpose, learning, courage, confidence and compassion is expanded, nourished and thriving. All the strengths are fully utilized, resources are used wisely and abundant creativity opens new possibilities for positive change on a regular basis.

As you look around you, what do you see happening? As you walk down the halls what do your hear? As you look into the classrooms, how do you feel? Who is there? What are people doing differently? What kinds of results are being realized? What impact is this extraordinary school having on its students/the parents/community? What impact is it having in the world?

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

Session Two

Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday

April 29, 30, or May 1, 2008

Today & Tomorrow
Working Together for Student Success

- Strengthening relationships that lead to a sense of belonging and resiliency
- Building capacity through collaboration and partnerships
- Valuing innovation and providing choice

DREAM ACTIVITY

Envisioning the Future of our School District

Outcome

Build a common vision for the preferred future of schools in our district.

Guidelines

Time	Step
5 minutes	Introduce yourselves to your table group. Select the leadership roles for your table group; discussion leader, timekeeper, recorder, and reporter. Review the steps below to make sure everyone is clear on the tasks and the time frames.
5 minutes	Participate in guided imagery.
10 minutes	Share with members of your table group, the images that came to mind for the future of schools. Determine the most important elements of your collective dreams for the future.
30 minutes	In your group, choose a creative way to present your dreams as if they were happening now. Examples: a TV special, magazine cover story, diagram, picture, skit, song, rap, or dance. Have fun, be creative and present a strong image of what's possible. Table groups will be invited to share their short (2-3 minute) presentation with the full group.
10 minutes	Break

30 minutes	Do presentations.
5 minutes	In your table groups, debrief the dream presentations. What did you most connect with? What images most inspired or excited you?
25 minutes	Table groups draft a vision statement for our schools of the future.

If you can dream it, you can do it.

Walt Disney

Appendix F

DRAFT VISION STATEMENTS

DREAM/VISION STATEMENT A

Our schools have the resources to give each individual the time, learning tools, and environment that they require to realize their fullest potential.

We value and appreciate everyone in our schools and we are willing and open to learn from each other.

We strive to extend and deepen our understanding of effective teaching and learning through on-going professional collaboration.

Students have the freedom to be themselves. Teachers acknowledge and respect students while teaching them to be compassionate, caring, and accepting.

Students feel comfortable to learn, share, and grow through discussion and a wide variety of activities, while teachers guide their learning.

Students are actively engaged, and are willing to step outside of their comfort zone in order to challenge their learning. They look to the future with hope and passion.

DREAM/VISION STATEMENT B

Our schools are places of opportunities where people come together as a community of learners.

We have integrated and relevant learning between school and community that creates success for all students through encouragement, challenge, and inspiration.

We value relationships by fostering a nurturing and inclusive environment that promotes socially responsible individuals.

Students will enter the world as leaders who are respectful, have integrity, and are caring.

We are educating the students today for the world tomorrow!

DREAM/VISION STATEMENT C

We are a district with passionate learners and teachers, where everyone feels they belong.

We have open and honest communication that fosters respect and acceptance for individual differences.

We provide students the opportunity to discover and pursue their interests and strengths. We challenge them to surpass their expectations in a safe and supportive environment.

We provide a variety of settings for learning, in and outside of the classroom, which are friendly and inviting. With the help of our community partners, we engage students in authentic and unique learning experiences.

Teachers, mentors, experts, and community members all contribute to improving student learning and personal development. Together we prepare students who are the best for the world!

DREAM/VISION STATEMENT D

We are a community of learners striving together to build success for all. We have a safe, healthy and welcoming environment. Teachers connect with students through caring and laughter.

All members of our learning community are motivated, knowledgeable and engaged. Everyone is valued and respected. Cultural differences are honored. We all belong.

We nourish body, mind and spirit and believe in finding beauty in every human being.

We are excited about our learning. We take time to share our stories and celebrate success.

We are proud to see students leave our system confident in their skills and abilities, open to on-going learning, and prepared to make a difference in our world.

Appendix G

DOCUMENTS FOR THE SUMMIT

Agenda for Design Session May, 2008

Time	Activity	Comments
6:00-7:00 60 min. Larry and Leslie	Welcome, objectives, community building and review agenda for the weekend	-Review purpose and objectives for the “Today and Tomorrow” sessions and the outputs of this session. Indicate how it fits with the larger plan/roadmap—Lesley --Review history—invite to view as they work this weekend. -show video(s) and show how it fits within the roadmap--Larry -Roles and introduce facilitators--Larry
Tony and Joanne		-guiding principles--us -review agenda for the weekend and Day 1 agenda--us -Table discussions or interviews—what are you most excited about/proud about with this process so far and hopes/wishes for this weekend -capture popcorn group report out wishes
7:00-7:45 45 min.	Confirming Draft dream/vision statements	-situate where we’re at in the 4D cycle -introduce the draft dream

		<p>statements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -in table groups, discuss what most connect with in draft possibility statement(s). -invite likes/wishes of the statements during break times. This will provide valuable input to the group inspired to create one statement
7:45-8:00	Task instructions— Crafting focus area success statement and confirm initiatives	Go to focus area of choosing. Craft success statement for focus area and confirm initiatives
8:00-8:45 45 min.	Focus areas vision statement and confirm initiatives	
8:45-9:00	Close and Prep for Day 2	Review work of tomorrow
9:00-9:15	Welcome back; review agenda for the day	-review agenda and housekeeping
9:15-9:30 15 min.	Reconfiguration activity task instructions	
9:30-10:00 30 min.	Reconfiguration task	
10:00-10:30 30 min.	Report out	
10:30-10:45	Break	
10:45-11:15 30 min.	Report out on focus area vision statements, initiatives and clarifying statements	
11:15-11:30	IDEO video	

11:30-11:45	Capture design principles	
11:45	Set up the afternoon process of open space and rapid prototyping	
12:00	Lunch	
1:00-1:45 45 min.	Delivery round 1	
1:45-2:00	Plenary	
2:00-2:15 15 min.	Break	
2:15-2:30 15 min.	Process moving forward and prioritizing	-clarify how the Board proposes to support the innovation teams and any inspired actions -multi-vote on priorities at design level
2:30-2:45 15 min.	Individual inspired actions	-paired or trio discussion -sign up for innovation teams (sign up sheet for tables and at door)
2:45-3:00 15 min.	Close and Check out	Appreciations, Hope, Commitment Song

Appendix H

“Today and Tomorrow”

An Opportunity to Shape our District’s Future

Purpose

The purpose of the Today and Tomorrow sessions is to involve a broad cross-section of staff, students, parents and community members in generating innovative ideas for the future of schools in Peace River North, and in updating our district vision statement.

Objectives

- what our strengths are and what we want to preserve as our school district grows and changes;
- what we value most and what our future priorities are;
- what our collective hopes and dreams are for our school district;
- how we can work together to ensure success for all students;
- what actions should we consider as the most important next steps in moving forward.

the process... Appreciative Inquiry

- Not another intervention, but a new approach to existing interventions & applications
- A philosophy, a process, and an approach to change

**If you want a different “what,” you
need a different “how”**

Two Approaches to Change/Innovation

Problem-based

- Identify Problem
- Conduct Root Cause Analysis
- Brainstorm Solutions & Analyze
- Develop Action Plans

Metaphor:

Organizations and communities are problems to be solved

Asset-based

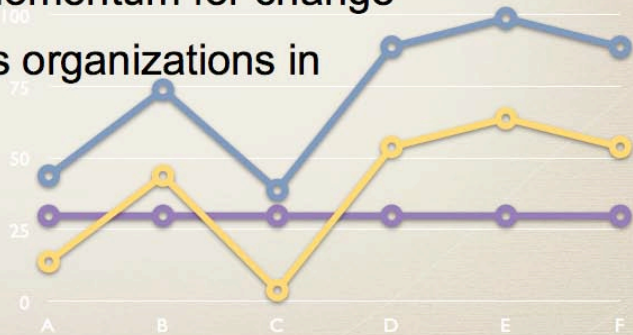
- "What is"
(What gives life?)
- Dream "What Might Be"
- Design "What Should Be"
- Deliver "What Will Be"
- Discover

Metaphor:

Organizations and communities are solutions to be embraced

Why Focus on Strengths?

- Builds on the best aspects of the organization
- Creates new positive images of the future
- A possibility/solution focus
- Strengthens teamwork and relationships
- Creates energy and momentum for change
- Strength-Focus moves organizations in desired strategic direction



Positive Image → Positive Action

Placebo Effect

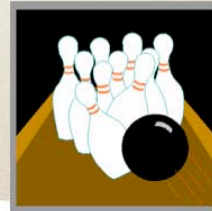


Pygmalion Effect



Affirmative
Capability

"Watch out for
the woods!"



Definitions

Ap·pre·ci·ate v.

1. Recognize the quality, significance or magnitude of
2. To be fully aware of or sensitive to
3. To raise in value or price

In·quire v.

1. To ask questions
2. To study
3. To search into and explore

Appreciative Inquiry is...

- A ***highly participative approach*** to generating ***new knowledge about and practical innovations*** for our organizations, relationships, families, communities, and society.
- A very ***inclusive, strength-based process of inquiry and action...*** leading to the creation of ***future realities which are built on combining the best of our past with our hopes/aspirations, assets, opportunities and core values***
- ***An invitation for people to co-create*** the sort of relationships, families, communities, organizations and networks in which they want to live.

Words Create Worlds

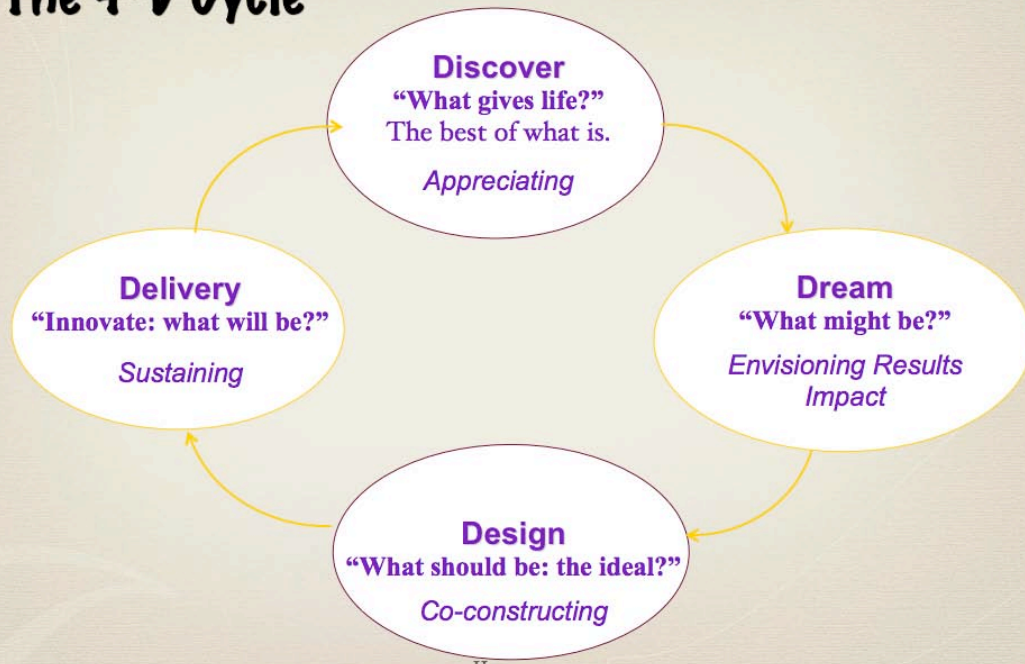
organizations and people *grow and change in the direction of what they study.*

- What we **ask** determines what we **find**
- What we **find** determines how we **talk**
- How we **talk** determines how we **imagine** together
- How we **imagine** determines what we **achieve** together

The Power of Narrative and Stories

- * The tradition of story-telling has been with us for a long time and is recognized as an effective way to teach and learn.
- * We are drawn to good stories.
- * They can engage both the heart and the imagination.
- * They can give shape to our hopes, dreams and fears, and remind us of important values.
- * They connect with our emotions and remain vivid in our memories.

The 4-D Cycle



Purpose of Discovery Phase



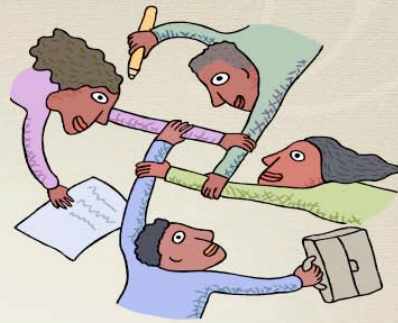
To discover our positive core

- Strengths and core values
 - Root causes of success
- ... The underlying conditions present when we're at our best

To develop connections which will allow us to create the sort of innovations and changes we want

To generate energy and confidence in our ability to create the future

The Positive Core



- Wealth of knowledge, wisdom and experience waiting to be discovered
- Source of often untapped potential for innovation and change

Discovery... Activity #1

1. Choose an interview partner
2. Interview your partner
3. Take turns: 30 minutes each
4. Ask questions, be curious.
5. Listen for great quotes, stories
6. Take good notes, for your own memory
7. You will use the data throughout the process



Tips for Interviews

- Read the questions aloud
- Allow for silence, self-reflection
- It's okay to skip questions
- Help your partner; use 'probing' questions
- Listen deeply
- Manage your time carefully

Discovery... Activity #2

1. Introduce your partner, sharing one best story that you heard.
2. Select roles.
3. Using a page of chart paper, record/brainstorm "root causes of success" from Q#1 (or common factors contributing to powerful learning experiences). Prioritize top 3 using Red dots.
4. Using a page of chart paper, record/brainstorm "root causes of success" from Q#2 (or common factors contributing to inspired teaching that makes a difference). Prioritize top 3 using Green dots.
5. Using a page of chart paper, record/brainstorm "root causes of success," from Q#3 (or common factors contributing to improved choices and relevance in school programs). Prioritize top 3 using Blue dots.

(see Page 7)

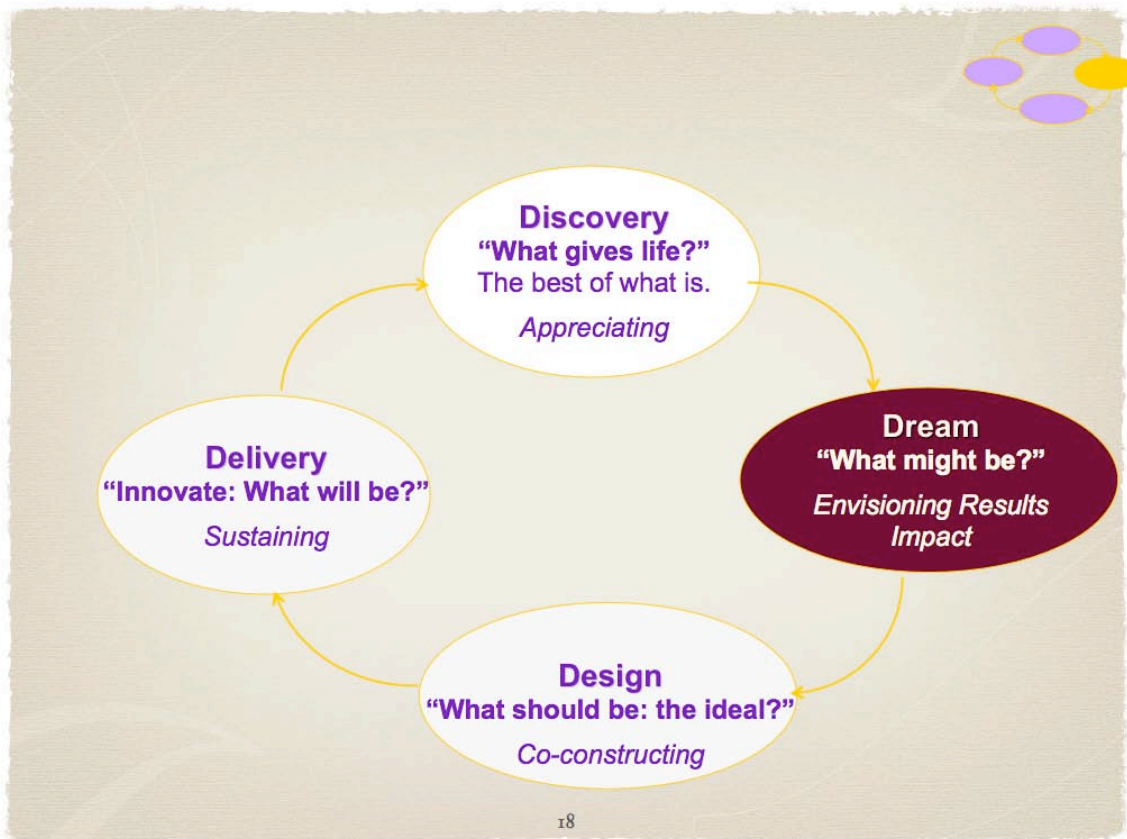
6. Recall your answer to question #4. Choose your top wish and write it on a sticky-note. Post your sticky-note on a page of chart paper at your table.

If there is time, cluster your sticky-notes by common themes.

7. Prepare to report out to the full group, one best story shared by a member of your table group.

8. Listen as each table reports one story.

9. Each table posts charts on the wall in 4 stations (Q#1, Q#2, Q#3, Q#4)



Purpose of the Dream Phase



- Opportunity to challenge the status quo; to present new assumptions
- To think and create new possibilities
- To imagine and visualize the most preferred or ideal future—the future we want to work toward.

**"A vivid imagination compels
the body to obey it." Aristotle**

"Dream Activity"



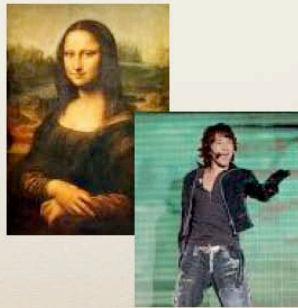
1. Participate in the "Guided Imagery." Write what you have imagined on the template provided.
2. Share your images from the Guided Imagery.
3. As a table group, determine the important elements of dream... the common vision.



Dream Presentations...

1. As a group, choose a creative way to present your dreams as if they were happening now. Have fun, be creative and present a strong image of what is possible. Table groups will share their short (2-3 min.) presentations with the whole group.

Examples: a T.V. special, a magazine cover story, skit, song, rap, dance, diagram or picture.



(see Page 8)

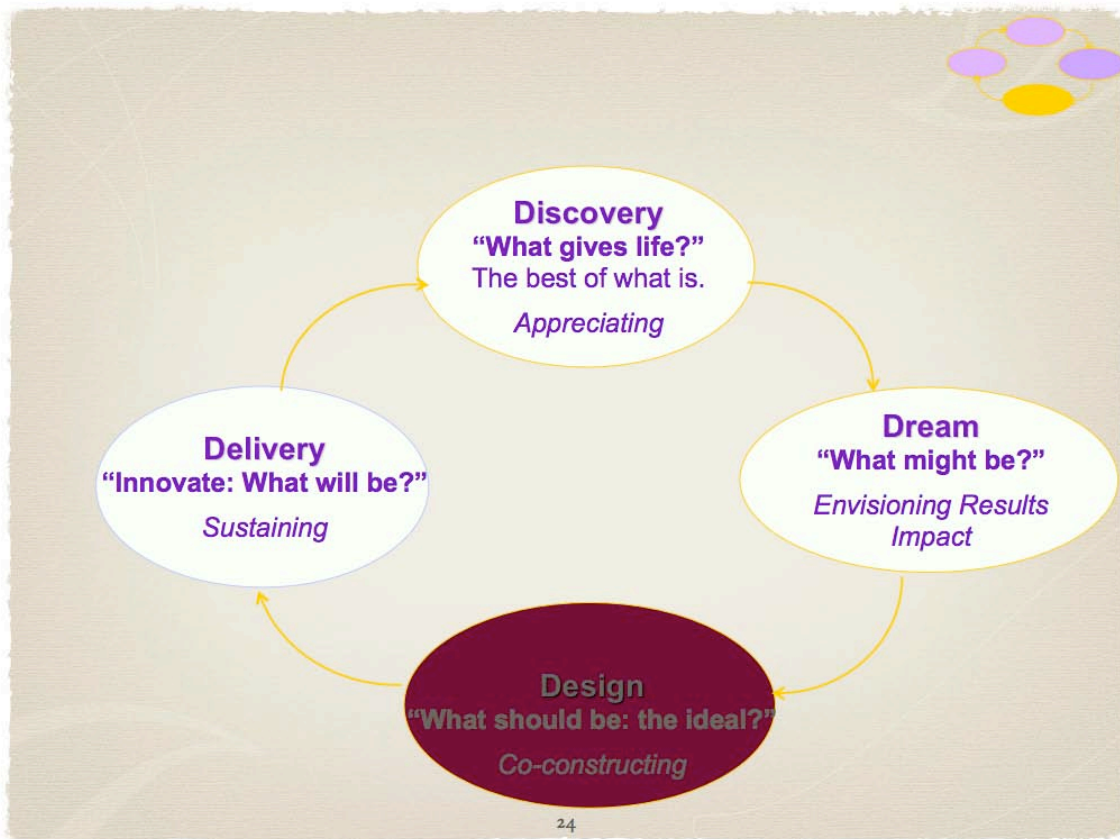
Possibility Statements

... are statements which describe ***what our schools will look and feel like when at their best***...when all of our conditions for success are fully utilized and aligned

... are statements which translate our images of the future into compelling words

Possibility Statements are...

- **Provocative:** appealing, exciting, inspiring
- **Written in the present tense:** describes the future as if it were the current reality (example: “We are... We do...”)
- **Grounded:** based on our positive core
- **Desired:** if you had it, would you want it?
- **Affirmative:** describes what we want (vs. what we don’t want)
- **Guides:** provides direction for possible initiatives, projects, actions.



Group Task... Dream / Vision Statements

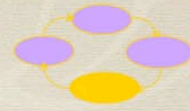
1. Review the draft Dream/Vision statements created by the planning team based on the output of all the dream presentations and dialogue
 - From all the statements, what do you most connect with in the statements? What is most compelling and exciting for you? What were some of the most hopeful images?

Appreciative Feedback... Likes and Wishes

Please provide your feedback on the Dream/Vision statements on the wall, chart:

- Your likes—what you like about each statement and think we should keep in the next draft
- Wishes—wishes or suggestions you can offer to make any of these statements even better

Design...



Purpose:

- To move ourselves closer to our desired image of the future

How:

- Confirm focus areas for growth and innovation
- Craft a focus area vision statement and identify key initiatives

Focus Areas for Growth and Innovation

Sustainable, Healthy Environment -Greening Schools -Environmental Responsibility	Inclusive Learning -Learning choices -Intergenerational learning/multi-age -Flexible timetables -Hands-on, project based learning	Community Partnerships	Vision Group
Mutual Relationships -Belonging and resiliency -Welcoming the community -Extra-ordinary transitions	Innovative Practices in Teaching	Best for the World Citizenry -Contributing to Community -Global Responsibility	

Identifying Objectives and Actions

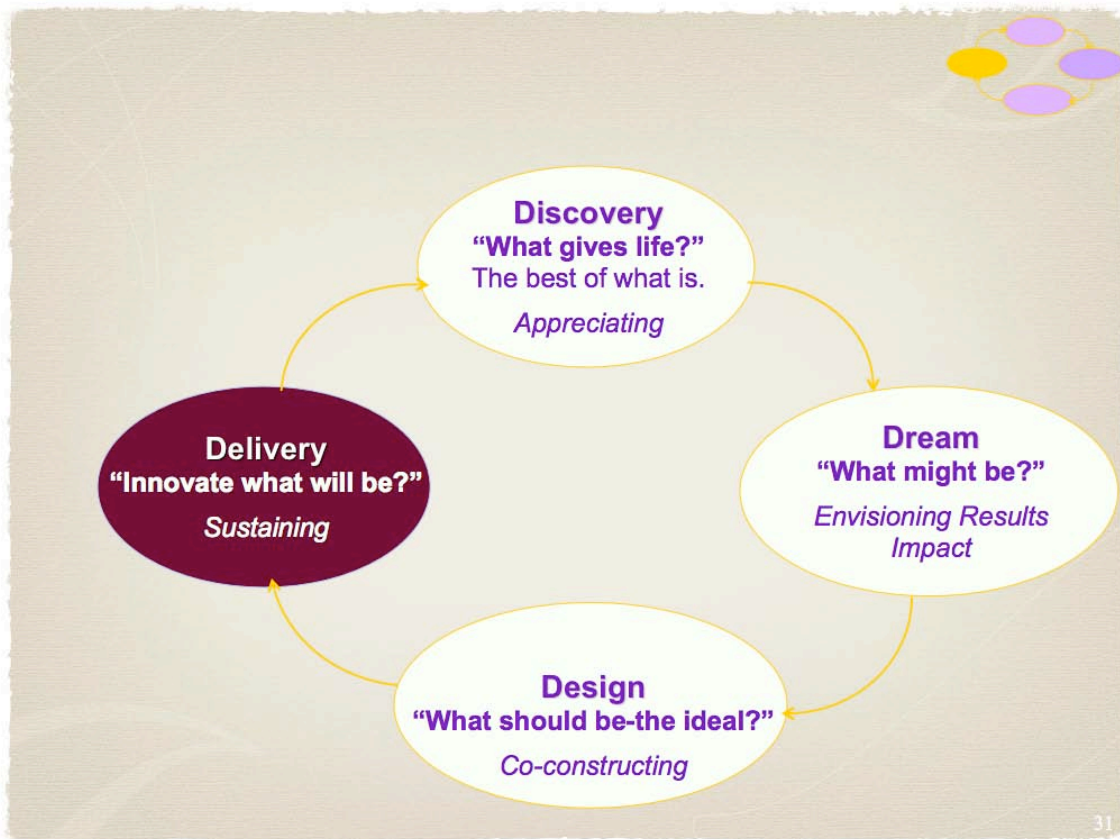
Initiative:

Objectives/Outcomes:

Key Actions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Who else needs to be involved:



Inspired Actions...



What are you inspired and committed to doing to carry forward this work?

- Initiatives—I want to participate on ‘xyz’ initiative team;
- Inspired action—something you can do on your own that requires no resources or collaboration with others e.g. start out school council/staff meetings off by sharing ‘celebration stories’

Turn to the person next to you and quickly talk about what you each are inspired and committed to doing.

Appendix I

SAMPLE DISCOVERY STORIES - “Teachers you admired”:

- **“My poetry teacher was my favourite. She took us to the gym and bounced a ball... we had to rhyme with the 4th bounce. She paid attention to students’ lives and took a personal interest in them. She appeared to truly care. She wrote little notes to ask us how things were going. We felt like she was a friend.”**
- **“My Geography teacher. He was also a driving instructor for the school. I remember there being three people in the vehicle and the teacher giving every opportunity for me to be successful. It was a nerve-racking experience but he made me feel comfortable and confident. He always looked at the positives, his quote was “There is always enough negativity in the world, I don’t need to add to it.”**
- **“My PE teacher taught practices that I now use every day. He went out of his way to make things meaningful and he created a culture and community that students wanted to be a part of. He created opportunities for students to succeed by going above and beyond for benefit of the students. He provided meaningful relationships in all aspects of student’s lives.”**
- **“My son’s Grade 9 science teacher. He had a difficult class. He used humour with them and was encouraging and passionate. She actually planned to say things that were positive. She was very human and shared her personal experiences. My son had her for two years. Once, when he couldn’t get out of bed for an exam, she came to the house and got him. He even got best mark in exam.”**
- **“This teacher, my son’s teacher ... she gave him a special card that she had written for him. She tells him what he is good at and what he needs to work on and he is motivated to work on those things.”**
- **“I had a Core/PE teacher in Grade 8 who was outgoing, knew how to read students and how to get best from us. By joking with kids he was able to open up the withdrawn students. He lifted your spirits and never let you feel down. He talked with his students not down to them. He encouraged me to be the**

best I could be at anything I chose. He encouraged us to make ‘eye contact’.”

- **“I am thinking of a Grade 4-5 teacher in a rural school in this district. He takes life experiences and he make learning fun for kids and they love it. He does more things for the kids that others wouldn’t do. He teaches CORE; he teaches survival; teaches real life lessons. He has personality, he plays music, provides school culture, and the kids and everyone love him. You just know he loves teaching. He teaches who he is, he wears his heart on his sleeve, and he is a wonderful role model.”**
- **“My anthropology teacher – he was passionate about the subject; he was very knowledgeable and also admitted his faults. He was funny, yet he was polished and credible; he did not just B.S. Once he told me that I should teach the course, not be a student. That inspired me to try harder. I may go back to school when I retire. He marked my papers based on what I had to say rather than my grammar. He didn’t expect me to be perfect. He was real, he was honest and it made me want to excel. When he said something he meant it, his words meant something.”**
- **“I remember an elementary school teacher in two-room country school about 30 years ago. She spent time teaching the student not the subject, and she incorporated the different age groups and the subjects. She was enthusiastic about bringing in news and current events to the remote location and sharing her interests with students.”**
- **“My daughter’s teacher is extremely supportive and has helped her to take pride in her achievements. This has helped her become more confident and to feel smart. This teacher is effective because of who she is – calm, strong, and yet sensitive to individual needs.”**
- **“I went to a small high school and had this teacher in many classes. He always allowed us to work at own pace at a time when structure was still “the way”. He challenged yet respected students and expected respect in return. He saw potential in every student. I don’t think I would have gone through life as I have if not for his support. I saw this teacher many years later and he told me that he knew I had met success in life.”**
- **“My Math professor at university. His favorite question was “how do you know?... show me”. He made me reflective. He showed me how to be a teacher. He was excited about his subject and I felt he would listen to what I needed and how I wanted to learn. He was open to new ideas. He really listened and brought kids to the classroom to improve our practices. He loved teaching and that came through.”**
- **“Miss Ross was 4’ 11” and kids thought they were going to run her into the ground (Grade 8). She was humble, quiet, and sweet. We ended up being**

willing to do anything for her. Everyone loved her to death. She coached the school teams in our rural school and everyone got a chance to be a part of the team. I admire her to this day.”

- **“I know a teacher within this district who always looks for the most positive aspects in her students. She is a huge advocate for kids who may not have advocates. She makes everyone around her better (because others want to support her approach). Her attitude is always positive ... if it helps kids she wants to do it and always puts her heart into it.”**
- **“My Grade 5 teacher. He treated everyone fairly. He believed in me. He made opportunities to get to know me.”**
- **“I had a teacher with an intrinsic ability. She is empathetic and has the ability to see what each child needs. She is excited about her work and her experiences. She shares her experiences with children and children share experiences with her. She has the ability to capture or make a personal connection with students. She taught a problem child with whom she made such a connection that he would come to visit with her years later and have coffee with her. He was not the same child that people had seen at school.”**
- **“My Grade 12 Math teacher. He believed all kids could learn and were better than average. He willingly did a tutorial after school prior to big tests and he took away the fear factor. He was very approachable and created an atmosphere for success. I will always admire him because helped me to believe in myself.”**
- **“School wasn’t easy for me. I had some personal situations to overcome. This teacher was personable, concerned, took care of me, checked in on me. We were in tough. She built up my self-esteem and showed me I was worthwhile on the inside and outside.”**
- **“He made us understand by using hands-on material. Visuals as well as writing. He encouraged personal creativity that resulted in better marks later.”**
- **“My Grade 6 and 7 teacher who started each day with “joke time”. He set a tone that was light and fun. He was willing to try and to change. He commented on behavior in a positive way and made you more inclined to change your behavior.”**
- **“My Math teacher in college... she treated every student with the same respect. She loved life and was passionate about teaching. Each lesson or idea was easy to understand because she made it as if she was teaching her first time. She was always positive... a very loving person.”**

- **“My Science/Biology teacher from Grade 7 to 11 in a small school. She challenged us with new things all the time. She used hands-on learning methods not just notes, and was willing to spend extra time with you. She was firm but yet very loving and caring to all students. She was respectful of everyone’s different levels of learning.”**
- **“When a child started school her grandma had just passed away. This teacher took her under her wing. She took her home for supper while parents were dealing with Grandma’s funeral. She helped everyone. Was like a Grandma to everyone. She was prepared to put herself out there and take a child under her wing when she was needed the most.”**
- **“I had a teacher for three years from Ireland. He helped fulfill my potential. He shared his personal stories about Ireland. He talked to everyone. Every class remembers they felt they were special. He encouraged me to get out of my comfort zone. I was naturally quiet and shy and he helped me be more confident as a public speaker.”**
- **“My Grade 3 teacher. She had students helping each other. She made us teachers and inspired teamwork.”**
- **“A Grade 4 teacher... the way she handled her children. She would talk them through the way they were doing things. She wouldn’t discipline but would rather seek to understand why they were behaving that way. Often she would be in the classroom all lunch hour. Picked out the good in kids and focused on that. She connected with the kids.”**
- **“I struggled in high school and got into the wrong crowd. My Biology 11 teacher took the time with me. He told me where I was headed, shared his past experience with me, and turned everything around for me. I went from not making it to getting A’s. He showed me how to do that in other subjects. He had an accent and others made fun of him. I got to see another side of him. I felt inspired to change. If not for him I don’t think I would have graduated.”**
- **“I heard about this teacher when I was a young child. I heard the stories about how he changes the lives of people around him. When I was little I wanted to be just like him.”**
- **“My Grade 11/12 Algebra teacher helped me decide to be a teacher. I fell in love with math. He gave clear instruction, was approachable at all times, and wanted everyone to succeed.”**
- **“She helped me see myself in a new way. She turned a negative education into a positive experience. She made a difference in me and made me want to do the same for others. She used my interests to help me learn but it was not just one thing she did, it was her entire being. I went from the bottom of the pile to**

the top of the heap. I went from lacking confidence to being more successful.”

- **“Even though I was seen as a jock/bully he didn’t let the stereotype stop him from helping me. He bent over backwards to help me learn. He allowed me in to the library after hours to read. He saw my potential and I’d read most books in library by time I left that school.”**
- **“My Drama teacher. He ever made it seem like he was better than everyone else and wanted to be called by his first name. He had a high level of respect for students. He gave me confidence to exceed my own expectations and to take ownership and pride in my work. I developed a feeling of self-worth. I appreciated his honesty the most.”**
- **“My high school French teacher – influenced my life. French became a part of my life. He was authentic, loved his topic and he was eccentric and didn’t care what others thought about him. He didn’t live by the rules and showed me that you didn’t have to follow all the rules to fit in. He pushed students to challenge themselves and passed his passion and zest for life on to the students.**
- **“My Grade 11/12 English teacher – she had a way with words. She impressed me and I respected her. I love reading and words because she challenged me. She didn’t like the word “nice” and pushed us to use better words. She set high standards but when we didn’t meet them she would be flexible. I really looked up to her; she inspired me to impress her and to meet her expectations. She was an interesting person.”**
- **“My sponsor teacher – my mentor. She could show me how to put my ideas into practice. She truly valued each and every student and she cared about all of them no matter what. She was compassionate and had a great sense of humour.”**
- **“She always listens to the kids and never interrupts them when they were talking. She is always respectful and never raises her voice, but she is firm. She sets an example, the values she demonstrates is what she asks back. She practices what she preaches. She is very polite and stresses that to students. She is always available for the students.”**
- **“He let us be ‘self directed’. He challenged our values and cared about students. He was a “man of his word” who challenged us to be better “people” not just better “students”.**
- **“My Grade 7 teacher was strict, had expectations, rules, and there were consequences for you’re your actions. He encouraged community and we had freedom and guidelines out of respect. I learned good work ethics. He was active in physical activity and outside of classroom he participated with**

students. To this day still call him 'Mr'."

- **"My Grade 7 teacher treated me like a human being, challenged me to take risks and told me it was OK to make mistakes.**
- **"My high school geography teacher... he was interesting and he was entertaining. Even though I didn't do well, he helped me to prepare for provincials; he gave up his time to help me study. Once when I was sick for three weeks he personally called me to see how I was doing. His commitment to students made a difference. He went the extra mile, he knew his subject, and knew what he was doing."**