

How Might Appreciative School Leadership Meet the Needs of 21st Century Schools? An Initial Inquiry

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore how Appreciate Leadership might meet the needs of 21st Century schools, using the Core Administration Team members of Colegio Maya (2002-2008) the American International School of Guatemala (CM) as a case study. Team members were asked to describe their “high point experiences” as school leaders at CM. This research project enquires into the essence of Appreciative School Leadership and reveals how CM core administrators envision using Appreciative Leadership for the future of schools, while referencing CM.

This study seeks to remedy the current scarcity of research on Appreciative Leadership by exploring successful contextual Appreciative School Leadership practices and seeking to understand the conditions that sustain and extend the application of AL (Appreciative Leadership) in a school environment.

The design methodology is qualitative. Specifically, it is an autoethnographic participant observer case study grounded in the assumptions of social constructionism. Appreciative Inquiry (AI), an action research strategy congruent with social constructionism, orients research toward the study of organizational strengths and successes rather than its deficits and failures.

Participants were guided through an Appreciative Inquiry Team Learning Process using the four stages (Define, Discover, Dream and Design) of a 5-D Appreciative Inquiry. Participants were asked to volunteer for semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and to create documents for cross-validation and triangulation of concepts. A typological data analysis of CM school leaders’ Appreciative School Leadership practices was compiled using the themes and formative ideas of Appreciative Leadership.

The analyzed data revealed that: (1) the process of conducting an Appreciative Inquiry into school leadership resulted in the CM Core Administration Team members feeling empowered in their future work; (2) CM Core Administration Team members had used Appreciative Leadership concepts to create a generative holistic school learning community; (3) the CM Core Administration Team describes optimal leadership strategies for the future that are congruent with Appreciative Leadership; and (4) the CM Core Administration Team recommends that school communities interested in shared school leadership adopt Appreciative Inquiry as the preferred approach/framework (for school leadership). The findings documented a successful Appreciative Leadership inquiry with CM core administration from a set period of time and suggested the grounded ecological conditions needed for the use of Appreciative School Leadership in the future.