

# Appreciative Learning Approach: A New Pedagogical Option

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**Abstract:** This is a theoretical paper in which authors attempt to present appreciative learning approach as a new pedagogical option for educational setting. The paper starts with the description of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as both theory and practice. Next, it discusses the eight principles of AI in relations to the current trend of learning. Then, the 4Ds (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) model of AI that facilitates the practice of appreciative learning approach is illustrated. Authors propose some amendments to the initial model in order to promote more flexibility adapting to the aggressive technology progression. Subsequently, some thought provoking questions and recommendations for future researches are formulated at the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** Appreciative Inquiry, appreciative learning approach, pedagogical strategy

## Introduction

Appreciative learning approach proposed by the authors as a new pedagogical option for educational setting is based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Conklin [1] believed classroom is a form of organization amenable to development and change. However, most schools in Asian countries are traditionally regarded as social institutions [2]. Tan and Law [2] described teachers dutifully transmitting standardized knowledge with conventional methods most of the time. The current norm seriously hold back students from exploring new ideas [3] and being creative [4]. In addition, it is also being deemed as dull and uninteresting by students [5] and it critically deprived students of their rights [6]. Therefore, appreciative learning approach is proposed as a pedagogical option for teachers.

## 1. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) – Theory and Practice

Appreciative and inquiry are defined as [7]:

**Ap-pre'ci-ate, v.,** 1. to value; recognize the best in people or the world around us; affirm past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems. 2. to increase in value, e.g., the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: value, prize, esteem, and honor.

**In-quire' (kwir), v.,** 1. to explore and discover. 2. to ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: discover, search, systematically explore, and study.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is both theory and practice [8] [9] [10]. As a theory, AI offers a perspective, a set of principles, model, and beliefs about how human systems function. In

terms of practices, AI is a transformative agent that recognizes the best in people and helps them moving towards their potential. It is a co-evolutionary search for the best in people and the relevant world around them [7]. According to Cooperrider et al. [7], the practice of AI involves systematic discovery of what gives life to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in human term.

AI practices focus on merging the past and present capacities such as achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, high point moments, and visions into possible futures [10]. Fitzgerald, Murrell and Miller [11] described problem solving approach as lowered an individual's energy and creativity. On the other hand, by focusing on what is desired, constructive, and possible, it will shift a person's perception and effectiveness towards positive direction. This is because human systems grow in the direction where persistently search on the best of the past will create more desirable future [10]. The powerful images of oneself and the world around will help the person to inspire action and innovation. Cooperrider and Whitney [10] claimed positive images as an important technique to counter initial negative images, beliefs, and expectations. Practitioners guide subjects into discovering positive aspects of themselves and their surroundings, in order for the subjects to lead their life with better visions and actions. Therefore, AI practices start from the desired objectives to achieve and not from the existing problems to be solved.

## **2. The Eight Principles of Appreciative Inquiry and the Current Trend of Learning**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century of learning uses technology heavily [12]. Yet, digital technology alone cannot be depended on to produce classroom dynamic [13] [12]. Students need to be guided by interesting task integrated with contemporary artefact in a constructive environment. Cramer [12] perceived teaching children of the current century to be more challenging since they were 'born with technology in their hands'. Thus, successful integration of technology into education need changes in teaching and learning strategies [14]. Appreciative Inquiry could be an ideal theoretical and practice guide for today's teachers.

Appreciative Inquiry is originated from management change process within large organisations but less commonly used at classroom level [15] [16] [17]. However, teachers are managers too. In addition, teachers need to manage students in the most humanizing ways. Neville [18] considered classroom as one of the living systems. In order for teachers to practice Appreciative Inquiry both as theory and practice, they need to be well versed with the eight principles of AI. Social constructionism provides the fundamental foundation for the first three principles of AI theory [10]:

### **i. Constructionist principle**

Constructionist principle which based on generative theory focuses on anticipatory articulation of tomorrow's possibilities [10]. Students should not be treated as having brains like blank papers to be filled [19]. In fact, students have their own prior experience and understanding on all context of learning. Learning with technology is not about copy, cut, and paste information [12]. The current trend of authentic learning engages students in real-world and virtual communities of practice [20]. Students are expected to construct information into something novel. Learning itself is a constructive process where students construct personal interpretation of experience. Connections between knowledge and experiences are reform and refined from time to time. Therefore, based on the constructionist principle of AI, teachers are suggested to provide more opportunities for the

construction of knowledge, skills, experience, and potentials in order for students to construct tomorrow's possibilities.

ii. Simultaneity principle

Simultaneity principle recognizes discovery and change as simultaneous process [7]. In order for students to change, they should be exposed to different available alternatives. Students will start reflecting and reconstructing their future based on what they found or discovered. The current trend of teaching and learning process is a shared responsibility between teachers and students [21]. AI practices acknowledge this accountability. Thus, in AI practices, teachers are encourage generate questions that will have impact on students' lives. When students start thinking and reflecting positively, simultaneously it co-creates their future possibilities.

iii. Poetic Principle

Pasts, presents, or futures are endless sources of learning, inspiration, or interpretation [10]. Neville [18] illustrated human system as an open book, where experiences being co-authored and co-created. Schools should have community with shared experiences, values, and aspirations. It will help creates connections between students and teachers through better understanding of one another. Students learn best when they experience strong relationship with their teachers and peers within the safe and supportive learning environment [22]. Van Tiem and Rosenzweig [23] also emphasize on the importance of positive language. The world can be created through the words we use and the knowledge we share with others.

The next two principles are based on imagery [11]. The well-known '*placebo effect*' explains situation where positive imagery leading to positive action. Imagery provides the foundation for the following principles:

iv. Anticipatory Principle

Cooperrider et al. [7] claimed that the most important resource for generating constructive change and improvement are through collective imagination and discourse about the future. This is because the images of the future will guide the current behaviour. Anticipatory principle assumes human systems as forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent [7]. Neville [18] hold teachers responsible in creating experiences whereby students learn to explore multiple perspectives and imagine beyond the existing. Learning by doing is considered the most effective way as visions are transform into actions and students are provided the opportunities to explore the implications of their actions, decisions, and perceptions [20]. Without a platform for students to take actions, visions will turn to hallucinations.

v. Positive Principle

Building and sustaining momentum for change requires large amounts of positive influence and social bonding [7]. Attitudes such as hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, friendship, sense of urgent purpose, and sheer joy in creating something meaningful are parts of the momentum. The more positive the questions and statements posed, the more long lasting and successful the change efforts. It does not help to begin from the standpoint of the world as a problem to be solved [10]. It will create more problems. Instead, students should be made to believe their capabilities. Life-long learning and innovation abilities emerge when curiosity and affirmation exist [18]. Hence, the theoretical and practice approach of AI

provide teachers a guide in cultivating life-long learning among students. Learning does not stop when students graduated from any formal learning institution.

The next three principles are the evidences of the continuing evolution of AI theory [24]:

vi. The Wholeness Principle

Wholeness means involving the entire subjects in a large group to stimulate collective capacity [24]. Wholeness is expected to bring out the best in people. Wholeness does not only mean the involvement of entire subjects in a group but also the completeness outcomes. Learning should not focus entirely on the new knowing of skills and information. Being fun is an important element too. Fun in the sense of enjoyment and pleasure, will help putting students in a relax and receptive frame of mind for learning [25].

vii. The Enactment Principle

Preskill and Catsambas [24] highlighted that in order to really make a change, it should be the change one really wants to see. Positive change occurs when there is a model of the ideal future and living examples of the future. The future is now [24]. It can be created with words, images, and relationships. Students at adolescent age need to feel in control and in power [26]. Teachers should find a platform and pedagogical option in order for students to feel they are in control of their own learning.

viii. The Free Choice Principle

A person is perceived to perform better and more committed when there is freedom to choose [24]. Free choice stimulates creativity and positive change. Learning environment should not restrict student's cognitive process. Instead, students should freely construct knowledge and make choices that could accomplish their dreams. Education relates to what human beings need to learn in their own rights [6]. However, most Asian schools did not facilitate free choice principle in learning process [2]. Students have to follow strictly the conventional ways of teaching and learning. As a result, students often countered it with disciplines problems. On the other hand, if students were given more autonomy power in the process of learning, they will go beyond traditional ways [22]. Thus, the outcomes of learning will be a surprise for both teachers and students.

### **3. Appreciative Learning Approach and The 4Ds Model of Appreciative Inquiry.**

Appreciative learning approach proposed in this paper is based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) theory. In order to put a theory into practice, it needs to be supported by a model. The 4Ds (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) model of Appreciative Inquiry (Figure 1) helps translate images into possibilities, intentions into reality, and beliefs into practice [7]. Cooperrider et al. [7] illustrated the 4Ds model as revolving in the sequence of discovery, dream, design, and destiny respectively.

Figure 1 shows the core of the cycle is an affirmative topic choice. It is the most important part of the AI theory and practices [10]. The practices of AI do not focus on unmotivated subject matter. The 4Ds model of appreciative learning approach links the energy of positive core to changes that never thought possible [7]. Therefore, teachers practicing appreciative learning approach need to look at students' most unappealing habits and behaviours as a positive starting point. These are opportunities and not detrimentally aspects that could not be countered.

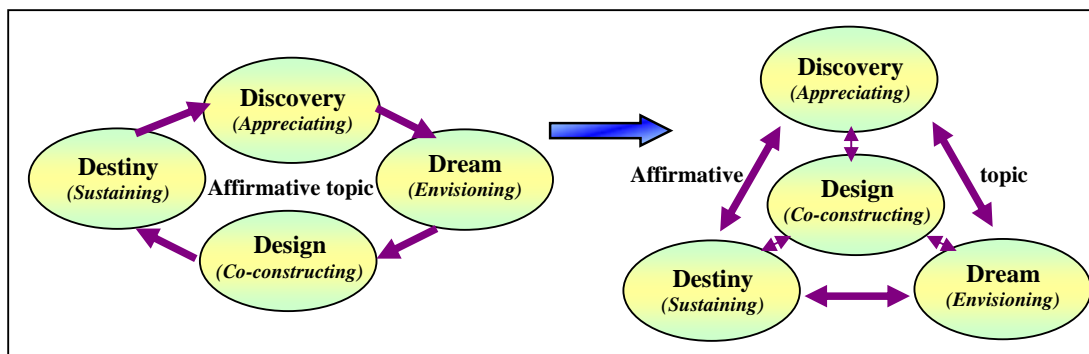


Figure 1: The initial 4Ds model (left) and the amended 4Ds model (right)

Discovery stage involves the process of valuing things that worth doing so from the perspectives of the beholders [7]. Dialogue and conversation can be used to facilitate the discoveries of positive moments and peak experiences [15]. The central aim during this phase is to search and appreciate what gives life and energy to a person [27]. Accordingly, teachers have to discover and appreciate students' experience in life, aware of what students love to do and accomplish in their life. Subsequently, teachers should provide opportunities for students to discover alternatives and potential in the areas students appreciate and value in their lives.

Secondly, the students are lead to envision and imagine the possibilities through dream stage. This is when the mind naturally begins to search in-depth and envisioning new potentials [7]. According to Cooperrider et al. [7], envisioning are transpired through passionate thinking, positive images of desires, and preferred future. Dream stage connects a person to images of all possibilities in relation to the discovered potential and capabilities. Teachers can lead their students in questioning themselves of what they want their world to be like with the experiences, skills and knowledge acquired.

The articulation of dreams into constructs occurs during design stage. In the design stage, the emphasis changes from dreaming to co-constructing [27]. Practitioners create opportunities for their subjects to act and achieve their dream at design stage [10]. The subjects will co-constructing their existing world with the dream they generated in previous stage. Design stage also meant to trigger students' curiosity to explore beyond the materials provided. Thus, environment and materials have to be designed to facilitate students in expanding their self-development and capacities, as well as realizing their dreams.

The last stage is destiny. Destiny stage strengthens the affirmative capabilities of the subjects [10]. It focuses on the sustaining of the development and innovation experienced in previous stages [27]. Destiny stage enables the subjects to envisage how they are going to empower their discovered and affirmed experiences, skills and knowledge. It assists the subjects in building long term hope and momentum in their life. Destiny looks beyond current needs and desires.

Today's students anticipating the use of technology during learning process [12]. Since we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some of the skills and knowledge that are introduced at university level could now make its way to be learned much earlier with the ability of computer technologies in schools [28]. However, most of the time, teachers did not push students to work at higher cognitive levels [29]. It may be due to the weight focus on examination commitments. In addition, teachers find themselves still playing catch up with technology [30]. Teachers often lack the skills and knowledge to integrate technology effectively into

their classrooms [21]. On the other hand, today's students know more and will always know more than their teachers about technology and how to manipulate it [21]. Learning by doing, active learning, authentic learning, and experiential learning is the foreground of today's education [31]. Thus, appreciative learning approach could be an appropriate pedagogical strategy for teachers of current generation.

Based on the current trend of technology progress and students' learning style, authors wish to propose some amendments to the initial 4Ds model of appreciative learning approach (Figure 1). Although the model has been amended, the objectives of all the stages remain the same. Tracking along the rigid sequence of discover, dream, design and destiny stages did not provide flexibility to the process of learning. Learning with digital technology is not always the case where students start with discovering of new knowledge and skills. Students can actually start by having a dream or destiny before proceed to discovery stage. By having dream or destiny, students may take the initiatives by discovering more knowledge and skills that can help accomplishes their dream or destiny. By discovering more knowledge and skills, students are expected to generate or even change their dream, design, and destiny simultaneously. The concrete outcomes are produced through design stage. While constructing their products, students may have changed their dreams, as well as their future envisions in destiny stage. Therefore, active, authentic and experiential learning complemented with digital technology tool needs a more flexible 4Ds model of appreciative learning approach.

As a conclusion, appreciative learning approach does not view students as lack of ideas. Students might be lack of skills and opportunities to think about their own ideas, turning ideas into construct and decide their own destiny based on what they believe in. Therefore, with the application of appreciative learning approach, students' opinions will be the fundamental base for teachers to take actions accordingly and prepare more opportunities for students to act and making own decisions.

#### **4. Issues and Future Research for the Practice of Appreciative Learning Approach**

Authors had tapped on the application of appreciative learning approach in computer games development class for enhancing students' creative perception [32] and creative process [33]. Other researchers probed the practice at tertiary level in management classes [1] [15] [34], in promoting social inclusion of students with disabilities into the school system [35], and business organizations [11]. The question remains as to how appreciative learning approach can be best fit into conventional classroom in teaching standard curriculum. What are the benefits teachers and students might gain when appreciative learning approach is applied into conventional classroom?

The fast evolving technology development has indeed a major challenge for many teachers [36]. While teachers are trying to be comfortable with the contemporary technology, at the same time, teachers need to utilize suitable pedagogical strategy. Authors proposed appreciative learning approach as a new pedagogical option for teachers whom complemented students' learning process with technology tools which students love using. Learning is no more a mere process of knowing. It is a process of utilizing knowledge and skills to produce outcomes that students can be proud of and claim its ownership. Authors foresee teachers might have contradicting belief with students. Thus, how far teachers are willing to change their own attitudes toward learning and teaching process? Will teachers be more receptive and acknowledge students' desires and dreams? Are teachers willing to

put extra effort in preparing the settings which consist of discovery, dream, design, and destiny stages that could facilitate students' learning process?

At the end of the day, students and teachers will still facing the assessment of standard curriculum. No one in authority is interested to know what students have learned beyond the standard curriculum. What has been our sadness as educators are the inability in making learning as whole life process. The current norm fails to provide students a platform to think of their future destiny in relation to their current desires. Learning becomes a force action. Teachers are so used in criticizing and belittling students' habits and behaviours by referring to the society norm, without thinking how to manipulate the unwanted elements to improve students' self-development. For example, if students like smoking, maybe they can be given task in finding ways to curb smoking through their own experimental research. As a conclusion, if teachers are receptive to Appreciative Inquiry as both theory and practice, it will change not only the teachers' attitudes, but their pedagogical strategy in class as well. Accordingly, learning will be meaningful and worthwhile experience for students. Therefore, Appreciative Inquiry is a recommended guide for teachers to create classroom dynamic.

## 5. Summary

In brief, appreciative learning approach does not put teachers as the dominant figure in learning process. What students feel, think, and desire are the most important aspects in learning. It is definitely a mistake to continue teaching students in the time-worn ways as their expectations are beyond what the curriculum offers. However, authors do not assume every student as having the same learning style. Therefore, there is no one best pedagogical strategy in education. Appreciative learning approach could be just another new pedagogical option for teachers of current generation.

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