



Appreciative Inquiry: A Protocol to Support Professional Visitation

An adaptation of the Inquiry Circle Protocol developed by Betty Bisplinghoff and Frances Hensley

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.

Overall Purpose

To generate robust inquiry questions that can lead our work in support of small school conversion and school transformation.

Supporting Goals

- To place inquiry at the heart of our work
- To support reflective practice
- To encourage the development of an evidence-based, positive narrative culture
- To build on the good
- To develop a vision-based professional voice

The *Inquiry Circles Protocol* is offered in support of individual, group, and/or school-wide professional inquiry. It provides a framework for beginning a type of action research that intentionally builds on what is good in our work rather than what is wrong and in need of fixing. In offering this stance toward inquiry, we choose to contribute to the development of an evidence-based, positive, narrative culture within our educational communities. We are inspired by the Appreciative Inquiry model for organizational change generated by Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2003). They propose that “organizations move toward what they study” (p. 29). We recognize the power of our questions to influence our actions.

If we choose to begin our inquiries from the best of what is, we have the opportunity for involvement in cycles of possibility-based study. Personal/professional and organizational change is grounded in what people think about and talk about, what they discover and learn, and how such topics influence images of our future. The questions we pursue “set the stage for what is “found” and what is “discovered” (the evidence/data). How we inquire influences the culture of schooling. Our evidence base fuels the stories out of which we grow our futures. It will be interesting to consider, as a professional community, what these stories tell us about what actions we need to support in order to make a positive difference for teachers (professional educators) as learners and students as learners.

For these reasons, we choose to approach inquiry through a storytelling and interviewing process that calls into focus what we do well and what we value as professionals. The protocol intentionally provides time for participants to think for themselves and to think in collaboration with others. It is a reflexive and expansive process. This is the dance of professional inquiry – space to reflect alone – space to reconsider in the company of respected others – space to act and grow. We anticipate that *Inquiry Circles* will help identify and disseminate those life-giving moments that enhance professional enthusiasm, encourage a shared sense of purpose, help us learn from our school’s achievements, and seed even more compelling images of professional futures.

Please note that this work is not meant to simply support “happy talk.” The protocol intentionally focuses on what is healthy about our life’s work but also challenges us to use this information in strategic ways. It is clear that “goodness” is fraught with complications but by choosing to grab hold of the positive core of what is working for us, we believe we can make a difference in the quality of our work experiences and in the public conversation about education. **Where is the evidence of promise and potential?** This information should be as much a part of the discourse on schooling as the failures that are most often highlighted and serve to weaken our sense of power to make a positive difference for children in this world.