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The Power of an Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle in a Non-AYP Middle School:
Positive Direction for Eighth-Grade Teachers

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Annotation: A doctoral field study research team comprised of a faculty member and three doctoral students collaborated with an eighth-grade team of teachers to improve instruction in a non-adequate yearly progress (AYP), low socioeconomic status middle school using an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) 4-D Cycle. The research findings revealed that an AI methodology can serve to facilitate change in teacher pedagogical practices.

Abstract: The purpose of this research is to describe how a university doctoral research team entered into a collaborative research partnership with a Midwestern rural school district to work with an eighth-grade team of teachers (teacher team) to think differently about their pedagogical practices in their non-AYP, low socioeconomic status middle school.

A qualitative case study using an appreciate inquiry (AI) methodology was used with an eighth-grade team of teachers—four women and two men. Data were collected through semi-structured paired interviews, whole-group discussions, shared written activities, narrative group story, extensive researcher field notes, and activities related to enhance team members' dialogue over an eight-month period.

The findings indicate the importance of using an AI methodology when whole groups want to change yet seem mired in traditional behavioral patterns reinforced by a stagnant organizational culture. Progressive AI meetings were conducted with the eighth-grade team where the AI 4-D Cycle process became the catalyst for team change. Follow-up semi-structured interviews with the teacher team indicated their sustained excitement with the AI 4-D Cycle and provided feedback for future progressive AI meetings.

The research team concluded that the teacher team gained a deeper appreciation of each other on a personal and professional level. Incremental change took place through the AI 4-D Cycle. Teacher team members undertook training in technology and other pedagogical related professional development. They discovered new ways to collaborate and integrate their teaching. And, they began a series of conversations with school and district administrators to facilitate changes discussed during the AI 4-D Cycle.

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Purpose of the Study

If teachers in low-performing, non-adequate yearly progress (non-AYP) school continue to use the same pedagogical practices, student achievement and the school's AYP status are in jeopardy. The Elementary & Secondary Education ACT (ESEA) "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB) requires that all students achieve a prescribed state determined level of academic achievement. The No Child Left Behind Act also requires that all students become proficient in reading and mathematics by the school year 2013-2014 (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). Schools failing to achieve the required level of academic achievement receive non-AYP status.

The purpose of this study is to describe how a university doctoral research team entered into a collaborative research partnership with a Midwestern rural school district to work with an eighth-grade team of teachers (teacher team) to think differently about their pedagogical practices in their non-AYP, low socioeconomic status middle school. For purposes of confidentiality, we used the name "Grainville" to identify the middle school and community.

Grainville is a Midwestern rural community that is located approximately 40 miles south of the state's largest population center. It has a population of 8,600 residents and a reputation for its grain productivity. Even though it produces a large quantity of grain, only 2.1% of the residents participate in farming. The largest employers are rail transportation,

small manufacturing plants, a medical center, and the school district (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). We visited Grainville Middle School (GMS) on a regular basis over eight months to conduct our research with the teacher team. The research period occurred over the fall, winter, and spring seasons. We traveled from an urban university via the interstate highway to rural Grainville. After exiting the interstate, we observed crop fields on both sides of the road; we witnessed the transition of the crop fields that surrounded Grainville during our research period. As we entered the center of Grainville, we observed several gas stations, restaurants, small shopping venues, and a new high school.

Grainville Independent School District (GISD) is comprised of four elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and one alternative school. The majority of the district's 1,650 students are White; 45% of students qualify for free and reduced lunches. The district built a new high school and renovated the old high school to a middle school. GMS has 391 students in sixth through eighth grades, a principal, a vice-principal, 33 teachers, approximately 20 para-educators, and other support staff.

The underlying subtext for GMS was NCLB. NCLB requires states to have accountability systems that identify schools failing to educate traditionally underserved populations (Balfanz, Legters, & Weber, June 2006). In part, annual assessments in reading and mathematics are required for all students in third through eighth grades (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2007). Annual assessments are one factor this Midwestern state uses to identify non-AYP schools. At the time of our study, GMS received non-AYP status for three consecutive years. The primary cause for its status was the students with disabilities subgroup's low performance in reading and math.

When we met with GMS's second-year principal, he stated that his goal was to improve GMS's status from non-AYP to AYP in the shortest possible time. The principal worked with us to identify a teacher team with high readiness for change. The principal hoped this teacher team might become a model for improved pedagogical practices for the other three academic teacher teams at GMS.

Based on information we received from the principal and our review of documents related to GMS achievement, we believed that the teacher team had an untapped positive core of outstanding instructional experience that would serve as the foundation for change. Consequently, we suggested an appreciative inquiry (AI) methodology that focused on stakeholder assets through teacher team participation in the AI 4-D Cycle. AI is used with public and private organizations as a change methodology involving whole group participation. Participation in the AI 4-D Cycle would allow the teacher team participants to collaboratively discover and create new ways of organizing, producing, working, and collaborating to positively impact their pedagogical practices (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

We framed the study in an AI theoretical research perspective. AI brings a social constructionist epistemology and philosophy to whole-group change efforts (M. Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). Flowing out of a constructionist epistemology, AI embraces the concept that social groups construct their reality; moreover, social groups can discover what is good and true and, as a result, experience a form of liberation from fixed perceptions and practice (K. Gergen, 1996). Consequently, AI asserts

that an organization is not a problem to be solved but a creative expression of human thought (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Appreciative inquiry is a form of action research developed, in part, as a reaction to the problem orientation of contemporary applications of action research. Instead of taking the problem direction, AI brings people together to collaboratively and generatively discover new positive and productive directions that have not been previously considered (Bushe, 2007; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). AI is grounded in five basic principles: the constructionist principle, the simultaneity principle, the poetic principle, the anticipation principle, and the positive principle (Weber, 2003). These principles state that we socially construct our reality, our change and inquiry occur simultaneously and in the direction of our inquiry, we constructively and collaboratively work toward an anticipated beneficial future as our stories unfold in a mysterious—almost poetic fashion, and our positive images of the future generate positive actions toward the positive image (Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Newman, 2001; Randolph, February 2006).

Since the focus of AI is to seek the good in people, their organizations, and their work context, the outcome is often a deep and rich understanding of what gives life to people, their work, and their organizations (Cooperrider, 2001; Kerka, 2003). Operationally, AI is a collaborative whole group inquiry approach that involves organizational stakeholders in a dynamic, highly participative, collaborative process. Researchers and those involved in organizational development report significant success in applying AI in a variety of settings: large group, small group, private, public, and globally. In public venues, it has been used as a change and evaluation process in multiple settings: government, health, and education

(Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Calabrese, 2006; Freitas, 2006); business and religious organizations (Browne, 1999; Kinni, 2003); and global settings to empower people to transform their lives and that of their villages (Murrell, 1999; Thatchenkery, May 1999).

As Cooperrider and Srivastva (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) state:

[Appreciative inquiry] has one aim—to provide a generative theoretical springboard for normative dialogue that is conducive to self-directed experimentation in social innovation. . . . It appreciates the best of “what is” to ignite intuition of the possible and then firmly unites the two logically, caringly, and passionately into a theoretical hypothesis of an envisioned future.

Methodology

We applied an AI methodology to a qualitative embedded case-study research design to facilitate the improvement of instruction with a teacher team using progressive AI meetings. A progressive AI meeting generally stretches over 10 meetings that are more than an hour long (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003). In our case, the meetings extended over eight months. The majority of the meetings lasted 90 minutes. There were several lengthier meetings, lasting between four to six hours. These extended meetings occurred at the beginning and end of the AI process.

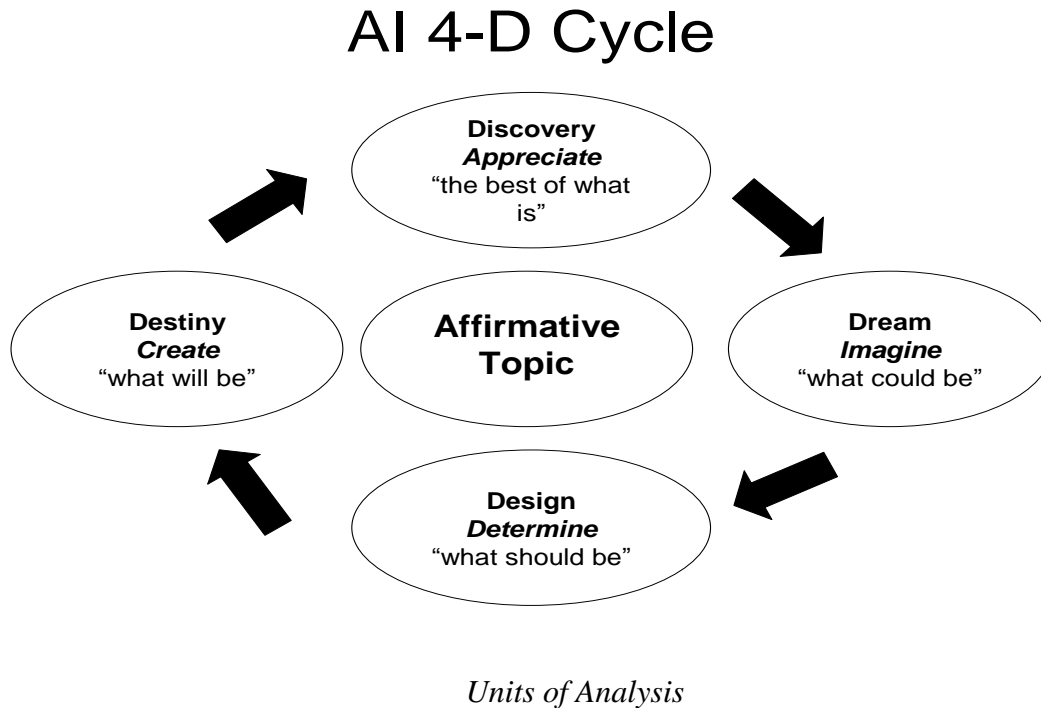
The number of teacher team meetings and the length of meetings were dictated by the teachers’ teaching schedule, the ability of the district to find suitable teacher-substitutes, and the ever-present pressure on the teachers related to forthcoming state assessments. Consequently, our meetings were arranged around the teachers’ block scheduling planning times. On several occasions, we were able to schedule extended time for the meetings with

the teacher team. During our meetings, we guided the teacher team through the AI 4-D Cycle: discover, dream, design, and destiny (see Figure 1).

The discovery stage mobilized inquiry into the teacher team's positive core, where each member recalled a highpoint teaching experience. The dream stage facilitated the teacher team's socially constructed vision of optimum pedagogical practices, where they envisioned new generative teaching and learning possibilities. The design stage resulted in the teacher team's construction of an idealized design—making their dream reality. The destiny stage facilitated the team's construction of a provocative proposition and public commitment to implement their idealized design (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000).

We employed an insider/outsider component to our research team (Bartunek & Louis, 1996). The use of an insider/outsider research team ameliorates criticism of qualitative research related to subjectivity in interpreting data. Moreover, it provides greater access to data as well as insights into the team that are not easily accessible to outsiders (Mantel & Ludema, 2004). One of the members of the research team was an assistant superintendent in GISD and a doctoral student in the final year of class work.

Figure 1. The AI 4-D Cycle



The primary data source was an eighth-grade team of middle school teachers—teacher team: four women and two men who worked together as a teaching team for two years. The teacher team had a mean of 17.6 years teaching experience. Their teaching experience ranged from 2 to 34 years. Two teacher team members had less than five years of teaching experience. Four teacher team members had 18 or more years of teaching experience. Three teacher team members had advanced degrees.

Data Collection

Appreciative inquiry methods are similar in many ways to traditional qualitative data-gathering methods (Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007). Our AI methods included semi-structured paired interviews, whole-group discussions (similar to a focus group), shared

written activities, narrative group storytelling, extensive researcher field notes that include direct quotations and rich descriptions of teacher team members' observed behavior, and activities related to enhance their dialogue over the eight-month period during each stage of the AI 4-D Cycle. We also collected data using a facilitative process where teacher team members gathered in paired groups, reconvened in three-person teams, and then met as a whole group. Moreover, there were numerous teacher team generated materials. These materials were in the form of newsprint documents, drawings, and electronic collaboration on AI story generation activities.

We used AI protocols throughout the four stages of the 4-D Cycle. We also provided the teacher team with AI protocols that they used in each of the paired semi-structured interviews. We participated in these interviews as observers to insure the consistency of protocol application and the garnering of rich, descriptive stories. In the discovery stage during the semi-structured paired interviews, for example, each teacher team member asked interview questions to each other: "Recall a highpoint teaching experience where teaching and learning came together. Who was present? What was the context? What was the outcome? And, how did you feel about this experience?" Each participant as interviewer shared his/her partner's story to the whole group. Then the whole group identified common themes from semi-structured paired interviews. This process occurred throughout the four stages of the 4-D Cycle.

Additionally, we reviewed relevant documents related to student achievement, technology, and teacher schedules. Several weeks after we completed the progressive AI meetings and the AI 4-D Cycle, we conducted follow-up semi-structured interviews with

teacher team members. During each data-collecting process, we were present and at times interjected a focusing question. In our role as participant/observer we took extensive field notes and reframed problem-based conversations to an AI perspective.

Data Analysis

We collected a large quantity of data that we triangulated by using multiple investigators (four); multiple sources of data, including participant generated documents, field notes, interviews, and school/district related documents. The multiple methods in the AI 4-D Cycle helped to confirm our findings. We identified themes using content analysis and pattern matching by applying open and axial coding processes. Moreover, we used member checking throughout the AI 4-D Cycle to ensure member consensus at each AI 4-D Cycle stage. We confirmed findings with the teacher team and conducted post-AI interviews. During the progressive AI meetings, we observed the teacher team throughout the AI 4-D Cycle. In addition, we used two software programs, Atlas.ti and CATPAC, to filter data and initiate the open and axial coding processes.

Findings

According to Sandelowski (1998), qualitative researchers choose a central point to tell the story they present in their findings. The story we chose to present illustrates the central point of growth and change that occurred incrementally to the teacher team through their participation in the progressive AI meetings – AI 4-D Cycle: discovery, dream, design, and destiny. We use pseudonyms for teacher team members: Jack, Kent, Edith, Sara, Karen, and Brittany.

As a precursor to the progressive AI meetings, we facilitated a whole-group meeting to define an affirmative topic that became the focus of the AI 4-D Cycle. To identify the affirmative topic, we paired teacher team members and asked the pairs to identify their primary challenge as a team. We collected the challenges and shared them with all teacher team pairs. We then guided them to consensus on their primary challenge.

Sara looked at the list and said, “I need more hours in a day; this is hard to solve.” Yet, they persisted in their struggle to identify their primary challenge. We continually reframed their problem-based, communication language. The reframing moved them from a problem-based focus to restating their challenge in affirmative language. They declared, “We want to expand the application of technology to increase student engagement and increase cross-curricular activities.”

Discovery Stage

With the affirmative topic as a guide, we asked the teacher team to remember a time when they felt most alive, most fulfilled, and most excited about teaching. They responded by saying that this was the first time anyone had asked them this question. Their conversations were animated. They mentioned several highpoints. Edith referred to a Hewlett-Packard grant they received. She said, “We were shocked at first—why us? And then, we were overwhelmed with the work.”

Brittany identified cross-curricular activities that focused on the Great Depression and the 1960s decade. The cross-curricular project linked students to teacher team members. They described the project as enjoyable, joy-filled, and enthusiastic. Jack said, “I would say it was great.” Edith agreed, “[The students] saw that we were excited – then they got excited.

They became excited learning new things.” Kent said, “We were a brand new team, so we started coming up with all kinds of ideas, and everyone wanted to be simultaneously engaged. The kids saw us in a different light.”

The teacher team’s highpoint teaching experiences were collaborative, highly engaging, and enjoyable. The recollection of highpoint experiences was transformational. They began to view themselves as capable teachers who successfully educated their students. Moreover, they recognized that they enjoyed working collaboratively as a team.

After they recalled their highpoint experiences, we asked them to share what they valued about themselves, the nature of their work, and their teammates. They were unanimous in stating “caring relationships.” Noddings’ (1995) concept of caring reinforced this finding. Team members believed that their caring relationships with students provided their students with hope and encouragement to aspire to achieve. Karen was emphatic, “I care about students!” Brittany supported Karen’s strong statement, “We expect each student to reach beyond the reachable and achieve greatness in academics and society.”

A caring manner was evident in their voices and actions throughout the progressive AI meetings. One research team member stated in her field notes, “The teacher team appeared to care deeply about students and wanted to be the positive bridge for students between elementary and high school.” Also, recorded in our research field notes were the strong tonality in their voices and hand gestures that occurred frequently throughout the caring relationship conversations. Their behaviors and conversations reinforced our belief that caring was a core value.

Caring about students linked the teacher team's social collaboration to the academic aspects of their work. Their desire to care was a core aspect of their roles as teacher and colleague. Jack stated, "We are always willing to "give" time if another teacher needs it, and we do not resent or worry that it would take away from our class time." Each team member nodded in agreement with Jack's statement. Brittany added a supportive comment, "We work well as a group. We are friends. I feel like I have people that I can depend on." Sara concluded, "They are my family." The teacher team's excitement was evident as they recalled their successful history, identified core values, and named what they valued in each other. These activities prepared the groundwork for the dream stage.

Dream Stage

We initiated the dream stage by asking the teacher team to identify a personal metaphor that was empowering and that lifted their aspirations. Their metaphors were *eagle*, *still deep lake*, *ocean*, *coach*, *patchwork quilt*, and *seasons*. We used these metaphors as a starting place in the generative development of a team metaphor. They selected *circus* as their metaphor to represent their team and its aspirations. At the exercise's conclusion, they chose the title for their metaphor—*The Greatest Show on Earth*. They said this metaphor represented the importance of integrating enjoyment and humor to learning and collegial relationships. Next, they illustrated their metaphor and corresponding roles on large newsprint paper. Each depicted role was an integrated part of the *Greatest Show on Earth*. Karen, for example, took special care in detailing her role as *lion tamer*. We witnessed the development of respect and trust among teacher team members as they described their roles in the circus. In the same way that the personal metaphor empowered and lifted their

aspirations, their team metaphor empowered and emboldened their collective aspirations.

Jack said loudly, “We are a good team.”

Once the teacher team had a metaphorical understanding of who they were, we asked the deeper question: What is the world calling you to be? We complimented this seminal AI question with a series of probes: As a person? As a teacher team? As a middle school teacher?

As their responses to “What is the world calling you to be?” unfolded, we identified their other-centered commitment. They talked about being the best wife, mother, husband, or father. They wanted to have a positive influence on children and give something back to the world. As a teacher team, they envisioned collaborative actions to lift their students’ aspirations through academic achievement and increased social skills. They mentioned that collaborating to *reach* students by sharing ideas, generating enthusiasm, and creating a support system for their students was part of their call.

When we asked what the world was calling them to be as a middle school teacher, we felt that their aspirations moved from the micro to the macro. They talked about the following: (a) being a model middle school for this Midwestern state, (b) building trust with their students’ parents, (c) achieving the state standard of excellence each year, and (d) being a bridge for their students’ successful transition to high school.

We linked their responses and metaphor to the concept of idealized design. We asked the teacher team to imagine how they would function in the year 2015 if they realized their aspirations. We used a group story-telling process (McClintock, 2003/2004) to promote the

construction of this imagined reality. They constructed a group story using a computer-mediated data-gathering process.

The teacher team's socially constructed group story focused on changes in curriculum and pedagogy. Edith wrote, "We will share our ideas, enthusiasm, and knowledge with other teachers. We will develop multi-cross-curricular units and interact daily as a teacher team and with students through the use of technology." Throughout the group story, the welfare of students was foremost. Kent wrote, "We will maintain a support system for kids. It [school] will be a place that parents can trust."

The teacher team envisioned an evolving role for the teacher. Karen said, "Our teacher team will be like instructional specialists who make sure students are successful." Karen's statement set off a spiral of tagging comments. Brittany broadened Karen's concept, "We will work as instructional specialists, improving the curriculum, and research new ways to present material." They began to focus on student learning. Kent stated, "Students are learning interactively in groups with interactive materials and technology." They believed that creating relevant learning units was important to increasing student achievement. They identified the integration of technology into instruction as a crucial component. Sara said:

I changed as a teacher by using technology. I don't believe my role is to tell students what needs to be done; I now act as a coach. I am a support system and provide ideas or strategies. The students are my colleagues and we work together. I am their team leader. I don't believe that there is a distinction between teacher-student other than the discipline factor; discipline has not been much of an issue since we changed the way we teach.

We used the group story to generate deeper conversations leading to agreement of their idealized design.

Design Stage

We began the design stage by asking the teacher team to identify core processes essential to their teacher role. They identified three central core processes: (a) caring for and about students; (b) making learning fun, regardless of level of learning, through differentiated instruction; and (c) connecting students' lives to contemporary issues. We asked them to apply these processes to the development of a provocative proposition.

Provocative propositions are bold and affirmative statements of the future written in the present to stretch the team to achieve its dream (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000; Wynne, 2002). Their provocative proposition began, "We provide 360 degrees of support for one another to motivate students to stretch and achieve greatness in academics and society." Included within their provocative proposition were the following: (a) small instructional group processes, (b) appropriate instructor-to-student ratios, (c) cooperative learning strategies, and (d) differentiated technological instructional processes. Their provocative proposition became the design blueprint as they moved toward implementation. As the teacher team collaboratively worked on the development of their provocative proposition, Edith stopped working and addressed us. "You people are awfully quiet." At that moment, we knew they had taken responsibility for their destiny.

Destiny Stage

In many ways, the first three stages of the AI 4-D Cycle were enjoyable and safe. The teacher team recalled successful and highlighted memorable positive teaching experiences.

They shared how valuing each other bolstered their caring relationships. They believed in their dream and enjoyed constructing their idealized design. When we introduced the destiny stage, however, they voiced excuses that focused on systemic issues that prevented change. They attributed blame to the school board; they felt the school board would not allocate funds or the time for the realization of their dream. Brittany said, “The dream is great, but we don’t have time to work on technology strategies after a staff development session.” Jack nodded his head, “I’m getting ready for retirement in a few years; I’m concerned with writing my lesson plans each day.” The other teacher team members looked down at their worksheets.

We felt the decisive moment arrived for the teacher team and the research team. The research team’s lead facilitator stated:

I’m hearing excuses—reasons why you can’t achieve your dream. The language is deficit-based. Today, let’s look at what you can do. It’s not that those other issues do not exist, let’s set them aside until we complete our task. You can get this done; you can climb this mountain.

The strategic request to acknowledge and then set these issues aside was crucial. It validated the concerns of those reticent to change. The teacher team knew they could address their concerns at the conclusion of the destiny stage. All agreed to focus on initiating individual and team commitment for action to implement their provocative proposition.

We asked each team member to identify and make a public commitment to take one action step toward fulfilling the design encapsulated in the provocative proposition. Sara said, “I will contact tech support and ask for greater Internet access for student and teacher

research.” Kent followed Sara’s lead, “I will integrate more technology activities and secure more laptops for next year.” Jack, who moments earlier was reluctant to move forward, focused on cross-curricular activities, “I will meet with Edith and Karen, and create a plan for an interdisciplinary unit.” Karen added, “I will talk to Jim [principal], and request new textbooks and professional training. Moreover, Edith said, “I will set up a meeting with the state expert in technology integration and identify how we can get technical professional development.” They agreed that they would initiate each action commitment within 24 hours. They spent the remainder of the time planning how to move their provocative proposition forward. At the conclusion of the day, the teacher team reflected on the issues raised earlier in the day. They recognized that they had addressed all of the deficit-based issues through the reconstruction of their language. Moreover, their reconstructed language was empowering, allowing them to see themselves in control of their destiny through commitment to positive action.

We left believing that the progressive AI meetings facilitated change among team members. Yet, we wondered, “Did we really make a difference? What about their initial concerns?” We returned six weeks later and conducted follow-up semi-structured interviews to answer our questions.

Progressive AI Meetings Follow-Up Semi-Structured Interviews

We conducted follow-up semi-structured interviews six weeks after the completion of the destiny stage. We asked the teacher team to share their perceptions of their participation in the progressive AI meetings. Our follow-up questions focused on the highlights of their

experience and outcomes. We also asked for recommendations for future progressive AI meetings with other teachers. We now share their perceptions.

At the heart of their highlighted experiences were newfound relationships, respect, and belief in each other. Sara said, “It was us all coming together. We sat down and acknowledged each other as professionals, friends, and family. We knew that we needed each other to make our team’s work successful, so our students can be successful.” The teacher team was together for a year prior to our study. During that time, they met on a daily basis and collaborated about work and students. Moreover, they met socially at each other’s homes periodically during the year. Yet, in spite of the apparent closeness of the team, they never expressed how or why they valued each other until going through the progressive AI meetings process. Kent stated:

[During and after progressive AI meetings] we appreciated each other. We talked about things that that we normally wouldn’t talk about. In the past, we saw things happening, but we didn’t talk about it. We appreciated people for doing certain things, but we didn’t stop to share our feelings.

Appreciating each other at deeper levels led to personal growth. Karen said, “I am not the most confident person in the world; it was good to hear different ideas. It gave me more confidence as a teacher. I am doing good things that other people respect.” Sara added, “When someone from our team says, ‘here’s what you mean to me’ or, ‘this is what you do for me,’ or, ‘this is what you contribute to the team,’ it means everything.”

As action researchers, we knew we facilitated the growth of deepening relationships among teacher team members. We did not know if their commitments to the provocative

proposition would continue after we left. What we found was a transformation among teacher team members that gives testimony to the power of using progressive AI meetings as a vehicle for collaboration and change. The changes that took place after the progressive AI meetings were both personal and team related. Kent said he was motivated to learn more. He also said, “You have to keep up with technology. I made a personal goal that day to use it more in the science classroom. I did some things with laptops the next week.” Karen decided to take a class on technology. She said:

I don’t use technology as much as others do. It isn’t that I wouldn’t like to, I am just not comfortable with it. I decided to take a technology class. I feel like that is going to help me [be successful]. I will create a technology-based unit that I will use next year.

In addition to personal initiatives, participants addressed ways that the progressive AI meetings served as a catalyst for continued collaboration and implementation of cross-curricular learning units prior to the end of the school year. Jack said, “Edith and I thoroughly worked on our cross-curricular assignment. I know Sara and Kent are working together as well. They are taking responsibility on a flight assignment and having students calculate features that tie into science.”

Cross-curricular learning units were an important part of the teacher team’s provocative proposition as well as technology. Sara said, “Kent and I met and planned our units. It was our commitment. I know that Jack is integrating some technology. In fact, the entire team is trying to find ways to integrate technology into the classroom.”

The progressive AI meetings initiated new direction for the teacher team’s inquiry procedures. Instead of focusing on problems, they talked about improving instruction.

Brittany stated, “During the AI process we evaluated our resources and identified gaps, especially in technology. It is important to get laptops in the classroom.” It was evident that the teacher team was moving beyond initial concerns to actively pursuing their dream.

Our relationship with the teacher team developed over the course of the progressive AI meetings. They began to view us as their coaches. As a result, we recognized their candid responses when we asked what we could have done differently to make the progressive AI meetings more meaningful for our continued work with AI. They were unanimous in claiming that they thoroughly enjoyed and learned from the experience; yet, missing important instructional time was an important concern.

Jack said, “We missed a lot of class time. It messed up the day.” Edith was more specific, “That’s always a worry when you have substitute teachers coming in for core classes. There have been many behavioral issues this year. You hate to leave your class.” They were concerned because substitute teachers were often untrained to teach their subject. This caused disciplinary issues that needed to be resolved when they returned to the classroom. Brittany said, “Maybe we didn’t have enough time. That is the only thing.” Karen added:

If our participation didn’t have to be taken out of class time, it would have been great. I feel like I lost a lot in working with the students. Substitutes can come in and do a good job, but I have certain ways I want to do things. It bothered some of us to be out of the classrooms.

On the one hand, time was an issue for the teacher team. They were concerned about being absent from their classrooms and coping with the extra remedial work. On the other

hand, they were grateful to their school district for providing resources to pay for substitute teachers, lunches, and other materials so they could take part in the progressive AI meetings.

Conclusions

Our experience in working with the teacher team reflects the potential of using an AI methodology when whole groups want to change, yet seem mired in traditional behavioral patterns reinforced by a stagnant organizational culture. Immersion in progressive AI meetings by means of an AI 4-D Cycle became the catalyst for change for the teacher team and potentially for GMS.

At one level, the teacher team gained a deeper appreciation of each other on a personal and professional level. The public expression of hearing someone value them was important to members. It helped them to create an image of themselves as a family. As a family, it was important to take care of the family's children—the students.

At a deeper level, they set aside numerous self-imposed obstacles and gave themselves permission to envision their dream's distinct possibilities for their teacher team. Their generative conversations created a new belief system that they could find new and innovative ways to collaborate, infuse technology, and improve their pedagogical practices.

We discovered when we returned to GMS six weeks after the conclusion of the AI 4-D Cycle for follow-up semi-structured interviews that change occurred and was sustained on personal and pedagogical levels. The change described by the teacher team was incremental. They undertook training in technology and other pedagogical related professional development. They discovered new ways to collaborate and integrate their teaching. And, they began a series of conversations with school and district administrators to facilitate

changes discussed during the AI 4-D Cycle. They indicated their sustained excitement with the AI 4-D Cycle and provided feedback for future progressive AI meetings. We left GMS with the belief that team members would continue to follow through on their changes, especially as they reflected on their pedagogical practices.

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