

Essential Activities - Appreciative Inquiry

Reading Time: 4-5 minutes

In advocating for [ecosocial literacy](#) as a foundational organizing principle in classrooms, schools, homes and institutions, we aim to broaden and deepen the principles, practices and mindsets, and importantly, the possibilities, that educators and facilitators can draw upon to become active participants in manifesting a more peaceful, harmonious, just and sustainable world and mentoring an entire generation of ecosocially literate humans. Every educator, parent and mentor has their own unique situation, yet within those situations, each of us can find small steps we can take in alignment with our vision of a more eco-socially just and harmonious world.

In “Foundations of Ecosocial Literacy” we briefly discussed the four foundational ideas or thoughts summarized as follows:

- ▶ Adopt an *enriched view of human beings*
- ▶ Recognize that outer change begins with *inner transformation*
- ▶ Develop our *non-cognitive ways of knowing*
- ▶ Incorporate and honor our *contemplative and reflective lineages*

Keeping in mind these four foundational thoughts, we draw upon eight essential activities or mindsets that we aspire to include in our everyday language, lessons, curricula and conversations. At all times, we’re looking for ways to engage activities that will illuminate and explore these following eight ideas.

Eight Essential Activities

1. The Importance of Language & Human Stories
2. Reverence (Pointing to a Universal Set of Values)
3. Self-Reflection, Introspection, Inquiry (Contemplative Education)
4. Disorienting Dilemmas (Exposure to Different Worldviews)
5. Practice Mentality (Small Consistent Steps with Intention)
6. Appreciative Inquiry as a Method of Non-force Based Change
7. Creativity and Creative Recovery Practices
8. Cultivating the Eight Intrinsic Attributes of Ecosocial Leadership

These eight activities or mindsets are not separate; rather, they are interconnected at many different levels. Often, to engage one means to engage others. But each one points to a particular facet of our orientation and world view that we manifest in different ways and in different circumstances.

Appreciative Inquiry

[Appreciative Inquiry](#) (AI) is a profound, strengths-based method for co-creating change in human systems.

“Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an energizing and inclusive process that fosters creativity through the art of positive inquiry. It builds new skills in individuals and groups, develops new leaders, encourages a culture of inquiry, and helps

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create shared vision and purpose by building on an organization's core values and strengths. Perhaps, most importantly, are the outcomes that emerge during the process which provoke action, inspire commitment, and lead to results.” — The Center for Appreciative Inquiry

What makes AI so important for us is that it provides an energizing, non-force based method for creating change. It doesn't rely on a central source of power or authority telling others what to do. It leverages collaboration, creativity and cooperation and relies on the positive energy, excitement and enthusiasm of diverse individuals and groups to co-create ideas and momentum for positive change. While AI was originally designed to facilitate organizational change, the principles and practices are easily applied on a personal level, helping people discover creative ways to make changes in their own lives and relationships. Thus, it serves dual roles. On a personal level, it provides creative practices and mindsets for individuals. It supports each of us in our transformation into becoming the change we wish to see in the world. On a systems level, it provides methods for co-creating positive change with groups, both small and large. It is an ideal vehicle for both student personal growth and developing self-awareness and also for student outreach projects involving their communities (both small and large groups).

Appreciative Inquiry has a set of [five original principles and five emergent principles](#) that form the foundation of the view and practices. It intersects seamlessly and supports all of our other activities and especially mirrors and reinforces the importance of language & human stories. With Appreciative Inquiry, we recognize that language encodes and co-creates our world views. We say that “words create worlds”. We leverage this insight to help us understand the critical nature of the words we use to form our inquiries and direct our creative energy. We also recognize the choice we have in every moment to direct our attention using our language and inquiries. We say that the language we use is *fateful*. Appreciative Inquiry helps us become more aware of the language we use moment to moment and its power to direct our energy and attention.

As we develop ecosocial literacy, we become more and more aware of the questions that are being asked and the questions that are being left out, especially in contentious polarized debates and also in the discussions around the issues that most concern us. AI helps us become more aware of the questions we ask and the language we use, and guides us to seek out and craft questions that will serve the movement towards positive change.

Resources

Jacqueline B. Kelm. *Appreciative Living: The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*.

David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney. *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*.

Jane Magruder Watkins, Bernard J. Mohr, Ralph Kelly *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination*

Stavros, J. & Torres, C. *Conversations Worth Having: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Fuel Productive and Meaningful Engagement* (2nd ed.) Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2022.

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Stratton-Berkessel, R. *Appreciative Inquiry for Collaborative Solutions: 21 Strength-Based Workshops* (1st ed.). Pfeiffer, 2010.

Bernard J. Mohr and Jane Magruder Watkins. *The Essentials of Appreciative Inquiry: A Roadmap for Creating Positive Futures*

Warren Berger, *A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas* (2014; Bloomsbury Publishing).