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Intergenerational Dialogue

ABSTRACT

Appreciative Inquiry and Intergenerational Dialogue are inextricably connected. Human experience is framed by past generations, contextualized by our current generation, and influenced by the next generations. Our friends - particularly the young friends - bring out our best selves.

Intergenerational conversations are my absolute favorite dialogues. My friend Sonia Nevis, who describes herself as 'on the road to 82', says we learn so much from these talks because 'I work with mostly young people and this makes for a lively life. They know things I don't know and you don't have to dig for the information. It is an easy and pleasant way to learn.'

We sometimes talk about 'knowledge as power'. Learning becomes an adversarial competition with winners and losers. In intergenerational dialogue the essence is spontaneous generosity. As Sonia says, 'Young people love conveying their knowledge. They put it out there easily with no holds barred.'

We are in a world-wide reconsideration of the rights and resources of intellectual property. The lack of copyright on the concept of Appreciative Inquiry is the essence of the love of conveying knowledge. The economic and emotional resources in a knowledge based economy suggest that in this decade 'Power is Knowledge'. David Cooperrider has been an exemplar in sharing wisdom, knowledge and information. By declining a copyright on the term Appreciative Inquiry, he has opened the doors of understanding to the widest audience.

Appreciative Inquiry and Intergenerational Dialogue are inextricably connected. They are impossible to divide. The DNA of AI is to know the good, show the good and grow the good. This calls for deep listening and strategic inquiry that has a foundation of appreciative intent. As scholar Gerte Hofstede has noted we all speak from the perspectives of our individuality, our common humanity and the multiple communities or cohorts of which we are members. Appreciative Inquiry invites us to explore the positive core of all three of these perspectives in ourselves and others.

Human experience is framed by past generations, contextualized by our current generation, and influenced by the next generations. This trio of perspectives

This AIP issue focuses on my passions: children and youth; leadership; diversity; and the art and science of questions.



When Marge asked her young friend Gordon, aged 17, what the world is calling for, he said, 'compassion'.

When you only stay close to the people you are already close to, you form your own little bubble.

enlarges our definition of communities and extends our time horizon from the next quarter or the next school year to a more useful constructionist view of time and time frames.

Time after time I have seen adults rise to their best selves when they are part of an intergenerational conversation.

It was college students in Mexico City who helped business people open up to new ways of seeing men and women work together.

It was students in Utah who moved a state wide educational summit from business as usual to new ideas for building strength upon strength in Utah Public Schools. In Massachusetts, adults were amazed by the talents of middle school students. And we all stand in awe of those near the end of life who retain the excitement to learn and the ability to produce superior work. So AI and conversations among multiple generations are, for me, inseparable.

After all, one of the AI principles tells us, 'diversity is what creates robust imagining and robust results.' Conversation from a maximum mix of multiple perspectives helps us live more comfortably in a world constructed of many points of view.

This issue of *AI Practitioner* is a celebration of diversity of outlook. What happens when we move from similarities to differences, from 'yes, I understand' to 'well I never thought about it that way'? Intergenerational Dialogue with those who are older or younger gives a new vitality to the dance of teaching and learning.

Kara, who is 14, said, 'When you only stay close to the people you are already close to, you form your own little bubble.'

Intergenerational dialogue happens when we talk and listen to people whose generation, experiences, perspectives and references are different to our own.

'Generation' is defined as a group of individuals having a contemporaneous status (as that of students in a school). We are using the term rather loosely. We might even say that generation is in the eye of the beholder... ten, twenty, thirty or more years?

The essence of learning through dialogue is friendship. When we dialogue with friends there is the opportunity to ask questions and feel intellectually safe. The theme from a deep conversation with a group of middle school students was that learning is based on friendship with adults and with peers. One girl wondered if it would even be possible to aspire to college without the support of friends.

Thinking of my conversations with young people, friendship stands out. Making friends with youth has a leveling effect – we speak from the heart and the head. We move from espousing theory to genuine connections that open the way to walking like we talk and acting with alignment. Our friends (particularly the young friends) bring out our best selves. Good stuff.

Last year I asked one of my close friends, Joyce Lemke, if she would be interested in working with me as an editor on the topic Intergenerational Dialogue for an upcoming AIP issue. Silly question, since Joyce leads a life devoted to young

Know the good. Show the good. Grow the good.

people. She is an educator who has played many roles: teacher, principal, alternative school designer, program developer and grant writer. Joyce is mother to four young people who were adopted as teens, taken from the foster care system into the Lemke family. Joyce teaches and writes about Appreciative Inquiry. She is the current president of the Positive Change Core.¹

Peter Whitehouse, M.D. Ph.D., is a newer friend. He is really the man for all seasons, as he holds multiple appointments at Case Western University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA. He is a geriatric neurologist, cognitive neuroscientist and deep bioethicist specializing in the care of persons with age-related cognitive challenges. His own practice is moving towards integrated evolutionary health. This holistic model of health parallels the appreciative discussions in this issue. He believes that health must be based on individual and community stories, be a lifelong pursuit and be grounded in a deep knowledge of our personal biology (including genes and neurons) and of our relationship to natural communities over time (evolution). His interests are in the young and the old, in social policy and business... actually he is interested in just about everything. Peter's curiosity was one reason why Joyce and I are so delighted that he joins our trio of editors.

As for me, this AIP issue focuses on my passions: children and youth; leadership; diversity; and the art and science of questions.

Joyce Lemke, Peter Whitehouse and I have had a chance to make or deepen friendships while working with the contributors to the May, 2009 issue of *AI Practitioner*. We also renewed our friendship with AIP's founder Anne Radford and (thanks to Skype) a new friend, editor and proofreader Shelagh Aitken.

'Marge Schiller's passion for children and youth extends from her twin grandchildren to my 18-year-old granddaughter,' Joyce adds. 'She is persistently working to know, show and grow the good in each of them. Most AI'ers are familiar with Marge's long history successfully using Appreciative Inquiry. What fewer may know is her more recent commitment to bringing strength-focused approaches to schools and youth. When she founded the Positive Change Core, her vision was crystal clear. She was intent on uplifting children and youth to their brightest possible future – she still is.'

What you will see in this issue are artistic expressions of Intergenerational Dialogue leading off with Sérgio Medina Roman's photo essay. Wikipedia defines a photo essay as: a set or series of photographs that are intended to tell a story or evoke a series of emotions in the viewer. Sérgio tells a story in his artistic presentation of images.

Our contributors' cases, stories, research, tips and 'how tos' divide into: *Intergenerational Dialogue in Schools* and *Intergenerational Dialogue in Communities*.

Part 1: Intergenerational Dialogue in Schools

A UK case study of whole school transformation using AI, *School Board Chairman Reflects on his Student Interview and Impact of Whole School Inquiry*,

¹ The Positive Change Core (PCC) is a collaborative global community dedicated to serving education and youth. The PCC offers a sustainable, appreciative practice that facilitates community conversations of change and partnership.
<http://www.positivechange.org/>



Joyce Lemke and Marge Schiller

by Neil Samuels and Glyn Willoughby, is an article based on a chapter of their newly published book.

Cathy Whitehouse, the director of the Intergenerational School in Cleveland, Ohio, USA and Peter Whitehouse, co-editor of this issue of AIP, tell a story from her school in her article, *Envisioning the Past and Imaging the Future: A Day in the Life of The Intergenerational School*, which was founded with the vision of creating a successful intergenerational learning community in greater Cleveland. Read the thoughtful story that Cathy and Peter tell.

A Canadian Perspective on Intergenerational Learning on experiences of participants in summits and the post-summit outcomes. We often ask 'what happens after a summit?' Sue Derby and Mo McKenna give us some answers.

Peter Kozik provides a researcher's perspective in his article *Inspiring the Best in Student Achievement*. Building on strengths allows teachers, parents and the students themselves to know the good, show the good and grow the good.

Collegio de Mayo in Guatemala is the setting for *The Beauty Of The AI Experience – AI Principles In Action!* by Jeff Fifeld and Mike McGuigan.

Finally, Joyce Lemke wraps up the section on of the Intergenerational Dialogue in Schools positioning youth: *Youth are the Answer – and the Question*.

Part 2: Intergenerational Conversations in Communities

Bliss Brown has written *An Inspired Future: the Significance of City-wide Conversations in Chicago, USA*. This article will give readers just a taste of what to expect from her yet-to-be published book.

Steven N. Pyser takes Joyce's definition of the role of youth and tells the story about *Building Capacity and Connection: Intergenerational Community Dialogue in the USA*.

Collaborative Conversations: Creating Positive Family Dynamics by Dawn Cooperrider Dole, Ada Jo Mann and Jen Silbert, inspired by their book *Positive Family Values*, brings intergenerational dialogue close to our hearts and homes.

In *Lessons From My Grandmother*, Joyce Lemke reflects on conversations with one of her major mentors, while Canadian Mike Sands writes about *Intergenerational Conversations: the Art of Inquiring Appreciatively*.

Facilitating Cross-generational Dialogues Among Work Teams by Phyllis Weiss Haserot moves the setting of AI dialogic applications to the workplace. We get some tips on how to bridge age divides where we work.

Peter Whitehouse describes *Valeo: Empowering an Epidemic Of Health*. He speaks of the essence of healthy communities that serve people of all ages.

And finally we offer a poem. A former New York teacher writes of the power of the listener and the compelling need we all have to tell our own story. Enjoy Mel Glenn's *A Glimpse of Humanity Through a Donut Hole*, and enjoy this inquiry into intergenerational dialogue.

Marge Schiller, co-guest editor, AI Practitioner, May, 2009

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

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Purpose of AI Practitioner

This publication is for people interested in making the world a better place using positive relational approaches to change such as Appreciative Inquiry.

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