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# AI Practitioner

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry



## Learning Leaders Influencing through Inquiry and Appreciation

Edited by

**Louis Alloro, Cecile Betit, Marge Schiller and Jacqueline M. Stavros**

Co-publishers

**Instituut voor Interventiekunde and  
the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry**



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# Learning Leaders

## Influencing Through Inquiry and Appreciation

**What is a Learning Leader?**  
The articles in this special issue illustrate the relationship of learning leaders and Appreciative Inquiry in diverse ways from different contexts, organizations and age cohorts. Some demonstrate the core principle of co-construction – connecting with others to learn and live in the multiple, inclusive 'we', rather than the singular 'I', exploring and embracing concepts from multiple sources.

We are delighted to convene a conversation to spotlight learning leaders. Learning leaders is a construct combining two words we use often but usually separately. What might happen when we fuse them together? What and who are learning leaders? Who is it that inspires us to think differently? What part does each of us play in accelerating learning for others? Following its exploration of learning leaders, our editorial team recognizes these are early stages of considering what it means to be a learning leader. We have chosen the authors in this issue to introduce aspects and examples of learning leaders, agreeing with Cole, Stavros and Herath (p. 96) in their observation at the conclusion of their research, "We see learning leaders as leaders who use lifelong learning, dialogue and collaborative communication to lead their own lives and lead others through leveraging strengths, identifying opportunities and aspirations of self and others, and being results-driven." (Cole, Stavros and Herath, p. 96)

Bloom and Elsberry (p. 47) offer, "being a learning leader demands that we constantly and consistently think, understand, grow and begin each day anew." Hearn says (p. 33) that learning leaders move from monologue to dialogue to suggest the collective aspect of this work. Novotony and Wells (p. 24) add,

*Learning leaders ... create a new pathway that makes a real difference.*

“Learning to learn in community is a very personal journey, and, at the same time, a collective adventure.”

The seeds for this conversation were planted during an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and education meeting at the Cooperrider Institute in Champlain College. These seeds blossomed at the Third Global Forum gathering at Case Western University in the summer of 2017. The question, “What do I need to know?” that was evolving in education and business extended to other questions involving curiosity and reflection such as “How do I know what I need to know? How do I keep growing into the knowing that I know I need to know? And how does knowing affect my leadership?”

The remarkable *AI Practitioner* Editor-in-Chief, Wick van der Vaart, began helping us develop these thought exercises into a topic for the *AI Practitioner*. His prescience was soon endorsed by the editorial team. The four of us were heartened, amazed and very appreciative of the full-hearted response to our call for submissions. On the closing date, the number of responses was the largest for any issue of the *AI Practitioner*.

With such a surfeit of riches, the selection process was both an inspiration and a challenge. The team grappled with depth, scope and word counts – a range of aspiration and practicality. As we present this issue of the *AI Practitioner*, our editorial team experiences it not as a conclusion, but rather a prelude. The thoughts presented are current, engaging, multifaceted, global and inter-generational. They provide an important threshold for future exchanges.

The articles in this special issue illustrate the relationship of learning leaders and Appreciative Inquiry in diverse ways from different contexts, organizations and age cohorts. Several demonstrate the core principle of co-construction – connecting with others to learn and live in the “we”, exploring and embracing concepts from multiple sources.

In this special issue, there are myriad examples of learner leaders with active curiosity co-creating ways of being, knowing and behaving. We see learning leaders expressing a growth mindset with an enduring curiosity. We experience their “what if”, “what next”, “when” and “how” questions. We see their comfort and sometimes discomfort in a conscious stream of learning; their skills being developed in environments of uncertainty and complexity; their ability to innovate and co-create across a multiplicity of settings; their ability to motivate and ignite the best learning in themselves and in others. They create new pathways that make a real difference.

*Just as there are many definitions of learning, there are many definitions of leader.*



To read more about using AI to nurture learning leaders among rural women in Nova Scotia, Canada, go to page 9

Each article contributes to ideas and practices of learning as an active, lifelong process to expand and elevate one’s knowledge, skill, awareness, and meaning-making and building capabilities through inquiry, experience and study. Using the definition Googlers use, we think “Learning is a personal and social process happening in real life.”

Just as there are many definitions of learning, there are many definitions of leader. Multiple types and styles of leadership have been noted in the literature – from transactional to transformational, to autocratic and democratic. Leadership is neither a unitary skill set nor fixed. Learning is how to remain adaptive and generative. We think learning leadership is both equitable and co-constructed. The submissions here exemplify just that. We have accepted submissions from around the globe in a diverse and creative context. What an awesome group of contributors – thank you! Their submissions fall into four broad classifications: research report, interview, case study and creative exploration of the learning leader concept.

### Learning leader case studies from the field

We have six case studies to launch this issue. First is a journey about learning leaders as a team: Gwenth Dwyne, Rhonda Frasier and Dale Gruchy worked with an AI facilitator, Joan MacArthur-Blair, to deal with challenging issues of violence and abuse of girls and women in rural Nova Scotia. They used Appreciative Inquiry to nurture and develop learning leaders where girls and women’s lives were transformed. In their work of social justice, hopefulness and curiosity are scarce resources. Yet, Appreciative Inquiry nurtures these resources to turn despair into hope and create pathways for a culture of well-being and flourishing.



To read more about the use of AI to support learning leaders in the challenging environment of a maximum security prison in Oregon, USA, go to page 36

The second case study shows the power of a group of students from Monash South Africa’s Development Studies using story-telling to understand and promote social change in a grassroots program while developing their leadership capacities and capabilities. This approach facilitates learning and leading through what they call “the river of life approach”. The principle is that no matter how educated development-sector professionals are, their success is based on being with and learning from the people they are working with.

In the third case, Miriam Novotny and Sandra Wells invite us to consider a provocative question: What if our liabilities can be reframed as our assets? Read about how the Mosaic School in Burlington, Vermont applies Appreciative Inquiry to form a strengths-based culture and curriculum.



To read more about Leora Viega Rifkin's MAKE BREAD project in Boston, USA go to page 42

In the fourth case study, Erin Hearn has a fresh take on school discipline moving the process from a focus on punishment to a focus on learning. She uses Appreciative Inquiry in a thoughtful and strategic way.

In the fifth case study, Michelle Inderbitzin shares her use of AI with self-taught learning leaders in the Oregon maximum security prison as they develop, mature and mentor others in their club structure and contribute to their communities inside (for example, making an outside playground for visiting children, printing an anthology of prisoners' writings, holding activities for senior prisoners and planning for a Japanese Healing Garden) and outside (for example collecting hygiene items for homeless teens and holding fundraisers and donating to causes).

In the sixth case study, Leora Viega Rifkin shares what her Boston-based organization is doing to shift towards collective learning leadership creating results for justice and societal change.

### Learning leader interviews from the field

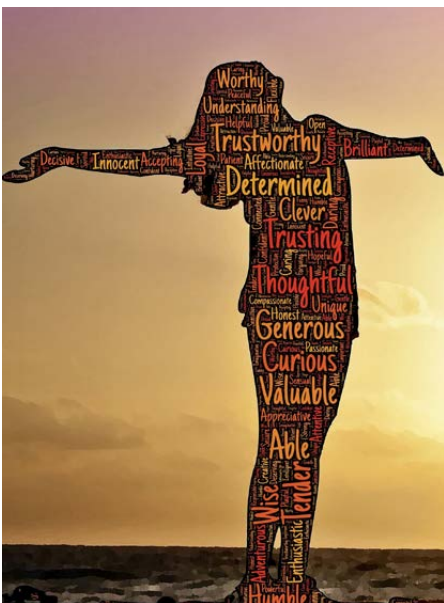
A series of questions in our call was do you know a learning leader? Who is it? How is the learning leader expressed and experienced? How has this learning leader impacted the life of others?

In this section we have four interviews to share: In Jennifer Bloom's and Meagan Elsberry's candid conversation with Joan McArthur-Blair in Nova Scotia, Canada, she shared her embrace of the humbling practice of AI and how as a learning leader it is important to "live life as a draft", unlocking the wisdom of others and letting go of perfection.

From the interviews with two learning leader entrepreneurs from HH Global, Lidia Doncova-Macri of Australia shares how they have used the principles of Appreciative Inquiry to enhance the importance of learning, challenge ideas and old ways, and to promote the necessity of progress and change.

Zuica Donev cites the qualities she finds in Annette as a true example of a learning leader. Annette learned early on the truth shared in Appreciative Inquiry, "What we choose to focus on becomes our reality.<sup>2</sup> As coach, CEO, and mother of two, Annette asked the question, what did she want to create more of, and focused on possibilities. Annette kept her mindset open and curious, regardless of circumstance.

Steve Pysner, a college professor, was interviewed by a former student on his engaged civic-learning approach to classroom and community development which leverages Appreciative Inquiry and more.



To read more about Annette, described by Zuica Donev as 'a true example of a learning leader', go to page 53

## Learning leader: Creative pieces

Three submissions stretched our thinking. These pave new paths for looking at learning leaders:

Judy Johnson and Debbie Castle explore AI and experiential learning. They note that, with learning as our leader, our perceptions of ourselves, our organizations and the world around us change. New horizons are glimpsed and the future unfolds naturally; curiosity shifts our inner dialogue and inquiry leads to living models of equity and wholeness.

Rotem Elinav explores learning leadership through a poignant fable about a lion, his kingdom and his transcendent lessons on what's really important.

With twenty years of leadership development expertise, Michael Molinaro challenges traditional notions of leadership as a role and explores leadership as actions. He encourages us to think of learning leaders as those with an attitude of acting towards leadership, an orientation and paradigm shift.

## Learning leaders: A research study

In this issue Matthew Cole and Jackie Stavros, with their graduate research assistant, Menuka Hearsh, conducted a study with over 600 participants who offer insights on what a learning leader is, with practical suggestions on how to become a learning leader, and connections to Appreciative Inquiry.



To see Martin Seligman's video, click to activate.

## A learningful journey

Our special issue concludes with a nod and bow to the influence of technology on learning leadership. As has been the case throughout history, the innovative and creative nature of technology can facilitate a conscious and continuous stream of learning.

We present two links to videos of learning leaders:

- The first is an excerpt from Dr Martin Seligman's remarks starting with a very personal learning legacy dream plus a creative concept for accelerating positive education and co-creating new generations of learning leaders.
- We also invite you to watch a short video clip from fourteen-year-old Sarah Schiller giving her perspectives on learning leaders from intergenerational perspectives.



To see Sarah Schiller's thoughts on learning leaders go to her video at <https://youtu.be/9yq4YGe827I>

The 2018 Positive Education Accelerator (2nd Festival of Positive Education + Appreciative Inquiry Summit) will feature multimedia opportunities for exploration between and among learning leaders of many generations. For those seeking additional opportunities to explore learning leaders, plan to attend the Accelerator.<sup>1</sup>

### With Appreciation

Appreciative Inquiry invites us to find the best in ourselves and those we engage with ... so does a learning leader. We express our thanks and deep appreciation to Anne Radford who returned to the *AI Practitioner* after the passing of our dear, appreciative colleague Wick. She worked with Shelagh Aitken, managing editor for *AI Practitioner*, who applied her talent and dedication to make this issue come alive for our readers – thank you Shelagh and Anne! And thank you, the readers and supporters of this issue and work.

**Louis Alloro, Cecile G. Betit, Marge Schiller and Jackie Stavros**  
**May 2018**

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<sup>1</sup> Go to <https://ipen-festival.com/> for more information.



# AI Practitioner is Looking for Reviewers to Contribute Peer Reviews

*AI Practitioner*, the International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry, is looking for people in academic positions to review articles being considered for publication in the journal. This will potentially entail reviewing one or two articles per year in your area of expertise or one related to it. We will include the names of all who have agreed to be reviewers for *AI Practitioner* on the website and list those who have reviewed articles in the relevant issue.

After articles have been accepted and before they have been reviewed by the guest editors for the relevant issue, the Editor in Chief will contact potential reviewers with expertise in the topic of the issue to ask if they would be available to review articles for that issue. Guest editors for each issue will be given the shortlist of potential reviewers to contact as the need arises.

Articles chosen for publication in the journal range from theoretical to practical 'stories from the field'. The variety is integral to the journal, and the balance depends on the subject of the issue and the decisions of the editors. *AI Practitioner* is looking for reviewers who will be comfortable applying AI principles to reviews of both academic, theoretical, research-based articles and practical, experience-based stories.

If you would be able to contribute to *AI Practitioner* as a reviewer, please contact Shelagh Aitken, Managing Editor for *AI Practitioner*, at [info@aipractitioner.com](mailto:info@aipractitioner.com).

# AI Practitioner Co-publishers

*AI Practitioner* is brought to the world by academic co-partners the Instituut voor Interventiekunde in Amsterdam and the David L. Cooperrider Center in the Stiller School of Business at Champlain College, Vermont.



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## Appreciative Inquiry Theory and Practice in Amsterdam

The Instituut voor Interventiekunde (Institute for Interventionism) was founded in 2005 by Wick van der Vaart for two purposes:

- To train coaches, trainers, consultants and/or managers in the craft of appreciative interventionism. Students range in age from 24 to 65.
- As a network of practitioners who use an appreciative approach in working with individuals, groups and organisations.

The programs the Instituut voor Interventiekunde offers are both theoretical and practical. Our main programs are:

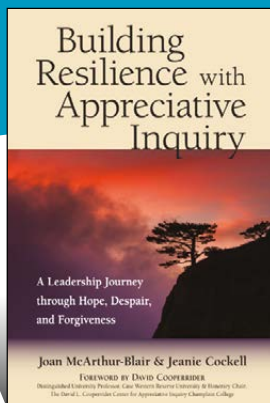
- A two year basic program in interventionism;
- International programs to become an AI practitioner, an AI master practitioner, and an AI meta practitioner.

## The David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry

The David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry is the global Center of Excellence in Appreciative Inquiry and strengths-based organizational management. Situated in the Robert P. Stiller School of Business at Champlain College, the Center:

- Provides cutting-edge educational offerings in AI and Positive Organizational Development,
- Provides AI-related organizational consultancy services to organizations,
- Serves as a scholarship incubator that advances the theory and practice of AI across all organizational sectors around the world.

## Appreciative Inquiry: New Applications!



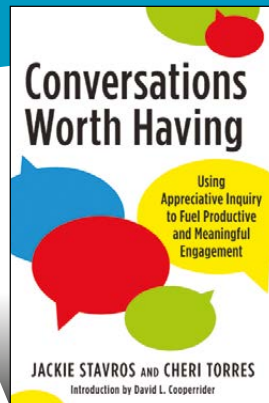
Joan McArthur-Blair and Jeanie Cockell  
Foreword by David Cooperrider

### **Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry**

A Leadership Journey through  
Hope, Despair, and Forgiveness

*"A wholly unique, original, and poetic book . . ."* —**Jim Kouzes, coauthor of the best-selling *The Leadership Challenge*, and Dean's Executive Fellow of Leadership, Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University**

McArthur-Blair and Cockell's Appreciative Resilience model enables leaders to use AI to weather the storms they'll inevitably face. This profound book features theory, first-person accounts, and practices leaders can apply immediately. Find out more [here](#) or at [cockellmcarthur-blair.com](http://cockellmcarthur-blair.com).



Jackie Stavros and Cheri Torres  
Introduction by David Cooperrider

### **Conversations Worth Having**

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**General Registration (Aug. 1 - Sept. 7) \$450 USD**

**Student Registration \$150 USD**

Registration includes all activities, 3 breakfasts, 3 lunches, and an evening reception at Champlain College. **Space is limited so register early!**

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<https://www.taosinstitute.net/ai-community-jam-2018-registration-form>

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We all need support to keep our appreciative voices alive in our respective places, identifying the strengths of the community to help us stay aligned as we innovate individually on various paths. What is the underlying positive core that animates you and unites us? What choices, practices, tools, and mindsets are required for engaging appreciative voice day in and day out so that we may be of service to self and to others?

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT

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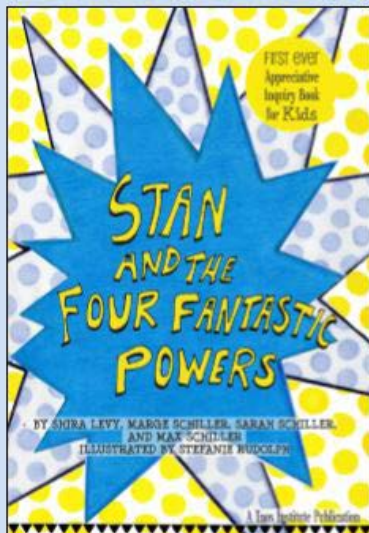
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The Taos Institute presents: *Stan and the Four Fantastic Powers!* The available in May 2018 at: [www.taosinstitutepublications.net](http://www.taosinstitutepublications.net)

Written and co-constructed by a special team of intergenerational collaborators: An AI expert and grandmother (Marge Schiller), in collaboration with her two grandchildren (Sarah and Max), a positive psychology practitioner and school psychologist (Shira Levy), and an artist (Stephanie Randolph).

*Stan and the Four Fantastic Powers* presents readers with a new way of looking at their world and the possibility of becoming change agents. Appreciative Inquiry encourages the use of positive questioning, collaboration, curiosity, and creativity, using the AI 4-D cycle represented through Stan's Four Fantastic Powers:

- ME Power: discovering strengths
- SEE Power: dreaming future possibilities
- WE Power: working as a team to develop goals and a plan
- DO Power: delivering the plan

Join Stan, Mr. Gladstone's class, and the Lincoln Elementary School community, as they embark on their adventure!

Appreciative Inquiry has been used in schools, often resulting in curiosity, creativity, questioning, collaboration, and an increased voice for students, families, educators, and stakeholders.

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