

Nourish to Flourish



Nourish to Flourish brings together practitioners' voices and creative practices, and appreciative reviews of resources that support strengths-based approaches to human interactions.

Voices from the Field



Keith Storage | Australia

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In her four-part series “A Practitioner’s Journey to Living with Climate Change”, Alex Arnold has advocated for a transformative approach to climate resilience and action grounded in the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. She has emphasised the significance of positive language, values-driven questioning, hopeful focus, and aligning actions with personal strengths as tools to build climate resilience and inspire change from within. Alex’s final article in this series, “Climate Action Starts Within”, focuses on the five core principles of Appreciative Inquiry, emphasising that positive conversations about climate change can foster hope and inspire action. I would like to thank Alex for her depth of knowledge and the inspirational outlook she has shared throughout this valuable and timely series!

Also, in this issue of AI Practitioner, Dr Nick Heap presents his work and focus on “Naturalising Appreciative Inquiry” where he emphasises that, by shifting our perspective towards positive interactions and shared experiences, we can foster deeper human connections and inspire hope. Contemplating key questions and sharing uplifting stories, such as moments of happiness, can help bridge cultural or organisational divides. Simple daily practices, like acknowledging a smile, can be a step towards embedding AI into our daily lives, cultivating a world with more love, understanding and cooperation.

It is my pleasure to present Alex Arnold and Dr Nick Heap and their insightful work!

Alexandra Arnold | USA



Alex Arnold (she/her) MSPsy, MSHR/OD, ACC, is Executive Consultant for [The Taos Institute](#) and a climate resilience coach at [Alma Coaching](#), where she uses [positive psychology](#) and [Appreciative Inquiry](#) to help introverted and highly sensitive people shift from climate anxiety to inspired action.

Climate Action Starts Within

In this four-piece series, A Practitioner's Journey To Living With Climate Change, we have explored different ways to listen: listening to science, listening inside of us, and listening beyond the human, to the natural world. We have considered the many ways one can start a climate conversation: it can be about the gut microbiome, conscious influence or cosmology, to name just a few. The last article was a personal account of my experience witnessing a climate-related disaster. It makes sense to complete this series with a discussion about what to do.

The timing of this publication is aligned with the 2023 AI Jam (October 19–21), the virtual conference hosted by the Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry. I had the honor of participating in a panel discussion on the topic: AI for Life: Putting Life-Centric Practices at the Heart of All We Do, A Dynamic Dialogue with Global AI Practitioners, in which I spoke about coaching as a tool to manage climate anxiety, build climate resilience and take inspired action. A question the panelists were asked was: "How do you see the work you are doing as a manifestation of the principles of Appreciative Inquiry?"

CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS
Global Inspiration. Local Activation.

OCTOBER 19, 2023
**AI FOR LIFE:
PUTTING LIFE-
CENTRIC PRACTICES
AT THE HEART OF
ALL WE DO**
WITH ALEX ARNOLD, CLAUDIA GROSS &
TOJO THATCHENKERY

Rather than listing specific climate actions, let's look at the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry and how they can guide us, as individuals, and as practitioners with our clients.

The Constructionist principle

Words create worlds. The topic of climate change is often associated with conflict, with others or within ourselves. It doesn't have to be that way. When

we open up to different stories, perspectives and conversations, we can create different realities. When we accept that there isn't one Truth, and that our local truths are the outcome of our unique life trajectories, we can approach climate conversations with curiosity, care and respect. We can inquire into another person's worldview without feeling the need to judge or convince. Connecting with others over shared life experiences, interests or values will have a much more positive impact than any scientific data we can share. How do we have conversations that connect or inspire rather than divide or deflate?



This principle also invites us to reconsider the language we use around climate. (For more on the power of appreciative language, check out my co-panelist Claudia Gross' book: *Speak Green*). What might happen if we replace statements like "We need to fight the climate crisis before it's too late" or "We're headed toward an apocalypse" with questions like "How might we learn to live differently in response to the changing climate so that people and the planet can thrive?" Or "What is the latest innovation, story of resilience or flourishing you've heard about?" We talk about the latest climate news story or comment on the unusual weather pattern in mundane small talk every day. Let's slow down to consider the impact our word or story choices have. The language we use in conversations around climate shapes our future.

The Simultaneity principle

Asking appreciative questions that bring out the best in people reminds them that they are skilful, capable.

Change begins the moment we ask a question. One common experience in response to climate change is to feel powerless. We are stuck because we feel too small or inadequate to make a difference. Asking appreciative questions that bring out the best in people reminds them that they are skilful, capable, that they have resources, influence and control (at least over some things). Inquiring about past successes or peak experiences, even those not related to climate, can help people regain agency. They can start imagining how their skills can be applied in different ways. It also helps them clarify what really matters to them. Indeed, many people are overwhelmed because they don't know where to start or what to do. We hear that we need to change our diets, electrify our homes, switch cars, move our investments, replace our wardrobes, vote, get involved politically or with environmental organizations and more. It's just too much and we can't do it all.

Knowing one's personal values can be hugely helpful in choosing a direction for action. One question that is sometimes used in climate coaching conversations is to ask the client to remember a movie, a book, a superhero, a cartoon character or a role model that the client admired as a child. When we inquire deeper into what this person/character/story stood for, we discover topics or causes that the person might feel really passionate about that they may have forgotten. This

could lead someone to narrow their focus to social justice, or protecting a certain species or habitat – or maybe the food industry will call them most. A different way questions can be powerful, for example with someone being impacted by weather-related events, is to ask them about something they are grateful for, something they have learned, something that surprised them, or what helped them cope with the situation, instead of focussing only the distressing aspects. Use these questions thoughtfully and without dismissing the gravity of the situation, of course.

The Poetic principle

One of the simplest things you can do right now is to subscribe to a source of positive news.

What we focus on grows, or what we appreciate appreciates. If all of our attention is on stories of apocalypse, doomsday, extinction, countdown, catastrophe, disaster and suffering, that is the world that we will be living in. But if we focus on stories of hope, innovation, resilience and thriving, we start to notice more and more of them. This creates a positive spiral, until we are surrounded by solution-focused news rather than what seems like insurmountable problems. One of the simplest things you can do right now is to subscribe to a source of positive news and limit or even stop taking in any traditional news. The impact on our emotional state is significant. By being mindful about what we pay attention to, we can balance despair, anger, sadness and hopelessness with hope, curiosity, interest, optimism, admiration or awe. This is not a linear process or a quick fix. These are coping strategies; they are not meant to replace, end or fix climate anxiety altogether. In fact, experiencing climate distress is not a problem we want to solve: it is what makes us human and what connects us all. We hurt where we care.

The Anticipatory principle

We can practice daily visualizations of small goals.

Images inspire action. According to this principle, we move in the direction of our vision of the future. What images come to mind when we think of climate change? Most of us only see images of destruction, suffering or death. Can we imagine a bright future for people, animals, ecosystems and all living things when we are taking in so many visuals of desolation and loss? To regain our ability to dream, let's look at images of beauty, abundance, lush environments, thriving communities – human and non-human. Even looking at images of technological innovation like models of green cities or 3D-printed, eco-friendly, affordable houses can help create a positive vision of what we want to move toward. On a smaller scale, we can practice daily visualizations of small goals, rather than being lost in a blurry picture not knowing where we fit in. How about dreaming of a delicious vegetarian dinner, or imagining shopping at a local store, meeting the owner or the maker of the item you're purchasing, instead of placing an Amazon order? How vivid an image can you get of the

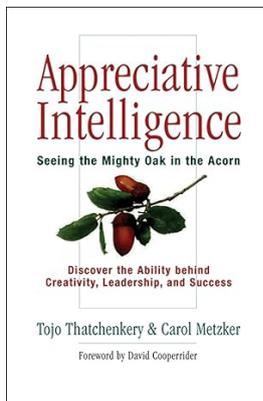
What we believe is possible will determine what is.

rich, fragrant soil you will harvest from your compost? What is one tiny thing you can see yourself doing to green-up your house today? Visualization can be applied to conversations: how can you prepare for a different exchange when the inevitable topic of the latest weather oddity or disaster comes up today? What we believe is possible will determine what is.

The Positive principle

Positive images lead to positive action. There are many stereotypes associated with climate action: radical activism, confrontational conversations, public and sometimes violent protests, political involvement, extreme lifestyle changes like giving up meat, air travel, or switching cars: "I should be doing X." Whatever we are doing, it seems that it's not enough, or not the right thing. These actions are all great and necessary, but they are not useful if they are such a stretch that we are paralyzed instead. Unfortunately, self-judgment and societal pressure only exacerbate climate distress.

What would happen if we gave ourselves permission to choose the type of climate action that brings out our best selves? No matter our skills, they are needed. When we build on our positive core, climate action becomes effortless, inspiring; it generates positive emotions that have physical and mental health benefits, and it can even be fun! Jane Goodall says that "whatever you do, do it out of love, not out of guilt".



If you love to write, try writing social media posts or a blog, an article, or a newsletter story on a topic you're passionate about, directly or indirectly related to climate. If waste and pollution are topics that make your blood boil, consider how you might use your passion to model or educate others on Reducing- Reusing- Recycling- Refusing practices or on circular economies (the topic discussed by my second co-panelist, Tojo Thatchenkery, author of *Appreciative Intelligence: Seeing the Mighty Oak in the Acorn*, who with two colleagues, developed the *Appreciative Intelligence* instrument).

If you're a more private type, climate action can start by being more present next time you go to the grocery store and, rather than filling your cart on autopilot, experimenting with different items – for example, pick the peanut butter in a glass jar instead of a plastic one. You'll be surprised how different your fridge and your pantry will look in a few months.

If you're a foodie, have fun experimenting with new vegetarian recipes and local, organic and sustainably produced ingredients – and tell your friends about it. Climate action no longer requires us to be loud, extroverted, risk-takers,

What is the tiniest step you can take right now?

angry or radical. Living in alignment with our natural world can be a life-giving display of strengths.

Action starts within

Using life-giving language and asking generative questions about climate change, visualizing the thriving world we want to live in, appreciating climate solutions that already exist and honoring our positive core as our best form of climate action are all tools that AI offers to build climate resilience. With all of these suggestions, let's remember to ask, "what is the tiniest step you can take right now?" We are not looking for final solutions or big changes all at once. Climate resilience is not about getting rid of our difficult emotions to jump into action. It is about developing coping skills, new mindsets and shifting lifestyles the same way we would to manage a chronic illness. It's about experimenting, learning, adjusting and being self-compassionate in the process. Climate action starts within.

Naturalising Appreciative Inquiry

I hear people talking about what needs to be fixed everywhere. It's profoundly depressing and lowers everybody's energy and sense of hope. I'm sure it doesn't have to be this way.

So, I've been wondering how we can create an appreciative inquiry where we look at what works, making it the default way we think and interact. How can we spread this revolutionary practice and way of being in the world simply and effectively without using alienating jargon or technical language?

What I've done to make AI as natural as breathing

Sharing happy stories

An anecdote: We had friends around for a meal and shared stories about when we were happy. This was an enriching and joyful experience. We learned many ways of being happy, some of which we hadn't considered. When we talked about a time when we made somebody else happy, our energy went up. So – the simplest way to be happy is to make someone else happy!

I've used this exercise in workshops. One was between senior people in organizations that had to work together but with different cultures. When they shared a story about when they were happy, it was very moving. They all talked about their children. One was in near tears as he spoke about his little boy. He loved him so much. The people established a deep human connection and

Nick Heap | United Kingdom



Dr Nick Heap was a scientist, then an OD consultant with ICI (Imperial Chemicals Industries), and has been a volunteer for The Samaritans as well as a counsellor for Relate. He is a self-employed coach, counsellor, facilitator and trainer, and works with individuals, teams and organisations in the charity, private and public sectors. Nick has been using Appreciative Inquiry since 2004.

When they shared a story about when they were happy, it was very moving.

realised that the problems they had at work were trivial compared to what was important, their families.

Sharing happy stories also worked well for greater numbers of people from many different cultures. I put them in small groups, and they had a wonderful time. I can remember the buzz now!

Random acts of listening

A group of us met in a coffee shop and talked about what how we would engage in random acts of listening. It was a scary prospect. We went out individually for an hour into a park and initiated conversations with strangers. The purpose of each interaction was to understand their worlds from their point of view. We had to make a natural connection, not start with, "Are you willing to answer some questions?" So, you might say, "Oh, what a lovely, lively dog!", which could lead to a conversation where you listened a lot.

We found a fantastic range of skills and experience in the people in the park.

It was astonishing how much people we approached enjoyed the exercise and wanted to talk. Sometimes the conversations were deep. One person talked about his sudden, shocking bereavement. We found a fantastic range of skills and experience in the people in the park. I met a man from Israel who was an expert in psycho-acoustics, the way to design a concert hall which people enjoy being in. He spoke about the differences between bringing up a child in the UK versus Israel, which he said was mainly because of the difference in climate.

I met a young Portuguese couple with a seven-day-old baby. The man told me how much he'd been looking forward to being a father and what it had been like so far.

It's also interesting to notice who we found easy to approach and who we avoided. I'm an elderly man, so I was reluctant to speak to young women as I wondered what they would think of me. I faced my prejudices about tattoos and piercings when I met a sensitive and thoughtful man who was heavily tattooed and a young woman with piercings carrying a violin who was about to play at a concert of baroque music.

I could have taken these conversations further. A young mother told me how much she loved being a mum. I didn't take the time to ask what she enjoyed about it.

The original group met again after an hour to talk through our experiences and learning. The exercise has had a profound effect on me. My chronic shyness has gone, and I'm reaching out to people who live near me now.

Even if things are terrible, when you ask people how they cope or how they survive, that makes people more confident and willing to make things better.

What could you do to spread Appreciative Inquiry 'in the wild'? What have you already done?

How and where can we explain what Appreciative Inquiry is in a way that people can hear?

A bright ten-year-old could understand it. It is a simple idea. We could say, "When you ask people what's wrong, they usually feel miserable and overwhelmed. If you ask people what's working, they feel good. Then, you can ask them how things could be even better and how they could get that to happen. Even when things are terrible, if you ask people how they cope or how they survive, a positive question makes people more confident and willing to see how to make things better. This is what Appreciative Inquiry is about."

I would like to see this information in magazines, newspapers, on television, and for it to be taught and used in schools. It might also be good to show people. Let's stop having programmes about "neighbours from hell" and see stories about "neighbours from heaven".

The media assumes that people are interested only in bad news. It's worth testing. Bad news all the time depresses people. It suppresses our energy to create positive change. This is in nobody's long-term interest. We could get together in small groups and write separate letters or call influential people and organisations to suggest a more appreciative approach. Many of us live in countries with a free press where we can express ourselves. Let's use it positively.

What is your best idea about how to communicate AI simply? What have you already done that has worked?

Where is Appreciative Inquiry thinking and practice most needed now? It's needed everywhere. If I had three wishes, I would wish to embed AI in families, in education and in politics. Imagine the effect of paying attention to what's working in families. Whatever you pay attention to grows. We can choose to grow love, connection, partnership, fun, mutual understanding, creativity and joy. Children raised in this environment will hang on to their natural zest, ability to learn, power and humanity. They will become the remarkable adults we need to lead us to a more sustainable and healthier world.

Education would become more about discovering and developing the unique talents and interests of the individual child. We can't predict what work will be available or what life will be like for young people in twenty years. We can predict that young people will need to learn new things, so let's focus education on encouraging them to learn rather than telling them what to think.

The complexity and interconnectedness of the modern world demand cooperation, not competition and conflict. Although politics appears to be broken, there will be examples of outstanding collaboration and creativity. Appreciative Inquiry could help us identify and magnify these.

Where is our practice and thinking most needed now? How do we start? What is already working?

What are simple micro-practices that we can do every day?

Thank you for your smile

I'll share one. If someone smiles at me, I say, "Thank you for your smile". What we pay attention to grows. What do you do to "Be AI"?

What micro-practices will you do in the next few weeks to Naturalise AI?

Any comments on any of this are welcome!

MORE INFORMATION

Blog: [Random Acts of Listening](#)

Conversation: [Appreciative Inquiry in the Wild](#)

Tools and consultancy to help people work together better:

Web: nickheap.co.uk (Over 300 free articles and tools)

Simply Better Ways of Working is my free course about developing people, teams and organisations.

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