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INTERGENERATIONAL

"Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much."
-Helen Keller



Intergenerational Appreciative Inquiry in Conversation and in Action

Edited by

Marge Schiller
Matthew Moehle
Peter Whitehouse

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Appreciating People



Intergenerational Appreciative Inquiry in Conversation and in Action

Inside this issue

Welcome to May 2015 issue of AI Practitioner

Intergenerational Appreciative Inquiry in Conversation and in Action celebrates the diversity and generativity of intergenerational conversations. Business, education and communities show what they can achieve by reaching out and connecting with different age groups. They share their successful methods to 'go between in order to create the beyond'.

In her Feature Choice, Jacqueline Wong develops a model for engaged governance

in reviewing the momentous citizen engagement process in Singapore that involved 660 dialogues, 47,000 who met in face-to-face meetings and 4,000 more who engaged online.

In Research Review & Notes, Gail Simon at the University of Bedfordshire in the UK highlights cases on collaborative or reflexive inquiry from social services.

AI Resources includes a variety of resources related to intergenerational efforts that celebrate diversity.

We would like to thank Appreciating People for sponsoring this issue.

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Alexandra Stavros

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Appreciative Intergenerational Conversations

A Place to Flourish

In this story, Ally Stavros shares pieces of her appreciative learning journey and how appreciative intergenerational conversations have helped her flourish. She includes personal stories about how these have been especially influential during some of the not-so-positive moments that many teenagers experience. Her discussion includes a focus on the application to SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) approach to her personal life and its impact on her development.

I have grown up around Appreciative Inquiry (AI). The first time I actually remember hearing about AI is when my mom visited my kindergarten class almost twelve years ago. She helped the teachers organize a conversation with all the kindergarteners (aged four to five) and the older kids in the school to help us get excited about starting elementary school. We were asked questions about what we loved about being in kindergarten, what we wanted to be when we grow up, and what we thought elementary school would be like. We were fortunate enough to have someone saying that anything was possible – telling us to dream big.

The next time I went to an AI-related event was with my mom and Ms. Marge (that is Dr. Marge Schiller). I was in third grade. We went to a graphic recording event taught by Ms. Diana Arsenian. I remember being surprised that I got to leave school and go on a trip to learn to color. I found out it was more than just coloring pictures. Before long, my mom, Ms. Marge, several other people and I were illustrating and writing at the same time to collaboratively bring AI conversations to life. Ms. Arsenian provided an illustration for this article.

Over the next couple of years, I attended some Positive Change Core (PCC) meetings (www.positivechange.org). I liked how all these adults included young people like me and cared about our thoughts and feelings. I remember Ms. Marge saying, “We have two possibilities, we can look at what works, or we can look at what doesn’t work. Whatever we look for is what we are going to find.” Even back then I remember thinking, “I am going to be a person who looks for what works, and I am going to find it!”

Recording an appreciative inquiry
 Graphic recording courtesy of Diana
 Arsenian
<http://www.dianaarsenian.com/about.html>



It is little moments that make an impact on someone's life, and I remember how it helped me learn about who I want to be.



Ally Stavros with her Uncle Matthew and cousin, Miyako, in front of the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, Australia



Ally with her mom, dad, and brother, Adam at the Parshallville Cider Miller in Fenton, Michigan

Five years ago, I joined my mom for a three-week adventure to Australia, where she led several workshops with Mr. John Loty (<http://www.johnloty.com/>). On the 22-hour trip, my mom had me read *Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* and the *Thin Book of SOAR* (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results) to understand why we were going there. My mom shared with me what she loves and what she teaches. I really took away a lot from those two small books and our conversation.

All of these trips and adventures were great, but I never realized how much the people in my early years would make a profound impact on me as I entered my teenage years, until having this opportunity to reflect and write this story. It is little moments that make an impact on someone's life, and I remember how it helped me learn about who I want to be.

Let me share a story about how I had to learn to SOAR at a difficult moment in my life, one that I know many teens go through at some point.

When transitioning from middle school to high school, I began to think that I was not really good at anything. I was not athletic. I was a good singer but not at the top of my choir. I felt that I wasn't pretty. I was not the girl who stood out or had some undeniable, fantastic talent. I was just an all-around, average high-school student. I remember one time sitting on my bed thinking about how everyone else seemed to be so put-together, when I looked up and noticed all the amazing pictures that blanketed my bedroom walls and desk. There were pictures from all the amazing people I have met and places I have gone, pictures of friends and family. The pictures of so many happy events, adventures and smiling happy people gave me a jolt.

Suddenly, I remembered all those conversations with people like Ms. Marge, Ms. Diana Arsenian, and Mr. John Loty (and his partner Ms. Jenny), teachers, friends, family, my parents – even my younger brother Adam. These conversations with



Ally's wall collage of events with family and friends

people from different ages and places allowed me to begin to pull myself out of the negative spiraling place that I was in at that moment.

It was at that moment that my mom walked into my room. She knew I was having a bad day (she always knows). We talked for a while and she helped me reframe my thoughts. She pointed out that I need to think about what made me special instead of only thinking about what made everybody else special. We started talking about my peak experiences, what I value about myself and those I am with, what are the strengths that give life to who Ally is – she reminded me of all the opportunities that I have had, and she asked me what I want to do (aspirations) and achieve (results).

At that moment of reframing and answering those positive questions, the pieces started to come together. I am special. I am smart. I have an amazing family and a gift for easily getting along with people. We talked about how I am not really with one clique of friends, but how I embrace a diverse group. When my dad joined the conversation, he reminded me that I am a hard-worker – very disciplined, sensitive and kind-hearted. We reminisced about how I had traveled to 24 states and four different countries – not bad for 16 years old. We were now in the heart of creating the positive core – defining who I am, what I am doing, and building a positive momentum to where I want to go. At this point, we were all quite animated, and not only was I thriving but so were my parents!

I realized how, through appreciative intergenerational conversations (having different ages together creates a maximum mix that is magical), a poor self-concept can be reframed in a matter of minutes to a positive conversation where we are all flourishing. I have learned that with the help of others and through appreciative questions we can discover and dream to design a destiny. I am fortunate to be living an appreciative intergenerational life!

In writing my story, I learned a new term, “appreciative intergenerational conversations”. This means that I am learning about what truly defines my life through the relational conversations that I have with others. It opens up possibilities that I could never imagine alone. I also noticed that this is not a one-way street. It is not just me who is getting all the benefits of these intergenerational conversations, it also makes a positive impact on others around me.

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Purpose of AI Practitioner

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