

Being Authentically ALIVE – Sustaining Ourselves Personally and Professionally Through Challenging Times

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Bios:

Dr. Joan McArthur-Blair and Dr. Jeanie Cockell, Co-Presidents of Cockell McArthur-Blair Consulting and co-authors of *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force* (2012). Joan works with groups of all kinds to make a positive difference. For more than 25 years she held roles in higher education from faculty to president. She specializes in the use of Appreciative Inquiry to foster leadership, planning, and innovative strategies for organizational development. Jeanie is an educational and organizational consultant who specializes in collaboratively designing strategies to surface the wisdom of individuals, groups, and organizations so that they can build positive futures and respond effectively to change. Contact: jmcarthur-blair@ns.sympatico.ca; jeanie@jeaniecockell.com.

Conference Paper:

One day, Jeanie woke up in a hospital bed with a crushed femur, broken pelvis and ribs, massive internal bleeding, concussion, punctured lung. She still has no memory of the car accident that landed her in that bed. Now she's very much alive and well after a deeply personal healing journey grounded in her practice of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), supported throughout by her partner, Joan. Out of this experience, we developed a model called being authentically ALIVE—Appreciate, Love, Inquire, Venture, Evolve—that applies Appreciative Inquiry through challenging times in our personal and work lives.

In this paper, we provide an introduction to *Being Authentically ALIVE*, one chapter of our book, *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force* (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). This chapter focuses on using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a personal practice and, in particular, how AI can be used in challenging times, both in our personal and work lives.

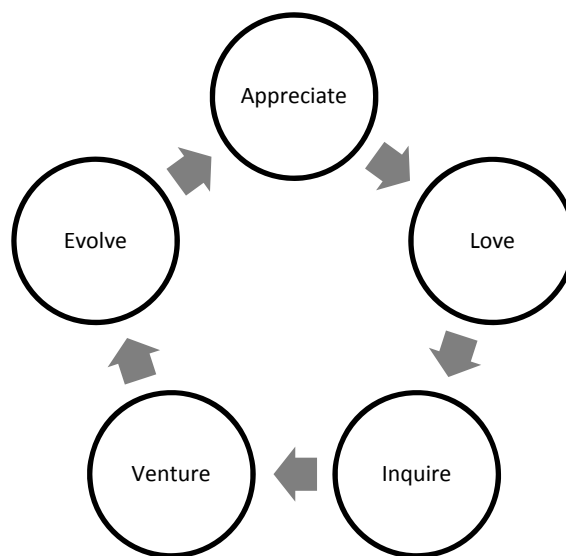
What is Appreciative Inquiry? AI is an energizing approach for sparking positive change by engaging people in focusing on what is working well (appreciative) through asking questions and telling stories (inquiry). This focus allows people and organizations to build futures on their strengths and successes in order to achieve their goals. AI is both a worldview and a process for facilitating positive change in human systems (individual, group, organization, community). Its assumption is simple: every human system “has something that works right – things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways... “ (Cooperrider, Whitney, Stavros, 2003, p. xvii). AI begins by identifying this positive core and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy, sharpen vision, and inspire action for change. Since the 1980s, AI has been used to bring about collaborative and strengths-based change in communities and organizations worldwide.

The being authentically ALIVE model applies AI to living through challenging times. As in life, in higher education challenges occur, whether one is working with students and colleagues, creating policy, leading change, writing proposals, designing curriculum, or managing facilities. There are many contexts that provide us with challenges, big or small. The ALIVE model came out of a very personal challenge. As we share our experience with others who work in higher education, we find that it provides for them a framework for reflecting on the challenges in their work lives and their personal lives. Many of the challenges in higher education are based in

interpersonal relationships. By pausing to reflect on relationships through an appreciative lens, one can more easily resolve the challenges. We hope you will find the being authentically ALIVE model useful in this reflective practice.

Being Authentically ALIVE

Imagine some of the challenges that you may have lived through in your work or personal life.



Apply the being authentically ALIVE model to your world through the following reflective questions. Some of them may fit your particular challenge and some may not. Other questions may arise for you as you reflect on how you successfully lived through the challenge. Start with the part of ALIVE that you are drawn to and move through the parts that draw you as you reflect on living through your challenge.

Appreciate – value; increase in value; grasp the significance of; be fully aware of; express gratitude

- What did you value about the situation, yourself and others?
- What did you want more of?
- What were you fully aware of?
- What did you choose to focus on?
- How did you reframe to see the positive possibilities?

- How did you express gratitude?
- How did you seek and multiply appreciative moments?

Love – deeply care for yourself and others; be open and present with others; be loved and cared for by others

- How did you seek and recognize allies and supporters?
- How did you respond to their support?
- How did you and they show love?
- How were you open and present within these caring relationships?
- How did you care for yourself?

Inquire – ask questions; be curious; seek to learn; research; engage in dialogue

- What questions did you ask?
- How did you seek to learn about this situation?
- What did you learn?
- How did you engage with others?
- How did you reframe the situation to see possibilities?
- How did you strive to understand the outcomes outside of your control?

Venture – undertake; show courage; brave the risks

- How did you brave the storm?
- How did you courageously undertake to move forward?
- How did you find the courage and determination to follow expert advice?

Evolve – develop; unfold; expand, open

- How did you develop, unfold yourself into your future?
- What allowed you to expand and be open to opportunities?
- How have you incorporated the new and different you into your life, which is both the same and forever changed? (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012)

If you would like to explore further how appreciative inquiry can be used in many ways – planning, leadership, team development, facilitating, teaching and learning – please read *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force* (2012).

References

Cockell, J. & McArthur-Blair, J. (2012). *Appreciative inquiry in higher education: A transformative force*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. (2003). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: The first in a series of AI workbooks for leaders of change*. Bedford Heights, OH: Lakeshore Communications.