

AI Facilitator Practicum: The Macon Miracle
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Introduction

Probably the most applied lesson from Chaos Theory is known as the 'Butterfly Effect'. Briggs and Peat (1999) explained simply "Chaos Theory shows us how apparently tiny and insignificant things can end up playing a major role in the way things turn out." In other words, the flapping of a butterfly wing in Asia can trigger an untraceable series of changes which will ultimately influence weather patterns in the United States, perhaps creating a tornado in the Midwest. This idea has inspired many people to consider how their own subtle actions or words could influence other people or events in ways which lead to drastic system change. Leaders of organizations spend millions of dollars every year on on performance and strategic initiatives in hope of discovering or creating a few bankable butterflies.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has been used quite successfully as a means to understand and capitalize on the many butterflies which exist and create value for the organization. The AI process has also served as the catalyst for new butterfly creation. Both these uses have the goal of creating a tornado of future success for the organization. Morgan (2006) stated an interesting notion for managers that the "challenge will be to open the door to instability, or even to create the instability that will help a new pattern of behavior to emerge" (pg. 257). Imagine the powerful influence the instability of a tornado can have to change the flight of thousands of butterflies who might not have otherwise had reason to flap their wings! This reversal of the butterfly effect can be a powerful tool to create system wide change.

This fall I had the opportunity to participate in a de-stabilizing tornado. Bibb County Georgia is home to approximately 155,000 people, 25,000 of which are students in the public school system. Statistics for last year at Bibb County School District (BCSD) show that nearly 500 students were expelled, nearly 8,000 were suspended, 532 were identified as homeless, 1,000 students had at least one parent incarcerated, and the graduation rate was at 44.6% of incoming freshman. In February of 2011, Dr. Romaine Dallemand began his work as the Superintendent of Bibb County School District (BCSD). This visionary leader believes the district employees and community stakeholders have both the answers and ability to design, create, and implement a new educational system "so all our students can have high quality education...and be fully prepared for the 21st century" (From Dr. Dallemand's address on Oct. 10, 2011).

Dr. Dallemand demonstrated his belief by choosing Appreciative Inquiry as the vehicle through which the collective knowledge would be gathered and the construction of a new system and culture of educational success would begin. A common approach to Appreciative Inquiry is to gather a sample of stakeholders, a swarm of butterflies, who identify the common threads an positive core of the organizations successes, create a positive vision of the future, develop strategies for realizing that future, and then be released back into the organization as catalysts for positive change. What made the AI summit in Bibb County School District qualify for a classification as a 'Tornado' instead of a 'butterfly' was the literal inclusion of all 3,600 BCSD employees and 700 community representatives; approximately 4,300 people in one place at one time to share, envision, plan, and grow together. The two days of AI summit, held on

September 19 and Oct 10, 2011, began the process to reframe the culture toward a positive educational focus, collect information and insight upon which to develop a strategic plan, and develop localized and individual action steps. These two days were to serve as a motivation to move people towards creating a positive culture and action steps towards a positive future, and to collect data from all stakeholders for the creation of a strategic plan which would design and create a new education system.

Kathy Becker, of the Center for Appreciative Inquiry, negotiated a contract to facilitate the AI summit for BCSD. One of the key factors in winning the contract was her willingness to individualize the AI process to the time limitations, resources, and needs of the district. The facilitation team consisted of four principle facilitators, six co-facilitators, and a staff assistant. The co-facilitators were chosen from applicants who responded to a call for participation in the Center for Appreciative Inquiry newsletter. Continual communication for planning and coordination occurred between the facilitation team members through e-mail, group phone calls, sharing documents online, and onsite meetings. Throughout the process Kathy Becker took the lead in coordinating directly with the school district, which included Summit planning through Suzanne and logistical coordination through Judy.

Core Team

Central to the success of the AI process in BCSD is the Core Team. This team consisted of approximately 60 people with "at least one person from each category: elementary, middle school and high school administrators, 2 elementary, 2 middle and 2 high school teachers, elementary, middle and high school paraprofessionals, clerical staff from the elementary, middle and high school, custodial staff and food service from elementary, middle and high school, elementary and high school counselor, middle school psychologist, elementary, middle and high school media staff, 6 community members, Superintendent, 5 cabinet members, 2 associate superintendents, human resources, fine arts, psychological services, campus police, maintenance, community affairs, assessment, professional development, risk management, parent training, transportation, CTAE (Career, Technical and Agricultural Education), media, school nutrition, After School program, Special Education, gifted education, account, Title I, Custodial, early childhood, instructional technology, technology support and 3 parent advocates." (Personal e-mail from Kathy Becker, 9-24-2011). The role of the core group was to

- provide input for the affirmative topic choice, interview guide, and event schedule, help plan and carry out event logistics such as flow between rooms, lunch and breaks, data collection, and set up.
- Assist the small groups with their participation in the phases and activities by providing clarifications or participating with them.
- Assist the room Facilitator to manage the group and communicate participant needs back to the facilitator or relevant leadership.
- Help organize data collected into a manageable and useful form.
- Participate in the creation of the strategic plan.
- Serve as catalysts for positive change throughout their respective departments and schools.

The Core Team participated in a training and planning meeting on Sept 15-16, 2011. Cheri Torres took the lead in drafting the design with Kathy and Charles Miller, and they all took part in facilitating the meetings. The Core team participated in a Discovery and Dream session, which produced the Affirmative Topic and Interview questions.

Affirmative Topic

We stand at a crossroad in education in Bibb County, Georgia, and the United States. We can either continue down the path we are on now that has led us to a 44% graduation rate or we can select a path that will ensure **every** child is receiving a high quality education that prepares them for the possibility of a 4-year college degree and leads to a successful life.

This is your chance to express how we can best meet the needs of our students and help them succeed and maximize their potential. Our children must be prepared not only for the world they live in now, but also the one they will enter in the future. It is up to every employee, every parent, and every member of this community to provide them with the education, tools, resources, and support to be lifelong learners and to be globally competitive.

Our education system is not currently designed to prepare them for a world that is changing on a daily basis. We need a different system, and we have the wonderful opportunity to work together –with the students—to design a system that meets their needs today, tomorrow, and in the future.

With a new system, we will bring the best of what we do to help students discover their intelligence and their gifts to improve our community, our state, our nation, and our world.

You are a part of something miraculous: creating a better future by improving the lives of children today. (Copied from Interview Guide for the Bibb County School District Strategic Appreciative Interview Guide 2011)

Interview Questions

Question #1: Exceptional Learning Experience

Recall a time when you were part of an exceptional learning experience--a time when learning was inspiring, challenging and exciting and even if it was hard, you and others seemed to be highly engaged and learning rapidly. Tell me that story. What was exceptional?

Question #2: High Expectations

Research has shown that the expectations we hold about one another influence our beliefs about what we can do. When someone holds high expectations, they try harder and achieve more. Recall a time when either:

(a) high expectations inspired you to be more than you thought possible; or

(b) your high expectations for another encouraged them to do something they did not think they could do.

Tell me about that time and what happened. Why is this story important?

Question #3: Opportunities and Innovations

Look beyond our traditional classroom and school year traditions. What positive and novel things are happening in the world that could influence our thinking, so we can design an innovative and highly effective educational system to ensure the success of every student and to generate inspiration for everyone?

What opportunity do you see?

What innovations/possibilities might inspire us?

Question #4: Our Future

Imagine it is 2020 and Bibb County Schools have become internationally known for their innovations in learning and teaching. Our students have made remarkable strides in learning and achievement, and the 2020 graduating class boasts 90% going on to further their education and the other 10% finding meaningful work or serving in the military.

Our innovative strategies have resulted in students who love coming to school. Teachers are inspired by their students and vice versa. In fact, teachers report greater energy at the end of each term. Our drop-out rate has been eliminated; only those students moving out of the area generate the small numbers that show as non-completers.

You have met someone from another state who has heard about our progressive school district, and they want to know more. Describe our new system and what makes it exceptional and effective.

What role did you play in designing this innovative system and making it a reality?

(Questions copied from the Interview Guide for the Bibb County School District Strategic Appreciative Interview Guide 2011)

Day One

Day 1 of the summit consisted of the Discovery and Dream phases. The day started with an opening assembly with everyone in the main arena. Dr. Dallemund introduced the focus of the Summit. Upon arrival participants were assigned a random color which correlated to the room they were assigned to. Participants were then directed to the assigned room and asked to sit with people they did not know. Each room had chairs in circles of 8 people. For the discovery phase participants first paired with another in the circle and interviewed each other using the above mentioned interview questions. They then reported the highlights and quotes from each others responses to the small group of eight. Each group then identified the common

threads, patterns, and themes in order to identify the positive core. These positive core answers were collected through electronic and paper methods. Below are some examples which came from the approximately 70 groups in my room.

Positive Core examples:

- Hands on and visual learning
- Cooperative learning, build personal relationships "We need to empower the community as a whole to make our students successful"
- High expectations
- Incorporating technology and Embracing technology
- Cooperative and collaborative work "when you expect more you get more"
- Engaging relationships
- Differentiated learning
- Relevant technology
- Student choice

The use of personal cell phones and ipads to electronically collect and organize the data from the Discovery phase over the lunch break. Each room then reviewed the collective results, and individuals shared specific Positive Core examples with the room.

The Dream phase began with each small group developing a shared image of the future, then creating a creative presentation to represent that vision. To share their creative visions, large groups consisting of ten small groups were formed. Each small group then presented to the large group. Logistically this was a bit difficult. I had seven groups of ten in my room. The immense size of a circle of 80 people, combined with noise from seven circles, and the acoustics of the room made it difficult to follow and participate in the large group. Despite that, people generally had a good time and enjoyed each others presentations.

The second part of the Dream phase consisted of creating an opportunity map. This part did not go as outlined, but was still successful. The idea was that each small group would create a 5 word headline that would capture an action item that will help achieve the future image. These headlines would then be shared with the large group which would decide on a category to place it under. This process of sharing and categorizing was going to be difficult with the poor communication of the large groups, creating categories at the same time as the categorization, and a shortened time frame due to a last minute schedule change. In consultation with the core team members assigned to my room, we decided to simplify the process by having each small group that wanted to share their headline with the room. This ended up being a great experience. The positive response from the other groups gave legitimacy to each and every vision and headline. Many people took notes of others ideas. There was also a lot of energy created by many groups who did a creative presentation, such as a song, rap, cheer, or gave an eloquent oration as moving as the best Sunday preacher. Below are some examples of headlines from the room:

- Bibb County-Where Leaders Learn
- Differentiation+Choice+Technology+Expectations=Success
- Home, School, Community Working Together

- Heads, Hearts, and Hands Drive Education
- Bibb County's Interactive Classrooms Lead the nation
- Motivate and Believe

Data from the afternoon was again collected via electronic and paper means. Core Team members also collected each and every poster which had been created by the groups. District officials wanted to make sure all ideas generated were collected and recorded. Electronic data was recorded by a group member with a smart phone and marked with a room and group #. The paper record could then be reviewed for groups unable to send it electronically. This process greatly sped up the data entry, collection, and organization process. This became a very important element of the logistical procedures. The quick organization of all this data allowed for a quick turnaround time so the data could be used to plan for and be used in the Design and Destiny phases.

Planning for the second session involved frequent communication between the district, Core Team, and Facilitation Team. Each one shared and presented ideas, which were reviewed by one another. Some examples included :

- The facilitators made a suggestion for six broad themes the data could be categorized under. These were Experiential and Relevant Learning, Student Focus, Focus on Teachers, Parents and Community, Structure of the School, and Technology. Subcategories were listed under each. These themes were reviewed and accepted by the District. This themes list as well as all the headlines were provided to each group in Day Two.
- One of the big projects for the Facilitation Team was to incorporate the Day Two handbook participants received with the facilitator instructions. Having separate documents during the first session was difficult to manage. Though not intended for this purpose, the rough draft copy served as a guide for the Core Team meeting and helped make the final schedule and process for the Day Two.
- Everyone's suggestions were important in determining logistics for moving people between locations on day two, and making some glitches better.

Day Two

There were some big procedural changes the second day. First was the location. Fewer rooms at the conference center were available for the sessions. Each available room had to be maximized to accommodate all participants. Second was the facilitation. Facilitation in each room on Day One was done by a co-facilitator, with the principle facilitators visiting each room to assist, guide, and give feedback. For Day Two each room was assigned a pair of facilitators to work together. Third, it was decided that each room would be assigned topics to focus on. Participants were given a survey to choose the topics (Key Themes) they were most interested in exploring.

Day Two on October 10, 2011, opened with all participants in the arena. Dr. Dallemand opened again with a speech to discuss results from the first day, introduce the days events, and motivate participation. Participants were directed to their respective rooms according to the themes they chose. The Design Phase consisted of the first two activities. Each of these consisted of small groups developing Strategic Proposals around the Key Theme assigned to the

room. Participants were asked to sit with groups of people they did not know to draft a positive and bold proposal which challenges and stretches the current system, then identify 3-5 key concepts important for the success of the proposals.

Below are some examples of Strategic proposals for my room themes: Technology and Experiential Learning:

- Strategic Proposal - Students achieve responsibility by moving from classroom to community.
Key Concepts:
 - Cooperative learning with technical schools and community businesses
 - Regular presentation of career fairs
 - Achieve competence and responsibility through continual community service.
 - Shadowing community professionals
 - more real life opportunities at every grade
 - restructuring the school day to accommodate student schedules, needs, goals
- Strategic Proposal: Bibb County students are utilizing 21st Century technology. Teachers and students are continually trained in the latest and most current technological advances.
Key Concepts:
 - All schools have up to date and fully functioning computers
 - All schools have on-site technical support personnel
 - Starting in kindergarten, students are learning fundamental computer skills essential to their life-long academic journey
 - Teachers receive ongoing technical training

For the most part, the groups during this process were very self organizing, and needed little guidance from the facilitators or Core Team members. This may be due to the groups familiarity with the AI process, well written instructions, and highly motivated and empowered individuals. The first proposal was developed, then presented to the group in the morning. The second right after lunch. Most groups appeared highly engaged with one another and their topic. During the presentations there was a lot of creativity and energy in the room, with artwork songs, raps, cheers, and lots of personality making the presentations more of a talent show than a simple statement of facts. How Wonderful!!! The groups lack of need for guidance allowed me a greater opportunity to discuss the topics and their answers with them. A majority of my suggestions for the groups consisted of re-wording some phrases to reflect the positive 'WE ARE' rather than 'we hope to be' phrasing.

Destiny was brought to life in the third activity. All previous activities had been done with mixed groups from various schools and departments. All participants returned to the Arena to complete the third activity with their respective schools or departments. They were to reflect on what they had experienced and discussed around the six themes, then discuss three small steps and three bold steps which could have significant impact , and be implemented tomorrow, next week, and this year. They also had to complete the sentence "in 2020 we are

most proud of Bibb County Schools and our community because....". Volunteers were then asked to share with the whole arena their answers. This third activity was added to capitalize on the motivation and ideas people would generate through the AI process. Participants would surely have ideas, and this gave them permission and motivation to act on the positive energy to create immediate and easy to accomplish results. Interestingly, as I walked around during this activity, I stopped to talk with a group of women who looked worried. When I asked them how their action steps were coming they responded "we just want to know what are we going to do with all these kids they will be bringing back?". The implications of their question may seem negative, yet the group was implying a very positive belief that there was going to be positive changes which would keep students in school and help others return. They simply had jumped ahead to that time and wanted to know how the resources needed to handle the increased student population were going to be provided. If that isn't a statement of faith then I don't know what faith is.

Impact and Results

I believe the AI process has had a positive impact towards a brighter future in Bibb County Schools. There was a noticeable difference in energy and participation on Day Two of the Summit. The morning of the first day there was a lot of apprehension about what was going to happen, what they were doing, and where this was all going to end up. Much of this had changed by the end of the first day. Many small behaviors indicated a change the second day. Core team members were excited to be there and shared that there was excitement throughout the district. Participants were very engaged with their groups, quickly and with out assistance. I expected to have to do far more coaching to help the strategic proposals be affirmative and bold instead of hopeful. Very few needed help with this. I would like to use a metaphor to explain how I felt when the whole group was together in the Arena. On day One there was the excitement one would feel going to a regular season basketball game. One is excited for the team, and there is a positive energy. On day two the energy felt more intense, like one would feel if we had been there watching our team play in the semifinal game to determine if they would play in the final for the national championship. More intensity, more reality, more on the line. The reason I chose the semifinal game for the analogy is that there was still an air of not being done yet, yet with a surety of greatness nonetheless.

Bibb County Schools has been very proactive in building on this momentum to ensure they move the district forward. Some examples of what they are doing include:

- Making all the information collected available for use on their intranet.
- Using technology and the internet to post information in written and video form, and in popular and frequently used sites such as YouTube, face book, and twitter.
- Encouraging individual, school, and department use of ideas generated as part of the AI process (see activity 3 on Day Two).
- Use of such a large and comprehensive amount of information for the basis of the strategic plan.
- Incorporating the Core Team into the summit planning and implementation, and into the application process by including them in developing the strategic plan.

Personal Learning and Experience

- First Day - I had a room with approximately 500 people. There was a lot of energy from the opening remarks combined with apprehension about what was supposed to happen. My biggest challenge was in having a command of the procedures for the day as we had a very short preparation with the final instructions. The depth to which each group participated varied from great detail to pretending to participate (several groups had people who were illiterate), and tended to be influenced by the development of a group leader. Sharing became the generating catalyst for increased participation as the day went on by giving life to peoples ideas, giving permission to dream big, recognition of commonalities, and learning what to do. Very creative and energetic groups (those who wrote songs, cheers, raps, or sounded like an energetic preacher) gave others permission to be creative and to be themselves.

Changes in the afternoon schedule, combined with the logistical chaos of hundreds of people moving around, necessitated some changes in procedure. After discussing the situation with Core Team members, we determined the best step for the group was to share our headlines with the whole room. Having the Core Team members to discuss ideas with and get a better feel for the needs of the group made these changes possible. I think there was benefit in simplifying the opportunity map. A complex and busy situation could have negatively impacted participants perceptions of the process, and impacted their motivation to participate in future processes. The more orderly process of sharing with the whole group, rather than trying to form large groups, deal with crowded conditions, and categorize would have deflated the power of the visions statements. Sharing seemed to be important to this group, and I feel created a lot of buy-in for the process and outcomes. There past present is full of dreams and visions being bogged down in the quagmire of procedures and beaurocracy. We can't move forward if the process for creating a positive future feels just as muddy. Flow is everything. It keeps the emotions positive, allows things to happen when they should, and gives a sense of competency.

- Second Day - The second session I was in a smaller room and had a co-facilitator with me. Personally it was a less stressful day. First, I felt far more prepared because we had more time to prepare, and because I participated more with planning, and developing the facilitator guide. This gave me a greater familiarity with the procedures. Second, with a strong co-facilitator and strong core team members I knew everything was covered well. This allowed me to have a greater focus on the participants themselves, rather than worry about procedures. I think the second day was a little simpler. The groups seemed more at ease as well. They had a better idea about what to expect, how to work together, and what they were working towards. At one point all the groups were working so well I felt there was little need for me to even be there. Sharing was again very important, and people seemed to look forward to sharing their ideas.
- There is a powerful visual component to seeing the ideas generated from hundreds of people up on the wall. Visual imagery is an important component to bring ideas to life

in AI. We hear a couple, then share with the group. Then we hang them on the wall. Even without looking at all the details, to see the walls of a very large room FULL of papers containing ideas, thoughts, and possibilities brings to reality the belief that people do have a lot to share. In his opening speech on September 19, 2011, Dr Dallemand said "I strongly believe that you have a lot of great ideas, and we want to hear them today...And what you have to share matters tremendously." And there it is. He said the ideas for the future are contained in the group and there they are for all to see. They actually exist.

- Technology - In the book Good to Great Jim Collins teaches that technology is not a creator of momentum towards greatness, but an accelerator of that momentum. The BCSD summit exemplifies how technology can support and accelerate the process without being the focus. Examples include:
 - The use of phones and iPads to collect data and send it in an organized fashion was brilliant. It sped up the collection process of large amounts of data, and made it possible to have Day Two shortly after Day One.
 - Technology allowed for the AI process to be individualized to meet the needs of this specific organization's needs, resources, size and scope, and time restraints. With technology the facilitation team was able to coordinate easily over weeks in order to create the specific processes. Without e-mail, smart phones, internet etc, facilitators would have had to physically spend weeks on location which may not have been possible or cost effective. A more standardized system would have been easier to implement but less effective for the school.
 - Well planned technology can effectively support a good presentation. Dr. Dallemand effectively used a short video clip linked to his PowerPoint presentation to very powerfully and humorously make a point. But that video clip alone was not the motivator for change. His words, questions and expert presentation were. I am still motivated two months later and I don't even work in the district.
 - This data resulted from a process which was very personal in nature, people in the same room at the same time, interacting, talking, sharing, and growing together. There was a power in people being together and focused on one another which technology cannot supply. Just like watching a sports event is never as powerful on TV in ones own living room as it is in a stadium with thousands of cheering fans. This is an especially important point to make for service industries, like teaching, in which the personal contact cannot be replaced by any technology no matter how advanced.
 - A large group will necessitate a large facilitation team. Technology makes this cost effective. It allowed the facilitation group to be made up of a diverse group which does not geographically live together and can only come together for short periods of time. This can enable teams made up of the best people for the specific organization, rather than simply who is

available. E-mail, conference calls and web conferencing, Google docs, text messaging etc allows a group to communicate frequently, share ideas, and work on resources. The handbook and facilitator guide could never have been put together two days before without personal computers.

- Core Team - the core team is key to the success. For groups this large they serve as more than resources for designing the process and determining the focus. They should be active participants in the facilitation of the summit. With rooms or 400 to 1000 people, one facilitator cannot be everywhere. The core team, if trained well, can serve as co facilitators by answering questions, helping to guide the groups, acting as informant to the facilitator, and encouraging or working with groups having difficulty to a greater degree than the facilitator could. Having members of the organization helping with the facilitation creates buy-in and a greater sense of ownership to the process. The core group also serve to create an AI culture. I was glad to hear the core group also is part of the strategic planning.
- There is a power in all being in the same place at the same time. I think having the opening, and closing together was very effective for helping keep a unified vision of where the AI process is going. Breaking up into smaller groups for the actual 4D phases is important. Where possible I would recommend placing a cap on around 500 per facilitator, less if possible. Close proximity of the groups allowed for easy flow between groups.

Leadership Lessons

Role of Leadership - The role and type of leadership on all levels plays a crucial role for the success of a large scale AI Summit. Leadership must have enough control to keep the group/organization focused, yet decentralize enough control to the participants to allow the generative nature of AI to not only result in a successful summit, but blossom into an AI culture. The principles of generativity, and the power of inquiry, collective imagery and discourse can only be cultivated through a decentralized system governed by leaders who can embrace and enable rather than control and command. One cannot standardize generativity. Here are some positive examples I experienced in the Bibb County Schools Strategic AI summit.

- Organizational leadership - For the social constructionist and poetic principles to have life, leadership must create a compelling vision, and install faith that everyone does truly have a part to play and an influence on the system. Dr. Dallemand stated "I strongly believe you have a lot of great ideas, and we want to hear them today. I want for you to help us build a new system because it will be your system. And what you have to share matters tremendously." (Opening remarks on Sept 19, 2011). BCSD leadership has demonstrated their commitment to creating the necessary environment in which these principles and processes can flourish by:
 - Choosing AI as the framework to build a positive future and collect and share the ideas contained within the district and it's stakeholders.

- Bringing together every single member of the district. Rather than just a sample, they brought every person there to give voice to their ideas. No one was excluded. People have ideas and often share with each other. Bringing them in and providing a means to collect the information gave a realization to those ideas. It gives people permission to do more than have ideas. They can act on them and share them with people who can enable their actions.
 - Make the information produced easily accessible to all stakeholders.
 - Minimization of the facilitation team. To many this could feel insulting. Yet for what the goal of the summit was it was necessary. BCSD knows that change is not just about developing new programs. It is a culture and attitude change. People must create their own positive present and future. We could not be seen as consultants, or the reason for the change. Facilitation is about bringing out what others have, and although the AI process does support this, it can't if people don't feel it is their ideas, or that they are the change. Minimizing the facilitators was necessary. Bringing in outside facilitators ensures competence and efficacy for the development and implementation of the processes. Using inside leaders (core team) and each other ensures trust in the processes, comfort in participation and implementation, and faith in the results.
- Facilitation Team - Although Kathy was technically in charge and served as the point person with the school, the team more closely resembled a self-managing team. All opinions and viewpoints were accepted and even encouraged. Different people took the lead for various portions of the preparations.

This openness allowed for greater success of the team and flexibility in adapting the process to meet the needs, resources, and changes of BCSD. This openness allowed the principles behind AI (i.e. poetic, simultaneity, and anticipatory) to bring out all the contributions each member could bring, and applied these principles to the team creation and working together.

It also allowed all the AI principles to flourish between district leadership, core team, and facilitators for creating an individual AI experience. The co-creation of a positive future was created through dialogue, inquiry, and imagery as exemplified through examples of district personal understanding how valuable and knowledgeable even a janitor can be, core team members got to experience first hand the District leadership's willingness to listen and work with them, and all could come together for the two main summit days to share and understand each other.
 - Group Leadership - I noticed that small groups (each table) who were the most successful with the process, participated the deepest, and had the most fun, were the ones in which a group leader emerged. This person (or people) tended to encourage participation, make sure all were included and important, and guided the process when needed. Groups who had poor participation and needed a strong facilitator and core

team presence lacked an internal group leader. The large groups who were the best at sharing and had the most energy and fun all had members of the group take charge in physically organizing the circle formation, direct the order, and encourage participation.

Personal Experience

Going into the Macon Miracle experience, I had wished for two things. First, I wanted the school district and all the participants to have a successful experience in which they could understand their own strengths and successes upon which they could build. I believe the total summit experience, including the planning sessions, were very successful at doing this. The amount and quality of responses, the energy brought to the meetings, set-up, trainings, and summit days, and the smoothness with which all the program and logistical areas came together, are all evidence of the success. I work full time in a school district and am so energized to make education here the best it can be. Two months later I am still energized by the experience in Macon.

Second, I wanted to learn more about and improve my ability to facilitate appreciative inquiry through a positive experience. Working with facilitators as experienced as Kathy and Jim (and Cheri and Charles as I would later learn) would provide a unique opportunity to learn far more than I could by trudging through a summit on my own. I had learned about AI while working on my Master of Science in Organizational Performance degree and took the 4 day AIFT course with in Las Vegas on January 10-13, 2011. Following the training there arose some changes and difficulty at my employment which made it impossible to implement a summit there. That fall I had changed employment and was then working towards building a relationship with my new employer in order to apply my AI training there. I had adopted an appreciative coaching model for my work as an occupational therapist, had applied AI principles and methodology to small group planning and program development, and successfully used a 4D approach for two specialized workshops I had developed for staff training and a state wide conference of early childhood educators. What I lacked was a full summit experience.

In August of 2011 I was trying to make a decision between two good employment options which I had before me. I chose the one which would allow me more time to focus on some personal venture, one being a scoutmaster, and the other to start my own business with a focus on professional facilitation and organizational development. The day after I made a final decision I read the Center for Appreciative Inquiry newsletter which called for assistance to facilitate the Macon Miracle. I applied for and was accepted as a co-facilitator. Things just worked out in my schedule to learn about and be able to arrange my schedule to participate in the Macon Miracle. Just worked out means it was a miracle at work in my own life.

My personal best always has been and always will be working as a team member with other people, to work with and pull together all they bring to the table. I am energized by the team effort and thoroughly enjoyed working with the facilitation team. I learned more about the process of putting together and running an AI summit than I could possibly write about. I have never been good at following cookie cutter programs, and prefer the flexibility to adapt and individualize to the needs of the people and situation involved. So being a part of the planning process, especially before Day Two, was so important for me to understand how to adapt and modify the AI methodology while still maintaining the integrity of the principles and techniques.

As I mentioned earlier, there was a sense of teamwork among the facilitators because Kathy, while maintaining the decision maker role, allowed all the freedom to truly be a part of co-creating the process for designing and implementing the summit. Consider that she was doing this with a project of immense proportion, in a way that had never been done before, and with people like myself who were skilled but unknown and inexperienced in AI facilitation. This was a huge leap of faith and one I fully appreciate. To have the feedback of all the facilitators, especially Kathy, Jim, Cheri, and Charles, was not only valuable for using my skills in the future, but was a confidence builder as well.

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