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Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry

Edited by

Duane Bidwell, Ph.D.

Katherine Rand, MPP

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Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry

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Welcome to November 2014 issue of AI Practitioner

Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry celebrates the spiritual dimension by exploring its connections with AI theory and practice. Editors Duane Bidwell and Katherine Rand bring together articles that reflect on how spirituality, spiritual practice and AI flow together to shape the experiences of practitioners and participants. Articles highlight new practices, offer case studies and provide insight into ways of integrating spirituality and AI principles.

Kristen Crusoe, Annette Garner, Kathlynn Northrup-Snyder and Sarah Wallace describe an innovation in nursing education in the Feature Choice article "Using Motivational Interviewing in Nursing for Improved Professional Development: Moving from Appreciative Inquiry's Dream to Destiny Phases."

In Research Review & Notes, Ottar Ness highlights first-person perspectives in dual

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Joan McArthur-Blair

Joan McArthur-Blair, co-president of Cockell McArthur-Blair Consulting, is a writer, speaker and facilitator who uses AI to foster leadership, strategic planning and innovative strategies for organizational development. Co-author: *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force*.

Contact: joan@cockellmcarthur-blair.com
www.cockellmcarthur-blair.com



Jeanie Cockell

Jeanie Cockell, co-president of Cockell McArthur-Blair Consulting, specializes in collaboratively designing strategies to surface the wisdom of individuals, groups and organizations in order for them to build positive futures and to respond effectively to change. Co-author: *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force*.

Contact: jeanie@cockellmcarthur-blair.com
www.cockellmcarthur-blair.com



Graffiti Paper – Co-created Learning as Spiritual Space

As professors, we challenged ourselves to create something unique for a group of graduate students studying appreciative inquiry. We created the graffiti paper and invite our colleagues from around the world to use it and experiment with it as an opening to spiritual space. This article explores the creating of spiritual spaces within learning by constructing conditions and exercises that maximize the possibility of learners tapping into deep listening and their own wisdom.

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We are standing in a classroom, and around us is a room full of graduate students. They are all moving in semi-silence from poster to poster, writing in response to the research abstracts of their classmates. We watch as each learner approaches the work of another learner with deep respect, silence, careful reading and appreciation for what has been created. They circle the room slowly, writing on the posters – words, thoughts, what moved them – around and around until each person has visited eighteen research abstracts.

This was the beginning of the graffiti research paper exercise, an experiment in co-created learning as a spiritual space. The graffiti research paper was one assignment in a graduate course at a Canadian university in Appreciative Inquiry attended by Masters and Doctoral students from education, higher education, urban planning and community development. This course ran over three weeks from Monday – Friday, two and a half hours per day. This article will briefly define our notions of spirituality; how we intentionally set the conditions for spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry (AI); and then delve into our experiment with the graffiti research paper.

Spirituality

We are educators, consultants and AI practitioners who define spirituality as the dimension of holistic learning where people are authentically present and interconnected with each other in the search for meaning-making – “magic”. For

In creating 'magic', we bring our intention to set conditions that allow it to happen.

us, the spirituality we bring to our work with AI does not spring from a particular spirituality; rather it is the creation of a set of circumstances that allow "magic" to occur. It sets in motion the possibility of seeing and being in ways that draw forth appreciative thought and inquires into the "more" that is available in the world.

Creating the conditions

In creating "magic", we bring our intention to set conditions that allow it to happen. With the learners in this example, we engaged in several experiences to create conditions for purposeful spirituality in the course before we launched the graffiti paper. These conditions are like having a meditation cushion. You can meditate without one but it is far more comfortable with one. Some of the experiences we use are: beginning with an inquiry into the best of ourselves and our learning experiences; setting agreements for learning together; and the use of circle practice. Each one of these processes draws AI and spirituality together to create "magic."

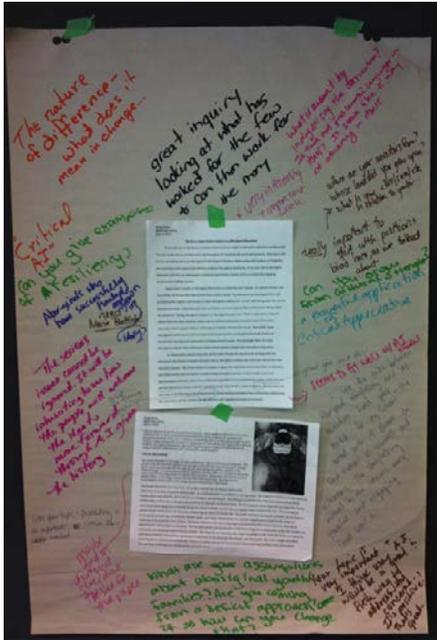
Best experiences and agreements: On the first day of class, each learner selected a magazine picture that metaphorically represented "you at your best". This exercise, as well as being a starter AI exercise, begins to bring people fully present into the classroom as they share their metaphors. They begin to see each other's strengths and what moves them in the world. The second part of this exercise is learners, in pairs, telling stories of best learning experiences. Built on these, they co-create agreements for learning together. These AI beginning exercises open the hearts of learners to both hearing and telling stories that inquire into what is right with them as a person; what is right with them as a learner; and what they are longing for from each other in this learning experience. They begin the process of drawing learners into being present with each other so the conditions for making "magic" can begin to form.

Circle practice

We began most classes with circle practice based on Baldwin's (1998) work. Circle practice has a few key components. The first is the physical configuration where everyone can see each other across the circle. Second, one at a time each person speaks and is deeply listened to without comment from other people. People can pass if they don't wish to offer anything into the circle. Third, a question is asked to begin. A few of ours were:

- What are you grateful for?
- What is on your mind?
- What did you read last evening – fiction or non-fiction and how did it prompt your thinking?

The time spent in circle varies, but this is a space for people to speak about the class – sometimes their lives – and to share what is on their mind. This sharing is a spiritual practice in that it is built around speaking with intention and listening with attention,



A graffiti paper step 1 example

and is linked to AI through the design of the questions and the focus on what is powerful and good.

These are just a few examples of ways to set the conditions for “magic”. We were very conscious that we were together with our learners socially constructing our experience, and we consciously brought exercises that opened doors to thinking with an open heart and mind. As the experience of learning about AI unfolded, we all brought more and more spiritual practices to the classroom each day. People began to link their graduate work to their lives and tell profound stories to the class about their work outside the learning environment, and to experiment with using AI in experiences from partner relationships to staff relationships. It was as if the study of AI linked with the conditions for “magic” to open the door to a form of spirituality where we all began to practice our best selves and inquire into how we could lift each other up to the sun.

Graffiti paper

The graffiti paper was an experiment set into these conditions, and neither of us recognized going in to it that it would be such a magical experience. In most graduate classes, papers are written individually, handed in and only read by faculty. We wanted to create something different, and asked ourselves what an AI research paper might be. The paragraphs that follow outline the steps in the graffiti paper and the experiences we had along the way with our learners.

Step One: In the third class, each of the learners brought two pages to glue onto a large piece of poster paper – a page with their magazine picture metaphor and explanation of what it meant; and a one-page abstract outlining their research paper on AI or a related topic. These were posted around the classroom. Then we all wandered the room, reading each abstract and writing on the chart paper our thoughts. Key questions guided the process:

1. What moved you about this abstract?
2. What more could s/he explore?
3. Comments/questions.

It was profound, wandering the room adding our comments and questions and watching the learners work. We did this for an hour, mostly in silence. We describe the feeling of this exercise at the beginning of this article. The intention was for all of us to surface the strengths being brought to the research and encourage inquiry into what more could be done.

Step Two: The next step in the process was for the learners to create a digital image of the graffiti poster. The assignment then was to create a link in the next section of the paper between what they originally wrote and the graffiti poster. We told learners not

As the experience of learning about AI unfolded, we all brought more and more spiritual practices to the classroom each day.

We could feel the visceral commitment everyone had to each other.

to re-write their abstracts; rather, to create a bridge between their original thinking and the new ideas being offered by other learners.

Step Three: In the seventh class, the learners brought in their abstract, graffiti poster and the first four to six pages of their paper. They worked in triads or fours. The task was to read each paper and again graffiti up the paper with ideas, drawings, poems, questions, etc. The learners brought their intention to offer mindful feedback to their peers and to extend their trust for the views of others.

Step Four: Learners built another bridge between the graffiti feedback and the next sections of the research paper, and included the graffiti pages in the paper.

Step Five: In the eleventh class, learners brought their final draft of the research paper. Learners worked in pairs, read each other's papers and attached a sheet to the back of the paper for their last piece of graffiti. Each piece of graffiti represented what was most compelling for the reader. This was a deep reading and reflection exercise that focused on what the research paper offered to a reader. For the most part, this exercise was done in silence. We could feel the visceral commitment everyone had to each other. This graduate course had taken them from being separate individuals to being interconnected. In that interconnected "magic", their ability to speak on paper and represent complex ideas soared and found new places to reside.

Step Six: In class twelve, the learners handed in their graffiti papers with all the graffiti woven in. We reviewed them and handed them back on the last day of class.

They assigned their own final grades for the course based on the papers, team presentations and participation, and wrote rationales for their grades. We had never read such powerful rationales. Learners wrote about their journey, their fears, what they had learned and where they were taking their knowledge. They co-wrote this poem, a wonderful parting gift to us.

The Poet and the Storyteller

You burst into our lives, all colour and sparkle and whispered these words into our hearts: “words create worlds”
 people create places
 two working in perfect oneness
 inspiring creativity and passion.
 with humour and kindness
 by creating safe spaces
 making magic
 harvesting hope
 looking within
 caring, sharing
 making provocative propositions
 Nurturing the beauty of the human spirit
 TEACHING US TO LOVE RATHER THAN FEAR IT
 Appreciating us
 Looking for the good
 Helping us change the world
 Discover, Connections, Constructing, Reflection
 Authentic healing & transformation

Magic

We both profoundly think that learning spaces are spiritual spaces and are places that we can intentionally create. New ideas, new learning and new possibilities make the heart and spirit sing, and it is in the co-created learning that spirituality takes its form.

We intentionally create spiritual spaces wherever co-creating learning happens, whatever the context for our AI work. Although we haven't used a graffiti paper in other contexts we do use circle practice, agreements, poetry, and many collaborative practices with team/group, organizational and community development. One possibility for a graffiti paper in other contexts could be writing AI interview stories, passing them around, having others in the team/group/organization respond with comments, questions, suggestions, images, poetry ... the beauty of AI is its adaptable, creative, inclusive nature, fitting so well with other processes for intentionally creating spiritual learning spaces – “magic”.

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Members of the International Advisory Practitioners Group working with AIP to bring AI stories to a wider audience:

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AI Practitioner Editor/Publisher

The editor-in-chief and publisher is Anne Radford. She is based in London and can be reached at

editor@aipractitioner.com

The postal address for the publication is:

303 Bankside Lofts, 65 Hopton Street,
London SE1 9JL, England.

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7633 9630

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Shelagh Aitken is the issue editor for AI Practitioner.

shelagh@editorproofreader.co.uk

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