Appreciative Inquiry

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Abstract: Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a reconfiguration of action research that has found particular traction within organisational settings and is explored here for its potential use within whānau (Māori family) research. Rather than focusing on what is wrong, AI practitioners ask affirming questions and encourage participants to focus on what works. The aim of the 4-D (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny or Delivery) AI Cycle is transformational change, sourced from collaborative inquiry with participants. AI is compatible with Kaupapa Māori concerns that whānau strengths be recognised and built upon in order to facilitate whānau ora (wellness). The pre-test of an AI Discovery phase with whānau highlighted the potential of affirming questions to elicit both positive and negative experiences from whānau, resulting in contextualised information. Whānau also provided feedback about the language used and stressed the importance of their relationship to the researcher. Overall, AI demonstrated its potential as a whānau research method, with the true test of its utility being whether or not it is able to catalyse whānau transformation.

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry; community research engagement; Kaupapa Māori; transformation; whānau

Introduction

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) began life in the late 1980s as a reconfiguration of action research (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The story told about Appreciative Inquiry's inception is that during his doctoral study David Cooperrider asked doctors in leadership positions within a United States medical centre to tell stories about their successes and failures. "He was amazed at the level of positive cooperation, innovation, and egalitarian governance when they were at their most effective" (Coghlan, Preskill & Catsambas, 2003, p. 7). This led Cooperrider and his faculty mentor, Dr Suresh Srivastva, to focus on the data about the organisation at its best and to hypothesise that an inquiry that asks questions about successes and strengths will be transformational, based on the premise that "organizations move toward what they study" (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003, p. 29). In Appreciative Inquiry this initial inquiry, or Discovery, is part of a 4-D Cycle that leads groups to Dream about what could be, Design a future, and take action to change their Destiny (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

This introduction examines the background to, and philosophy of, Appreciative Inquiry as an organisational change tool as well as a method for transforming relationships. Following this, the application of Appreciative Inquiry is outlined before Appreciative Inquiry is subjected to a Kaupapa Māori analysis of its potential as a tool for researching with whānau. A Discovery phase designed for research with whānau is then described, including feedback on the phase from a pre-test with whānau. Finally, some concluding comments are made.

Much of the information about Appreciative Inquiry comes from the Taos Institute, a North American non-profit organisation headed by Kenneth Gergen, an eminent American social psychologist. In his words the Institute is:

> ...dedicated to the development of social constructivist theory and practices for the purpose of world benefit. Constructivist theory and practice locates the source of meaning, value and action in communicative relations among people. Chief importance is placed on the

relationship process and its outcomes for the welfare of all. (Gergen, in Stavros & Torres, 2005, p. 7)

Many of the authors of Appreciative Inquiry books are involved in the Institute in some capacity, including David Cooperrider.

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003, p. 2) describe four beliefs about human nature and human organising that are the foundation of Appreciative Inquiry, and highlight its roots in social constructivist theory:

- People individually and collectively have unique gifts, skills and contributions to bring to life.
- Organisations are human social systems, sources of unlimited relational capacity, created and lived in language.
- The images we hold of the future are socially created and, once articulated, serve to guide individual and collective actions.
- Through human communication (inquiry and dialogue) people can shift their attention and action away from problem analysis to lift up worthy ideals and productive possibilities for the future.

A Marcel Proust quote is a favourite among Appreciative Inquiry theorists, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes" (cited in Bushe & Kassam, 2005, p. 164). The transformational elements of Appreciative Inquiry reside in its claims that it generates new knowledge and that it results in generative metaphors that compel new action. Generative metaphors are sayings that tend to juxtapose two words in evocative ways that 'unstick' social systems, for example, 'sustainable development' (Bushe & Kassam, 2005).

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) and other authors describe several principles that inform Appreciative Inquiry. A summary of the five 'foundational principles' is provided in Table 1. These principles are derived from social constructionism, image theory and grounded theory. From social constructionism comes the notion that social reality is constructed and maintained through language and communication. From image theory comes the notion that people's decisions are influenced by the images they hold of their future. And from grounded research comes the notions that participants hold the key to understanding their culture or reality, and that any research is also an intervention (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

Table 1. Summary of the five foundational principles of Appreciative Inquiry

Principle	Definition
The Constructionist Principle	Reality is socially constructed through language
The Simultaneity Principle	Change begins from the moment a question is asked
The Poetic Principle	Our choice of what we study determines what we discover
The Anticipatory Principle	Our image of the future shapes the present
The Positive Principle	Positive questioning leads to positive change

Whitney & Trosten-Bloom (2003)

Organisations

Appreciative Inquiry has been used as an organisational change tool by a number of corporations and non-profit organisations, including Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Deloitte and Touche (Ryan, Soven, Smither, Sullivan & VanBuskirk, 1999). Appreciative Inquiry is described as a change from more conventional problem-solving approaches to organisational improvement that tend to focus on what is not working, or what is wrong. Such

approaches can include strategic planning, restructuring, redesigning work, and project management (Sullivan, 2004). According to Sullivan (2004, p. 219) the deficit-based thinking underpinning these approaches emphasises "…problems; … people who are perceived to be causing these problems; [criticism] of ideas, accomplishments, and the people involved; and a focus on resources that are limited or lacking." McKenzie (2003) argues that such problem-solving, deficit-based approaches have a negative effect on an organisation (in her case, school climate and student achievement) and do not produce effective, positive solutions that enable an organisation to change and move forward.

Appreciative Inquiry, on the other hand, has been described as: strength-based, asset-based, ethnographic, a strategic planning model, participatory and a system-wide approach. Appreciative Inquiry seeks to discover what works in an organisation based on the assumption that solutions already reside within an organisation (McKenzie, 2003). In this way, it is argued, Appreciative Inquiry can describe a preferred future for the organisation alongside an understanding of how an organisation can build toward that future.

Definitions of Appreciative Inquiry often stress the collaborative nature of the research whereby groups create a vision for themselves based on affirmations from their past (e.g., Bushe, 1998; International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2000). In order to create this dialogue participants are engaged in interviewing one another (Patton, 2002). Appreciative Inquiry brings with it the promise of "enhanced relationships and communications while building enthusiasm, ownership, commitment, and a sense of purpose which [is] shared both within and outside [an] organization" (Trosten-Bloom & Whitney, 1999, p. 114). Appreciative Inquiry has also been found to accelerate learning, stimulate creativity, and enhance people's capacity for change (Trosten-Bloom & Whitney, 1999).

Bushe and Kassam (2005, p. 165) examined the organisational outcomes from Appreciative Inquiry undertaken prior to 2003 by assessing every published case study of Appreciative Inquiry against the leading prescriptions of Appreciative Inquiry theory and practice at this time. Their focus was on two key outcomes: new knowledge or new ways of doing things, and generative metaphors. They found that transformational organisational change was associated with a more radical Appreciative Inquiry change prescription; namely, changing how people think rather than changing what they do. It was also associated with an improvisational, rather than planned, approach to change. "Perhaps even more radical is the prescription to let go of control in planned change efforts and nurture a more improvisational approach to the action phase in action research" (Bushe & Kassam, 2005, p. 176).

This finding, that transformational processes should be allowed to emerge from the ground up, is compatible with claims that systems thinking is central to Appreciative Inquiry. In other words, organisations are acknowledged as dynamic, whole systems that change when improvised action by members is encouraged (cf. Bushe & Kassam, 2005). The principles of Appreciative Inquiry also align with those espoused in Senge's work on learning organisations (Senge, 1990; Sullivan, 2004).

Appreciative Inquiry can also be used in a community, in small groups, in "a situation, a relationship, or [with] an individual" (Sullivan, 2004, p. 219). The next section examines the use of Appreciative Inquiry within relationships and families.

Relationships and families

The use of Appreciative Inquiry within relationships is largely driven by the Taos Institute. Stavros and Torres (2005) provide a guide to using Appreciative Inquiry in daily life to achieve 'dynamic relationships'. Their book focuses on the application of Appreciative Inquiry within relationships, including families. It is based on the five foundation principles of Appreciative Inquiry with the addition of the Principle of Awareness; namely, that self-reflective awareness is essential.

> Self-reflective awareness means being self-aware, other aware, and socially aware of the dynamics of the relationships in a community. It means understanding your part in dynamic relationships, recognizing there are options for your actions that will influence the relationships and that at any given time there are many possible outcomes for any given situation depending upon your actions (Stavros & Torres, 2005, p. 79).

The Principle of Awareness is described as fundamental when applying the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle (see below) to self-development and the development of inter-personal relationships.

Cooperrider Dole and her colleagues (2008) build on this work with their "encyclopaedia of positive questions". Appreciative Inquiry questions are provided for a variety of life and relationship situations (e.g., welcoming a new baby, planning our dream wedding). Readers are encouraged to use these questions within these situations in order to 'create positive family dynamics' (also see Application section below). The authors define 'family' in the broadest possible terms.

As with Appreciative Inquiry within an organisational setting, an important aim of Appreciative Inquiry within a family is to leave people with "new ways to think about and discuss" their family (cf. Bushe & Kassam, 2005, p. 164). Appreciative Inquiry is therefore about more than just collecting positive stories or examples of 'best practice' from families; it is about tapping into family potential for transformational change.

Evaluation
Evaluators have used Appreciative Inquiry in whole or part/modified. As an evaluative tool or method Appreciative Inquiry is aligned with participatory and learning-oriented evaluation approaches (Coghlan et al., 2003). From his experience evaluating programmes for street children in Africa, Elliot (1999) described Appreciative Inquiry within evaluation as a teaching and training exercise as much as an evaluative one. It invited stakeholders to "reflect on their best practice rather than admit their failures and unsolved problems" (p. 203).

Issues
Finally in this introductory section, some of the potential issues identified with Appreciative Inquiry are canvassed.

Balancing the positive spin
Appreciative Inquiry has been criticised for being unbalanced by virtue of its emphasis on the positive (Patton, 2003). For example, Sullivan (2004) stresses the high level of commitment that is needed from senior people within an organisation to implement and maintain a positive focus. Others, such as Patton (2003), suggest that a more 'balanced' approach may be more worthwhile. The issue therefore appears to be whether this balance will occur 'naturally' or if it needs to be taken into account in a reformatting of the Appreciative Inquiry method.

Michael (2005) identified some concerns when she developed an appreciative interview schedule for research on African NGOs. When faced with a series of positive questions she wondered if interviewees would think that she was naïve about their reality, only wanting to hear good news, and/or downplaying the difficulties they faced. However, she found that these reservations were not upheld during the interviews themselves.

> AI practitioners do not…[turn] a blind eye to the negative and difficult experiences that are a part of all organisational experiences. To them, opting to use AI is to choose a starting point from which to work, rather than to choose some naïve and idealistic end point at which you will arrive. (Michael, 2005, p. 223)

Beliefs that reinforce disparities

The literature is silent about what might occur when participants' values, beliefs and notions of success affirm a status quo or 'commonsense' that marginalises groups within society. For example, a mainstream organisation that does not link its success or its future to being responsive to Māori needs and rights may not transform into a more inclusive or responsive organisation as a result of an Appreciative Inquiry.

Over-disclosure

The Appreciative Inquiry 'atmosphere' created for research participants may lead to the over-disclosure of information. This might occur because of the very intimate and caring environment Appreciative Inquiry initially creates through the discussion of positives and strengths. This environment, in turn, may aid relationship building between researcher/interviewer and participant so that the participant feels both comfortable and safe to disclose the 'bad news'.

The application of Appreciative Inquiry

The first step in Appreciative Inquiry is the selection of topics that the Appreciative Inquiry will focus on. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) describe the choice of topics as "fateful"; reiterating the notion that human systems move toward what they study. When a group is selecting a topic of inquiry these authors will ask a group, "Given that [people and groups] move in the direction of what they study, what is it that you want more of in [this group]?" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 134). Such a question leads to the selection of "affirmative topics". An important issue in the selection of topics is who does the selecting, with Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) stressing the importance of "whole-system" involvement as a way of securing buy-in and motivation. This may mean, for example, that all divisions of an organisation are represented at the inquiry, all family members are present, or all stakeholders in a particular service are invited (cf. Reed, Pearson, Douglas, Swinburne & Wilding, 2002).

The selection of topics proceeds from an overview of Appreciative Inquiry, mini-interviews between participants, the identification of themes arising from the mini-interviews, the sharing of stories and themes, and an overview of the criteria for topic selection (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The mini-interviews set the tone for the interviewing that takes place throughout Appreciative Inquiry, with Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) describing appreciative interviews as an essential factor in successful Appreciative Inquiry within an organisational setting.

> Appreciative interviews bring out the best in people and organizations. They provide opportunities for people to speak and be heard. They ignite curiosity and the spirit of learning, and in doing so enhance organizational knowledge and wisdom. They enhance the organization's positive core by surfacing stories that illuminate the distinctive strengths and potentials. And they bring positive possibilities for the future to life. (p. 147)

Following the selection of the topics the Appreciative Inquiry or 4-D Cycle is embarked upon. This is made up on four stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny or Delivery. Figure 1 shows a 4-D Cycle that focuses on relationships.

In the Discovery stage, participants are asked to identify what is best about their group through appreciative interviews. The questions asked of or by participants are about eliciting a positive discourse (e.g., stories, examples, metaphors) about their organisational, family or community life. These discourses will be about their most memorable experiences and accomplishments in the area of focus. When Appreciative Inquiry is applied to daily living, Stavros & Torres (2005, p. 113) recommend questions such as: What are the most significant stories in your life? Where are things going well in your life? Where are you making a

difference? In their chapter on 'Strengthening the family unit' Cooperrider et al. (2008) suggest the following question under the heading of 'family fun and rituals'.
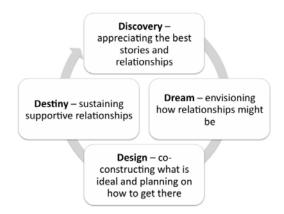

Figure 1. An Appreciative Inquiry relational 4-D cycle
Adapted from Truschel (2007) and Stavros & Torres (2005).

> When you think about family time, what are a few of the highlights for you, times when your family spent time together enjoying each other's company? Now choose one and tell me about it more detail. What were you doing? How did it happen that our family enjoyed that time together? How did this impact our family relationships? (p. 58)

Some Appreciative Inquiry studies have taken a very participatory approach by training a core group to ask these questions of other participants. This core group subsequently participates, alongside the researchers, in the analysis of the interviews.

The Dream stage involves "the creation of a vision that brings to light the collective aspirations of stakeholders" that emerged in the Discovery stage (Sullivan, 2004, p. 224). This stage is about challenging the status quo and building upon or expanding potential (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2000). Stavros and Torres (2005, p. 113) pose dream questions such as "What world do we want to create? What best possible dream can we share together?" The ways in which people are encouraged to dream are multiple, including silent reflection, role-plays, poetry and song. In an organisational setting, a mission or a purpose statement will often be written at this stage (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

> Working together in small groups…, participants share and discuss the data and stories collected in the Discovery phase. Even as these discussions ground them in the most positive aspects of their organization's past, they inspire them to imagine possibilities – what 'might be' for themselves and their organization in relation to the world. (Trosten-Bloom & Whitney, 1999, p. 119)

In the Design stage people work together to put a structure, or social architecture, to the Dream elucidated above. In an organisational setting this will include details about structure, systems, culture, and work design and environment (Sullivan, 2004). The design questions for daily living include 'How shall we live?' 'What relationships best support the dream?' with the responses used to create the relationship structures to support the Dream (Stavros & Torres, 2005, p. 114). For 'family fun and rituals' Cooperrider et al. (2008) suggest questions that help people both dream and design.

> Imagine it is a year from now and you are reflecting on all the meaningful and fun-filled family times you have had together. What did you do that was new and different to ensure

that each family member values the time spent together as a family? How were we able to create these special family times? (p. 58)

In the 4-D cycle high-impact design elements are drawn from the interviews and dreams and turned into 'Provocative Propositions' (or Design Statements). These are written in the present tense and are statements of the ideal situation (Trosten-Bloom & Whitney, 1999). For example, a provocative proposition from an Appreciative Inquiry at a high school was that "Teachers freely give their time to parents by responding to questions and concerns" (Ryan et al., 1999, p. 165).

Destiny/Delivery is the final stage and is about the commitment of individuals and the group to achieve their aspirations. While change occurs at all phases of the 4-D Cycle, the Destiny phase focuses on paths forward (Trosten-Bloom & Whitney, 1999). According to Stavros and Torres (2005, p. 114) "Destiny says live the principles – stay awake, change, improvise, be open, and flexible, practice the principles in alignment with the design and the dream will emerge. Engage in supportive intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships."

When this 4-D Cycle is followed Appreciative Inquiry becomes a tool (or 'methodology'; Michael, 2005, p. 222), for change, with members of a group being active participants in both the discovery of and implementation of goals and visions. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003, p. 14) describe Appreciative Inquiry as 'improvisational'; it is loosely structured so that each Appreciative Inquiry is a 'new creation'.

Some Appreciative Inquiry practitioners also suggest that the action plans, steering committees and other common components of the Destiny phase should be dropped in order to facilitate sustainability. "Instead, the first three D's of the AI should create a set of images and ideas that are so compelling to system members that they voluntarily find ways to transform their social and work processes" (Bushe & Kassam, 2005, p. 169).

A Kaupapa Māori analysis of Appreciative Inquiry

Graham Smith (1997) highlights six intervention elements that are an integral part of Kaupapa Māori and which are evident in Kaupapa Māori sites. These are:

- Tino rangatiratanga (the 'self-determination' principle)
- Taonga tuku iho (the 'cultural aspirations' principle)
- Ako Māori (the 'culturally preferred pedagogy' principle)
- Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kainga (the 'socio-economic' mediation principle)
- Whānau (the extended family structure principle)
- Kaupapa (the 'collective philosophy' principle)

These elements showcase the systems or ecological foundations of Kaupapa Māori; for example, that Kaupapa Māori is about recognising the strengths and aspirations of Māori along with Māori rights to self-determination. The role of the family is upheld while at the same time the negative pressures that are being brought to bear on many whānau through socio-economic disadvantage are acknowledged. Political, social, economic and cultural wellness is a collective vision and commitment, achieved through living and developing in a Māori way.

Appreciative Inquiry takes a strengths-based approach, rather than focusing on deficits, and is therefore compatible with Māori concerns that strengths be recognised and built upon in order to create flax root (e.g., community-level) change. Appreciative Inquiry is also concerned with structural change and is therefore compatible with a Kaupapa Māori commitment to

finding solutions and recommending change in order to facilitate better pathways and outcomes for whānau.

> The appreciative approach involves collaborative inquiry, based on interviews and affirmative questioning, to collect and celebrate the good news stories of a community – those stories that enhance cultural identity, spirit and vision. Appreciative inquiry is a way of seeing that is selectively attentive to – and affirming of – the best and highest qualities in a system, a situation or another human being (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2000).

Kaupapa Māori research encompasses the following values:
- Research that is controlled by Māori, conducted by Māori researchers and with Māori
- The prioritisation of Māori in research questions, methods, processes and dissemination
- It is not a prescribed set of methods but rather about how research should be framed
- It focuses on generating solutions and aspirations from within Māori realities
- It contains a notion of action and commitment to change, and to Māori development

It is important that any method for researching whānau also respect these values, either in the method's 'pure' form or in a form adapted for the present purpose. For example, the method should be compatible with Māori processes – fitting in easily alongside them, be able to document Māori realities, be about generating solutions, and be able to feed into Māori development and aspirations.

The collaborative approach taken by Appreciative Inquiry is important as it allows whānau to be in the 'driver's seat' during the research and therefore able to decide how the research might best serve their aspirations (rather than some preconceived idea that a researcher might have). The researcher's role is to facilitate this process within the bounds of the Appreciative Inquiry method. Whānau will therefore be the key decision-makers with respect to, for example, the Appreciative Inquiry topic(s), the interview questions, the analysis of interview themes, and the Dreaming.

Many of the values espoused in the 'community-up' approach to defining research conduct (Table 2) are inherent in the Appreciative Inquiry approach. And the 'missing' cultural elements can be readily wrapped round Appreciative Inquiry so that engagements with whānau are conducted appropriately and safely.

Cooperider et al. (2008) include holistic notions within their Appreciative Inquiry questions to nurture positive family dynamics. Their chapter on 'nurturing children', for example, includes sections on healthy habits (e.g., eating, exercising) and nurturing spirituality. This signals that Appreciative Inquiry may be open to the exploration of Māori holistic models of health and wellness.

Implementation of Appreciative Inquiry with whānau
As described above, it is proposed that the use of the method with whānau begin (following appropriate cultural processes of engagement) with an overview of Appreciative Inquiry and mini-interviews between whānau members (possibly after the interview process has been modelled by the facilitator) (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). In the mini-interviews whānau members will ask each other four core questions (Table 3). This should take 30–45 minutes.

For the identification of themes from the mini-interviews the whānau will come back together and, on a round-robin basis, members will share highlights from their interviews. The whānau will then work together with the facilitator to identify the 'root causes' of the good times that members have shared. A topic to take forward to the next stage is then selected, through group discussion, from this list of root causes. Whānau will be encouraged to "select a single

topic name that best carries the spirit, essence, and intent of the original interviews and stories" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 144)

Table 2. 'Community-up' approach to defining research conduct

Cultural Values (L. T. Smith, 1999)	Researcher Guidelines (Cram, 2001)
Aroha ki te tangata	A respect for people – allow people to define their own space and meet on their own terms
He kanohi kitea	It is important to meet people face to face, and to also be a face that is known to and seen within a community
Titiro, whakarongo...kōrero	Looking and listening (and then maybe speaking) – develop understanding in order to find a place from which to speak
Manaaki ki te tangata	Sharing, hosting, being generous
Kia tupato	Be cautious – be politically astute, culturally safe, and reflective about insider/outsider status
Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata	Do not trample on the 'mana' or dignity of a person
Kia mahaki	Be humble – do not flaunt your knowledge; find ways of sharing it

Adapted from L. T. Smith (2006, p. 12, Diagram 1)

Table 3. Mini-interview 'core' questions for whānau members

• When you think about spending time with your whānau, what are some of the good times or experiences you've had together?
• Now choose one of those times and tell me about it in more detail. What were you doing? How did it happen that your whānau enjoyed that time together? How did this impact on your whānau relationships?
• What do you value most about spending quality time with your whānau? • How does this time contribute to your development as a *parent, husband/wife/partner, child, brother/sister?* • How does this time contribute to the other people in your whānau, and to the whānau as a whole?
• What are the core things that make you a whānau, when you're at your best?
• Imagine it's a year from today and you're thinking about the good times your whānau has shared together. • What new and different things has your whānau done to create special whānau times together?

Adapted from Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003, p.140, Figure 3) and Cooperrider et al. (2008, pp.58–59)

The Discovery phase involves another round of interviewing focused on the selected topic. Whānau will be encouraged to develop a lead-in (to introduce the topic) and 2–4 interview sub-questions related to the past, present, and future. This is similar to the structure in Table 3. Once an interview schedule is developed, whānau will again interview one another. Whānau might also choose to widen the whānau 'circle' in this phase and interview whānau members not present. Michael's (2005) use of a mini-Discovery phase in her research interviews with African NGOs suggests that a similar process could be used with whānau.

That is, the development of a mini-interview schedule to guide interviews with whānau about a topic that could be of their choosing.

The Dream phase can begin with the imaginative, future-oriented questions asked in the Discovery phase. Whānau responses to this question are considered during a 'dream dialogue', or open-ended discussion, where they will share what they have learned from the interview responses and the future stories that were told. After this whānau will be asked to focus on clarifying their whānau dream for their future. The facilitator's role in this is to ask questions such as, "What have you heard? What does it look like? How will you know when you're there?" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 189).

The *Design* phase "addresses the question – what kind of actions and relationships will best support your dreams and wishes?" (Stavros & Torres, 2005, p. 125). Whānau will be encouraged to develop a design statement that incorporates whānau strengths and dreams. This will be a single sentence, if possible, written in the present tense. Whānau will then be asked to consider how they will reach this dream: "What will they do? Who will support them? Who do they want to be around? Who do they want to learn from?" (adapted from Stavros & Torres, 2005, p. 127). After making an action plan in response to these questions, whānau will be asked to reflect on the experience of developing a design statement (e.g., thoughts and feelings, relationships, process).

In the Destiny/Delivery phase whānau will be encouraged to apply Appreciative Inquiry to their everyday lives: to generate ideas for action, to organise for action, and to communicate about and celebrate accomplishments (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). In the words of Bushe and Kassam (2005, p. 168), whānau will "…create plans and processes that encourage and nurture improvised action" by whānau members. At the same time, however, this process will be open to Bushe and Kassam's suggestion that this forth D be dropped in order to facilitate sustainable change.

Whānau engagement with Appreciative Inquiry might be through the first one or two stages of the cycle, or they may have the time and motivation to engage with the whole of the cycle. Books on Appreciative Inquiry stress that this process is not necessarily linear or proscriptive so it may be important for whānau to find their own way through the parts of the cycle in their own time, at their own pace.

Pre-testing with whānau

The Appreciative Inquiry method was tested with a group of ten people from a small rural community, a group of smaller whānau groups. After a welcome and introductions the group was invited to participate in the pre-testing of the method.

The group was asked to talk in pairs and ask each other the mini-interview questions in Table 3 above. The group then spent 25–30 minutes telling each other the story of when their whānau had had a good time together and discussing the themes emerging from this time about whānau interactions, and what they valued most about these whānau interactions.

The group then came back together to share their stories and to discuss the themes emerging. The following observations were made:

- The group enjoyed sharing stories with one another although some group members were hesitant or shy about re-telling their partner's story in front of the larger group. When this happened their partner took a lead and told their story. The people in the group were well-known to one-another and it seemed that this shyness was anticipated and thus easily accommodated.

- The stories of whānau having good times were tempered by the acknowledgement that things could easily stop being 'good' if one or more whānau members had a dispute and

disrupted the occasion, and often these disruptions were caused when people had been consuming alcohol.

- A further discussion of the issue of alcohol revealed that approaching whānau just to discuss 'alcohol' may have evoked the same disclosures but, unlike AI, a narrow focus would likely have closed down the opportunity to talk about the good times that whānau had when they got together.

When the group was asked if this method was useful for talking with people about whānau they gave the following feedback:

- What the participants were willing to share with a 'researcher' would depend on who that person was; particularly how they were linked in and related to the participants. Thus whanaungatanga (making genealogical links) was an important part of an informed consent process for these people.

- Participants said that they would not use the language that the researcher had used with them. When asked to be more specific they responded that they would ask whānau questions like: What've you been up to? How's the whānau? Any gossip?

Feedback from the pre-test was encouraging about the potential of Appreciative Inquiry as a whānau research method. The language used might need to be adapted and consideration given to who conducts the initial stages of the research. These, and other changes, are all possible as Appreciative Inquiry allows for the adaptation of questions and language so that they suit the whānau involved. At the heart of Appreciative Inquiry is the sharing of affirming stories about whānau and this may be key to engaging whānau in this method.

Policy writing

One of the potential impacts of Appreciative Inquiry on policy writing is the same shift out of 'problem solving' to Appreciative Inquiry that it is hoped the method will bring to whānau. This may set the context for policy that facilitates whānau aspirations rather than focuses on whānau 'problems' in a deficit fashion. Appreciative Inquiry will also draw out potentially useful information about where whānau strengths are, what their dreams are, and (perhaps most importantly) what supports they would like to help them achieve their dreams. The main purpose of Appreciative Inquiry, which sets it apart from just the collection of stories, is the transformational component. Following Bushe and Kassam (2005), if Appreciative Inquiry works in this way for whānau, then policy writers might expect to benefit through the development of new knowledge about whānau and generative metaphors that might help 'un-stick' difficult policy areas.

Summary and discussion

The present paper set out to explore the potential of Appreciative Inquiry as a method for researching with whānau. As a tool for organisational change Appreciative Inquiry focuses on organisational strengths, with practitioners working collaboratively with organisations to explore the present and desired future and to plan for change. Appreciative Inquiry is also used to strengthen relationships, including family relationships. Practitioners work collaboratively with participants and positive stories are used as a platform for transformational change.

A Kaupapa Māori analysis of Appreciative Inquiry highlighted the method's compatibility with Kaupapa Māori and its potential as a method for researching with whānau. The collaborative and improvisational nature of Appreciative Inquiry will allow whānau to be in the 'driver's seat' during research, with affirming questioning reinforcing whānau strengths and potential. The focus on positive past experiences of whānau will also set the scene for an

insightful examination of where whānau aspire to be, with the topics of research leading them in that direction as they take control of their future. The pre-testing demonstrated that this focus on the positive does not prevent or discourage people from exploring the more problematic issues in their lives and in their community. It is therefore likely that the affirmative platform of Appreciative Inquiry, which takes the focus off individuals as the problem, will facilitate a more complex understanding of wellness in which whānau acknowledge and analyse the interplay of positive and negative influences.

Appreciative Inquiry also holds the promise of building the research capacity of whānau members by, for example, engaging them in the construction of interview schedules in the Discovery stage, getting them to conduct the interviews, and then involving them in the collaborative analysis of interview findings. The pre-testing conducted did not go this far with participants, although the people involved in the pre-testing were able to come up with questions that they could go on to ask whānau. Future research therefore needs to explore if and how whānau engage in a 3- or 4-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry, including the themes they decide to explore, the tools and skills they develop to do undertake this exploration, and the adaptations they make to Appreciative Inquiry in order to make it their own. Following on from these queries about the implementation of Appreciative Inquiry within research for whānau, the true test of whether the method works for whānau will be whether (or not) it is a catalyst for whānau transformation.

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