

# Philosophy of Learning & Leading

Jeff Fifeild

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## Wonder, Wondrous, Wondering ...

I find *wonder* in the purposeful play and power of well executed performance. These are moments representing true flow experiences where personally meaningful connected learning is demonstrated, enjoyed and shared.

*Wondrous* is the holistic passionate engagement in one's own learning through inquiry, reflection, and discovery. Heightened is the sense of appreciation and accomplishment that comes from seeking, embracing, and overcoming challenge. Learning is the spark of transformation.

I am continuously *wondering* what empowerment schools, organizations, and communities are in need of in order to create new possibilities and to perform – preferably together, to address new realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An intentional value-laden orientation may offer a continuous path intertwining learning as the making of meaning and transformational leadership for personal and collective synergistic growth.

## Social Construction and Learning

In my own venture I have arrived at the station to declare that I am a social constructionist with the basic premise being that together *we construct the world*. This links excellence in learning with excellence in relationships—between and among the students, teachers and staff, classrooms, and the world outside or all the members of an organization/community. A new world of possibility is made available with collaborative meaning-making in opening the door to creative and congruent learning practices that may include:

- (a) Truth and understanding created in community;
- (b) A non-hierarchical authority of knowledge that may grow from contextual learning situations, rather than a top-down model of instruction/direction;
- (c) Disciplines of knowledge may be crossed as learners construct their meaning from investigations and collaborative practices;
- (d) Multiple pedagogies of appreciation and critique may be utilized toward reflexive deliberation to forge a link between disparate groups; and
- (e) Knowledge does not reside only in individual minds, but also in generative relationships.

I believe that social construction may be used as an umbrella to engage the whole organization in bringing the various stakeholders together to join the making of reality, explore limits and create new visions together.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and its related practices are tools that I believe to be extremely valuable and which I use in carrying out social construction work with learning communities. AI is a constructive, generative, and capacity building mode of action-research in which inquiry, learning, and change are seen as a related, integral whole. I find it to be a powerful means to discover the positive core while focusing on what is most valuable, vitalizing and vibrant in generating growth. I believe that a school/organization/community should be a thriving Appreciative Learning Culture as defined by the following competencies:

- Affirmative competence: Draws on human capacity to appreciate positive possibilities by selectively focusing on current and past strengths, successes, and potentials.
- Expansive competence: Conventional practices are challenged to provoke members to experiment, stretch in new directions, and evoke a higher set of ideals to inspire passionate engagement.
- Generative competence: Constructs integrative systems that allow members to see the consequences of their actions, recognize their meaningful contributions, and experience a sense of progress and moving forward.
- Collaborative competence: Create spaces in which stakeholders engage in ongoing dialogue and exchange of perspectives.

I believe that the use of constructionist pedagogies allow for the activation of learning at deeper levels with rich experiences that promote exploration, creativity, and innovation. An appreciative pedagogy has a transformative bias, which is strongly oriented toward the challenging vision of a life worth living and favors dialogic processes where all members of the learning community are constantly engaged in the re-creation of knowledge - that matters.

## Leading - Transformational and Appreciative

Transformational leadership is an integral part of developing learning cultures. It is a growth mindset that need not only be for school leaders but which may be developed by all stakeholders in their self-learning. As such, transformational leadership:

- Is a model of integrity and fairness;
- Sets clear goals based on high expectations;
- Encourages, supports, and recognizes the efforts of all;
- Stirs the active-minded passions of people;
- Gets people to look beyond their self-interests.
- Inspires people to reach for the improbable.

From my own formation and exercised outreach as an educational leader, I strive to live and be an Appreciative Leader. By practicing the five core strategies of Appreciative Leadership I model the cultivation of character, liberation of others' potential, foster collaboration, design innovative structures and facilitate positive change. The core strategies are:

1. Inquiry: Asking positively powerful questions
2. Illumination: Bringing out the best in people
3. Inclusion: Engaging with people to author the future
4. Inspiration: Awakening the creative spirit
5. Integrity: Making choices for the good of the whole

Succinctly, I aim to develop a culture of Appreciative Leadership that focuses people's attention in ways that inspires passion, discover opportunities, and engage strengths. It is leadership as *searching for what works, being bold and taking risks, creating connections and synchronism, and as an emergent, iterative, learning process.*

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century requires ...?

As educators in the 21st century, we are charged with educating students to be successful in a complex, interconnected world. This responsibility requires schools to prepare students for ongoing technological, cultural, economic, informational and demographic changes. Addressing change and envisioning the future is a new constant in education.

As I look toward the future I hold the following tenets close to my chest:

The importance of considering the whole child in that academic achievement is but one element concerned with student learning and that a comprehensive approach is needed to address the myriad of factors that support the development of the whole child as a life-learner. I embrace the concepts of personal learning as s/he dives deeper in their own learning with a passion to carry them forward towards destinations of their choice.

Gardner's *5 Minds for the Future* include cognitive abilities to be sought and cultivated: the Disciplinary, Synthesizing, Creating, Respectful, and Ethical minds.

Senge's *Five Disciplines* as they relate to education:

- Personal Mastery: A set of practices that support children and adults in keeping their dreams whole while cultivating an awareness of current reality around them.
- Mental Models: Becoming more aware of the sources of our thinking;
- Shared Vision: Fostering commitment to a common purpose;
- Team Learning: Transforming our skills of collective thinking;
- Systems Thinking: Developing awareness of complexity, interdependencies, change and leverage.

Learning and leading go together, interwoven and transformational, in personal and professional endeavors. The focus of my work is to meet the amplified challenge of co-orchestrating this with all stakeholders in an educational community – in the spirit of performance and play with a large dose of wonder.