

# International Journal of Christianity & English Language Teaching

A refereed, online journal on Christianity and ELT

---

Volume 7

Article 5

---

8-2020

## Using Appreciative Inquiry for a Positive Approach to English Language Teaching and Teacher Education

Michael Lessard-Clouston  
*Biola University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/ijc-elt>



Part of the [Applied Linguistics Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lessard-Clouston, Michael (2020) "Using Appreciative Inquiry for a Positive Approach to English Language Teaching and Teacher Education," *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching*: Vol. 7, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/ijc-elt/vol7/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons @ Biola. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Biola. For more information, please contact [university.archives@biola.edu](mailto:university.archives@biola.edu).

## Using Appreciative Inquiry for a Positive Approach to English Language Teaching and Teacher Education

Michael Lessard-Clouston  
Biola University  
La Mirada, California, U.S.A

### Abstract

We live during challenging times, in a divisive world. English language students, teachers, and teacher educators long for positive input and useful perspectives. Ephesians 4:29 tells us to use language to build others up. Accordingly, this article aims to help English language students, teachers, and teacher trainers to take a positive approach to their activities. Following an introduction, it first introduces appreciative inquiry (AI), an approach to change that offers positive assumptions and affirmative questions. Second, it describes three case studies that used AI in ESL/EFL teaching and teacher education. Third, it concludes with a discussion of potential AI connections for taking a positive approach to teaching and teacher training, and offers additional resources so readers may locate further ways to implement aspects of AI in their work in English language teaching.

**Key words:** appreciative inquiry, case studies, English language teaching, ESL, EFL, positive questions, teacher education, TESOL

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29, NIV)*

### Introduction

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the coronavirus, we must admit that we live during challenging and unprecedented times of constant change. In the U.S., and throughout the world, we are also facing difficult days addressing police brutality and systemic racism requiring action, change, and reconciliation that necessitate hard work that can only be accomplished by God's grace and in His mercy. As Christian English teachers and teacher trainers, we are often known for what we are *against*, rather than what we are *for*. In Ephesians 4:29 Christians are encouraged to avoid "unwholesome talk" and instead to use our language to bless others, only speaking what builds up other people who listen. This does not mean we cannot correct ourselves or others, but the principle is simply that what we say and what we talk about should ideally benefit others in our classes and work, according to their needs.

English language teachers know the power of positive words and questions for us and our students, yet in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) the focus is often on deficiencies or problems. In English language teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics, Christians need tools for thinking about difficulties in ways that can help us view problematic issues, institutions, and even students or colleagues in a new light. One such tool is an approach to change entitled *appreciative inquiry*, which proponents suggest is particularly valuable in contexts and systems that may be overwhelmed by constant change. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is commonly used to help identify and implement change in organizations, but it has also begun to be implemented in addressing issues in English language teaching and applied linguistics. This article introduces background on AI, highlights three AI case studies related to ELT and English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) teacher education, and suggests some connections for teachers and teacher educators to consider in taking a positive approach to their English language instruction and teacher training.

### **A Primer on Appreciative Inquiry**

To understand appreciative inquiry for potential use of aspects of it in teaching ESL/EFL and/or in teacher education courses, it is important to grasp its eight assumptions, its positive focus and 4-D cycle, and eight principles of AI, all of which are introduced briefly here.

Hammond (2013) outlines *eight assumptions of AI* which undergird its philosophy. First, in every situation, something works. In essence, each group, organization, and society, despite its challenges or dysfunctions, provides something positive, or it likely would not continue to exist. Second, “what we focus on becomes our reality” (p. 14). If we are looking for mistakes or problems in students’ English speaking or writing, then that is what we will see and will become our focus. Yet if we are looking for what is good, or the true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy noted in Philippians 4:8, then that is what we will discern and focus on. Third, reality is created in the moment, yet there are multiple realities. And in any situation, each person is limited in their experience of reality, largely based on their experience. Fourth, “the act of asking questions . . . influences the group in some way” (p. 14). As Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) state, “At the heart of Appreciative Inquiry is the ‘art of the question’ – the ability to craft unconditionally positive questions and to interview . . . people with

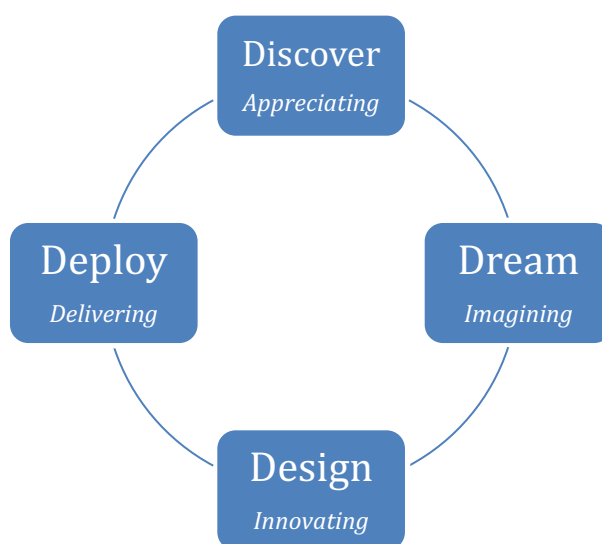
questions of . . . relevance and vitality” (pp. 11-12). Such questions help us think about realities in new and different ways, and teachers know that good questions assist student learning.

Fifth, Hammond (2013) states that “people have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known)” (p. 15). Change may be the only constant, yet if people can take something known and familiar with them as they adjust to new realities, they will do so more easily and with greater confidence. If English language learners (ELLs) can build on knowledge they have, then they will ideally grow in confidence and comfort as they expand their English knowledge and proficiency. Sixth, “if we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past” (Hammond, 2013, p. 15). In English language teaching, teachers often brainstorm to discern what students already know about a topic, and then help them bring useful knowledge (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, content, etc.) to a new topic, structure, and so on. It is wise to build on what is useful from past experience in language learning and teaching, as well as other endeavours. Seventh, “it is important to value differences” (p. 15), which requires that students and teachers alike are aware not only of similarities, but also of differences that can and should be appreciated and recognized. Synonyms are wonderful, for example, yet in English each has its own nuances, and it is beneficial to distinguish them and to know how to use each one in appropriate contexts. Eighth, and finally, “the language we use creates our reality” (Hammond, 2013, p. 15). This final assumption recognizes the power of language to be used positively or negatively, to bless or to curse (Lessard-Clouston, 2017). As Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) declare, “Words matter – they not only make a difference, they literally bring things to life, creating the world as we know it” (p. 53). English language teachers aim to help their students use English to communicate and to create the realities that will make a difference in their contexts.

Building on these assumptions, appreciative inquiry’s emphasis is not on a problem-solving focus, which usually first identifies a felt need or problem, analyzes possible causes for it, considers potential solutions, and then plans some type of action or treatment in order to address the need or problem. In contrast, an *appreciative inquiry* approach usually 1) appreciates and values the best that exists (what already is), 2) envisions what could be (imagining the future), 3) dialogues about what should be (innovating), and 4) creates what will be, destiny (Hammond, 2013, p. 18). This is known as the 4-D cycle, outlined visually in Figure 1.

The 4-D cycle of AI requires a positive focus (not shown in Figure 1., but often placed at the centre of it), and begins with a particular agenda for change or a topic of specific interest.<sup>1</sup> Then from the top down, clockwise, one starts with *discovering* what gives life and appreciating the best of what exists in a situation. Next AI moves on to *dreaming* of what could be or what opportunities exist for the future, also known as imagining, before turning to *designing* what should be, one's ideal, through innovating, followed lastly by *deploying*, sometimes labelled destiny, what one will do, or delivery (see Figure 1). As a cycle, one starts with determining the issue to focus on, and then will move through the 4-D discovering, dreaming, designing, and deploying phases, before adjusting and perhaps revisiting the topic or agenda for change and then going through the 4-D cycle once more at a later time. The cycle ends with participants deploying the strategies that they have determined to work best in action.

Figure 1. *The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle*  
(adapted from Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 6)



Imagine, for example, that your strategic focus is on improving assessment in a course. In the *discovery* phase you would consider all the positive aspects of assessment for you and your students, identifying common factors (e.g., providing feedback on what students do well, tips for where they can improve, etc.). In the *dream* phase you would invest time thinking about and imagining creative ways to improve your assessment, perhaps asking questions about the people

---

<sup>1</sup> As a result, some AI authors, such as Hammond (2013), refer to a fifth “D” for *defining* the topic or the agenda for change, and therefore call it a “5-D cycle” (p. 26).

involved, how to use your resources, including technology and classroom space, and how you will use your new assessment. You would ideally create a vision for an assessment that you would want for your course and that students could enjoy. With that vision, next in the *design* phase you would consider what the new assessment should involve and how specifically to go about it, creating a model, identifying specific questions and tasks and how to evaluate them, and getting input of other instructors or former students, and perhaps piloting the new trial assessment. Finally, in the *deploy* phase you will deliver the assessment by using it with students, and gauge its effectiveness. If it works as you hoped, you would work to sustain its use, or if tweaks are needed you might revisit your original focus and go through the 4-D cycle again. Yet using the assumptions noted earlier throughout this cycle enables you to start with a positive focus, what works, asking questions that help improve upon things while noting important differences for your new assessment, and finally using the tools and language that create the reality you desire in your new assessment, whether it be computer-based or an app, etc.

Finally, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) also discuss *eight principles of AI*, five of which I believe are especially important for issues in English language teaching and TESOL teacher education. First is the *constructionist* principle, that “Reality . . . is socially created through language and conversations” (p. 52). As “words create worlds” (p. 52), teachers and teacher educators can dialogue so that “broad social agreement [is] created among people through communication” (p. 53). Second is the *simultaneity* principle, as “The moment we ask a question, we begin to create a change” when we elicit affirmative possibilities to work with (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 52). Third is the *poetic* principle: “What we choose to study makes a difference. It describes – even creates – the world as we know it” (p. 52). This principle lends itself well to academic contexts, for the focus is on study and learning, and when we do so with others we open ourselves up to opportunities for productive collaboration. Fourth is the *anticipatory* principle: “The more positive and hopeful the images of the future are, the more positive the present-day action will be,” which argues that “human systems move in the direction of the images of the future” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 52). Fifth, and finally here, is the *positive* principle, that “momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core,” noting that momentum for positive change requires “large amounts of positive affect and social bonding” (p. 52). As Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) declare, “Positive questions bring out the best in people, inspire positive action, and create possibilities

for positive futures” (p. 64).<sup>2</sup> Several ESL/EFL and TESOL case studies illustrate this important point about affirmative questions.

### **Case Studies: Using AI in ESL/EFL Teaching and ESL Teacher Education**

Three published articles provide case studies which offer glimpses into appreciative inquiry in ESL, EFL, and ESL teacher education. They are each briefly summarized here.

#### ***Bentkowski and Yamaga (2006): Workplace and ESL Classroom Environments***

The authors of this article quote a Massachusetts school superintendent who realized that “focusing on what was not working” and using a problem-solving focus in education can often have “a negative effect on school climate and student achievement” (p. 41). Drawing upon Cooperrider and Srivastva’s (1987) influential chapter, Bentkowski and Yamaga (2006) observed that AI “marks a shift in organizational thinking by focusing on the positives and aims to enhance successes” (p. 41). Their article then reports on two exploratory studies in Honolulu, Hawai’i. First, in a workplace environment, Bentkowski carried out “participant observatory action research” at a Payless Shoesource store in Waikiki among five workers – a manager, three supervisors, and one new employee (p. 42). At least twice for each of two weeks, he asked participants to answer five open-ended AI questions, reproduced in Figure 2. below, and described the results. In short, based on answers to an AI survey at work, “participants had a positive disposition toward AI” (p. 43), and he concluded that these employees’ “motivation and performance” may “have had some kind of meaningful correlation to the sales increase” during the two weeks of the study (Bentkowski & Yamaga, 2006, p. 44).

Before turning to their second exploratory study, consider the questions in Figure 2. and how they might serve as models for other affirmative, open-ended questions that ESL/EFL teachers or TESOL teacher educators might use with students, as possible discussion questions or even potential writing prompts. How might we pose positive questions that “bring out the best

---

<sup>2</sup> The additional three principles are: 6) the *wholeness* principle, bringing all stakeholders together, 7) the *enactment* principle, to create the change one wants to see, and 8) the *free-choice* principle, that stakeholders have the “freedom to choose how and what they contribute” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 52). Murphey, Onoda, and Kobayashi (2014) chose to focus on the five principles I have outlined for their study, and I have also emphasized the first five principles in some more depth because I believe they are most relevant to the present discussion.

Figure 2. *Five Open-ended Appreciative Inquiry Questions*  
(Source: Bentkowski & Yamaga, 2006, Appendix B, p. 48.)

1. What good experiences or interactions have you had at work today?
2. What has helped you improve your interactions with customers, team members or supervisor?
3. How have you maintained your wonderful, positive attitude at work today?
4. What are two goals that you feel good about accomplishing today?
5. What positive things have happened to you recently outside of work?

in people, inspire positive action, and create possibilities for positive futures” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 64) in our classrooms and courses?

Second, at an English language school Yamaga completed “a cross-sectional survey of one ESL class” involving “13 intermediate-level students” from Japan (7), Korea (3), Taiwan (2), and Thailand (1) (Bentkowski & Yamaga, 2006, p. 44). Questionnaires with three AI or problem-focused questions plus two self-report proficiency questions, reproduced in Figure 3. below, were randomly distributed to participants.

Figure 3. *Language Learning Questionnaires #1 and #2*  
(Adapted from Bentkowski & Yamaga, 2006, Appendices C & D, pp. 49-50.)

<u>LLQ #1 (AI)</u>	<u>LLQ #2 (Problem-focused)</u>
1. What are some good experiences you had while speaking English?	1. Have you had any bad experiences while speaking in English?
2. What has helped you improve your English the most?	2. What are some difficult things about learning English?
3. What classroom exercises have helped you improve your English?	3. What classroom exercises have been the most difficult?
4. Do you think you are a good English speaker? Why/Why not?	4. Do you think you are a good English speaker? Why/Why not?
5. Please give yourself an English speaking score: (poor speaker 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 good speaker)	5. Please give yourself an English speaking score: (poor speaker 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 good speaker)

Bentkowski and Yamaga (2006) noted that “students who were asked the Appreciative Inquiry questions rated their English-speaking ability 25% higher than the students who took the problem-focused questionnaire” (p. 45). Based on this survey, the authors concluded that “students’ positive attitudes toward their ESL studies can be nurtured and encouraged to grow”

(p. 45). In their discussion, Bentkowski and Yamaga (2006) observed that “Appreciative Inquiry put students in the mode of learning positively and brings excitement and anticipation into lessons” (p. 45).

While an exploratory study with just 13 participants is not conclusive, as Bentkowski and Yamaga (2006) concede, it might nonetheless help other teachers and teacher trainers consider how we approach issues with students in our teaching. Are our questions in class or online for discussions, writing prompts, and so on, more reflective of what is positive, present, and possible (as in LLQ #1, to the left in Figure 3. above) or of what is difficult and negative (as in LLQ #2, on the right in Figure 3.)? The distinction between questions one to three in the Figure 3. is clear, with the appreciative inquiry questions emphasizing the positive, while the problem-focused questions highlight the negative. Bentkowski and Yamaga (2006) reported that in the discover and dream phases from AI, students remembering the AI questions “were able to remember and celebrate some good experiences which hopefully may motivate them to help other students because of their own growing confidence” (p. 45). Drawing on this experience with an ESL class, Bentkowski and Yamaga (2006) suggested that “using Appreciative Inquiry inside the classroom helps students to refocus on their positive language successes and helps teachers build up their students according to their students’ needs” (p. 45).

### ***Murphey, Onoda, and Kobayashi (2014): Using AI Questions with EFL Students***

At a university in Tokyo, Japan, Murphey, Onoda, and Kobayashi (2014) offered three “qualitative studies of how asking our students and colleagues positive questions might effect [sic] them and provoke learning” (p. 101). First, in university EFL classes, teachers used “Have you realized yet what a wonderful person you are?” as a speed dictation and then asked pairs to discuss this question and report back on their interaction to the class, followed by asking others the question outside of class and then reporting back on their findings in the next class (p. 102). Contrary to her expectations, Onoda reported that in one class of 16 students, seven answered “yes” to the question and nine students replied “no,” giving various personal reasons for their responses (p. 103). Murphey reported on several examples of students’ write-ups in their action logs, where they described asking the question to others outside of class. Most people replied, “no.” In essence, the authors found that “a simple question with brief answers spurred deeper

inquiry and understanding and most probably spread more positivity” in students’ networks (pp. 104-105). They also detected “the opening up of expansive learning” in their classes (p. 105).

Second, over several years “a group of teacher-researchers in the Tokyo area” asked students at the beginning of the spring semester to describe ideal classmates that they “could learn English well with,” and what they would “do to help each other learn better and more enjoyably” (p. 105). Responses “included showing care and respect toward other classmates, sharing common goals to improve English, being patient and accepting of” others’ abilities and mistakes, and working together to finish homework (p. 105). Kobayashi asked his class of 20 first-year Japanese undergraduate EFL students to “*describe a group of classmates that you could learn English well with. What would you all do to help each other learn better and more enjoyably?*” (p. 106, original emphasis). Students’ responses were typed up and given to them to read. After small group discussion of an ideal classmate, students wrote short essays on their learning from this experience. Students “all acknowledged the importance of working together,” and “two thirds emphasized their desire to work with classmates who are either more proficient or equally proficient in English” (p. 107). Murphey, Onoda, and Kobayashi (2014) believe that such “reciprocal idealizing potentiates positive adaptations by shifting questions about others to questions about [students] themselves” (p. 108). In short, the authors suggest that AI questions help “students change themselves in order to change their world” (p. 108).

Third, at the beginning of the academic year, 196 full-time faculty at a university in Japan were emailed a question similar to the one in the first inquiry: “*How might other co-workers help you to have a great day and a meaningful life? What would you see them do or say?*” (p. 108, original emphasis). While only a dozen (5 Japanese, 7 foreign) faculty responded, “they gave interesting comments and displayed desires to form better communities recognizing that friendly and helpful co-workers” help make their lives better (p. 109). One respondent, for example, wrote, “*Sharing ideas, articles, links with each other is nice and makes you feel an accepted part of a community*” (p. 109, original emphasis). Murphey, Onoda, and Kobayashi (2014) suggested from these responses that we need to discover ways faculty perceive what is working well. They concluded by indicating that their AI learning is not yet complete, but that these three brief studies reflect collaboration and expansive learning started through AI (p. 110).

### ***He (2013): Using AI in TESOL Teacher Education***

In a graduate ESL teacher education course at a university in the U.S., He (2013) applied the 4-D cycle of appreciative inquiry to complete a study on 21 participants' development of cultural competence while they prepared to work teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. In the course, the *Discover* phase included assignments and reflections on the student teachers' cultures, through an autobiography and class discussions, and their students' cultures, through readings and class discussions. The *Dream* phase required completing a cultural patterns questionnaire, readings, discussions, and reflections, while the *Design* one examined issues and strategies in and for cross-cultural communication (both verbal and non-verbal). The *Deliver* (or deploy) stage involved conducting visits and interviews, plus a description-interpretation-evaluation analysis and reflection (p. 59). Pre- and post-quantitative data were collected using a Cultural Competence Scale measure, while qualitative data were collected using the teacher candidates' reports, reflections, and weekly blog entries (p. 60). All but four participants' scores indicated an increase on the Cultural Competence Scale (p. 62), and qualitative reflections addressed prior learning experiences (*Discover*), their visions for ESL teaching (*Dream*), reflections on communication with ESL students and their parents (*Design*), and recommendations for other ESL teachers (*Deliver*) (pp. 63-66). He (2013) observed, "After completing the project, all teacher candidates recognized their learning and growth over the course of the semester and some were 'surprised at how much more comfortable I have become in cross-cultural communication in such a short amount of time' (LA, blog entry)" (p. 62).

He's (2013) discussion includes examples from specific participants of how the 4-D cycle contributed to the TESOL teacher candidates' growth and learning. She concluded that the study's findings "demonstrate teachers' enhanced cultural competencies" and "illustrate their development as teachers" (p. 55). In terms of AI, He (2013) stated: "Instead of focusing on the problems and challenges teachers face when working with ELLs, the AI model allowed teacher candidates to uncover the strengths and assets ELLs and their families bring, and envision how ELLs and their families could be more engaged in the teaching and learning process" (p. 67). In her conclusion, He (2013) described "AI as a reflective process that guides teacher candidates' self-questioning and interactions with ELLs and parents" (p. 68).

The first two articles summarized here reflect the use of AI principles and positive questions in ESL and EFL teaching contexts, while the third one describes using the AI 4-D

cycle in an ESL teacher education course. All three articles outlined in this section offer examples of how ESL/EFL teachers and a TESOL educator used aspects of AI to help their students and classes to think positively about their English language learning and teaching. Each of these publications, and the various case studies they describe, indicates that it is possible for ESL/EFL teachers and TESOL educators to shift from the dominant problem-solving stance in education to an appreciative inquiry one that focuses on the positives, helping both learners and teachers largely through affirmative questions and other AI assumptions and principles discussed earlier in this article.

### **Additional Sources on AI in ELT**

Some additional noteworthy AI sources provide further perspectives on ESL/EFL learning and teaching and TESOL teacher education. Korczynski (2012) offers a theoretical perspective on performance in second language acquisition by connecting “theories and practices of language acquisition with social constructionism,” using an emphasis on social interaction (p. 55). Also, Jones (2013) “outlines an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) project taught in English for students studying economics and business administration at a private university in western Japan” (p. 89). Jones (2013) succinctly outlines the 4-D cycle in his content-based EFL classes (pp. 90-91), and includes an Appendix of the affirmative interview questions he used (p. 93). Finally, Sedhai (2012) provides a short book on using AI in ELT in Nepal.

Although beyond the scope of the present article, three short reports reflect additional ways that AI has been used to impact ESL/EFL teachers and programs. Hoekje and Lahai (2015) report on how they used AI to carry out organizational change and staff development in an intensive English program (IEP) in Pennsylvania. Similarly, Paredes and Smart-Smith (2016) discuss how they used AI to help reimagine the program evaluation of their IEP in Virginia. Lastly, Ward (2015) used AI to better understand why ESL teachers in New Zealand teach.

### **Potential AI Connections for ESL/EFL Teachers and Teacher Educators**

Appreciative Inquiry has been used successfully in education, including Christian education (e.g., English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003), to change students and teachers’ focus of attention from negative problems to positive successes. For higher education, Cockell and McArthur-Blair’s (2012) book is a valuable resource, and in particular I recommend chapter 11

on teaching and learning. It discusses AI as a teaching and learning framework, with insights on good teaching and examples related to using AI to help students discover their inner strengths (p. 197), learn to believe in themselves (p. 203), and for teachers to create an appreciative classroom climate (p. 207). Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2012) end that chapter with brief reflections on appreciative feedback and strengths-based teaching and learning.

As He (2013) and Jones (2013) did with their students and courses, ESL/EFL teachers and TESOL teacher educators can create semester AI projects, by introducing AI to their students/classes, identifying a target issue (affirmative topic choice), and adapting or developing a protocol to focus on it for each phase of the 4-D cycle central to appreciative inquiry. Results can be shared at each step of the process, and/or in capstone presentations on students' projects. Central to such work are relevant, affirmative questions that focus attention on positives and successes, and as a result help students and teachers benefit from collaboration.

Drawing upon aspects of AI, teachers and teacher educators can use affirmative questions to encourage positive student and teacher attitudes towards learning, to help increase ESL/EFL students' motivation, and to create a more inviting classroom atmosphere (Blok, 2015). In short, both useful affirmative questions and the 4-D cycle can help focus students and teachers on what they are doing right, and what is working well, as the case studies introduced earlier reveal. Imagine the positive impact if more ESL/EFL teachers and TESOL teacher educators considered focusing on affirmative language and language learning and teaching successes in our work!

## **Conclusion**

This article has introduced aspects of appreciative inquiry and summarized ways that they have been implemented in ESL, EFL, and TESOL teacher education courses in Japan and the United States with positive results. It also pointed readers to sources discussed here for further information on AI, and to additional publications that address other contexts in Japan, Nepal, New Zealand, and the United States. Further resources online for exploring AI more generally are listed in the Appendix. In these challenging days, ESL/EFL and TESOL students and teachers long for positive input and ways to experience success in their learning and teaching. AI offers a positive approach using affirmative questions for challenges we face to help build up our students according to their needs, so that our teaching and their learning benefit them. "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." (Proverbs 16:24, NIV)

## Acknowledgements

An early version of this essay was presented at the CELT 2018 conference in Chicago, Illinois. I am grateful for the discussions there with participants, as well as for reviewers' feedback, which have improved this updated article version.

## References

- Bentkowski, E., & Yamaga, M. (2006). Exploring appreciative inquiry. *TESOL Working Paper Series* [Hawai'i Pacific University], 4(2), 41–50.
- Blok, S. (2015, September). Discover, dream, and design: Creating a positive learning environment. *TESOL Connections*.  
<http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolc/print/2015-09-01/2.html>
- Cockell, J., & McArthur-Blair, J. (2012). *Appreciative inquiry in higher education: A transformative force*. Jossey-Bass.
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Srivastva, S. (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In W. Pasmore & R. Woodman (Eds.), *Research in organizational change and development Volume 1* (pp. 129–169). JAI Press.
- English, L. M., Fenwick, T. J., & Parsons, J. (2003). An appreciative inquiry into the spiritual values of Christian higher education. *Christian Higher Education*, 2(1), 71–90.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1536375039015645>
- Hammond, S. A. (2013). *The thin book of appreciative inquiry* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thin Book Publishing.
- He, Y. (2013). Developing teachers' cultural competence: Application of appreciative inquiry in ESL teacher education. *Teacher Development*, 17(1), 55–71.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2012.753944>
- Hoekje, B., & Lahai, M. (2015, November). Appreciative inquiry: Organizational change and staff development through strengths-based inquiry. *PAIS Newsletter* [TESOL Program Administration Interest Section].  
<http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolpais/print/2015-11-10/2.html>
- Jones, B. A. (2013). Appreciative inquiry for language teachers and learners. *Teachers Helping Teachers Journal*, 1(1), 89–93.
- Korczynski, A.-M. (2012). The importance of performance in learning a second language. *AI Practitioner*, 14(3), 55–59.
- Lessard-Clouston, M. (2017). Biblical themes for Christians in language teaching. In C. L. Pierson & W. Bankston (Eds.), *Thinking theologically about language teaching: Christian perspectives on an educational calling* (pp. 7–28). Langham Global Library.
- Murphey, T., Onoda, S., & Kobayashi, M. (2014). A multidisciplinary view of appreciative inquiry through action research: Crossing borders. *Studies in Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 25, 93–115.
- Paredes, E., & Smart-Smith, P. (2016, November). Reimagining program evaluation through appreciative inquiry: Moving beyond the negative. *PAIS Newsletter* [TESOL Program Administration Interest Section].  
<http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolpais/print/2016-10-26/2.html>
- Sedhai, K. R. (2012). *Appreciative inquiry in teaching: A strength-based approach: Appreciative pedagogy*. Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Ward, A. F. (2015). An understanding of why ESL teachers teach. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *JALT2014 conference proceedings* (pp. 119–125). Japan Association for Language Teaching.

Whitney, D., & Trosten-Bloom, A. (2010). *The power of appreciative inquiry: A practical guide to positive change* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Berrett-Koehler.

Michael Lessard-Clouston ([michael.lessard-clouston@biola.edu](mailto:michael.lessard-clouston@biola.edu)) is a Professor in the Department of Intercultural Studies & TESOL at Biola University, where he teaches in the M.A. TESOL. His interests include culture and vocabulary studies. He is also the author of *Second Language Acquisition Applied to English Language Teaching* (TESOL Press, 2018).



## Appendix

### Further Resources for Exploring Appreciative Inquiry

A Short Guide to the Appreciative Inquiry Model and Process

<https://cvdl.ben.edu/blog/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/>

AI Commons <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/>

*AI Practitioner* - the International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry <https://aipractitioner.com/>

*Appreciative Inquiry: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Make Change Happen* (by Roger Rowett, Public Service Management Wales)

<http://www.assetbasedconsulting.co.uk/uploads/publications/PSMW%20Sowing%20Seeds%20AI.pdf>

Fowler Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit AI Resources

<https://weatherhead.case.edu/centers/fowler/business/appreciative-inquiry>

Positivity Strategist Appreciative Inquiry Resources

<https://positivitystrategist.com/appreciative-inquiry-resources/>

How to Teach Appreciative Inquiry to Your Students

<https://www.schoolrubric.com/how-to-teach-appreciative-inquiry-to-your-students/>

The Center for Appreciative Inquiry <https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/>

Watch “A 4 Minute Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry” online at

<https://www.thinbook.com/appreciative-inquiry>

What is Appreciative Inquiry? <https://www.davidcooperrider.com/ai-process/>