Part 2.1 Practice in Universities

“Dialogue is really aimed at going into the whole thought process and changing the way the thought process occurs collectively.” David Bohm.

These articles were written by consultants and practitioners working with universities and schools. Each article focuses on a story of application and high level of AI practice. First read the descriptions of Faculty Development and Leadership in three different universities in the United States. LaSalle University, West Chester University and Rider University have distinct and yet similar stories of how Appreciative Inquiry is used in academic settings.

AI and Faculty Development: Discovering Facilitation and Dialogue Tools and Techniques for Effective Adult Learning

Steven N. Pyser and Joseph Y. Ugras
steve@thedialogue.net and ugras@lasalle.edu

Meeting the educational needs of adult learners calls for applied creativity, learning strategies and delivery of course materials needed by them to succeed in a rapidly changing world. “Facilitation and Dialogue Tools and Techniques for Effective Adult Learning” was a strength-based workshop for supporting professors and optimizing learning environments. It brought out the best in people and encouraged breakthrough educational strategies for classroom facilitation through co-construction of a positive future for action by faculty and staff at LaSalle University’s College of Professional and Continuing Studies.

We are living in times of great change in American higher education, with shrinking student applicant pools and the impact of global economies on employment. Colleges and universities scan the horizon and marketplace for new sources of enrollment and revenue. They recognize the limited “shelf life” of knowledge and the “reality check” voiced by W. Edwards Deming’s statement, “Learning is not compulsory... neither is survival.”

Lifelong learning is an approach to education that encourages an attitude of openness to acquiring knowledge and new ideas and skills. Lifelong education is defined by Burns (2002) as “… all educational or training processes undertaken by adults, whether general or vocational, whether located in the workplace, in an educational institution, by distance education or in a community setting, and whether formal or informal. This term also implies
that education is not completed at any stage of the life span and can be part or full time in presentation. Lifelong education is education for life.”

In the United States of America it is not surprising there are growing cohorts of newly enrolled nontraditional learners. “Nontraditional student characteristics include the following: being 24 years old or older, delaying postsecondary enrollment by more than a year after high school, enrolling less than full time, being independent, working full time, being currently or previously married, being a single parent, having dependents or not having a regular high school diploma.” (Bradburn, 2003) More recent research by Gershuny & Rainey (2006) reveals older students are estimated to be over forty percent of all college undergraduate students.

This influx of nontraditional students has led to programs focusing on adult learners. German poet, dramatist, novelist and scientist Johann Wolfgang Goethe wrote “(t)reat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them become what they are capable of becoming.” In that spirit, forward thinking institutions of higher education are modifying their institutional missions and thinking entrepreneurially by creating programs that recruit students from outside their traditional student base. As the late Professor Donald Schön artfully stated, “We must … become adept at learning. We must become able not only to transform our institutions, in response to changing situations and requirements; we must invent and develop institutions which are ‘learning systems’, that is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation.” (Smith, 2001/2005).

Nontraditional students arrive in class with a different frame of reference than their younger counterparts. They know what they know, and want and need more from their educational experiences. They are eager to apply and share their lifelong experiences, want their learning to be relevant, and to apply what they learn to work the following day. In exchange for their enrollment and focused pursuit of knowledge these students seek to broaden their occupational horizons, get job security with higher pay and recognition.

LaSalle University’s College of Professional Studies used Appreciative Inquiry’s (AI) collaborative strength based approach to change to engage the “whole system” through a workshop designed and delivered by coauthor Steven N. Pyser. The Facilitation and Dialogue Tools and Techniques for Effective Adult Learning workshop co-constructed a positive future by bringing out the best in people leading to breakthrough educational strategies. (Pyser, 2006, October).

About LaSalle University’s College of Professional Studies
LaSalle University, founded in 1863, is an educational community in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania shaped by traditional Catholic and Lasallian values: a deep respect for each individual, a belief that intellectual and spiritual development goes hand in hand, a passion for creative teaching and learning and a conviction that education should be useful - for personal growth, professional advancement and service to others. (LaSalle University, 2006a) The College of Professional and Continuing Studies, created in 2005, shows La Salle’s further dedication to programs offering educational excellence for adults and tailored to meet their scheduling needs. (LaSalle University, 2006b) These programs include Accelerated Degree Completion Programs in Business; Organizational Dynamics and Liberal Studies; Master of
Business Administration in Basel, Switzerland; Master of Arts in Professional Communication in Prague, Czech Republic and Athens, Greece; and several Certificate Programs.

Objectives and Context of the AI Initiative and Workshop
The College of Professional and Continuing Studies was started in 2005 for adult learners 25 years or older looking to earn their first college degree. Joseph Y. Ugras, in his first year as dean, outlined his vision for the growth and success of College, including a series of Faculty Development Workshops in collaboration with LaSalle’s Teaching and Learning Center to support professors and optimize the teaching environment. He invited Steven N. Pyser to deliver the inaugural session. The workshop was conceived as an opportunity to strengthen professorial skills and facilitation abilities. The following objectives were selected to empower faculty to deliver quality adult learning:

1. Explore foundational principles of Effective Facilitation Practices (EFP’s) for adult learners to better facilitate learning.
2. Identify the Positive Core: Assets, Values, Strengths, Practices, Skills, People, Environments of LaSalle University’s College of Professional and Continuing Studies. (The final product is illustrated below.)
3. Interact with colleagues in a learning network and community of faculty/workshop attendees by building relationships, communication and connection.
4. Discover attributes of successful facilitation and the power of dialogue in the classroom.

Description and Focus of the Workshop Process
The workshop was held on Saturday, September 16, 2006 from 9:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. and attended by 16 participants representing faculty, College staff and its leadership. They were provided with a step-by-step workbook and adult learning resource materials. The AI session lasted two and one half hours. Attendees were paired for “discovery” interviews which led to shared highlights, insights and high point stories with table groups. This activity was followed by small group discussion, mapping of Positive Core, group presentations and a dialogue-based Inquiry Circle.

The AI component of the workshop sought to find out
what gives “life” to the College of Professional Studies and how to bring out the best in its professors, students and College. The “unconditional positive questions” strengthened participants’ capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential. The workshop themes that informed topics questions included:

- How might your use of Facilitation Tools and Techniques add value to LaSalle University’s College of Professional and Continuing Studies program?
- How does creating a rich learning environment support LaSalle University’s highly regarded College of Professional and Continuing Studies program?
- Can we leverage this value to raise visibility and recognition of the program to potential applicants to the program?

The program modeled best practices of adult learning, including Dialogue about (1) What is Facilitation? (2) Andragogy - The Art and Science of Teaching Adults (3) Teaching and Facilitation as Human Relationship and (4) What are the Differences between Andragogy and Pedagogy? Attendees had rich life experiences as students and professors. They were goal oriented and knew the purpose and potential use of workshop learnings. The Dialogue was facilitated by Mr. Pyser to guide the attendees to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts. Questions were framed in a way to connect the learning to their unique knowledge base.

**Perspectives and Viewpoints from Attendees**

Participant feedback rated the workshop as excellent, personally valuable including resources for later reference:

**A. AI Process**
- Great tools and concepts from participants
- Strengthened my commitment to successful adult learning
- Learned insights for relating with students
B. Learning Community
- My ability to meet and interact significantly with faculty members that I had never met
- Excellent interaction with people I don’t know or not know well
- Great techniques for facilitating, such as forming questions and responding to tough classroom situations

C. Skill Sets
- Pyser’s Facilitation, Interpersonal, Platform and Organizational Skills were polished; very observant and adaptive
- Lively interactive style with materials that will be useful
- Helped with suggestions for getting students involved

Closing Thoughts and Learnings
With a primary AI design and focus, this workshop was designed to be unlike traditional didactic modes for faculty development. The program brought about greater facilitator confidence, encouraged reciprocity and modeled respectful facilitation, platform skills, communication and cooperation. Not only did participants meet and learn with their colleagues - they understood each other, shared stories of value and discovered that they had more in common than they ever expected.

References