An Analysis of Appreciative Inquiry as Organizational Development for an Alternative School

Michael Young

University of New Hampshire, Durham

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An Analysis of Appreciative Inquiry as Organizational Development for an Alternative School

BY

Michael Young
Bachelor of Arts, Brown University 1994
Master of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2000

DISSERTATION

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This dissertation has been examined and approved.

Michael Middleton
Dissertation Director
Dr. Michael Middleton
Associate Professor, Associate Chairperson of Education

John Lannamann
Associate Professor of Communication

Sheila McNamee
Professor of Communication

Sharon Nodie Oja
Professor of Education

Jayson Seaman
Assistant Professor of Kinesiology

Date: March 11
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ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

By

Michael Young

University of New Hampshire, May, 2011

Schools and youth development programs are continually under pressure to reform and improve. Recent scholarship in the organizational development field suggests that a post modern approach to such efforts may yield new and generative results. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an Action Research methodology used for organizational development that is based on a number of post modern assumptions. Because AI has seen a rapid increase in use, including implementations in educational settings, and because of its potential to offer new insights into organizational development, a further understanding of how it works is warranted.

This interpretive case study, grounded in a social constructionist conceptual framework, uses a discourse analysis methodology to explore the linguistic possibilities AI offers participants. By exploring the presence of accounts, repair sequences, and the use of laughter and humor within the discourse recorded during an AI process facilitated by the researcher at an alternative school, the study empirically demonstrates the presence of an appreciative interpretive repertoire (or way of talking) as evidence of the AI process at work. The appreciative approach is not fully accepted however, and the implications of this partial rejection are discussed in relation to the stressed and often crisis driven nature of schools and programs serving alternative populations. Also
discussed is the mediating influence on AI of a broader and complimentary Positive Youth Development Discourse previously present at the school and likely present in other similar schools and programs as well.
CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PURPOSE OF STUDY:
UNDERSTANDING HOW APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY CAN HELP THE
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOLS

Introduction

In Maehr and Midgeley’s (1996) Transforming School Cultures, the authors describe an American school system in crisis as it tries to meet an expanding and complex variety of student and community needs: “Schools today serve increasingly diverse populations of children and are asked not only to be surrogate parents but to address a wide range of society’s ills… schools have, in short, become a the last resort for a full range of children’s needs, as well as the primary means for providing an ‘educated work force’” (p. 5). It was a crisis that demanded school change and reform in 1996.

While acknowledging that the crisis they perceived in that time was as “extreme” as ever, Maehr and Midgely cite Cuban (1990) and write that schools: “reform again and again… Whatever the reason the demand for school reform, even a thorough renovation, is incessant… Reform is a reality in the real world of schools” (p. 6). In 2008, a search of several on-line scholarly databases indicated that school reform and improvement efforts are still widespread, on going, and varied in nature.¹ The key words “school improvement,” for example, turned up 11,788 publications and “School reform” 1,909.

¹ The search was conducted in 10/08 utilizing the following databases: Academic Search Premier, Business Source Corporate, Business Source Premier, Communication & Mass Media Complete, ERIC, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Academic Search Elite, Business Source Elite
A specific focus within school reform, such as “Teacher Burnout,” turned up 1,375 “hits.” As Cuban (1990) and this robust collection of publications suggest, schools and educational programs are consistently involved in reform and development initiatives. Based on this, it is a core assumption of this study that such efforts are underway and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. What cannot be assumed, however, is that there is a clear way to best facilitate organizational change in schools.

Maehr and Midgely describe a number of the “different shapes and forms” of common school reform strategies: enforce and enhance standards, upgrade school staff, reorganize and restructure systems, enhance the “working conditions of teachers,” change and enhance curriculum, offer choice, and increase funding (p.6-11). For school leaders and change agents the question looms: which of these common “shapes” and “forms” hold true promise for the development of schools and youth development programs? To answer this, we must look for promising methods to implement such change processes. We must also look for promising methodologies to analyze and understand them. A logical place to look for these is within the field of organizational development (OD).

While not focused specifically on school-based or educational settings, the OD literature’s predominant focus on the management of change within the workplace offers insight into the school improvement issue. It is not a novel idea to approach school development in this way, as the “application of organizational principles” according to Maehr and Midgely (1996), is in fact “stock-in-trade” for educational administrators (p.13). However, while the choice to apply them may be “stock and trade,” the choice of which to apply is not.
The field of modern OD is arguably only about 50 years old, stemming from the war-time and post-war work of Kurt Lewin and a few others (Ferdig & Ludema, 2005; Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2005; Yaeger, Sorensen, & Bengtsson, 2005). While OD certainly has developed since that time, there are critics calling for a re-analysis and recreation of some of its core assumptions and technologies (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Ferdig & Ludema, 2005; Purser et al., 2005; Real & Poole, 2005; Senge & Scharmer, 2001). Scholars such as these question the effectiveness of the methods of OD that they see as traditionally applied.

As one looks into the some of the more recent OD literature, one finds a group of researchers and practitioners who are attempting to significantly change OD practice by applying elements of “post-modern” thinking to their work (Gephart, Boje, & Thatchenkery, 1996; K Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996/2004; D. Grant, Michelson, Oswick, & Wailes, 2005). As defined by these scholars, a post modern thinking is not based in the objectivist or positivist traditions, but instead includes a non-linear view of causal relationships as well as a focus that is not on objects per se, but on the interactions between them. While philosophically compelling, these ideas can be difficult to apply to practice. It is not clear how to apply such complex concepts to the concrete problems associated with the organizational development of a school or educational program.

How would a focus on non linear spontaneous change or on the discourse between individuals be pragmatically applied to an actual school-wide change process? How for example, would they be applied to a project based in the tradition of Action Research, an approach to school development that is promising enough to have seen continued use in many school settings (Dick, 2006; Durrant & Holden, 2006; Hendricks,
While promising, how it can best affect organization-wide change in an educational setting is not clear (Zeichner, 2001). Action research is held to be potentially congruent with some post-modern ideas (K. Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2004; Keiny, 2002; Noffke, 2008) and it is at this confluence, of post modern insight into organizational change and Action Research’s acknowledged potential, where in lies the use of Appreciative Inquiry.

The Appreciative Inquiry process or “AI” is often cited as an approach to OD that honors postmodern assumptions about the nature of reality and change processes (Bushe & Marshak, 2007; K. Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2004; Marshak & Grant, 2008). AI, however, has hit a nerve with more than just post modern OD scholars. It has seen remarkable recent growth as a facilitated organizational change process (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Yaeger et al., 2005), including implementation within numerous educational and youth development settings. (Berry, 2007; Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007; Clarke, Egan, Fletcher, & Ryan, 2006; Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003; de la Ossa, 2005; Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006; Lind, 2007; McNamee, 2003; Pratt, 2002; Ryan, Soven, Smither, Sullivan, & Vanbuskirk, 1999; Smart & Mann, 2003; R. Smith & Neill, 2005; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007).

It is clear that the need for school improvement at the organizational level will continue to be noted by administrators and reformers alike. It is also clear that while approaches like Action research, that seek to manage change in educational settings are continually being applied and reapplied, how to effectively do organizational development in schools is still an open question. The OD literature suggests that a ‘post-modern turn’ (K. Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2004) holds pragmatic potential to help the
developmental efforts of organizations, including schools. Because of the compelling nature of these claims and because an increasing number of school improvement projects are adopting AI, two questions beg answering. The first is centered on the question of why AI should be adopted in these contexts. Clearly, it has resonated with numerous school reformers and change agents, but where theoretically does its post-modern potential lie?

Second, in order to test our answer(s) to this first question, we must pinpoint methods for analyzing AI in action. This requires the unpacking of a post-modern process that rejects objective positivism and thus is a bit empirically slippery. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to address the rising interest in AI as an OD tool for schools by attempting to unpack an AI process while respecting its post-modern assumptions. This will be done through a careful analysis of an AI process as it is implemented in a particular alternative school setting.

This chapter is focused on the first question of why AI, as a post-modern application of Action Research, could be a legitimate and promising approach to OD for schools. In an effort to explore the potential of AI in educational settings, the following issues will be discussed: a) the promising concepts underpinning post modern OD practice; b) the history of educational action research utilized for school improvement; and c) the conception of AI not only as an action research OD practice that is situated to take advantage of these post-modern advances but one that is also appropriate for an alternative school context. Following this discussion, the study’s two research questions will be presented along with the assumptions underpinning them.
An Opportunity: A Post Modern Turn for Organizational Development

The term “post-modern” can carry with it a lot of different meanings based on who is using it. As Gephart, Boje, and Thatchenkery (1996) point out, it can for example refer to a historical epoch following a specified modern age, a genre of artwork, or a way of seeing the world (p.1). For the purposes of my argument (i.e., that a post modern sensitivity within organizational development practices holds real potential to help schools) I am referring to post modernism as a way of seeing the world, or as an epistemological shift. Here I follow the work of several scholars who describe it as a shift away from a more classic, positivistic or modernist view of the way organizations function (Bushe & Marshak, 2007; K Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996/2004; D. Grant et al., 2005; Marshak & Grant, 2008) and is a shift towards a view of organizations (or better yet, of organizing) as primarily socially constructed during interpersonal interaction. Instead of viewing organizations as stable objects that exist within distinct empirical boundaries, organizing is seen as evolving networks of shared discourse and action.

Some organizational science authors have argued that this shift is necessitated by a crisis within the OD field regarding the field’s potential effectiveness (Bushe & Marshak, 2007; Marshak & Grant, 2008). While this may be a bit over-stated, it is certain that facilitated organizational development is anything but perfected and can certainly benefit from critique and innovation. Take for example the argument by MIT’s Peter Senge, the internationally known developer of the “Learning Organization.” He writes that OD knowledge building institutions are struggling to create useful theories, while consultants repeatedly create “intellectually appealing change strategies” that don’t get
implemented by the organizations for whom they have been created (Senge & Scharmer, 2001, p. 238).

The opportunity that a post-modern turn offers is for augmenting or modifying current practice by moving towards some potentially new and generative ideas. Three such moves from the modern to the post-modern are outlined by Gergen and Thatchenkery (2004): from empirical methods to social construction, from individual to communal rationality, and from language as representation to language as social action. These concepts will be further developed in the Conceptual Framework for this study, however in order to understand how post modern thinking might hold potential for school development initiatives, it is important to note that OD scholars have explored these moves through analyses of a) “cause then effect” thinking and b) interpersonal interaction as a site of social construction.

**Cause then Effect Thinking**

As with much of the post enlightenment scientific project, organizational science has predominantly followed a concept of change that depends on a linear view of time. To a major extent, OD practices have grown directly from the work of social systems work of Kurt Lewin who modeled organizational change efforts after a “freeze, unfreeze, refreeze” progression (Lewin as cited in Ferdig & Ludema, 2005; and Purser et al., 2005). This concept requires the conception of organizational life as having the potential to move through somewhat static and definitive states. A school’s development, for example, could be analyzed and managed as a progression from one cohesive stage to the next.
This type of thinking can, and has, resulted in wide ranging useful prediction and action. As Kenneth Gergen (1999) states: “empirical findings” based on this linear causal thinking “can be used to generate useful predictions” such as election results, likelihood of auto accidents, the mental healthcare needs of a community, or a student’s likelihood of success in an educational program (p. 94). It is this type of thinking, for example, that has led to the majority of the astounding progress made by western medicine. However, its application to facilitated organizational change initiatives may be limited. Purser et al. (2005), for example, cite meta-analytic reviews within the OD literature and write that the outcomes of planned OD change efforts based on causal time “are mixed or inconclusive” (p. 9).

Rejecting linear predictive thinking entirely would certainly be throwing the baby out with the bathwater, however exploring new paradigms may serve to help with some of the ineffectiveness Purser, Senge and their colleagues have perceived within OD. Purser et al. (2005), for example, offer a theoretical description of management through an in-the-moment recognition of “flow-time.” Ferdig and Ludema (2005) arrive at similar conclusions based on their empirical investigation into a successful organizational change effort within the nuclear power industry in the US. Their research supported the idea that change within complex organizations occurs in a more spontaneous and localized way than that which might be allowed for by a larger scale strategic change initiative. They use complexity and chaos theory to better understand the non-linear and self-organizing nature of change within organizations. Citing eleven separate studies and publications, they write:

In recent years the organizational literature has paid increasing attention to the chaotic nature of change in complex systems. Authors have rightly pointed out
that far from being stable and certain, organizational futures, and any attempts to influence them, unfold in unexpected and unpredictable ways. Classical models for understanding and managing change that advocate planned intervention strategies have been criticized for their inability to create radical and sustainable transformation. Newer models that take into account the non-linear self-organizing dynamics of change offer alternative explanations about how complex organizations function. (p. 170)

Ferdig and Ludema’s research acknowledges a conception of organizing that does not depend on the classic perception of static periods connected by periods of change. It does not support a model based on the episodic causal thinking at the root of many OD implementation strategies (Real & Poole, 2005). Instead, Ferdig and Ludema’s work is congruent with other scholars’ acceptance of change within organizational settings as a constant to be continuously managed (Beech & Johnson, 2005; Purser et al., 2005).

The conceptualization of organizations as constantly evolving within the self-organizing micro-interactions among people may hold potentially profound ramifications for how change processes are approached by organizational leaders, including those within schools. One of these ramifications is a more deliberate attempt to focus on these interactions and how they occur. In the post modern OD approach this focus results in an acknowledgement of these interpersonal relationships as a site of social construction.

**Social Construction through Interpersonal Relationships**

Gustavsen (2001) advocates a shift in the focus of OD action research from “work roles” and “systems properties” to a “main focus on relationships” (p. 23) and in so doing, summarizes a shift suggested by post-modern thinking. It is a shift away from a more Cartesian or reductionist view social systems’ components or objects, and a shift towards a view that foregrounds relationship and interactions. The difference between the two and its implications for OD can be understood first, by embracing activity as a
unit of analysis and second, by seeing how social interaction *fundamentally* shapes the realities in which people function

**Interaction as the Unit of Analysis.** A major influence on the development of contemporary OD practices has been a humanistic focus on interpersonal relationships (Bushe & Marshak, 2007). While a humanistic emphasis on self actualization and subjective phenomenological experience advocates for a turn away from technical or behaviorist formulas and towards interpersonal ‘relationship’ (Brendel, 2006; Greenberg, Elliott, & Lietaer, 1994; Hansen, 2005; C. R. Rogers, 1980), it is important to see the distinction between focusing on humans in relationship (humanistic) and the relationship itself (post modern).

Instead of a humanistic focus on the value and subjectivity of humans in relationship, post modernism advocates a focus on the evolving activity of the relationship itself. It is a challenging epistemological (and potentially ontological) move away from a modernist social science perspective that has emphasized the study of people as individual, bounded subjects and towards a study of active interactions or relationships. The post modern turn in OD has focused in particular on these interpersonal interactions as represented by discourse or conversations within organizations and in particular, their constructive nature

**Interactions as Constructive.** In order to understand the potential of post modern OD to change management or reform in schools, it is important to understand that the

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2 A similar move towards a focus on ‘interaction,’ can be found within the sociocultural approach to developmental psychology. For example, Rogoff (1990) cites Leont’ev, along with Vygotsky and Luria, as some of the sociohistorical scholars who moved the basic unit of analysis of cognitive development inquiry away from “the (properties of) the individual” and instead to “the (processes of) sociocultural activity” (p.14) and she herself clearly tries to focus her work on what “happens between people” (p. 67, emphasis in original) not *within* people.
social constructionist school of thought sees the textual (i.e., spoken and written language) interaction between people in organizations as the very place that the organization is negotiated and created in an on-going fashion. Consequently, organizational development, change management, or reform could theoretically benefit from a focus on the ever emerging process of these interactions as opposed to its more traditional focus on individual role players or reified organizational structures.

Empirical work to support this thinking includes Ferdig and Ludema’s (2005) work that states that “changing the qualities of conversation, including who talks to whom, when, where, why, about what, and in what way becomes an important vehicle for transformative change” (p 180). Similarly, Mantel and Ludema (2004) found that effective organizational leadership required the following of “conversational streams” and “shaping conversation” (p. 320). Both studies point to the advantages of a post modern focus on interpersonal interactions and dialogue as the site where an organization comes to life (or potentially where it ‘exists’).

When the post-modern OD ideas of constant or non-linear change and constructive interactions come together, there are implications for OD practice. They affect for example, if and how ‘diagnosis” should be done (Bushe & Marshak, 2007) as well as how change should be managed:

Instead of planned interventions in which leaders or agents of change move an organization from an existing state through a period of transition toward pre-determined outcomes, change is described as an ongoing self-organizing process of lively and meaningful interaction among members of a system in which they jointly construct movement toward emergent and transforming outcomes. (Ferdig & Ludema, 2005, p. 197)

A post modern approach to diagnosing organizational problems and managing their change can certainly be compelling to anyone who has tried somewhat in vain to
understand the complex workings of organizations or has taken part in managed change processes within them. That said, it is not clear how these post modern approaches can be pragmatically applied in a school setting or within a youth development program.

**Post Modern Thinking within School-based OD: Action Research and AI**

As Maehr and Midgley pointed out, applying organizational concepts to schools is not uncommon. Schools are of course, organizations. It is thus plausible that some of these post-modern organizational concepts, such as self-organizing change or the formative power of interpersonal interaction, could hold potential for school contexts. Soshona Keiny, for example, describes an approach to school reform in her 2002 *Ecological Thinking: A New Approach to Educational Change*, that is derived from similar conceptual understandings. She writes: “the two dominant models for school change – the ‘top-down’ and the ‘bottom-up’ models are based on linear thinking. These models imply not only power and control but also cause and effect. ‘Ecological thinking change’ is built around circular causality, reflexivity, collaboration and interaction…” (p. 2.) Her concept of ‘ecological thinking’ is based on some of the same critiques of the positivist modernist project that post modern OD has emerged from. In this vein, Keiny suggests a post modern turn of her own: “In Albert Einstein’s words, ‘we cannot solve the problems we have created with the same thinking that created them’…indeed a paradigmatic shift in our understanding of reality is a pre-requisite for new educational thinking and practice” (p. 17).

Faced with this desire to shift organizational thinking and practice toward what I have outlined as ‘post modern,’ some OD scholars and school reformers advocate for the

This thinking is echoed in by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) when they write:

as ‘scientific management’ provided the philosophical and methodological legitimacy required to support the bureaucratic organizational form, action research may yet provide the intellectual rationale and reflexive methodology required to support the emergence of a more egalitarian ‘postbureaucratic’ form of organization. (p. 130)

Not only is Action Research amenable to certain post modern assumptions, but it also has had a long history of use in schools.

**Action Research as Organizational Development for Schools**

While Kurt Lewin is cited as a pioneer of the OD field (Ferdig & Ludema, 2005; Purser et al., 2005; Yaeger et al., 2005) he is also consistently cited as the original conceptual founder of action research (Ebutt, 1985; Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993; Oja & Smulyan, 1989). Lewin was in search of an applied social science capable of providing theory useful in solving practical problems (Oja & Smulyan, 1989). His vision has developed into a tradition of action research and science that although diverse, does share a common conceptualization as: a collaborative project with the twofold aim of theory development and professional development for those involved (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). Researchers with practitioners, or practitioners as researchers, do research in order to improve practice.

Not long after Lewin’s publications in the 40s and early 50s, action research was introduced into school and educational settings in the United States by Stephen Corey (Oja & Smulyan, 1989; Zeichner, 2001). Tracing the subsequent evolution of Action research in schools, Oja and Smulyan (1989) note first, a decline in educational action research in the US through the 60s and 70s during a period in social science development
that focused on more formalized forms of research. This decline was then followed by a
rebirth in the 80s as a result of previous federally funded educational (non-action)
research efforts from the 70s that had led to dissemination issues: research findings were
not contributing to improved practice in a significant way (p. 6-9). In summary,
according to Oja and Smulyan in 1989: “Action research, initiated in the 1940s by Kurt
Lewin, and adopted by educators soon after, has reemerged in the 70s and 80s as a viable
method for conducting educational research” (p. 10). A review of the current literature
would indicate that the practice of educational action research is still alive and well.

According to Dick (2006), in the period between 2004 and 2006, educational Action
Research was the “busiest” area of all Action Research publication (Dick, 2006, p. 444).

It is clear that there is a history of Action Research in schools and that during the
last five years it has received continued attention in educational settings. Action Research
is still accepted by many as a potential method for school improvement. In order to
understand and evaluate its potential in such settings, it will be helpful to explore
educational action research with respect to a) the tension between the dual goals of
improvement of practice and theory development, and b) its implementation for not just
improvement of teacher practice, but for school-wide organizational development.

Action and Research. When Stephen Corey applied action research to
educational settings, he was more conservative about the process’ potential to generate
educational theory than he was about its potential to improve the practice of those
involved. He likely experienced a paradox that is persistently encountered by educational
action researchers as a: “difficulty in producing both traditionally defined educational
theory and improved practice” (Oja & Smulyan, 1989, p. 4). This dilemma was taken up
by Susan Noffke in the October 2008, issue of the American Educational Research Association’s *Educational Researcher*. She writes that action research has received extensive “recognition” for its ability to help teachers but there has been limited “recognition” of its “importance” as a generator of knowledge (Noffke, 2008, p. 430). In its effort to create practically applicable knowledge produced by participant-driven inquiry, the results generated by action research projects often fail to meet the rigor required for academic theory building.

In Peter Sagor’s (1992) school-focused *How to Conduct Collaborative Action Research*, he attempts to come to terms with the tension between research and action by specifically explaining that action research is about researchers looking into their own problems (as opposed to traditional researchers looking into the problems of others) and concluded that if others “read about” or “use” the work “that is simply icing on the cake” (p. 7.) His argument is salient for OD applications of Action Research: its power to generate change may be its most important asset. Noffke takes a more epistemologically challenging stance and acknowledges the power of what she calls the “post-modern turn” to redefine the separation of local versus universal theory. She suggests that the solution to the action vs. research tension is not “to assist practitioners in the transition from the world of educational practice to that of academic research; the goal is to transform academic research to encompass research emanating from practice” (p. 430). Her point is provocative and accepts the post modern emphasis on the power and importance of localized interactions and the understandings that emanate from them. In a sense, she blurs the line between where action ends and meaningful research begins.
A post modern sensibility such as Noffe’s not only allows one to approach Action Research as an organizational change process that depends upon the creation of new understandings by the participants, but it also encourages one to see these new understandings as knowledge production that holds equal (or more) validity as that which is created through research aimed at more generalizeable results. While she points out the possibility of a false dichotomy between action and research, she, along with Sagor emphasize the potential power of Action Research to affect change within a school setting.

Educational Action Research and School Improvement. While action research has a history of being applied to affect change within school settings, this change has often been focused first and foremost on the improvement of teacher practice. If and how this kind of focus can affect school-wide change is not clear. Oja and Smulyan, in describing the three areas that educational action research is hypothesized to affect, “staff development, improved school practice, and modifications of theories of teaching and learning,” list a history of projects that are primarily focused on teacher development and practice within the classroom. While they acknowledge that some studies indicate that action research can in fact help with “community” or school-wide change, this potential is referenced in a way that suggests such changes have been based more on the school-wide dissemination (supported by school leadership) of findings from a smaller classroom oriented project (p. 16). In his 2001 review of the field, Zeichner arrives at a similar conclusion. He states that while there is some overlap, educational action research traditionally has been used for teacher development rather than for larger scale school reform (Zeichner, 2001).
While Sagor (1992) argues specifically for the merits of this overlap and suggests that school reform should focus on teacher development first and foremost, Maehr and Midgely (1996) argue to the contrary when they write that the “personnel approach to school change” is a “half truth,” as school change does not just happen when you get “the right teachers to do the right things” and thus organizational development efforts must be focused at the system level (P. 126). In order to work towards organizational change, it is important to focus on organizational goals. It is possible however, and maybe necessary to do this through the localized initiative of teachers and staff.

Hendricks (2006), citing Fullan (2002) and Allen and Calhoun (1998) notes that the practice of action research encompasses the “key elements’ of producing lasting and sustainable change in schools” (p. 10) and holds the potential for “site based school improvement” (P. 11). While citing the organizational-level potential of Action research, Hendricks’ work itself seems more focused on personal professional development at the teacher level and not necessarily at the level of organizational development (p. 11-13). Durrant and Holden (2006) also focus predominantly on teacher led inquiry but they do not orient school improvement as a potential secondary result but instead see teacher led initiatives as powerful instruments for school change. They review the British based school improvement literature and conclude, to a degree, that a “bottom up approach” to school change is highly effective as long as it is “supported from the top down” (p 29). By definition, Action Research projects involve the participants of the study inquiring into their work or practice. These participant-driven and localized projects seem to hold potential for affecting school-wide change, however, the potential is tempered by the degree to which stake holders accept organization level goals as part of the process.
While varied in the specifics of its application, it is important to note that action research utilized for school-wide change continues to find traction. Dick’s review of the action research between 2004 and 2006 included several books focused on school change, and as recently as 2008 Teachers College Press published a edited book with the same focus: *Collaborative Action Research* (Gordon, 2008). It is clear that while the acceptance of action research as an effective knowledge producing research methodology continues to be debated, it continues to be presented as a useful and viable approach to school-wide change. However, just how it can affect this kind of change, and thus how it should be implemented, is not clear.

It is being argued in this paper that some post modern assumptions and perspectives can shed new light on OD practice. This could include the practice of Action Research in schools. Some of the post modern conceptual shifts may provide some generative new directions. In the case of Action Research methodology, David Cooperrider offered just such a shift. In 1987 with his doctoral advisor Suresh Srivastva, he first published an account of Appreciative Inquiry as “a conceptual reconfiguration of action research.” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Since then, the application of AI in both educational and non-educational settings has grown dramatically.

**Appreciative Inquiry: How is it helpful to schools as Post Modern Action Research?**

AI is a form of Action Research that is poised to take advantage of promising post modern thinking. In particular, its theoretical grounding embraces both of the primary post modern conceptions offered in the contemporary OD Literature: the acceptance of the non-linear nature of self-organizing change and the acknowledgement of a socially constructed reality. Potentially even more important than AI’s theoretical justification is
the recent and impressive growth of its use both in and out of schools. Consequently, because it is based on promising new notions of organizational change and because it is being wielded more and more freely by schools and organizations around the world, AI warrants further analysis and understanding.

**Appreciative Inquiry as a Non-linear Change Process**

Within the OD literature, when post-modernism is discussed in relation to practice, AI is often included as a noteworthy example (Bushe & Marshak, 2007; K. Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2004; Marshak & Grant, 2008). One reason for this is that AI is based on a vision of organizational change and management that does not occur in a planned top-down manner but instead tries to take advantage of the tendencies for change to occur in spontaneous, diffuse, or self-organizing ways. According to Stamps and Lipnack (2004) “AI is to self organizing networks as problem solving was to command and control bureaucracies” (p 30).

Whether AI consistently plays out with this level of ‘success’ is open to debate, however the point here is to understand AI as an OD practice that at least holds potential for schools; and in particular, how this potential is due in part to its post modern sensitivities. For example, while AI’s encouragement of organization-wide collaboration is part of the reason for these “egalitarian” or “self-organizing” hopes, another compelling and more epistemologically oriented reason for its potential may be the acceptance, inherent in the AI process, that there can be no real separation between inquiry and intervention (McNamee, 1994, 2002).

The notion that the act of inquiring inherently effects the object(s) of inquiry brings to mind both the ‘Hawthorne Effect’ in the social sciences (i.e., the involvement in
an experiment can affect the behavior of the subjects) as well as the ‘Observer Effect’ in quantum physics (i.e., the very act of observing sub-atomic particles alters their properties/behaviors). While the mainstream scientific discourse has traditionally been focused on strategies for controlling the “contaminating” or confounding variables associated with researcher influence, the field of action research embraces the “contamination” and instead chooses to see inquiry as a potential positive social intervention in itself (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This acceptance of contamination, when viewed through a more modernist lens acknowledges the Hawthorne Effect more so than the Observer Effect. In other words, much of the action research literature accepts that an inquiry in a social setting can and will change that setting and thus should be directed at a pragmatic change for the better. The conception of this change for the better, however, is organized around the effects of an inquiry rooted in a more modernist or classic scientific view; a view that emphasizes an objective investigation followed by the planned dissemination or implementation of findings. Applying a more post-modern understanding to the idea that inquiry and intervention are simultaneous,

Bushe and Kassam (2005) write:

This principle argues against the traditional action research model where first we do the inquiry, diagnose the system, generate and select change options, and only then implement the change. Rather, AI theorists argue that questions are fateful and that change begins the moment the system begins to engage in inquiry. The OD literature has certainly acknowledged for a long time that observation changes that which is being observed. Until AI, however, this insight had not led to a change in the action research model. (p 166)

Mantel and Ludema (2004) describe one way that AI’s appreciative or positive approach embraces this ‘simultaneity principle’ (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001): “As
people ask themselves unconditional positive questions, they generate new thinking about resources that make their organizing and action possible. They strengthen the relational bonds needed to translate vision into reality…” (p333). In other words, while organizational development certainly can occur in part, from larger planned out initiatives, the AI process intervenes in organizational processes based on the assumption that important organizational change can and will occur on a very local interpersonal level as well.

van der Harr & Hosking (2004) develop this further and describe how Mantel and Ludema’s ‘new thinking’ may in fact be part of the participants’ co-construction of a new organizational reality: “Based upon the belief that organizations grow in the direction of what is studied (inquiry is constructive), the choice of a positive topic for inquiry is proposed – as a way to construct positive social realities” (1025-6). Here the idea that inquiry is change is combined with the idea that this change to a degree operates through social construction. The social construction of realities suggested by van der Harr and Hosking reflects the epistemology at the root of AI. It is a world view which AI shares with the post modern view of OD.

Appreciative Inquiry as Social Constructionist Practice. Cooperrider and Srivastva’s (1987) initial description of AI argues that it is a revision of action research that stems from a “socio-rational” epistemology. Their use of the term draws heavily in the work of Kenneth Gergen, who since then has developed the “socio-rational” paradigm into what he now refers to as “social constructionism” (K Gergen, 1999). Gergen’s descriptions of the concepts and literature that inform social constructionism are cited extensively within the post modern OD literature, including AI specific work AI
in turn, is cited in Gergen’s later work as an example of social constructionist practice (K Gergen, 1999; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Based on this body of literature, it is not surprising that AI seems to be generally understood to be conceptually rooted in social constructionism (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001; McNamee, 2002; Whitney & Trotsen-Bloom, 2003).³

Ultimately, AI can be understood as an approach that is predicated on the value of interpersonal dialogue as a creator of organizational reality. With that social constructionist assumption at its epistemological and methodological base, AI resonates with the literature that supports a post-modern turn in OD. AI fits neatly, for example, into Bushe and Marshak’s (2007) definition of a post modern OD approaches that:

promotes inquiry based methods of facilitating large and small groups to increase collective self-awareness and productive conversations. Its core methodologies are based more on constructionist social and symbolic interaction rather than on problem solving and objectivist action research. It has to explicitly recognize that reality is sometimes created and maintained through actions and negotiations involving power processes, and develop and advance values and methodologies for dealing with that. (p. 4)

Appreciative Inquiry and Contemporary Views of School-wide Change. Some of AI’s potential can also be found in the way that it compliments some contemporary views of school reform. For example, Maehr and Midgley (1996) discovered that within their efforts to affect school culture, “the major instrument for action would involve dialogue: exchanges of beliefs, attitudes, and ideas” (p. 139); a finding that is certainly in tune with AI’s constructionist focus on the power and importance of dialogue. Keiny’s more recent (2002) “ecological” approach to school reform, with its focus on action research in

³ AI’s social constructionist epistemology will be further developed in the Conceptual Framework of this study. However, if one accepts the presented social constructionist post modern critique of how OD practices might be improved and one is to evaluate AI’s potential as effectiveness within this context, then it is important to highlight here how AI embraces a social constructionist approach to organizational change.
the pursuit of creating “self organizing” (p. 2) communities, also reflects AI’s allowance for locally situated self organized change.

While conceptually sympathetic, Maehr, Midgely, and Keiny’s theories of effective school improvement do not specifically include AI. Other contemporary critiques of school change do. Clarke and Ryane (2007), for example, write that the “appreciative approach runs counter to some of the current practice of school development which atomizes tasks, specifies targets for them, and responds to pre-specified or prescriptive outcomes, closely controlled” (p. 49). Echoing similar concerns for some of the arguably more “modernist” approaches to school improvement in the UK and Ireland, Smith and Neill (2005) describe school effectiveness strategies of the 1980s and 90s as aligned with private sector commercial/industrial values (p. 8). Citing Ball (2003), they describe “…the processes and effects of this realignment as the “terrors of performativity” (p.8). They go on to write of the period:

Privileged within performative cultures were discourses that emphasised technical-rational and structural approaches to school improvement, where, for example, success was defined in narrow instrumental terms and change was conceived of in terms of a mechanical journey along predetermined routes. (p. 8-9)

Smith and Neill proceed to suggest an alternative approach to school reform, which is based on what they see as the collaborative and spontaneous narrative processes of AI.

After their own review of the recent school reform literature, Willoughby and Tossey (2007) conclude that there is “a substantial contemporary emphasis on capacity-building for school improvement through self-evaluation, participation, and distributed leadership” and go on to conclude that AI is an “innovative strategy for change that appears compatible with this emphasis” (p. 501).
The Exponential Growth of AI. While AI may be philosophically congruent with other contemporary views of school reform and while a post modern approach to understanding AI may seem to hold theoretical promise, AI has already gained the significant attention of OD scholars and organizational change practitioners, including many working in educational settings. Yaeger, Sorensen, & Bengtsson, (2005) review the AI literature through 2003. They find 34 publications about AI between 1986 and 1994 and during the subsequent eight years between 1995 and 2003 they locate at least 358. Furthermore, they cite records of its implementation not only in the US, its country of origin, but also within Brazil, Canada, Australia, Nepal, Mexico, the Netherlands, multiple countries in Africa, and a few multinational settings. In his review of trends in the action research literature through 2004, Dick (2004) leads his review with a section on AI and states that the growth of the AI literature was so impressive that “it might reasonably have an entire review to itself” (p. 426). In his subsequent review of the literature between 2004 and 2006, he still finds it necessary to provide AI with its own section (Dick, 2006). Bushe and Kassam (2005) describe AI’s “exponential growth” since 2001 in the following terms:

Since 2001, things have changed considerably. Five significant AI books have been published. Elsevier and Jossey-Bass have each launched a separate series of books on AI. A global consulting firm, AI Consulting, that, according to their web site at the time of this writing had 97 members, was launched in 2002. One of the largest consulting firms in the world, Cap Gemini Ernst Young, has declared that AI is the core of their human systems consulting practice. The first international conference on AI was held in Baltimore just weeks after 9/11, and still close to 600 people flew in from all over the world to attend. Ludema et al. (2003) list more than 75 businesses, nonprofit organizations, governments, and communities that have engaged in significant AIs, and this is just from their personal experience. Even the U.S. Navy is in the game, having created a center for positive change that is leading multiple AIs. Robert Quinn (2000) of the University of Michigan recently wrote that “Appreciative Inquiry is currently revolutionizing the field of organization development” (p. 220). (p.162)
This growth has been extensively outlined here to demonstrate how AI has clearly hit a nerve and is being perceived from the UN to UNH Residential Life, as a promising approach to organizational development. It is an understatement when Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas (2003) write that the “overall impact of Appreciative Inquiry on the organizational development field has been significant” (p. 8).

Of the 50 AI studies Yaeger et al. (2005) sampled from the over 400 they found, six took place in schools. My own review of the literature turned up thirteen dissertations and published accounts of AI in school, educational, youth development, or mental health settings that I deemed informative to the alternative school context in which this study was to take place (Berry, 2007; Calabrese et al., 2007; Clarke et al., 2006; Coghlan et al., 2003; de la Ossa, 2005; Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006; Lind, 2007; McNamee, 2003; Pratt, 2002; Ryan et al., 1999; Smart & Mann, 2003; R. Smith & Neill, 2005; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). Within these studies, AI was used for a variety of purposes and as either the exclusive methodology or as part of a broader OD or evaluation strategy (e.g., Ryan et al., 1999; Smart & Mann, 2003).

A few authors presented their AI derived findings as contributions to broader educational theories concerning the application of deficit-based language to at-risk students (Calabrese et al., 2007); the design and delivery of science education (Clarke et al., 2006); the understanding of adolescent mental health issues (Lind, 2007); and the delivery of services by alternative schools (de la Ossa, 2005). Similar to many projects in the broader educational action research literature, two of these AI studies in schools focused directly on improving practice in the classroom (Clarke et al., 2006; Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006). While both of these studies reportedly resulted in broader “trickle-
up” school improvement, a number of the other AI initiatives were focused more directly on organizational development, and in particular were described as having successfully facilitated consensus around values and vision (Berry, 2007; Coghlan et al., 2003; McNamee, 2003; Pratt, 2002; Ryan et al., 1999).

With respect to consensus building, while it is an accomplishment that Mehr and Midgely (1996) argue is the essential first step to any school reform effort (p. 112, 129), it was also been noted by Sheppard and Brown (2000) to be a significant challenge during an OD action research project in an alternative school setting. After tracking an on-going OD process aimed at developing organizational learning, the authors acknowledged both the potential power of engaging the school in such a process as well as the incredible difficulty in achieving lofty OD goals amid an environment ripe with crisis and staff turn-over. There are few if any examples in the literature of AI being used for OD purposes in similar alternative schools, however, there are a few studies where AI is used with this population for other purposes.

Calabrese et al. (2007) for example, used AI to explore teachers and administrators work with students at-risk of academic failure. The results of the study indicated that although there was an identifiable gap between actual practice and the goals of the professionals, there was a positive core of caring upon which future work could be based upon. Other utilizations of AI with at-risk youth have built upon its potential as a participatory model for research and change by including the students themselves as researchers. Lind (2001), used an appreciatively inspired methodology and engaged adolescents receiving mental health services in an inquiry into the services they were receiving. While adolescents struggled at times with their roles as researchers,
according to the authors, they also found new levels of empowerment and voice. Similarly, the students involved in de la Ossa’s (2005) Appreciative Inquiry at an alternative high school in the US also not only provided a voice for at-risk youth, but also helped them to see the power of this voice. The focus groups with youth that formed the core data gathering strategy of this study showed that while publicly funded alternative schools were meeting an important need, their students often identified themselves as marginalized and second class.

While not taking place specifically with at-risk youth or in alternative school settings, there are a couple examples in the literature of Ai being used intentionally as an OD process aimed at school wide change. In what the authors claim to be the first published account of Ai in a school setting, Ryan, Soven, Smither, Sullivan, and Vanbuskirk, (1999) conclude that:

The appreciative inquiry process is best understood as a strategy for initiating micro-level reform within a single school, reform that is both affective and analytical. The process reconnects teachers and administrators to their passion of teaching and to their sense of mission; for students the process enhances school pride and fosters recognition of the bonds that students have with peers and teachers alike. (p. 167)

Van Buskirk (2002) traced the use of AI in three Urban Catholic Schools. He attributed some very significant community building outcomes of the processes, such as mobilizing school communities to rethink disciplinary procedures and to keep open schools that were threatened with closures due to declining student numbers. Van Bushkirk also acknowledged how crisis and staff turn-over in stressed youth development organizations can have a profound effect on the implementation of organization-wide OD initiatives. Similarly, Willoughby and Tosey (2007) also saw the potential for Ai to create the energy needed to bring a school community together in productive self reflection while
marveling at the complexity of facilitating a developmental process at a secondary school that could maintain a cohesive participation midst the numerous competing demands on staff and students. The authors are also careful to note that Ai is not an apolitical technical application, but regardless of its participatory and affirmative origins, it is still likely to be used by different stakeholders to accomplish their own agendas. These studies underscore the potential for AI to be a powerful change process within schools while still showing that such setting offer some unique challenges.

Based on this review of the literature, it seems clear that AI is being implemented in educational settings, with some degree of success, for the purposes of organization-wide change and development. Because it seems to hold potential and because it is being widely utilized already, it is important to try to gain understandings of the process of AI. Ideally, this analysis would allow for the informative unpacking of some of the post modern concepts being argued by scholars as promising to the practice of OD.

**Research Questions**

AI’s incredible growth, including numerous applications in educational contexts, is an indicator of its broad appeal. Its continued growth 20 years after its initial publication is also an indicator that it is probably not a fad that will have passed us by any time soon. Consequently, it seems likely that school administrators and reformers will continue to look to AI as a potentially promising approach to their school change efforts. If this is in fact the case, then on-going analysis and evaluation of how AI functions is important. Not surprisingly, both supporters and critics of AI have expressed the need for further empirical analysis and evaluation (Golembiewski, 1998; S. Grant & Humphries, 2006; P.
Rogers & Fraser, 2003; Yaeger et al., 2005). This study is designed to contribute to this literature.

In an effort to produce insights into AI that prove generative to other educational professionals or OD practitioners, the study analyzes the process of AI as it played out at single alternative school setting. The hope was to facilitate an AI process that was “true” to AI’s foundations and to explore its impact with regards to the hypothesized location of its influence: the dialogue and discourse of the participants.

Utilizing discursive activity as its unit of analysis, the study will focus on the following two sub questions:

1. **How do the influences of the appreciative process emerge within the participants’ dialogue?**

   It seems that AI’s effectiveness depends in part on how it influences what people speak with one another about as well as the way they do so. Consequently, this first research question was aimed at analyzing how the interactions (primarily spoken dialogue) between participants play out during this AI process.

2. **How does the dialogue during the AI process work to construct the organizational reality at the school?**

   The study is based on a conceptual framework that assumes that the discourse\(^4\) that occurs between school staff, students, and stakeholders has a strong impact on the organizational reality of the program. As will be developed further in the conceptual

\(^4\) By “discourse” I mean the interpersonal interactions that transpire between participants. I believe that the meaning that emerges from these interactions is dependent on far more than language, such as body language, physical positioning or even the presence of certain props. Take for example the implications of the same statement (such as , “Hello”) made, in one case while holding a bouquet of flowers and in another case while holding nothing (K. Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004)? That said, for practical reasons, the major analytic focus of this study will be linguistic.
framework section of the paper, this organizational discourse can be seen as actually constituting the organization (or as representing the organizing taking place). The action research project undertaken by the study participants focuses on understanding one another, the program, and the work being done there. This second research question is focused on exploring how the dialogue that occurred during the AI process worked to construct these objects of their inquiry.5

**Summary**

A focus on discourse notwithstanding, the justification for this study stems from the fact that school reform and change processes are on-going “realities” of schooling (Maehr & Midgley, 1996) that effect entire school communities and thus investigating the methods used to for managing these processes deserves our attention. Further, in pursuit of promising and productive means of organizational development in these educational settings, accepting some emergent post modern assumptions may lead to new insights and outcomes. In particular, AI is an approach to Action research for organizational change that holds post modern potential and that has experienced on-going and impressive growth. Thus, as more school leaders and change agents choose to

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5 The language of both this study’s guiding research questions emphasizes a focus on organizational discourse. This focus will be further described in the “Conceptual Framework” and “Methodology” sections of this paper. For now, however, it is worth noting that in adopting discourse as its unit of analysis, the study attempted to address what some organizational discourse analysts have referred to as a “disillusionment with mainstream theories and approaches to the study of change” (D. Grant et al., 2005, p. 6). The justification to conduct this analysis through a focus on organizational discourse is not only a result of the post modern and social constructionist conceptual roots of AI but also is attempted as a partial answer to a published call in the OD literature to better understand how discourse and dialogue function within (or as) organizations. A review of the OD literature, starting with the work of Lewin, may reveal a “robust line of inquiry” into the correlation of collaborative dialogue with positive outcomes and sustained change, but there is still a need to understand how dialogue can function in this way (Ferdig & Ludema, 2005; K. Gergen et al., 2004; Mantel & Ludema, 2004). Consequently the study was designed to focus on discourse in order to better understand how AI operates as an organizational change process.
employ AI, the research questions here are meant to answer the call from both supporters and critics for further analysis of AI as an OD practice (Golembiewski, 1998; S. Grant & Humphries, 2006; P. Rogers & Fraser, 2003; Yaeger et al., 2005).

The argument for the use of AI depends upon the acceptance of the potential for AI to do good for schools and organizations. Potential like that cited by Mellish (2007), who argues that AI can to help facilitate a shift to a networked style of management. According to Mellish, AI can support people in transition and thus “AI represents a viable alternative to coercive, dictatorial and unsustainable approaches to organizational change and therefore provides a process to democratize strategy, build commitment in the process and sustain energy for change” (p. 35). Mellish describes AI as a process that can help deal with organizations as they exist in a state of constant change and thus supports the idea that AI’s promise as an OD approach may be due in part to its post modern sensitivities. Mellish’s quote seems, however, to suffer from some of the “evangelicalism” that arguably permeates the AI literature (Dick, 2004, p. 427). With this in mind, the purpose of this study is not to produce another OD practitioner-produced AI “hero story” (P. Rogers & Fraser, 2003; Yaeger et al., 2005). It is instead to analyze just how an AI process operates at a school, in an effort to better inform the educational programs and practitioners who may seek to use it.

Assumptions

1. The underlying epistemology guiding the study is social constructionist in nature (as will be elaborated in the next chapter).
2. School reform and change are inevitable and on-going processes that schools will continue to engage in.

3. Schools are similar enough to other organizations to benefit from lesson learned from the organizational development efforts of other businesses and programs.

4. All schools and educational settings are different, but lessons learned at one, if learned through a transparent and rigorous process, can inform processes at another.

5. While they may not end up closer to an objective truth, personal, organizational, and scholarly efforts benefit from reflective processes.
CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:
AI AND THE ORGANIZATION AS DISCURSIVE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Introduction

What exactly is AI and how best should we seek to understand how it works? There is certainly truth in the claims by van der Harr & Hosking (2004) that AI “can mean many different things...there are no firm rules and each [AI] process emerges in a different way” (p. 1019). However, there do seem to be some core defining elements that allow for AI to be conceptualized as a somewhat cohesive construct. Some of these core elements suggest that AI is an OD process positioned to takes advantage of a post modern turn for OD. This postmodern turn includes a shift away from grand linear cause-then-effect theorizing based on a postivistically identifiable truth towards the acceptance of a more locally constructed and contextually coordinated reality. It is a conceptual framework rooted in social constructionist thinking that offers new and valid perspectives on how to study and understand organizations.

AI Defined

AI is a solution oriented OD strategy that is aimed at exploring the ‘positive core’ of an organization through a collaborative, system-wide appreciative dialogue.
Cooperrider and Avital (2004) describe AI as a simultaneous endeavor into organizational change and inquiry:

Appreciative Inquiry is a constructive inquiry process that searches for everything that “gives life” to organizations, communities, and larger human systems when they are most alive, effective, creative and healthy in their interconnected ecology of relationships...as a form of study, Appreciative Inquiry focuses on searching systematically for those capacities and processes that give life and strength and possibility to a living system; and as a constructive mode of practice, it aims at designing and crafting human organizations through a process in which valuing and creating are viewed as one, and where inquiry and change are powerfully related and understood as a seamless and integrated whole. (pxii; emphasis in original)

When AI is used for OD purposes within a school or organization, it is most often practiced through the facilitation of appreciative interviews between staff members. The interviews are focused on generating stories about high points, personally energizing moments, and best practices being experienced at the program. These interviews, and the subsequent “meaning making” meetings “when interview data—stories, quotes, and inspirational highlights—are formally shared and made sense of in total” (Whitney & Trotsen-Bloom, 2003, p. 165) constitute the roots of a change process focused on realizing the positive potential that has been uncovered (or, maybe more accurately: constructed) by the interviewing process.  

Connecting these interviews and discussions to an organization-wide collaborative change process is often described as the four phases of a “4-D” cycle (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003; Whitney & Trotsen-Bloom, 2003):

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6 While it seems accurate to describe this positive focus as “defining” for AI, it may not be as unique as it is at times made out to be. Dick (2006) comments that that within the AI literature the “constant praise of ‘strength-based’ approaches wears thin...Most of the action researchers I know are less ‘deficit-oriented’ than the appreciative inquiry literature proclaims” (p. 447). For example, Ebbutt’s (1985), summary of his own action research cycle along with the well established cycles of John Elliott and Stephen Kemmis, depicts all of them beginning with the identification of an “idea,” not of a “problem” (as cited in Oja & Smulyan, 1989).
1. Discovery
2. Dream
3. Design
4. Destiny

To some degree, these phases can be understood as a linear OD action research process of assessment/diagnosis (Discovery), goal setting/gap analysis (Dream), planning (Design), and implementing (Destiny). However, to view it as such would not be taking advantage of some of the post modern perspectives that may offer insight beyond more linear views of organizational change. It is potentially more fruitful, and certainly more in line with AI’s original conceptual origins, to try to understand AI as a less linear and less positivistic post-modern practice.

**Conceptual Framework: Social Construction and Organizational Discourse**

This understanding of AI depends upon a conceptual framework that foregrounds certain understandings of language and how it is used to make sense of the world around us. This approach to language builds on a major result of post-modern thinking in the social sciences that is sometimes cited as the ‘linguistic turn’ (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This turn is marked by a move away from a representational understanding of language where words directly represent the objects they refer to, and towards the premise that language gains its meaning in the moment, as speakers use words in reaction to one another and the context they perceive themselves to be in. After taking this turn, language gains its primary
pragmatic meaning from contextual coordinated social interaction and not from pre-determined rules and referential definitions.

If the “truth” of words and statements are determined actively, continually, and contextually; if the contexts are culturally and historically specific in many ways; and if language is our core mechanism for describing and thinking about our world; then it is possible to make the epistemological jump that our “truths” (or our shared social realities) can be understood as constructions born of interactions within specific sociocultural/historical contexts. This jump is at the core of the Social Constructionist perspective (Burr, 2003; K Gergen, 1999). While challenging to many of our existing positivistic assumptions, it is one that has proven to be valid enough and important enough to be adopted by scholars of both human development (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000; Rogoff, 1990) as well as organizational development (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004a; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; K Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996; D. Grant et al., 2005).

With respect to understanding AI and organizational development within a school, social constructionist thinking frames the way AI can be best understood to facilitate change within an organization. A social constructionist framework also frames the methodology through which AI can be most effectively analyzed. To better define this conceptual framework and to understand the advantages of adopting it, it is important to explore it in two parts. The first includes a definition of the ‘social constructionist’ perspective and three of its primary assumptions: the socio-historical nature of our thinking, the relational nature of the self, and ‘the language turn.’ Second, when this perspective is applied to organizational studies, organizations become best understood through the discourse that occurs within them, or rather, the discourse that constructs
them. Within this conceptual framework, organizing and organizations can be seen as primarily *discursive constructions*.

**Social Constructionism**

Social Constructionism is a term that can be defined in many ways. For the purpose of this paper, drawing heavily on the work of Kenneth Gergen, the term will be used to represent an epistemological stance based on a set of assumptions that suggest that the realities we perceive are socially constructed in nature. More specifically, as described in the work of Burr (2003) and Gergen (1999), these assumptions include:

1. Taking a “critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge” (Burr, 2003, p. 2) is important, as we attempt to embrace a self-reflective/critical “reflexivity” acknowledging the idea that “reflection on our forms of understanding is vital to our future well-being” (Gergen 1999, p. 49-50).

2. “The terms by which we understand our world and our self are neither required nor demanded by ‘what there is’” (Gergen, 1999, p. 47). These terms are instead subject to “cultural and historical specificity” (Burr, 2003, p3.)

3. More specifically, instead of coming directly from the “nature of the world” these terms are defined through “social processes” (Burr, 2003, p. 4). In other words, the agreed upon meanings (i.e. knowledge or reality) that we utilize to inform our decisions and understandings are “derived from relationship” (Gergen, 1999, p. 48).

Based on these assumptions, if we look at the way we understand our world through a social constructionist lens, it is our coordinated social activity that is brought into focus. It is a focus that has profound implications for understanding how organizations
function and change. To see how this is the case, it is worth exploring the second two social constructionist assumptions in a little more depth.

The Sociohistorical or Sociocultural Nature of our Thinking. The second assumption of Gergen’s social constructionism is based on the idea that the understandings we have of our existence are inseparably bound to the cultural context that we inhabit. To great extent, these contexts define our beliefs and values for us. As Gergen (1999) writes:

The generation of good reasons, good evidence and good values is always from within a tradition; already accepted are certain constructions of the real and the good, and implicit rejections of alternatives. Whether we should ban smoking from public buildings, allow child pornography, oppose land mines, or support feminist liberation in Arab countries are questions that can only be treated from within some tradition of discourse. Thus our “considered judgments” are typically blind to alternatives lying outside our tradition. (p. 50)

To further illuminate how these cultural traditions can be inextricably intertwined with our thinking, it is helpful to explore what can be called the sociocultural or sociohistorical approach to human psychological development as described by Barbara Rogoff (1990).

In her exploration of psychological development, Rogoff acknowledges that we develop amidst very similar cultural biases to those described by Gergen. She goes on to describe how cross-cultural study can relieve some of our blindness: “As participants in sociocultural activity and users of societal definitions of intellectual goals and techniques, we take the activities and definitions for granted unless we have the opportunity to observe them from a vantage point outside our own society” (p 190). To Rogoff, it is not just that one culture might value an aspect of development over another (e.g., spacial skills vs. abstract math skills), but rather that development itself can only be understood amidst the culturally defined goals of the culture where it was taking place. With this
claim, she rejects the idea that there is some sort of cross-cultural Piagetian
developmental progress towards universal logical-rational goals. Instead, she defines
thinking as a problem-solving endeavor focused on culturally relative issues thus “in
understanding cognitive development, it is essential to take into account the particular
problems that children are attempting to solve and their importance in the culture” (p.
116) and more broadly, “the particular actions and skills of an individual cannot be
understood out of the context of the immediate practical goals being sought and the
enveloping sociocultural goals into which they fit” (p. 139).

It is important not to underestimate Rogoff’s assumptions in these areas. I do not
believe she simply means that cross culturally, we think similarly but operate within
different value structures; she argued that development within different cultures actually
leads us to think qualitatively differently. She is, for example, building from Vygostky’s
theory that was based on the notion that much of our uniquely human thinking is based in
our internal use of language and that our language is inherently a socially created tool.
Thus, through this internal use of socially constructed language, every time we attempt to
understand something, our path to that understanding “passes through another person”
(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 30) and consequently “the use of sign leads humans to a specific
structure of behavior that breaks away from biological development and creates new
forms of a culturally-based psychological process” (p. 40).

While Rogoff (1990) does not refer to her work as ‘social constructionist,’ her
depiction of human cognitive development is a clear and empirically sound description of

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7Along these lines, the title of Rogoff’s 1990 book, Appreniceship in Thinking, is a clue to her argument
that development does not occur through the use of thinking based on universal cognitive structures to
navigate towards culturally valued goals, instead she suggested that we are learning from our culture how to
think or rather, that the navigation is the thinking itself (p. 8).
how our understandings and our ways of understanding can be sociohistorically relative. In light of this, it is not surprising that Gergen and Gergen (2003) suggest that readers interested in learning more about constructionist ideas within educational discourse should refer to Rogoff’s work (p160).

**Beyond the Bounded Individual: Relational Being.** In an attempt to further understand a social constructionist conceptual framework, it is relevant to look at one area where Rogoff’s work diverges significantly from Vygotsky’s. It is a diversion that is very congruent with Gergen’s work: the rejection of the individual/social dualism. It is a conceptual move that changes both the way an organizational change process would be planned as well as how it would be researched and analyzed.

Instead of attempting to conceptualize a mechanism for the internalization of learning from the “outside” (social or intermental plane) to the inside (inner mental plane) of an individual, a process or mechanism that Vygotsky’s theories of development arguably require, Rogoff (1990) proposes that there need not be a process of internalization if our thinking is truly understood as communal activity. In her words:

> However the problem of specifying the process of internalization may be a problem only if priority is given to the internal or individual functioning with the internal given responsibility for bringing something across a barrier. If, as I suggest, individuals are seen as appropriating some aspects of activity in which they are already engaged as participants and active observers, with the interpersonal aspects of their functioning integral to the individual aspects, then what is practiced in social interaction is never on the outside of a barrier, and there is no need for a separate process of internalization.

> To act and communicate, individuals are constantly involved in exchanges that blend “internal” and “external” – exchanges characterized by the sharing of meaning by individuals. The “boundaries” between people who are in communication are already permeated...(p. 195).

This idea of a permeated or relational self is central to Gergen’s social constructionist theory, as indicated by the titles of the chapters in his books: “Toward
Relational Selves,” chapter 5 of Gergen’s (1999) *Invitation to Social Construction;*” and “The Relational Reconstruction of Self,” part IV of Gergen and Gergen’s (2003) *Social Construction: A Reader.* After arguing that many of our emotional and psychological states (e.g., anger, love) are better defined as “performances” and that they only gain meaning by their “relationally embedded nature,” Gergen (1999) writes:

> ...we are now positioned to see the entire vocabulary of the mind as constituted by and within relationship. There is no creation of an independent mind through social relationships, as in earlier accounts. We don’t have to worry about how the social world gains entry into the subjective world of the individual. Rather, from the present standpoint there is no independent territory called “mind” that demands attention. There is action, and action is constituted within and gains its intelligibility through relationship...in this sense theorists propose that thinking is not a private event... (p. 133)

While they are involved in different scholarly projects, both Rogoff and Gergen offer views of intersubjective human activity. Focused on understanding human cognitive development, Rogoff rejects what she calls the commonly used “social influence” research approach to “understanding the collaborative nature of cognition” that “uses the generic individual as the basic unit of analysis and adds social factors as external influences” (Rogoff 1998, p. 680). This type of separation is untenable within Gergen’s constructionist epistemological project as well, which also questions the value of analysis that requires a separation of the self from the exterior world. He argued that this sort of analysis relies on a “dualistic ontology” that “a long history of philosophical writing has taught us...creates problems as profound as they are unsolvable” (Gergen, 1999, p. 8).

Gergen and Rogoff advocate for the adoption of a new view of the self and of human development. They are assumptions that generate a new clarity when trying to understand complex social phenomena such as human development. They are post
modern views that offer new and potentially fruitful views of how organizations develop as well.

The "Language Turn". Within a social constructionist conceptual framework, these ideas of socioculturally specific thought and relational existence help to define a potentially radical "social" aspect of our existence. To understand the "construction" that may be taking place as a result, we look to the third social constructionist assumption about where the language we use gains its meaning. It is an assumption that turns us away from a view of language as an indexical tool where words correspond directly to objects and instead depends upon relational meanings we create in action. According to Gergen (1999) "this [third] assumption follows largely from the use-view of language...On this account, language and all other forms of representation gain their meaning from ways in which they are used within relationships" (p. 48). In other words, the meanings of the words we share, and thus the meaning of the interactions we experience, are more dependent on how we use them in the moment than on a predetermined representational scheme.

To articulate this assumption, Gergen (1999) draws on the work of Wittgenstein who posited that words are not inherently attached to certain things or concepts by concrete representational ties, but instead gain their meaning based on "their use in language" amidst our coordinated almost "game" like activity (Wittgenstein, 1978, as cited in Gergen, 1999, p. 35). This idea that linguistic meaning is derived from contextually dependent coordinations has emerged from various empirical and philosophical sources including Austin’s (1962) speech act theory as well as the sociolinguistic work of Hymes (1974) and Gumperz (1992).
Stanton Wortham (2001), drawing on this work by Gumperz (as well as on the literary analysis of Bakhtin, the ethnomethodology and conversation analysis of Garfinkel, Sacks, and Schegloff, and the sociolinguistic work of Silverstein), articulately describes a view of language, that fits this social constructionist view, though he does not specifically situate it as such. He describes a “dialogic, mediated, and emergent approach to language” (p.159). He describes meaning as context specific and interactionally positioned. In his account, there is a mediating step between participants’ utterances and the meaning derived from them: people in dialogue use and pick up on indexicals or contextualization cues to help identify the context that is relevant. The meaning however, also evolves over time, or emerges through on-going interactions: it can be “revised” (p.61) as we go. A set of emerging cues or indexicals will form a “poetic” structure that, although open for on-going revision, cue the analyst and speaker to the situated meanings coordinated within the interactions (Wortham, 2001, p. 35-44).

If we accept these well developed ideas, as Reason and Bradbury (2001) argue many scholarly circles have, we thus take the “linguistic turn” and “have left the idea of language as ‘representation’ behind us” (p. 5). Furthermore, when the idea embedded in

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8 For example, the meaning of the statement made by an emotional lover can be seen to depend more on what happens after it is made, then by its intention or a pre-determined understanding of what the words reference. If, after the statement: “I am angry about what you did last night,” the interaction evolves into a discussion about the couple’s true love for one another, then the “meaning” of the first utterance could be analyzed as “a need to be listened to,” “a refreshing expression of honesty,” or “an indicator that s/he cares.” If the conversation leads to an argument, then the expression could be interpreted to have been “picking a fight,” or “another complaint.” It is certainly the case that a meaning of the initial statement is tied at its conception, to the emotions it may have emerged from, it is also possible to understand its meaning (and maybe its most pragmatically important meaning) to be defined by how it is connected to the actions (including the subsequent dialog and activity) of those involved. For example, if the original emotions behind the statement were simply sadness and longing but the utterance ended up being part of a violent episode, understanding its meaning as a ‘trigger’ might be more important than its intended meaning. This example is limited but it is meant to begin to illustrate the fact that it is possible to understand the “meanings” of what is said as contingent on how the speakers coordinate their activity with one another and not simply by what was “meant” and what the words indexically refer to.
this ‘turn’, that the meanings we create within our language are dependent on the way we “use” this language together (as opposed to existing somehow within the language itself), is combined with the second constructionist assumption that these agreed upon terms do not come necessarily directly from an objective, natural, or real phenomena but are instead the products of our socio-cultural environment, then it is possible to see how a constructionist view based on these assumptions, could begin to effect the way we could approach social endeavors such as organizational development.

In a school setting, for example, what is said between staff, students and stakeholders becomes central. The way the school, the students, or the work being done is described, joked about, or avoided is a critical location of organizational truths. The choices made regarding what to communicate and how to do so are choices that reflect the very nature of what the school is at any given moment. Consequently, it is important for the organizational change agent or scholar to place discourse near the center of their work.

**Organizations and Discourse**

There are certainly many ways an AI process could be analyzed. Thus far, for example, experimentally, its outcomes have been compared to those of other OD approaches (Jones, 2000); quantitatively its effects on the physiology of participants has been measured (Sekerka & McCraty, 2004); theoretically it has been analyzed as contingent upon antecedent “attachment” issues between participants and their organization (Neilsen, 2005); and reflexively, AI itself has been used as a method for evaluating AI (Emery, Bregendahl, Fernandez-Baca, & Fey, 2007; Whitney & Trotsen-
Bloom, 2004). While many of these efforts have been fruitful, there is a strong argument to be made for discourse analytic design used here.

If we make the linguistic turn towards a constructionist view of how language is actively used and how this can impact the way we interpret and thus act in the world (a turn the developers of AI as well as scholars of post modern OD have taken), then a focus on discourse becomes important. Goodwin and Duranti (1992), for example, citing the significant impact of sociolinguistic studies inspired by the work of Hymes and Gumperz, state emphatically: “Such research has made it clear that it would be blatantly absurd to propose that one provide a comprehensive analysis of human social organization without paying close attention to the details of how human beings employ language to build the social and cultural worlds they inhabit” (p. 1-2). Similarly but from within the organizational studies literature, Alvesson & Karreman (2000b) cite recent work in “philosophy, sociology, social psychology and communications,” and write: “Indeed, it seems that language (and language use) is increasingly being understood as the most important phenomenon, accessible for empirical investigation, in social and organizational research” (p. 1126). Bushe and Marshak (2007) describe how “Post-modern OD focuses on language, metaphor, symbols, day to day conversations and how these shape experience as the critical variables in organization development” (p. 2). They go on to point out that “key premises” of this work include the assumptions that:

Reality is a co-constructed social phenomenon versus reality is something objective that exists separate from the observer; Experience is mediated through language and other symbolic representations; In groups there is no single, objective reality; instead there are multiple realities; In any group power and political processes have made some narratives or stories the established or favored view; Inter-subjective truth is a negotiated rather than a discovered phenomena; Ways of analyzing discourse, including the analysis of organizational stories,
narratives, conversations, metaphors, rhetoric, texts, etc., provide insights into key organizational issues, processes, and actions. (p.2, emphasis added)

These scholars all argue that the analysis of discourse can be a helpful, and possibly essential, method for exploring how we organize ourselves.

Furthermore, the social constructionist conceptual framework adopted by this study suggests that some more “traditional” qualitative methods (e.g., ethnographic field observations, phenomenological interviewing) may not get at the coordinated meaning making and constructive aspects of the discourse under scrutiny. A discourse analysis methodology may better help to explore the processes of social construction. As Phillips and Hardy (2004) write:

Although the linguistic turn has led to a growing acceptance of a social constructivist epistemology, traditional qualitative methods provide more insight into the meaning of social reality than into its production. Discourse analysis provides a sympathetic epistemology and set of methods which are useful for empirically exploring social construction. (p. 82)

In their exploration of the “burgeoning” “new frontier” of organizational discourse analysis, Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) offer a spectrum on which to conceptualize the relationship between organization and discourse. They argue that organizational scholars who have taken the linguistic turn have at one end, the organization as “cast as an already formed object with features and outcomes reflected in discourse.” At the other end the organization “may be seen in a perpetual state of becoming through the ways that the properties of discourse shape organizing” (p. 2). Gee (1999) describes the potentially reciprocal relationship between the two poles as a “chicken and egg” dilemma: “Which comes first? The situation we are in (e.g., a committee meeting)? Or the language we use (our committee ways of talking and

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9 Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) actually offer a third pole as well, one they describe as the organization “as grounded in action and discursive forms” (p. 10).
interacting)? Is this a “committee meeting because we are speaking and acting this way, or are we speaking and acting this way because this is a committee meeting?” (p. 11). A social constructionist conceptual framework for an organizational study can certainly commit to one or the other of these. However, it may be more fruitful for a study to acknowledge the spectrum as an irresolvable chicken and egg paradox that exists in balance and tension. In order to do, each side (i.e., organization as discourse and discourse as organizing) must be more clearly defined.

**Organization as Discourse or as Discursive Context.** At one end of the pole is the “objectified organization,” where the structure of the organization can be described as preceding or determining the structure of the dialogue that takes place. For example, your presence in the context of a committee meeting, or the Equinox program, determines the boundaries of acceptable ways of interacting (as opposed to your ways of interacting determine the nature of the meeting or program). In some ways this positions the organizational context as, what some authors have called a Discourse with a capital “D” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b; Ferdig & Ludema, 2005; Gee, 1999).

Here little “d” discourse refers to the local enactment of language (e.g., conversation or a written memo) and big “D” Discourse refers to a larger discursively constructed social reality (e.g., the Discourses of the performance gap, masculinity, or illegal immigration). Big “D” Discourse is analogous to the Foucaultian sense of discourse where Discourses are “bodies of knowledge that ‘systematically form the object of which they speak’” (Foucault, 1979, p. 49; as cited in Hardy & Phillips, 2004, p. 301). When we speak or act within a Discourse, we are somewhat limited in how we can speak (and simultaneously how we can know) what it is we speak about. Citing a broad
range of ethnographic, linguistic, and psychological literature, Gee (1999) argues that this concept of Discourse covers important aspects of scholars’ conceptions of "communities of practice," "cultural communities," "discourse communities," and "activity systems" (p. 38).

Gee also suggests that these Discourses do not need to be as grand as the cultural conversations about race, class, or gender, but instead can also exist at very local levels. To illustrate this, he describes the separate Discourses that might exist consistently at specific ends of a long bar in a restaurant (p. 22). Some authors have suggested that this type of smaller Discourse, in contrast to the grand or "mega" cultural Discourses and the local in-the-moment interactions of "micro" discourse (or lower-case "d" discourse), could be called a "meso-level" (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b; Heracleous & Marshak, 2004) discourse. Within this framework, organizations, such as a school, could be understood as existing as meso-level D/discourses.

Conversation Analysis work that has focused on institutional settings has predominantly focused on work and professional settings and while at times it has focused on meso-level discourses, much of the work has been oriented around the grander institutional Discourses like "the legal system" or "medicine," etc. (Drew & Sorjonen, 1997; Heritage, 1997). Drawing on conclusions drawn chiefly from Conversation Analysis done in institutional settings, Drew and Sorjonen (1997) describe how people "orient" themselves to the institutional context they are in by limiting themselves to a certain set of linguistic options; in their words: "The point to be made here is that speakers orient to the institutionality of the context, in part through their selection of terms from the variety of alternative ways of describing people, objects and
events” (p. 99). The institutional setting or context, in other words, can be defined by the “various grammatical forms” that make up the contextually specific linguistic or discursive “resources available to participants” (p. 101). Thus while their description of the institutional context is a little less deterministic than some descriptions of larger scale, often oppressive, Focaultian Discourses, Drew and Sorjonen’s depiction of the institutional context is one where the context can be perceived as possessing somewhat stable and influential or structuring qualities.

Another way to conceptualize somewhat stable discursive organizations is to describe them as “mediational” in nature (Cooren & Taylor, 1997; D. Mumby, 2004). In other words, the meso-level organizational discourse (i.e., the patterns of belief and activity identified with the organization) acts as a mediator between the meaning participants make and the organizational discourse or dialogue they are involved in. Participants’ “inferences” or “situational understandings” are guided by the institutional or organizational context (Drew & Sorjonen, 1997, p. 111). The mediational view of context is called upon in Wortham’s description of context mentioned earlier which is in turn indebted to Gumperz’ (1992) notion of context as a referential grounding that once cued into, helps people to make sense of what others are saying. While Gumperz focused more on the way cultural or ethnic ‘contexts’ acted in this way (as opposed to organizational contexts), he did position these contexts as mediating structures.

In summary, whether the organizational Discourse of a school is viewed as a structuring and limiting context, a specific linguistic menu to choose from, or a mediator between text and meaning, it can still be understood to represent in a somewhat stable and objectified sense, the organization itself. While social constructionist thinkers might
argue that this context of mediational discursive rules or habits is for all intents and purposes, all an organization really is, most organizational discourse scholars would likely opt for a slightly more compromising position. For example, the definition for organizational discourse offered by Mumby and Clair (1997) is quoted more than once in the literature:

...when we speak of organizational discourse, we do not simply mean discourse that occurs in organizations. Rather, we suggest that organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are 'nothing but' discourse, but rather that discourse is the principal means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are. (p. 181; emphasis in original)

Not only do Mumby and Clair argue that there may be more to organizations than discourse, they also introduce the idea that instead of being limited by their organizational context, organizational members may actually be actively constructing their organizational reality all the time.

Water against the Rock: Discourse as Organizing. As Mumby and Clair (1997) suggest, at the opposite end of the spectrum from organizations as meso-level somewhat stable discursive contexts is the idea that the discourse that takes place within organizational settings is constantly shaping and re-shaping those settings. If we imagine that the daily discourse occurring at an organization or school is a stream flowing through its rocky channel, where the channel represents some of the limiting structures offered by the reified organizational context, one can see metaphorically how an organizational Discourse (the rocks) can limit and set boundaries that influence how people interact (water). However, one could also note how the water works, albeit often slowly and minutely, to change the course of its stream-bed by carving away at sandy spots and maybe at times, dislodging a large stone. There may still be the over-all chicken and egg
question for which came first, the flow of water or an initial channel of some sort, but at least at any given moment after the stream is running, the flow of water is working to shape and alter its own boundaries. Similarly, while constrained to a degree by the organizational context, the discourse that occurs at a school every day works to shape the context of the future.

This reflexive or reciprocal relationship between discourse and Discourse or between language and context is summarized by Goodwin and Duranti (1992) when they write:

Recent work in a number of different fields has called into question the adequacy of earlier definitions of context in favor of a more dynamic view of the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions of communicative events. Instead of viewing context as a set of variables that statically surround strips of talk, context and talk are now argued to stand in a mutually reflexive relationship to each other, with talk, and the interpretive work it generates, shaping context as much as context shapes talk...the characteristics of language as an interactive phenomenon have challenged traditional notions of linguistic structure and linguistic rules, suggesting a view of the relationship between language and context as a process that emerges and changes through time and space. (p. 31)

Goodwin and Duranti imply that our linguistic activities can influence even the non-linguistic aspects of our larger contexts or Discourses. In an introduction to Conversation Analysis, Pomerantz & Fehr (1997) also point to this reflexive relationship between speakers and their context. They write (similarly to Gee’s committee meeting example) that: “by speaking ‘informally,’ one is not only responsive to an informal setting but also helps to constitute the setting as informal” (p. 70).

Within the organizational discourse literature, this active and influential role of discourse has been described as the “organizing nature of discourse” (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2004, p131; emphasis in original). At this end of Fairhurst and Putnam’s

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10 I am indebted to Dr. John Lannamann of the University of New Hampshire for this stream metaphor.
spectrum, instead of a focus on an organization per se, the focus is on “organizing” and in this case, the organizing that transpires through discursive interactions. Ferdig and Ludema (2005) adopt this angle of analysis when they write: “Conversations, in this broad sense, are the processes through which we construct organizations as well as the product of the construction. Conversations are the organization” (p. 178).

Ultimately, an organizational study should embrace the dynamic nature of the relationship between discourse and organizing. The relationship between context and discourse is reciprocal. As Heritage (1997) puts it: “The assumption is that it is fundamentally through interaction that context is built, invoked and managed, and that it is through interaction that institutional imperatives originating from outside the interaction are evidenced and made real and enforceable for the participants” (p. 168). A reflexive and holistic social constructionist framework will on the one hand see each end of the spectrum as offering a potentially generative angle of analysis and on the other hand as existing with the other as inexorably intertwined as a single stream in the woods.  

A conceptual framework for an organizational study rooted in social constructionist approach to organizational discourse has the ability to inform an understanding of any OD process. When applied to AI, a process that is rooted in the potential of local discourse to construct the reality at an organization, this framework offers a perspective that matches the epistemological origins of AI. More importantly,

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11 While the holistic view is appealing, it does suggest a certain analytical difficulty that resembles the Heisenberg uncertainly principle in physics: as you try to pin down an object’s location you inevitable loose accuracy with respect to determining its velocity, and vis versa. In this case, as you try to pin down and understand the important, influential, or structuring aspects of the organizational context, you will start to lose the ability to see if and how interaction in motion can (and are) changing it; and vis versa.
this framework also sheds light on how AI can be most productively implemented and analyzed.

**Situating Appreciative Inquiry within the Social Constructionist Framework**

AI’s original conception was rooted in a turn away from a positivistic or modern view of action research and organizational change, towards the post-modern socio-rationalist worldview described by the earlier work of Gergen (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Since that time, Gergen’s socio-rational epistemology has evolved into the social constructionist epistemology outlined in this conceptual framework. AI is now consistently understood within the literature as a distinctly social constructionist practice (e.g., Ludema et al., 2001; McNamee, 2002; Whitney & Trotsen-Bloom, 2003).

Consequently, if we take the linguistic turn and begin to look seriously at discourse as a powerful lens through which to view the construction of organizations or organizing, AI becomes appealing. It’s epistemological roots and its focus on effecting change through discursive means, makes it a legitimate post modern option for OD (K Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996; Marshak & Grant, 2008).

Within the context of school improvement and reform efforts, it is important to apply this framework and its social constructionist lens to the more narrow question of how the AI process may help an educational program manage organizational change. For example, how does approaching AI as an organizational change process from a social constructionist perspective shed light on the first “d” of AI: the initial AI step of “Discovery?”
If a social constructionist framework is not applied then the “discovery” phase of AI could be understood to function as a positivistic form of inquiry focused on uncovering the truth about a school or program. In this light, it could be argued that as an organization utilized only affirmative or positive questions to uncover the reality of what was going on within it, that it might miss an important half of the story. The diagnosis would be inaccurate and potentially unethical. However, when inquiry in the service of OD is understood through a social constructionist lens, the picture shifts a bit. As Bushe and Marshak (2007) put it:

Diagnosis as a formal step in contemporary OD practice is withering away...it only makes theoretical sense to diagnose if one assumes that there is something real and tangible independent of the meaning making process to diagnose. Postmodern OD assumes that the things it is interested in – social systems, human learning and performance – do not have this kind of tangible reality. Instead, in post-modern OD any data collected is used not to identify the problem, or “the truth”, but to raise collective awareness of the multitude of perspectives and discourses at play in the system and/or the meaning-making process itself.

Ferdig and Ludema (2005) add that “the contribution social constructionism makes to the literature of organizational change in complex systems” is that “it places the dynamics of communication front and center as the primary means by which change is generated” (p. 171) and thus for OD practitioners “changing the qualities of conversation, including who talks to whom, when, where, why, about what, and in what way becomes an important vehicle for transformative change” (p. 181). From this perspective, the appreciative interviews that accompany the “discovery” phase are not tools to get at the truth but instead are vehicles that interact with the conversations or dialogue that occur between organizational members.

Through the lens of the constructive and “organizing aspects of discourse,” these appreciative conversations are the site of the present and future organization, not just fact
finding endeavors. As Purser et al. (2005) describes it, “the key to AI may be the element of collective discussion. It is not that such discussion generates new ideas or images or confirms old ones, though this may happen. Rather, participants in the discussion, encouraged to let go of their usual identities by an appreciative focus on excellence, have the opportunity to live in future time” (p. 20). What Purser is getting at here is that although the conversations are “about” what people think has happened and is happening at the program, their power is not in their ability to reflect accurately these experiences or incidents, but instead as energizing moments where the future of the organization is being constructed. Simply put by McNamee (2003), AI may be a “potentially generative assessment tool by virtue of the propensity of the appreciative oriented conversation to yield creative possibilities for coordination” (p. 24).

Similarly, when K. Gergen et al. (2004) explore AI through a social constructionist lens as a promising approach to organizational development and change, they highlight the potential of the process to facilitate affirmative and productive dialogue, and not as a way to uncover the true successes of a program and build from them. Cooperrider and Sekerka (2003), in their attempt to describe the change process as it occurs during an AI process, focus on the way they believe that inquiry into the “appreciative world,” progresses alongside an increased “relatedness” (i.e., participants spend time together “bonding” over affirmative topics and activities), ultimately

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12 The perspective that an assessment is not in fact a separate (and privileged) event that can somehow uncover the status of the assessed is echoed by Rogoff (1998) in her discussion of student assessment: “The division of the two phases [of an inquiry] into an intervention and an assessment often involves the assumption that the posttest taps into some rather stable outcome such as the acquisition of a skill or the attainment of knowledge. The posttest may be regarded as a context-free window on the intellectual...possessions of the subject. However, from a sociocultural perspective, no situation is context free. The training and the posttest phase are simply two different social situations, both social and both involving processes of learning and communicating. Thus neither phase would be privileged as revealing what an individual can do and think.” (p. 143-144)
generating an “activation energy” with which participants can enact changes. Here again, the change process is not viewed as a linear, if compelling, implementation of a positively (and positivistically!) derived plan. Instead the potential of organizational change is viewed as born from generative local interactions.

After a review of the OD literature that cited measurable outcomes for AI processes, Bushe and Khamisa (2005) concluded that the results of AI processes are very much dependent on the spirit in which the process is undertaken. They argue that when AI is practiced based on a theory of “implementation” or behavior change, that the outcomes are more likely to resemble those of more traditional OD practices. However, AI processes focused more on “transformation” or changes-in-thinking (which they define from a constructionist perspective as the creation of new “generative” language) were more apt to produce more significant organizational change. In other words, it seems plausible that the way AI is understood affects the way it is practiced and that it holds greater potential when approached through a Social constructionist framework.

There are of course other valid ways for participants or scholars to conceptualize and understand AI and the organizations, where it may be implemented. When some of these other lenses are utilized, some potentially serious limitations to a constructionist approach to AI and the organizational d/Discourse at Equinox. For example, what if participants view it as a more of a diagnostic process of inquiry than a social constructionist approach towards generating a new and generative language?
A Social Constructionist Approach to Organizational Discourse: Limitations

In contrast to the discursively constructed organization that emerges from the conceptual framework offered here, many would argue that significant aspects of our schools and their contexts exist beyond discourse. Organizational scholar Mike Reed (2000; 2004) cautions from what he calls a “realist” perspective, that the world is not wholly constructed and insists that discourse occurs in a “previously structured” environment (M. Reed, 2004, p. 415). This caution is also embraced by scholars who are more steeped in the study of discourse and constructionist paradigms (e.g., Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Gee, 1999). This concern for pre-existing structure can take on ethical significance.

A more critical perspective would assume that there are some fundamentally powerful and entrenched structures that may severely limit the options available to certain people in certain situations. To ignore these structures in order to focus on the positive construction of the future can be problematic. For example, in the Spring of 2008 I attended a workshop designed to orient those working in the social services to the AI process. The participants in the workshop included a woman who worked with families living in public housing in Washington, DC. During the course of the workshop, she struggled visibly and vocally with the proposition that the single mothers of color that she worked with, had at their disposal, the opportunity to construct their own realities.

Theoretically, an answer to this may rest in the idea that Discourses can be so entrenched in the practices of so many people that they seem to have an objectified and unalterable existence, even if these limiting structures may in fact be better understood as the formidable yet malleable sides of the streambed. That said, facilitating an AI process
in certain oppressive situations could be tricky at best and highly problematic at worst. While not as blatantly oppressive as certain societal Discourses of injustice, similar issues arise within the hierarchical power relationship inherent in most organizations, including schools. Facilitation in this context must be sensitive to the possibility, for example, that exclusively positive focus could potentially be utilized to serve the powers in charge (P. Rogers & Fraser, 2003; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007).

It would seem that while it may be supported by a theoretically cogent justification, the application of a social constructionist lens to a socially complex and problematic context, may have some serious limitations. To this point, Reason and Bradbury (2001) argue that although constructionist paradigms:

> help us immensely see through the myth of the modernist world, they do not help us move beyond the problems it has produced...We are particularly concerned about this in these times of approaching ecological crisis when appreciating the embeddedness in the more-than-human-world (Abram, 1996) is so critical...we need to find a way of acknowledging the lessons of the linguistic turn while not ignoring the deeper structures of reality...(p. 6)

**Summary**

With these potentially serious practical limitations in mind, a conceptual framework that relies on a post modern approach to organizational discourse, still offers a potentially generative way of facilitating and analyzing AI. The framework is congruent with the theoretical underpinnings of AI as OD action research and is consistent with the thinking that drives the methodology of organizational discourse analysis. It is a conceptual framework rooted in social constructionist thinking that offers new and valid perspectives on how to study and understand organizations.
This path to understanding organizing draws heavily on the work of Kenneth Gergen and includes emphases on the sociohistorical nature of our thinking and knowing, the relational nature of our existence, and a use-view of language. It relies on this view of language where meaning is not as much the result of indexed references as it is coordinated, emergent, and mediated by context. By embracing this view, organizational discourse studies offer us a spectrum where organizations can be understood at one end as somewhat stable discursively constructed objects and at the other end, as emerging through the organizing properties of discourse. A useful conceptual framework and associated analysis tries to hold both ends of the spectrum in view by acknowledging their reciprocal nature and by orienting research questions with both ends in mind.

When applied directly as a lens through which to view the change process that AI may offer an educational program, the framework illuminates the potential power of appreciative discourse and dialogue but leaves in the shadows potentially important oppressive structural realities. Consequently, in order to conduct an effective analysis using this lens, a rigorous and yet reflexive discourse analytic methodology must be developed.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Introduction

AI has emerged from a theoretical framework that foregrounds discourse as a significant locus of organizational change and development. This study is designed to analyze how Appreciative Inquiry operates within the discourse of an alternative school and program. Equinox Program staff, students and other stakeholders were recorded as they engaged in an AI process facilitated by the researcher. With my two posed research questions in mind, the data are being explored for indicators of how the appreciative process emerges within the participants’ dialogue, and how this dialogue, works to construct their organizational reality. This chapter is a complete description of the study’s methodology including: 1) my dual role within the study; 2) the implementation of AI at Equinox; 3) a description of the “socio linguistic interpretive case study” research design; 4) my approach to data analysis; 5) the limitations of the study’s methods; and 6) a rationale for the study’s potential validity.

My Roles

My presence in the project is twofold: I was the facilitator of an organizational change initiative and I am also a researcher analyzing the process. In order to reflexively keep tabs on how these simultaneous roles potentially affect the study, I maintained a journal throughout the course of the project, including the stages of analysis and writing.
(Alvesson, 2003). In order to further describe this dual role, I will draw on the two constructs of "involvement" and "presence," as introduced by Schram (2006). He defines involvement, as it corresponds to the level to which the researcher participates in the research activities and he defines presence, as the level to which involvement impacts my the analytical process.

**Involvement**

Citing Rossman and Rallis (2003), Schram outlines involvement along the spectrums of a) levels of "immersion" in the setting and b) "openness" about one's role. As for immersion, because of my role as facilitator, I consider myself as being fully immersed in the project as a participant. While I am an outsider to a degree, as I am not an actual staff member at Equinox\(^{13}\), I am an insider with regards to the research project which is focused specifically on the AI process at Equinox. In other words, while I am not an integral part of the Equinox program as it functions outside of the AI process, the study's focus is really on interactions during the AI process exclusively; a process in which I was fully immersed. In addition to my role as facilitator, my role as researcher did emerge within some activities, and I at times experience my two roles in conflict. For example, during one meeting (10/8/08), the group transitioned to a table for a new activity where I had audio and video recorders set up. While the other participants seemed to adjust without too much difficulty to these researcher props, if I were solely a

\(^{13}\) At the start of this study I already had existing professional relationships with many of the staff members and a few of the students. For almost 10 years (1998-2007) I worked with a therapeutic adventure program that shared with Equinox the same campus and parent mental health services organization. While I never worked directly for the Equinox program, my program provided Equinox clients and staff with a variety of services, all of which I coordinated and some of which I directly facilitated. Consequently, through the provision of these services as well as the common location of the programs, over the years I was able to get to know many of the staff and clients at the Equinox program. These relationships (in particular a close relationship with the parent company divisional VP who oversees Equinox and during part of the study was the program's acting program director) position me as less than a total outsider and no doubt were instrumental to my ability to gain access to the program as a site for this project.
facilitator, I would never have opted to “disrupt” the meeting with the introduction of recording equipment. As a researcher however, this was exactly what I felt I needed to do. So in this case, the researcher’s needs were met *in spite of* the needs of the facilitator.

As a researcher, I felt a need to have the school follow through with the AI process more or less as I had planned it (in order to maintain a fidelity to the AI process I hoped to analyze). To accomplish this follow through, at times I felt the urge to do a little “arm twisting” (Researcher’s Journal 2/10/09). In these types of situations, my two roles were in sync, as both the researcher and facilitator wanted to have AI happen, however in these instances it seemed that my goals were not necessarily in sync with the goals of the participants: if they had been, then ideally no “arm twisting” would have been needed.

This tension between my needs and those of some of the participants was in conflict with my hopes for a degree of “reciprocity” between us. This tension will be further explored in the Discussion chapter of this paper.

With regard to my “openness” or the way I portrayed my involvement during the study (Schram, 2006, p. 125), I tried to be transparent about my dual roles with the participants (Pacino, 2000). For example, at an opening workshop (10/8/08), with a group of program staff, I expressed that I had woken up feeling nervous about the day’s activities. When a participant asked if I was nervous about facilitating the process, I pointed out that it was not concern over facilitating the AI process but rather my role as a researcher that had elicited the butterflies. I described that I was anxious not so much about how the day would work as part of an organizational development process but instead, how well it would work as a source of data for a research design on which my doctorate was dependent.
While I was very open with study participants about my role(s) and my goals, I was somewhat unspecific about my research questions. I merely described how I am hoping to better understand if and how AI works. If a participant expressed a more detailed methodological or theoretical interest in my project I would elaborate but more info than that seemed unnecessary at the outset.

**Presence**

Defining my “presence” or, more specifically, managing “the relationship between my presence in a setting” and how it effects “the credibility of my work” (Schram, 2006, p. 133) is another reflexive aspect of the study’s methodology. Here, I lean on the history of action researchers as fully involved subjective participants in their studies (P. Reason & H. Bradbury, 2001) and thus do not claim that I will offer a definitive or ‘objective’ account of the AI process at Equinox. Further, I will accept McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead’s (1996) permission for an action researcher to be openly “passionate” about an “overt desire” to improve a situation (p. 9, 14).

That said, as I headed into the study, I was wary of how my desire as a facilitator to feel successful would influence my interpretations of the data as a researcher. Take, for example, my search for the discursive emergence of AI at Equinox (research question #1). While as a researcher I am trying to stay open to whether or not AI “worked,” as a facilitator my ego is somewhat wrapped up in whether or not I was able to be the catalyst of a successful process. A success that, based on one reading of the AI and post modern OD literature, could be understood as a victory of one discourse (in this case an appreciative one) over others (Hardy & Phillips, 2004; D. Mumby, 2004). So if the research demonstrates the emergence of an appreciative discourse at Equinox, then the
facilitator would feel good about the process he had introduced. Thus there is no doubt a chance that the facilitator’s desire for success could make the researcher more likely to “find” an influential presence of an appreciative discourse.

In other words, it would be different if my research questions were focused, for example, on ‘the roles women administrators play in school-wide meetings’ and my research setting was school-wide meetings that were part of an AI process that I was facilitating. In that scenario, while my interactions as a facilitator could certainly effect how the women administrators presented in the study, my ability to analyze the roles they were playing would not hinge on my success as an organizational developer using AI, (AI would not have to have had a significant impact in order for me to have rich data to work with). Instead, however, my research questions are focused on how elements of an appreciative discourse emerge. Thus my findings are intertwined with the ‘success’ of my facilitative “bid” at influencing the discursive context (Gee, 1999, p.47). Due to this contingency, I have tried to be sensitive to how I might at times have been “subordinating moral values in favour of those that meet personal or social aspirations;” and consequently, I can see how “personal ambition could lead to forms of research that are unethical” at worst and invalid at best (Greenbank, 2003, p. 798).

Ultimately, I feel much of this conflict of interest is tempered by two conclusions that I have reached while analyzing the data. The first is my interpretation that the appreciative discourse I introduced merged (or was mediated by) an existing “positive” discourse at the program. This conclusion allows me to explore the presence of this combined positive discourse that to a degree was already present, as opposed to discourse that was present solely as a result of my successful facilitative “bid.” Second, I believe
this appreciative and/or positive discourse to be present but also contested. This also allows me the comfort of seeing that I can still have rich data to work with even if I was not successful as a change agent; a comfort that I believe helped me to interpret the data with fewer ego-strings attached.

This analytic move away from exploring the presence of an influential appreciative discourse towards a broader and contested positive discourse alleviates some of the tension surrounding my involvement and presence within the study. However, in order to maintain the credibility of my study, I have to try to maintain the kind of reflexivity that allowed me to journal about and unpack some of these tensions in the first place. In this pursuit of reflexivity, I believe I am in-line with Greenabank’s (2003) position, that “research methods cannot be value-free in their application” and thus “researchers should adopt a reflexive approach and attempt to be honest and open about how values influence their research” (from abstract).

**Implementation of AI at Equinox**

In an effort to pursue this reflexivity, it is important to be as transparent as possible regarding the AI process I attempted to facilitate at Equinox. While I agree with van der Haar and Hosking (2004) when they write: “the question of what AI ‘is’ must necessarily be answered in relation to each case and its local particularities” (p. 1024), AI does seem to maintain an amount of conceptual cohesiveness that allows for “AI” to be written about as a unique OD practice. Consequently, some level of “implementation fidelity” (P. Rogers & Fraser, 2003) is important if others are to learn from a study such as the one proposed here. With these ‘fidelity’ concerns in mind, I followed what I saw as
a core set of practice guidelines that emerge from the AI literature. In particular, I collected data during the first two “D’s” (discovery and design). The facilitation and design of the process was guided by Whitney and Trotsen-Bloom’s (2003) *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*. Whitney and Trotsen-Bloom’s book is a practical guide that presents an AI process that, based on my review of the literature, is in line with AI’s theoretical roots and common modes of practice. The process facilitated at the Equinox program mirrored Whitney and Trotsen-Bloom’s “organizational change” (p. 26) engagement strategy utilizing a “Core Group Inquiry” that led into a “Whole-System 4-D Dialogue” (p. 32). The way this played out specifically at the Equinox program is included in appendix A: “AI at the Equinox Program,” which begins with a chronological overview of the process.

Finally, following the analysis of Bushe and Kasssam (2005), an attempt was made to facilitate the AI process with an eye towards “transformation” stemming from a social constructionist approach, as opposed to more of an “implementation” rooted in diagnosis and planning. In other words, I tried to pay particular attention to the localized, continuous, or self-organizing change possibilities (as highlighted by some of the post-modern OD ideas explored in this paper).

**Research Design: A Socio-Linguistic Interpretive Case Study**

As the facilitator I focused on the implementation of the AI process. As the researcher analyzing the process, I focus on a case study involving an alternative school

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14 The process at Equinox, while using the four “D” cycle as a conceptual source for planning, ultimately may be better understood as having followed the first three “I’s” of Watkins and Mohr’s (2001) hypothesized four “I” cycle: Initiate, Inquire, Imagine, and Innovate (as cited in Coghlan et al., 2003, p. 12). A diagram of the 4-I cycle is included in Appendix A: AI at the Equinox Program
taking part in an organizational development process. In order to understand this process, I focused on discursive units of analysis.

The setting for this discourse analysis is the AI process as it takes place within the organizational boundaries of the Equinox program. The data is analyzed with primarily this organizational setting in mind and thus the research design can be described most simply as a case study (Creswell, 2003, p. 183). Merriam (1998) offers categories of case studies based in their analytic intent. This study is designed with more than simply “descriptive” aims and yet it does not seek to make overt judgment about the effectiveness of AI. Thus it is not a “descriptive” or an “evaluative” study. Instead its intent is to “illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions” (in this case assumptions about AI and the discursive construction of organizations), and can thus be considered an “interpretive” or “analytic” case study (Merriam, 1998, p. 38).

Further, because of its constructionist assumptions as well its discourse analytic methodology, the study can be further identified as what Phillips and Hardy (2002) call a “social linguistic analysis.” A social linguistic analysis, as they define it, is focused on “a close reading of the text to provide insight into its organization and construction and also to understand how texts work together to construct other phenomena” (p. 22). Phillips and Hardy contrast this with other types of constructionist discourse analyses that are conducted either with a broader focus on the context in which the text is occurring or with a more critical intent to expose the power dynamics at play. This study’s research design builds from this combination of Creswell, Merriam, Phillips, and Hardy’s work, and can be thus be described as a socio-linguistic interpretive case study. The design involved the following setting and units of analysis.
Setting

The AI process analyzed in this study was facilitated at the publicly funded, privately owned Equinox school and residential program for at-risk and special-needs adolescents in Massachusetts. Primary data (i.e., recorded discourse) was collected exclusively during organized AI activities. Thus the setting of the study was the Equinox school during an AI process. The recorded activities involved staff, students, parents, and external stakeholders in different combinations and are summarized in Table 1.

At the time of data collection, the Equinox program had the capacity to service 13 residents and over 30 additional day students. Referrals to the school were made primarily through the regional special education departments within the state Department of Education (DOE). Referrals and payment to the residence were made primarily through the state Department of Mental Health (DMH). There was also some limited third party insurance reimbursement.

Students and clients had arrived for a variety of reasons and diagnoses including learning, emotional, and psychological disabilities. While the program accepted clients and students whose issues were severe enough to warrant placement outside of the mainstream educational system and to require significant behavior management interventions (including occasional restraint and the long term prescription of mood stabilizing or anti-psychotic medications), Equinox is not a locked facility and can be considered a “step down” or “less restrictive” setting than a hospital or short term crisis facility. Equinox does not serve clients with mental retardation diagnoses. Approximately 30 staff were employed including administrators, teachers, clinicians, residential youth workers, awake-overnight staff, and behavior management specialists.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Recording Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/8/08</td>
<td>Advisory Team reviews AI theory, goals of OD, and the facilitator/researcher's dual role and then conducts appreciative interviews with one another. They are then recorded as they create a poster (Data sample 4, Appendix D) depicting the positive core of the Equinox program.</td>
<td>(8) staff from program including teachers, clinicians, and administrators (eight attend first part of activity and six are recorded during the poster-making)</td>
<td>Digital Video/Audio Recorder and Digital Audio Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/16/08</td>
<td>Advisory Team is recorded as they: a) review poster created during the prior week, b) recount moments during the past week when they felt they witnessed aspects of the programs' positive core (as depicted in the poster), and c) plan further implementation of the AI process at the program.</td>
<td>(9) staff from the program, including (teachers, clinicians, and administrators)</td>
<td>Digital Video/Audio Recorder and Digital Audio Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/6/09</td>
<td>As part of AI “summit” meeting, break-out group reviews appreciative interviews between students, staff, parents, and stakeholders. Group then tries to envision what the “perfect” day at the program might look like.</td>
<td>(1) staff from the program (clinician), (2) parents, (4) students, and (1) Department of Mental Health Case-Worker</td>
<td>Digital Video/Audio Recorder and Digital Audio Recorder (Audio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/6/09</td>
<td>As part of AI “summit” meeting, break-out group reviews appreciative interviews between students, staff, parents, and stakeholders. Group then tries to envision what the “perfect” day at the program might look like.</td>
<td>(3) staff from the program (teachers and a behavior specialist), (1) parent, and two (2) students</td>
<td>Digital Video/Audio Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/6/09</td>
<td>As part of AI summit meeting, break-out groups reconvene with some additional participants to discuss what actions can be taken over the next six months to help Equinox be the program they want it to be.</td>
<td>(6) staff from the program (teachers, clinician, administrator, behavior specialist, residential counselor), (3) students, (1) parent, (1) Department of Mental Health Case-Worker</td>
<td>Digital Video/Audio Recorder for first half of activity and Digital Audio Recorder for second half of activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the year leading up to the time of this study, Equinox had been experiencing a significant turn-over of its leadership. As of October 2008, the program had just recently hired a new educational director (in charge of the school), had promoted from within a new clinical director, and was yet to fill a vacant program director position. While data were being collected for this study, the Program Director’s responsibilities, which included the oversight of all residential, clinical, and educational operations, was shared by the divisional VP and the former clinical director. This transitional period, particularly significant to a program that had stable leadership for the 10 years prior, was exacerbated by severe regulatory actions taken by the DOE who found the school to be out of licensure compliance. Also, during the period of the AI process and data collection, referrals to the school program were at historic low, adding a significant financial strain.

The Equinox program is unique in some ways but it exists within the context of potentially thousands of programs serving similar populations of youth through similar funding schemes, referral sources, and program goals (AACRC, 2007; Broughman & Swaim, 2006; J. K. Edwards, 1994; Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002; "National Association of Private Special Education Centers," 2008; E. P. Smith et al., 2004). Many of these programs and schools likely suffer from similar difficult and stressful situations. The issue of chronic staff turn-over, for example, which was an important aspect of the Equinox environment during this study, is common throughout the youth care worker field (Larson, Hewitt, & Knoblauch, 2005).

These features of Equinox (i.e., a clinically oriented special education program; a challenging therapeutic population of students; a significant staff turn-over rate; and a
precarious relationship with funding sources) all contributed significantly to the results of the study. The AI process was a time consuming organizational initiative, a commitment that could not be made lightly amidst competing needs and priorities. Consequently, the activities involved in the AI process that were recorded for this study took place as conscious planned events that were a departure from program activities that would have otherwise taken place.

**Units of Analysis: Events, Sequential Talk, & Repertoires**

Consistent with the discourse analytic methodology, the focus of the study is on speech activity. In particular, the analysis explores the speech activity during interpersonal dialogue. This mirrors the idea presented in the Chapter 2, that language gains much of its meaning through the way it is coordinated locally. The primary focus is on how adjacent statements imply how the participants coordinate meaning between one another rather than on individuals and their intentions. In an effort to describe a shift away from speech-act analyses focused on speaker intentions, Cooren and Taylor (1997) explain this analytic move: “Rather than starting from a subject who performs an act, we propose therefore, with Ducrot (1991) to start with the act as it is accomplished and interpreted, and to demonstrate how different acts accomplished by locutors are differentiated according to the transformations they generate” (p232). This analysis is organized along these lines and thus focuses on the units of discourse themselves.15

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15 This approach to dialogue is similar to the ethnomethodological work done by Garfinkel and others, where the analysis does not try to determine if the “actors accounts are accurate or faulty” (Heritage, 1984, p. 140). The focus on discourse as the unit of analysis in this study is even more similar to Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) description of their social psychological discourse analytic work, which is focused on: “not trying to recover events, beliefs and cognitive processes from participants’ discourse, or treat language as an indicator or signpost to some other state of affairs but looking at the analytically prior question of how discourse or accounts of these things are manufactured” (p. 135).
More specifically, this broke down into three basic units of analysis: events, sequential talk, and interpretive repertoires.

**Events.** The first unit of analysis that I utilize is a mid-level unit that consists of anywhere from a couple of exchanges or conversational “turns” to a couple of minutes of sustained dialogue between multiple parties. This type of unit is described by Gumperz & Berenz (1993) as a “thematically coherent” and clearly bounded “event.” They describe the process of locating them through the “segmentation of the interaction into thematically coherent and empirically boundable portions, that is, events within the encounter as a whole” (p. 94, emphasis in original).

**Sequential Talk.** Once these events or sections of interest are isolated, attention is paid to a second, finer grained unit of analysis: what Gumperz and Berenz (1993) call sequential analysis. This involves a closer look at sequential talk, or conversational turn-taking, and at the meaning that is coordinated at this finer level. It includes what Pomerantz and Fehr (1997) describe as linguistic “packaging” (e.g., selection of reference terms or humor) as well as the timing and taking of turns (p. 72-3). It is at this level where the bulk of the analysis takes place and where the major conversational constructs of accounting and repair along with the participants’ use-of-humor are utilized (these will be described further in the following “Data Analysis” section).

**Interpretive Repertoires.** The third and final unit of analysis is a broader grouping of linguistic practices or resources that I propose exist from one event to another. These practices include “ways” of talking or ways of making sense of the talk. While there are likely a number of these that could be constructed, my first research question (*How do the influences of the appreciative process emerge within the participants’ dialogue?*) is in
essence a search for an emerging appreciative discourse. I am looking for evidence of a ‘way of talking’ that can be attributed to the appreciative inquiry process that I have introduced. Based on my analysis of the data, I argue that there is in fact an “appreciative discourse” that is evident in a number of events. This appreciative discourse consists of a cohesive set of linguistic resources (e.g., terms, metaphors, or ways of describing) that participants engage with.16

As a broader scale unit of analysis, I believe this cohesive set of appreciative dialogic practices is an example of an “interpretive repertoire” (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) According to Wetherell and Potter (1988), the repertoire consists of:

“... the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. Any particular repertoire is constituted out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion. Commonly these terms are derived from one or more key metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signaled by certain tropes or figures of speech. (p. 172)

As a rough example, one can think of the fact that in many professional or institutional settings (such as medical or legal settings) the repertoire available to express oneself or to interpret what is being said, is different than that which might be drawn upon in other more casual settings or even in other institutional settings. (Heritage, 1997).

On an even broader level, different cultural backgrounds also likely contribute to the development of different interpretive repertoires. This allows for the same utterances or exchanges to be understood in varied ways by different people when they are respectively drawing on different culturally influenced interpretive frameworks (Gumperz, 1992).

16 Ultimately, this ‘appreciative discourse’ did not seem to be a product exclusively of the AU process, but instead was part of a broader big “D” ‘Positive Discourse,’ an idea that will be explored in the discussion section of this paper.
A repertoire exists as "a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 138). These repertoires in turn serve as the context in which meaning is made and understood. The comments: "that’s bad" or "that’s cool" for example, have very different meanings depending on the repertoire in use. Thus, the repertoire is more than a list of available terms or a catalogue of metaphors. It is also a "a web of felicity conditions or a system of distinctions" that is "required for language to be used meaningfully" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 29).

In summary, my units of analysis are three types of discourse segments: a) events that seemed relevant to my research questions; b) the detailed interchanges that occur within these events; and c) the patterns of discourse and meaning-making which were related to the AI process and seem to be utilized across multiple events. In essence, I identified exchanges that included moments where a distinctly appreciative or positive discourse seemed to be at play. These events were then analyzed more acutely in an effort to better define the boundaries of this appreciative way of talking, boundaries that marked the edge of an appreciative repertoire.

**Data Analysis**

In order to identify the events and unpack the turn-taking sequences, I followed the general discourse analytic technique offered by Gee (1999):
grammatical terminology we use is less important than the patterns we find and
the hypothesis we form and test. (p. 97, 99)

More specifically, it is a three step process. First, I listen and watch the recorded
meetings with an eye towards the “events” that are relevant to my research questions and
label or code these events based on what I think is being accomplished within them.
Second, I transcribe these events with an increased focus on the linguistic features of
conversational exchanges. And third, utilizing some existing constructs I have found
within the discourse analysis and conversation analysis literature, I revisit the data as well
as my initial assumptions about what is going on within it.

**Step 1: Identification and Labeling of Events**

I identify the events more or less intuitively, while following Gee’s (1999) advice
of initially grouping segments of recorded discourse that struck me as having the
potential to “speak to” or “illuminate” my research questions (p.97). These segments of
data are “bounded” events such as those described by conversation analysts Pomerantz
and Fehr (1997). They recommend that the sequence chosen for initial analysis should be
bounded by the initiation of a new action or topic and by the moment when the next turn
is not associated with a prior action (p. 71).

So, for example, after I listened to the recorded discourse featured in Data Sample
2 in Appendix D: Extended Data Samples, I was initially struck by Maria’s response to
Bill’s suggestion of “increasing accountability” in line 62. He was trying to describe a
“challenging” approach to youth work and she was taking issue with his reference to
“accountability.” In particular, I noted what she says in line 67, that his comment “...is

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17 Whenever possible I will excerpt transcribed data directly within the text of this paper. However
“Appendix D: Extended Data Samples” is offered as a resource for viewing transcribed data in lengths that
would be too unwieldy for in-text citation. Appendix C is an index of the symbols used for transcription.
sounding more negative…” Since it seems that they are discussing the ‘negativity’ of his tone or word choice, I think this might be a moment where an issue related to the appreciative process (i.e., talk focused in a seemingly appreciative or positive manner) comes into play. Upon revisiting the data, I decided the segment was bounded at its beginning by Bill’s comment in line 13: “Challenge for experiential learning…” At this moment and in this line Bill offers a new idea, as the group continues to decide what items are to be added to a poster they are working on. His reference to challenge and experiential learning is divergent from the previous topic of ‘vocational training.’ His comment does not address vocational training, and instead begins a new activity of defining what he meant by “challenge” (it is ultimately within this effort of defining “challenge” that he offers the comment “increasing accountability” that Maria takes issue with). The conversational exchanges related directly to this effort to find an agreeable way to include “challenges” as part of the core of the Equinox program end at line 104. The ending is marked by some laughter, some agreement, and a long pause. After this closing, Maria returns to the listing of skills they have on the poster, an effort that is still oriented to the group’s poster activity but is not related to the pursuit of an acceptable definition for “learning through challenges.” Thus, lines 13-104 take shape as a specific bounded speech event; an event that is analytically isolated because it has the potential to ‘illuminate’ my research objective of identifying observable moments where an appreciative process (or an appreciative discourse) might be at play within the participants’ dialogue.

In this way, my initial step of data analysis is focused on the isolation of sections of data that are relevant to my research questions and represented specific bounded
activities. It was a process that was predominantly informed by both Gee (1999) and Pomerantz and Fehr (1997). However, my process also mirrored the first step of the sociolinguistic analysis described by Gumperz and Berenz (1993), from whom I borrow the term “events.”

In identifying these events, I have given them labels based on the activity that I think is happening as it relates to my research questions. These labels reflect the fact that many of the moments that jump out at me as relevant to my investigation (i.e., the presence of appreciative discourse), are often marked by a “tension” between ways of talking.

Examples of these labels are illustrated in Appendix D: Extended Data Samples. I use, for example, the title “Accountability is Too Negative” to label the event described previously between lines 13 and 104 of Data Sample 2. Similarly, I give the label “Metamorphosis vs. Slow Caterpillar” to the event that occurs between lines 62 and 111 in extended Data Sample 3. This title describes the tension within the event between a description of the program as a place that helps kids metaphorically (and ‘metamorphically’) grow positively from caterpillars into butterflies versus a description of the program itself as a caterpillar crawling in a slow and comical way towards its goals. The label I use for the event occurring in lines 185 to 242 of the same data sample also indicates a tension between two ways of speaking: “Donny the Nudge vs. Taking Steps.” I use this label as it seems that there are two competing or conflicting ways that Donny is being described during the event: is he better described as an annoying “nudge” or as a student who is taking small steps towards progress?
Step 2: Transcription of Sequential Turn-Taking

When transcribing the data, I followed the general rule of starting “broad” and getting more “narrow” as the analysis warrants (J. Edwards, 2001; Gee, 1999). In other words, the level of linguistic detail included in the transcriptions (e.g., overlap between speakers or exact timing of pauses) increases as I move from my first units of analysis, the events, to the second unit: the sequential turn-taking by participants. For example, lines 1 through 12 in Data Sample 2, Appendix D, which preceded the event “Accountability is too Negative,” are not transcribed in as much detail as the lines occurring within the event.

I began the transcription by following Gee’s (1999) recipe for sorting data: first, identifying the turns taken (i.e., who is speaking); second, dividing these turns into lines (separate intonation or “tone” units marked by a single accented word or words and usually containing only one verb: marking a clause of sorts); and third, clumping these lines into stanzas that “deal with a unitary topic or perspective, and which appear to be planned together” (p. 89). For example, in lines 1 through 14 below, Joe’s long conversational turn is divided into “lines” or intonation units that end with a comma (note that if the clause covers more than one line of text on the page, it does not end with a comma but continues on indented on the next line of text but remains part of the same numbered “line”). The “stanzas” are ended with periods.

((Group of staff members from Equinox are at a meeting as part of the Appreciative Inquiry process at their program. They begin by revisiting a poster that a few of them made last week at another AI meeting. Joe, who was not present when the poster was made, is given the task by the facilitator, to give his impression of how the poster depicts the Equinox program. A photo of the completed poster is included in this appendix as Data Sample 4.))
1. **JOE:** Be part of this.
2. U=m (1.1) this must be talking to … working with the <Q relationship Q>,
3. working with the kids and <Q peers and community and families Q>,
4. So as a stem I guess we are all supposed to work together.
5. And then um .. this is a big flower here,
6. so I guess this is all the different a=h layers that you guys are talking about.
7. A=nd <Q connecting .. reflecting .. next step .. ownership .. building strengths .. teachable moments .. experiential learning .. sense of completion and skills building Q> (H) … (1.5).
8. So I am not sure if it has to do with the staff or the kids,
9. I am guessing that has to do with the kids a-.
10. And then u=m … (1.5) the next layer would a- <Q positive outlook .. preparing and planning for the future .. social skills .. coping skills .. confidence .. life skills .. goals .. learning through challenges .. environment .. vocational skills .. affirmation .. self esteem Q> and <Q education Q>.
11. It’s all things we need to work on together,
12. so that we can have opportunity .. here at Equinox … (1.7)
13. That’s X,
14. That’s what I have.

Thus, for example, the three lines numbered 2-4 are three clauses that make up a stanza oriented toward deciphering what the “stem” represents in the picture of a flower that Joe is interpreting.

Pomerantz and Fehr (1997) suggest that after the identification of actions (such as Gee’s “lines” and “stanzas”) the analyst should explore how the linguistic packaging of the utterances as well as the interactional patterns between these utterances, contribute to show how the actions are constructed and understood contextually. For this study, this next step of analysis gains traction and validity through the utilization of some types of “linguistic packaging” that have been described previously in other published conversation and discourse analytic work.
Step 3: Identification and use of: Accounts, Repair, & Humor

After initial review and transcription of the recordings, I identified aspects of linguistic packaging, which had been previously described in either the discourse analytic or conversation analytic literatures. By basing some of my interpretation in the work of others, I hope to add rigor to my analysis and validity to my results. Two constructs that help inform my analysis include “repair” (Jefferson, 1974, 2007; Jefferson, Button, & Lee, 1987; Schegloff, 1992, 1997, 2000; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977) and “accounting” or “accounts” (Heritage, 1984, 1988; Morris, White, & Ittis, 1994; Pomerantz, 1984). In addition to these constructs, previous published explorations of laughter and joking also proved to be helpful (Jefferson, 1979; Jefferson, Sacks, Schegloff, Button, & Lee, 1987; Mulkay & Gilbert, 1982; Schegloff, 2000; Schegloff et al., 1977).

Accounts. An “account,” as it is understood as a linguistic construct is somewhat analogous to an excuse or explanation. One makes an account when one needs to make an excuse for what one is choosing to say or do. Thus, an account is often used when declining an invitation or a request. It functions as an explanation or “report” about why the speaker cannot follow through with the expected course of action (Drew, 1984; Heritage, 1988; Morris et al., 1994; Pomerantz, 1984; Scott & Lyman, 1968).

A good example of an account in the data recorded for this study appears at the beginning of an AI meeting at Equinox on October of 2008. It is the same meeting form

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18 While these constructs are pulled carefully from the Conversation Analysis (CA) literature, it is beyond the scope of this paper or study to engage fully in CA methods or history. It is within the scope of this study to acknowledge, as Potter (1996) does, that “A basic practical understanding of CA is a prerequisite for producing high-class discourse analysis” (p. 132). It is this sort of ‘basic’ understanding that I believe allows me to move from the identification of noteworthy events to a closer transcription and analysis of the sequential turn-taking within the dialogue.
which the previous excerpt was taken, where Joe, is sitting within a group of other staff members as they begin to revisit a poster that a few of the group members made the prior week at another AI meeting. Joe, who was not present when the poster was made, is given the task by the facilitator to give his impression of how the poster depicts the Equinox program.

15. **JOE:** Yeah, I can’t --
16. A=h I don’t know.
17. I can see like ah -- ,
18. <I Not a good day for me to try to decipher this I>,
19. But ah .. <Q opportunity Q> .. <Q DIM sense of completion .. experiential learning DIM Q>,
20. ...(8.2)
21. **MIKE:** And how about while Joe looks at that,
22. so he doesn’t feel totally on the spot,
23. give him a second.

Joe’s statement in line 18, “Not a good day for me to try to decipher this,” is his account. It is a report about how the kind of day he is having will make it hard for him to respond appropriately to the facilitator’s request that he decipher the complicated poster in front of him. While he does go on to respond to the invitation and analyzes the poster, he does so with the caveat that he may not do it well. As the transcript indicates with the “<I I>” symbols, this comment is made as an aside to the ‘content’ of his actual response. It is an off-topic aside addressing the structure, or expected flow, of the interaction rather than the content of the invitation or request itself. In other words, he steps outside of the conversational flow to address how his response may not follow within what he sees to be the expected rules surrounding the request. In this case, the rules he is not sure he can adhere to likely have something to do with how he thinks he should be able to invest in a thoughtful exploration of the poster.
Heritage (1984), as he explores the ethnomethodology of Garfinkel, notes that much of our communication is involved in the “routine production of actions which [are] recognized to be in compliance with some perceived framework of accountability” (p. 211) and when participants feel they are departing from the expected “accounting framework” (p. 230), then an account of their actions is required. Thus, the use of accounts can serve to reiterate “the presupposed primacy of the core accounting framework” (p. 230). With respect to the current study’s pursuit of valid evidence of an appreciative repertoire, it becomes relevant to locate accounts made by participants when they depart from it. In other words, when is there an appreciative repertoire (or in the language of Heritage and Garfinkel, an appreciative ‘accounting framework’) that is perceived as primary enough such that a departure from it warrants an excuse? 19

Repair. Another construct utilized in this study’s analysis of participants’ dialogue is that of “repair,” which is developed in the work of Jefferson, Schegloff, and other scholars working within the Conversation Analysis tradition (Jefferson, 1974, 2007; Jefferson, Button et al., 1987; Schegloff, 1992, 1997, 2000; Schegloff et al., 1977). These scholars have focused on moments of tension when speakers are momentarily misunderstood by their listeners, or perceive themselves to be misunderstood by their listeners. In these instances, a “repair” of understanding is required. Common patterns of

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19 It is interesting to note that Heritage (1984), in an argument similar to those made by organizational discourse scholars, concludes that one way to facilitate change within an institution is to affect the accounting framework that is accepted as primary:

“In turn, this suggests that a major mechanism for institutional change will involve the constitutive re-embedding of ‘discrepant’ activities within some new, normalizing, but equally self-replicating accounting framework. The development of new frameworks of accounts is permanently possible through some regrouping of the particulars which instance natural language categories. Under such circumstances, what is constituted from the perspective of an older accounting framework as ‘deviant’ will be treated under its new alternative as appropriate, normal or natural, and vice versa” (P 230-1)
repair initiation and sequence have been identified through extensive reviews of a variety of conversational recordings (Schegloff, 1992, 1997, 2000; Schegloff et al., 1977).

One example of a repair sequence in the data recorded for this study occurs in the interaction excerpted below, when a staff member, Kathy, offers another staff member, Bill, a chance at self correction. He starts to describe the work at the program as trying to offer a reality check of sorts to the youth.

24. BILL: Yeah ...(2.1) [@ reality @].
26. What...What do you mean too much?
27. @[ @]
28. KATHY: [@] @@ come on @>.
29. ...(2.5)
30. BILL: Might be a little cynical.

Kathy asks for his correction of this harsh comment when she makes the comment “come on” and then allows an extended pause to follow (lines 28-9). This would be described as an “other-initiated 3rd turn repair” (Schegloff et al., 1977). Kathy is the “other” initiating the repair (as opposed to Bill, “self- initiating” repair on his own comment) and Bill offers a correction in the “third” turn of the repair-oriented conversational exchange (i.e., the ‘first turn’ is the ‘trouble source’ when Bill makes an ‘error’ with his “Opportunity for reality” comment in lines 24-27, the second turn is when Kathy responds with a request for clarification in lines 28-29, and the third turn is when Bill offers his repair or correction in line 30):

24. BILL: Yeah ...(2.1) @@ reality @>.
26. What...What do you mean too much?
27. @[ @]
28. KATHY: [@] @@ come on @>.
29. ...(2.5)
30. BILL: Might be a little cynical.
Bill thus “repairs” his error of being too “cynical.

For the purpose of this analysis, the reason for showing exchanges as repair sequences is to build upon the previously published meticulous empirical work that has defined these types of repair sequences. By observing interactions as repair sequences, it becomes possible to illustrate the robust nature of the appreciative repertoire when departures from it require this sort of additional conversational attention and maintenance.

Humor. It has been noted within the Conversation Analysis literature that repair initiation and correction are often accompanied by laughing and joking (Schegloff, 2000; Schegloff et al., 1977). Schegloff (2000) observes in particular: “there appears to be a deep relationship between laughter and repair, the same occurrence serving as both a trouble-source and a laugh-source—perhaps by way of a design to depart from the readily projectable” (p.220) Jefferson, Sacks, Schegloff, Button, & Lee (1987) utilizing a large corpus of recorded dialogue, identify numerous instances where laughter accompanies a “breech of conventional standards” such as when a participant invites others to make a move from more “formal” norms to more “informal” ones (p.160). These analyses suggest that laughter and joking are partners with moments where there are transitions from, or tension with, an expected flow of conversation. In other words, they can be understood as moments of digression from an interpretive repertoire.

This interpretation of laughter and humor follows closely the work done by discourse analysts Mulkay & Gilbert (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Mulkay & Gilbert, 1982).
(1982) cite Paulos (1980), who after his own review of the general literature on humor and joking, makes the following assessment:

Most of the theorists I have cited (as well as those not quoted here) agree, once allowance is made for different ways of putting things and different emphases, that a necessary ingredient of humour is that two (or more) incongruous ways of viewing something (a person, a sentence, a situation) be juxtaposed. In other words, for something to be funny, some unusual, inappropriate, or odd aspects of it must be perceived together and compared. (Paulos, 1980, p. 9, as cited in Mulkay & Gilbert, 1982, p. 592)

Mulkay and Gilbert use this notion of “two incongruous ways of viewing something” and integrate it with their understanding of the interpretive repertoires used by scientists to describe the work they do. After extensive analysis of scientific texts, cartoons, and recorded data, they build off Paulos’ analysis in this way:

The additional suggestion that we wish to make is that participants regularly create the incongruity essential to humour by bringing together two distinct interpretative repertoires which are both appropriate to a common range of topics but which are normally kept separate. (p. 592)

With respect to the discourse recorded at the Equinox program, the laughter and joking is often related to the “bringing together” of the appreciative repertoire with other less appreciative ways of describing people or events. Because it is a commonly understood difference between these ways of talking that allow for these moments of juxtaposition to be potentially humorous, the identification of such moments further defines and validates the boundaries of the hypothesized appreciative repertoire.

Not only can laughter and joking indicate a boundary between two repertoires, it can be used as a discursive move to indicate a preference of one repertoire over another. While laughter may seem merely supplemental to a discursive exchange, it in fact can be understood by participants as “an official conversational activity” (Jefferson, Sacks et al., 1987, p. 156). Laughter, for example can be offered as an “invitation” to join in on a
certain perspective being offered by a speaker (Jefferson, 1979). Based on whether this laughter is joined in or ignored can mark whether or not this invitation to “affiliate” has been accepted or not (Jefferson, Sacks et al., 1987, p. 169). Thus in the case of this study, these moments of joking and laughter can not only mark moments when participants make note of diverging repertoires, but often mark their allegiance to one another and invite others to join them in their perspective.

While this three step process for data analysis (identifying events, transcribing in detail, and applying established discursive constructs) encapsulates my analytic process, it should be noted that this progression was and is, not entirely linear. This strategy to a degree evolves as the analysis progresses. This is due in part because this is my first utilization of these methods, but also because, as the discourse and conversation analytic literature suggests, these types of analyses require multiple trips through the data, starting with the transcribing itself (Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997). And further, the conclusions and hypotheses arrived at with each run-through, often affect subsequent analysis (Potter, 1996).

Limitations of Methodology

While the study’s design and the methods for data analysis offer the potential for some generative results, they possess a number of important limitations. Some of these are as follows:

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20 To some degree, this is similar to the emergent quality of grounded theory data analysis (Charmaz, 2002; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998, as cited in Schram, 2006). In the grounded theory model, as initial categories or theories are arrived at, they may subsequently effect later data collection. In discourse analysis, this ‘later data collection’ can be understood to a degree as subsequent ‘trips’ through the data where different linguistic features are collected (such as pause lengths, final intonation falls/rises, or speaker overlap). As a grounded theorist’s working-hypotheses may influence where or how in the field they may collect data, a discourse analyst’s working hypothesis may influence where in the data they may collect new ‘contextualization cues’ or ‘indices’ (Gumperz, 1992).
1. This study is an action research project in the sense that it was designed to improve the situation in which it took place through the collaboration between researcher and participants. However, unlike many action research projects, its primary aim is not to share new knowledge about the topics of inquiry chosen by the participants. While it is possible that the AI process at Equinox can lead to new and useful knowledge/theory about the objects of the participants’ inquiry (i.e., when and how opportunities for growth are offered to students and clients at the Equinox program), these conclusions will not be part of this study’s results. This study is more an example of an action research project that produces insight into OD or staff development processes (e.g., Oja & Smulyan, 1989; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). In other words, while this analysis of an OD technique is the focus for the study performed by the researcher, it was not the focus of the (appreciative) inquiry performed by the Equinox participants.

2. While this study seeks to better understand how an AI process might help a school’s organizational development, it is not set up as an evaluation to determine whether or not AI is “effective” or “works.”

3. This study aims to interpret the initial phases of an AI process, the first two “D’s” of the four D cycle (Discover and Dream) or the first three phases of the four “I” cycle (Initiate, Inquire, and Imagine). It does not attempt an exploration of the final phases of Design, Destiny, or Innovation. While it is worth noting that some post-modern conceptions of organizational change may suggest that the first phases may in fact be where the true power of AI resides (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Cooperrider...
& Sekerka, 2003; Real & Poole, 2005), it should remain clear that this study is not set up to explore the AI process in its conceptual entirety.

4. This study is oriented within a conceptual framework that foregrounds the importance of discourse as a locus of organizational change and a lens for organizational studies and thus is almost exclusively focused on analyzing recorded dialog. While visual recordings, contextual understanding (e.g., understanding of Equinox organizational history or certain staff members’ histories with the program), and written materials from the meaning making meetings (such as the “flower” poster created to depict the Equinox program visually) enter into the analysis of the AI process, the main focus is on spoken texts. Consequently, the study is not set up to capture the potentially wide ranging and significant aspects of the Equinox discourse that is made up of “other stuff” beyond language alone (Gee, 1999, p. 23); even though this “other stuff” may be crucial to the social realities of the participants (M. Reed, 2000).

5. This somewhat narrow focus on spoken texts and the fact that I only sampled meetings that occurred as part of the AI process will certainly limit my contextual understanding of the Equinox program. My choice to focus so narrowly was made for primarily practical reasons. This is certainly a limitation, as much of the generative work in discourse analysis has been comparative in nature.\textsuperscript{21} While my research questions are focused exclusively on discourse that occurs during the AI process, comparing this recorded discourse to a breadth of other recorded discourse

\textsuperscript{21} For example, comparing linguistic practices of one culture with those of another (Gumperz, 1992) or comparing both institutionally and non-institutionally embedded dialogue (Drew & Sorjonen, 1997).
at Equinox (or possibly during other OD development initiatives at similar schools) certainly could have been helpful.

6. Finally, as a single interpretive case study, the ability to generalize from the results will be seriously limited. This is a common criticism aimed at methodologies similar to the one embraced by this study. In response, I aim to follow the advice of Marshak and Heracleous, (2005) and have thus tried to:

...document as much relevant data as possible, as accurately as possible given the circumstances, be reflective on what the data mean, apply a thoughtful analytical framework to the data, and arrive at some valid insights that contribute to knowledge in some significant way. (p. 75)

Validity

The final limitation listed above, that of the limited ability to generalize from this study’s results, introduces the important question of validity and while Marshak and Heracleous’ advice may be helpful, it does not on its own assure rigor. Assessing the validity of a qualitative endeavor rooted in a social constructionist epistemology, however, is a potentially “vexing” task (Gee, 1999, p. 94), particularly when many of the well worn constructs traditionally used with regard to validity, such as generalizeability, predictive capacity, or accuracy in reflecting reality, may be fundamentally “unworkable” (Potter, 1996, p. 138). Consequently, both Potter (1996) and Gee (1999) outline some alternative metrics for the assessment of validity. While slightly different, both their lists seem to acknowledge that while validity may be a more subjective quality than is acknowledged in more traditional scientific discourses, it is something, as Gee puts it, that “different analyses can have more or less of” (Gee, 1999, p. 95). Their criteria converge around the idea that the results must be tied to the data and must be supported
either by clear consistencies in the data or through clear discrepancies with other general patterns. In order to more fully explore this issue of validity, this section will first, explore how the study meets Gee and Potter’s empirical requirements. Second, it will consider the concept of “generativity” as an additional component of validity.

**Empirical Support for Results**

This study is designed to explore how AI operates at the Equinox program. Ideally, it will lead to interpretations that illuminate aspects of AI as it operates as a somewhat cohesive OD intervention at a “meso” or organizational level of discourse. While the study is oriented toward this organizational level, it is the use of recorded and transcribed “micro” level interactions that will support the validity of its results. Citing Duranti (2001), Rampton et al.(2004) describe this kind of relationship between closely analyzed discursive interaction and larger level theorizing when they write that the study of “language, discourse, and communication are appealing” because “when relatively micro-phenomena – texts and recordings of interaction – are taken as the point of entry into cultural analysis, crucial data are made quite ‘easily accessible for counter-arguments and independent testing’ (Duranti, 2001, p. 7)” (p. 6).

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22 Another area where Gee (1999) and Potter (1996) agree is that a study’s validity can also be improved through “conformational” checks with participants. I did not perform any ‘checks’ with participants. This decision has been made for primarily two reasons. First, my hope is to infringe as little as possible on the commitments and responsibilities that Equinox staff and families already have piled upon their plates. Finding the time to engage in the AI process is already a burden and so I attempted to collect all my data during activities that were essential to the AI process only. Consequently, I do not want to add to their stressful schedules interviews or focus groups aimed at reviewing my analysis. Second, my analysis is not focused on the phenomenological self-reported perspectives of those involved. Instead it is focused on how meaning appears to emerge from their coordinated linguistic activity, in which case “intention would then be an effect of act, not a precursor to it” (Cooren & Taylor, 1997, p. 232). In other words, consistent with this study’s conceptual framework, I don’t believe I would gain greater insight into the ways participants’ previously recorded discourse was coordinated by interviewing them post-hoc about my interpretations. While this type of interviewing could certainly lend itself to greater insight into how AI played out at the program, I do not believe it would provide “confirmatory” help with respect to my specific research questions.
In my pursuit of organizational-level conclusions about AI at the Equinox program, I am relying on the micro-level analysis of the conversations held during AI meetings. By using this level of data and analysis to both generate and subsequently support my conclusions about larger scale phenomena (such as conflicting interpretive repertoires that influences how Equinox staff conceptualize their work) I hope to provide an empirical trail that can be used to corroborate or challenge my results. In support of this kind of approach, Rampton et al (2004) see the use of linguistic data within studies of culture and context, such as ethnographies, as a means for providing an empirical grounding and as subsequently “tying ethnography down’: pushing ethnography towards the analysis of clearly delimitable processes, increasing the amount of reported data that is open to falsification, looking to impregnate local description with analytical frameworks drawn from outside” (p. 4; emphasis in original).

For this sociolinguistic case study of AI, the “frameworks drawn from outside” are several linguistic constructs derived from other discourse analyses as well as from the Conversation Analysis (CA) literature. These constructs include “repair,” “accounting,” and some of the systematic uses of laughter/humor. CA, in particular, offers techniques for exploring micro-level conversational turn-taking. It also has documented a number of linguistic patterns or constructs that can be applied across situations by either participants or analysts to help illuminate the sense making activities of those involved. In this way, much of the validity or credibility of this study depends on the reliable use of small scale documentable linguistic analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Schegloff (1992), after twenty years of scholarly CA exploration of “repair” (i.e., moments when speakers either correct themselves or question other speakers), suggests that it is only in these immediate
moments of disagreement and negotiation that social organization (or “intersubjectivity”) is visibly achieved and maintained. He goes so far as to argue that any theory of human interaction should only be considered if it has similar “microanalytic” roots (p. 1338-9). While the analysis of this study is not as dogmatically tied to micro-analysis that Schegloff (1992) suggest, it does seek to gain validity by building its results from very specific examples of conversational turn-taking.

The methodology of this case study draws upon certain CA methods and findings, however, diverges a bit from a strictly grounded empirical pursuit. For example, while Pomerantz and Fehr (1997) suggest that CA methodology often rejects “the use of investigator-stipulated theoretical or conceptual definitions of research questions” (p.66), this study, to the contrary, explores the theoretical links between AI and organizational discourse and uses this conceptual blueprint for data analysis. It is this theoretical foregrounding, for example, that guided the decisions as to which meetings to record and then within those recordings, which segments of data to explore in more depth. It is an exploration that is driven by my specific research questions; questions that are aimed at uncovering more than emergent linguistic patterns but also how these patterns relate to both the social contexts where they occur (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Rampton et al., 2004) and to the “situated meanings” that ensue (Gee, 1999; Wortham, 2001).

This is a move away from an atheoretical cataloguing of language towards a broader exploration of how participants construct their worlds. It is a move, according to Cooren and Taylor (1997), that organizational scholars might find valuable:

...though [CA] has generated a truly impressive corpus of highly situated, and meticulously annotated, analysis of the organizational properties of locally managed and situated discourse, it has done so at a cost: that of largely ignoring transsituational organizing mechanisms. The consequence of this narrowing of
focus onto the local accomplishment of organization through interaction has been that organizational communication scholars have found the results of this research of limited value in addressing their own research questions...(p. 223-224)

Cooren and Taylor’s reading of the CA literature is certainly open for debate but they do highlight the desire of many organizational scholars to explore how discourse can be understood at the organizational level. The research questions driving this inquiry are aimed at exploring how the dialogue that occurs during the AI process works as a mediator at the organizational level to help construct the participants understanding of their work.

As analytic projects, however, attempts to explore the “constructive processes” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 21) of discourse within organizational dialogue are difficult at best. Finding and demonstrating clear empirical links between micro level interactions and larger scale contexts or discourses is identified by both discourse analysts and their critics as a notoriously challenging task (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; M. Reed, 2000; Tusting & Maybin, 2007; Widdowson, 1998).

Thus, while no doubt a challenge, the methodology of this study and the goals of its analysis are fueled by theoretical questions and concerns. The aim of the work is to go beyond the immediate implications of the micro in order to uncover new broader understandings about the meso or possibly even the macro; in this case, about AI as an organizational development process at a school like Equinox. While this is the case, the validity and credibility of the study’s results depend largely on the degree to which they are rooted in the careful analysis of the recorded and transcribed small scale conversational interactions.
"Generativity" as an Additional Component of Validity

When the challenge of validity is viewed from a social constructionist perspective, the credibility of a study will be, as Gee (1999) puts it, “social” and not “individual” (p. 96). In other words, while I can work to create a trustworthy product (e.g., one that includes multiple references to re-occurring patterns in documented data excerpts and calls upon previously identified linguistic constructs), ultimately the test of its validity will not be the objective quality of what I have produced, but instead how it plays out in conversation with the other scholars who read it. In other words, the validity, trustworthiness, or usefulness of the study can be understood to be dependent on the quality of the intersubjective meaning coordinated between the text and the scholars who read it.

With this in mind, one option is to consider the suggestions Cooperrider and Srivastra (1987) make in the first published introduction to AI:

We need a bold shift in attention whereby theoretical accounts are no longer judged in terms of their predictive capacity, but instead are judged in terms of their generative capacity—their ability to foster dialogue about that which is taken for granted and their capacity for generating fresh alternatives for social action. Instead of asking “does the theory correspond with observable facts?” the emphasis for evaluating good theory becomes, “to what extent does this theory presume provocative new possibilities for social action, and to what extent does it stimulate normative dialogue about how we can and should organize ourselves?” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 137)

When making these suggestions, Cooperrider and Srivastva rely heavily on the work of Kenneth Gergen (1978) who suggested the idea of “generative theory” as a legitimate pursuit of social sciences; a pursuit that requires evaluating the conclusions of studies not based on whether they are “true or false but whether they have generative potential” (K Gergen & Gergen, 1986, as cited in Burr, 2003, p. 144).
Similar arguments for “generativity” have been made by qualitative researchers, wrestling with similar epistemological dilemmas, as a basis for determining the rigor of a study:

Ideally, the results of a project should not be limited to just the situation in which that project took place. Although results are not transferable in the classical way, or “generalizable,” they ought to have “generative power.” This power depends, among other things, on the balance between results and investments, the question of whether in other situations the same or at least recognizable constraints apply, and the way in which the results are made known to others. (Wardekker, 2000, p 271)

Wardekker here makes a nod to the on-going scientific conversation about applications to other similar settings and yet acknowledges the importance of how the “results” are communicated. I would argue, through a social constructionist lens, that to a significant degree, the ‘results’ do not in fact exist beyond what I communicate and thus this communication is as important to the study’s perceived validity as any ‘objective’ set of ‘findings.’ 23 The study’s validity, its credibility, and its trustworthiness can be determined in part by the degree to which new and inspired thinking occurs in interaction with those that read it: a sort of intersubjective generativity.

Summary

Both AI and this study are grounded in a social constructionist epistemology that embraces this linguistic turn and thus the proposed discourse analytic methodology. My

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23 What I mean here is that while I do believe that certain ‘things’ will have happened whether I report them or not, any perceived relation of these ‘things’ to this study or its design are purely a result of how I choose to conceptualize and describe them and how the reader constructs their understanding of them in relation to my description and their previous understandings of related phenomena (including for example, school reform, alternative schools, me as an individual, assumptions about AI, investments in knowledge creation etc.). This is why, for example. I have chosen to label the following chapter “results” instead of “findings.” Semantics, to be sure, but this better reflects my feeling that my interpretive conclusions are not the result of a researcher “finding” something that was out there to be objectively discovered, but instead are the results of my analysis.

[95]
dual role of facilitator and researcher seems manageable, particularly if one accepts that although a separate researcher would be able to provide a *unique* view, this view is unlikely to be any more “true” or generative simply because it is more “removed.”

While I argue that the worth of the study is in part dependent on its intersubjective generativity, its value will also depend on the careful application of the proposed research design. It is a methodology that includes a rigorous and efficient approach to data collection partnered with data analysis that utilizes established constructs from the literature to build from the micro level of conversational exchange in pursuit of greater organizational understanding.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS:
AN IDENTIFIABLE BUT CONTESTED APPRECIATIVE REPERTOIRE

Introduction

Through a discourse analytic lens, the process of AI can be described as the engagement of participants in a dialogic process in the pursuit of organizational change. It is an approach that seeks to facilitate micro-level interactions so that significant and sought after changes transpire at the ‘meso’ or organizational level of discourse.

Consequently, the design of this study is oriented towards analyzing recorded talk at the Equinox program first for signs of an emergent appreciative discourse or “repertoire”; and second, for the impact of such a repertoire on the situated meanings constructed at Equinox. This discourse analytic approach, which borrows extensively from the conversation analytic literature, illuminates quite distinctly the boundaries of an appreciative repertoire. Further, this repertoire’s influence on the constructed reality of the Equinox program could be seen as distinctly positive, but also as distinctly contested.

The first research question (How do the influences of the appreciative process emerge within the participants’ dialogue?) was approached as a search for the emergence of an appreciative discourse or “interpretive repertoire.” Here, repertoire refers to a common or shared set of interpretive resources used by participants (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Within the recorded data itself, one way to see how an appreciative discourse plays out as a repertoire at Equinox, is to look for moments of conflict or friction where an appreciative way of talking and interpreting meaning stands
out from alternative discourses or repertoires. These moments, or “difficulties,” can be analyzed as distinct repertoires in conflict (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 155). This is not to say that as participants draw on the resources of the appreciative repertoire that conflict always arises, it is more to say that these types of problematic moments are the moments where the presence of the repertoire is made most empirically available to the analyst. The discernable identification of such a repertoire aids significantly in addressing this study’s second research question (How does the dialogue during the AI process work to construct the organizational reality at Equinox?), as it is then easier to see how the repertoire influences the situated meanings shared among participants; shared meanings that help to construct shared understandings of one another, their program, and the work being done there.

The results of this study will be described by exploring first, the empirical emergence of an appreciative repertoire within the data and second, this repertoire’s interaction with the participants’ construction of their organization. The distinct presence will be demonstrated through moments of conflict or friction marked by “accounts,” “repair,” and laughter. The ways the appreciative repertoire influences the construction of the organizational reality will then be analyzed though the participants’ descriptions of students, staff and the work being done at the program; descriptions that certainly create positive and potentially generative understandings of the program but are also descriptions that are at times resisted because they do not fit the participants’ preferred ways of seeing their organizational reality.
Research question 1: the emergence of an appreciative interpretive repertoire

If the success of AI as an organizational development tool can be understood in part as the adoption of an appreciate way of talking by the participants, then this 'appreciative way of talking' needs to be further understood and isolated. In this case, in order to decipher the empirical discursive presence of AI at Equinox, I attempt to locate an appreciative interpretive repertoire. This repertoire consists of somewhat narrow limitations on terminology and of fairly specific rules of interpretation. These limitations and rules are based on what I think was made linguistically available to participants during the AI sessions. More specifically, the appreciative repertoire is framed by:

- A positive focus when describing events and people
- An emphasis on clients' accomplishments and potential rather than their shortcomings and failures
- An understanding of the program as a place that presents opportunities to clients rather than one that tries to control or punish them

These specific aspects of the repertoire were 'made available' to participants through a number of means. These included specific conceptual introductions at several staff meetings about AI; carefully selected and designed positively oriented activities; and an over-all approach to facilitation that embraced the repertoire. Specific examples include the orientation lectures given in August and October of 2008 about AI's constructionist focus on the power of positive or appreciative talk. Another example of an AI activity that made the resources of the repertoire available to participants was the language used in the appreciative interview guides. These guides frame interviews which ask participants to reflect exclusively on highpoints or energizing moments within their
work and offer some specific language and metaphors to do so (see: “Appreciative Inquiry Interview Guide: Staff” in Appendix A: AI at the Equinox Program). These guides, for example, offer the appreciative metaphor of students making step by step progress and the positively focused idea of finding opportunity within challenging moments.

The presence of the appreciative repertoire in the recorded data seems most observable during moments of friction between the appreciative approach to dialogue and other conflicting less appreciative repertoires; moments when speaking and coordinating within the positively focused limitations and rules of the appreciative repertoire stands out, is called into question, or is in fact contested.

Three constructs or ideas from within the Conversation Analysis and the Discourse Analysis literature that address conflict between understandings are accounts, repair, and use the of humor. All three can reference a rift, or potential rift, perceived by participants in dialogue. All three can occur when there is a gap between how the interaction is taking place and how it is expected to be taking place. They can all mark moments when participants sense that the way an interaction is proceeding is not in line with their view of how it should be proceeding.

In moments marked by each of these ideas or constructs (i.e., accounts, repair, laughter/joking), there are noticeable departures from the flow of the interaction. The dialogue shifts so that the rift itself becomes the focus of the conversational exchange. This shift from the “content” of the conversation to a new focus on the rift itself is

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24 From these moments of friction it is possible to get a sense for these “less appreciative” repertoires. It is beyond the scope of this study, however, to try to define these alternative repertoires in great detail. With respect to the current research questions, it is most important to see how these alternative repertoires define the boundaries of appreciative talk and represent moment of resistance to its adoption.
described generally by Schegloff (1992) as a loss of “intersubjectivity.” Jefferson, Button, & Lee (1987) describe this moment in more detail as they describe participants’ subsequent attempts at ‘correcting’ it: “Whatever has been going on prior to the correcting is discontinued. Where prior utterances have been occupied with various ongoing matters, utterances are now occupied by the doing of correcting. That is, ‘correcting’ is now the interactional business of the interchanges” (p. 88). In other words, because a rule or expectation has been violated, the participants must pause in order to focus on the rules themselves.

While the extent to which the rifts identified in the data are followed by attempts at repair or correction vary, the quote from Jefferson et al. (1987) articulates well how these moments of friction are marked by a departure from an expected flow of conversation. In an effort to locate the relative boundaries of the appreciative repertoire, the analysis that follows focuses on examples where these departures mark rifts between the expectations of an appreciative repertoire and an otherwise non-appreciative flow of conversation. Accounts, repairs, and laughter/joking all serve as sign posts for these moments of friction and the rifts they represent.

**Accounts**

In an effort to locate the boundaries of an appreciative repertoire, it becomes helpful to locate accounts (Drew, 1984; Heritage, 1988; Morris et al., 1994; Pomerantz, 1984) made by participants when they determine for themselves that they are departing from this preferred way of talking. In other words, they feel that there is an appreciative repertoire\(^\text{25}\) that is perceived as primary enough to warrant an excuse when there is a

\(^{25}\) Here the interpretive repertoire could be described in the language of Heritage and Garfinkel as an appreciative ‘accounting framework.’
departure from it. I believe this happens a number of times within the recorded and 
transcribed data.

One example occurs in line 230 of the following dialogue when Maria says:

“Nah just kidding around” after she makes a somewhat cynical comment about “Donny,” 
a student. This is excerpted from the event coded: “10.16.08.2 Donny ‘The Nudge’ vs. 
‘Taking Steps’” which is featured in greater length in Data Sample 3 in Appendix D:

31.  **SUSAN:** Uh, I can think of a time.. [that] --
32.  **MIKE:** [Uh] Susan,
33.  I am just going to ask,
34.  does anyone need a little more time?
35.  Or do you have some?
36.  Everybody … (2.1) ready to roll?
37.  … (8.8)
38.  <WH OK, thanks, Susan @WH>.
39.  **SUSAN:** <@yeah@>
40.  Um .. just with u=m Donny and Act One,
41.  he would always --
42.  .. like last year he would either be like the film guy or --
43.  just either be there for five minutes and come back,
44.  going in and out.
45.  But today or --
46.  Last week he was um --
47.  He did one skit.
48.  Now this week he participated the whole --
49.  <@the whole time @>.
50.  Where he had a fan on and a hat,
51.  and was acting things out so --
52.  **JOEL:** That’s good.
53.  That’s very [good (CLAPS) ].
54.  **MARION:** [@ @]
55.  **SUSAN** [yeah].
56.  **JOEL:** That’s awesome for Donny.
57.  **SUSAN:** Yeah X.
58.  **JOEL:** Wow.
59.  [Awesome].

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26 In this chapter, if the excerpt is part of one of the longer data samples offered in appendix D, the line 
numbers correspond to the line numbers used on the longer data sample. This is done to allow the reader to 
locate the excerpt in the large data samples if so desired. This is in contrast to the previous chapter when 
the excerpted transcriptions were taken out of context and used for illustrating the methodology and thus 
the lines were numbered in ascending and continuous order throughout the chapter.
60. **SUSAN:** [@@]  
61. **MARIA:** [I was going to X mention to you too],  
62. Rhonda,  
63. on the same note,  
64. that I have noticed that although he got up once today for water,  
65. and once on Tuesday to go to the bathroom,  
66. he is doing a much better job remaining in groups,  
67. and not being as nudgy and staying focused.  
68. **RHONDA:** Hmm,  
69. So where is he coming from,  
70. when he is in my office <HI twelve times a day HI>,  
71. asking for attention?  
72. **MARIA:** <P @@ P>  
73. **RHONDA:** Nah just kidding around,  
74. [Um] --  
75. **BILL:** [He’s looking for opportunities].  
76. [[@@ ]]  
77. **MARIA:** [[@@ ]]  
78. **MARION:** [Or a XXXX]  

Within this interaction, Susan has begun describing in line 188 how Donny has begun to make small but positive steps. She is doing so as part of an AI activity in which each member of the group has been asked to review the week gone by and to think of a time when they have witnessed a success (more specifically, when they witnessed the occurrence of one of the elements listed on the poster of the “Positive Core” of equinox featured in Data Sample 4, appendix D). In line 218 Maria joins in the positive description of Donny’s week and addresses Rhonda specifically (possibly because Rhonda is Johnny’s assigned clinician/therapist at the program). Rhonda’s response in lines 225-228 is far more cynical and negative than the preceding discourse: “Hmm, so where is he coming from, when he is in my office twelve times a day asking for attention?” While others do ultimately participate in this alternate read on Donny (i.e., Bill, Maria and possibly Marion join in her ‘joke’ in lines 229 and 232-235), Rhonda
feels that the comment is enough outside the expected appreciative norm to follow up
with an excuse, or account, for her comment: “Nah just kidding around.”

Another example of an account being made in order to explain a digression from an
expected appreciative norm occurs within the following event which was coded

“10.8.08.3 Opportunity for Reality is Too Cynical”:

((Group of staff members from Equinox are sitting at a table working on a poster that
depicts the “Positive Core” of the program. This activity was part of a multi-faceted three
hour AI meeting. The transcription excerpt begins about 46 minutes into the recording of
the activity. The excerpt starts with Rhonda wondering if the word and idea of
“Affirmation” should be part of the poster. A photo of the completed poster is included in
Appendix D as Data Sample 4.))

1. RHONDA: What about <Q affirmation Q>?
2. KATHY: Sure.
3. RHONDA: Considering...you know--
4. KATHY: [XX]-
5. RHONDA: [ <F F>] .. I looked at it a couple of times in here.
6. We’re…affirming things.
7. BILL: Yeah ...(2.1) <@ reality @>.
9. What...What do you mean too much?
10. @[@]
11. KATHY: [ @ ] <@ come on @>.
12. ...(2.5)
13. BILL: Might be a little cynical.
14. RHONDA: Alright--
15. BILL: @[@@]
16. SUSAN: [<@ You think? @>] ((directed to Bill))
17. BILL: @
18. RHONDA: I think that’s about as good as it is going to get folks
19. ...(1.5)
20. MARIA: Rhonda I will see you Monday.

((Maria says her goodbyes and makes exit, Mike enters and the group moves on to a new
task: sharing the poster with the facilitator.))
In line 13, Bill makes the account: “Might be a little cynical” to account for his comments in lines 7 through 9. In those lines he suggests that the “opportunity” the program offers is a chance for the kids to experience “reality.” Here he digresses from an expected flow of conversation, as indicated by Kathy’s questioning and corrective: “come on,” where in essence she seems to be saying to Bill, “Come on, you don’t really mean that do you?” and then pauses to allow him to correct or clarify his comment. At this point, Bill offers his excuse, or account, that he was being overly cynical. What he says for an account is telling and indicates how he interprets Kathy’s request for clarification. Even though she does not specifically say so, he seems to assume that she feels his comment is “cynical” and thus apologizes for it along these lines. But from what set of discursive expectation has he diverged from? To what less cynical accounting framework does he assume he must make amends?

I would argue that one way to interpret this exchange is to see that Bill has departed from an appreciative repertoire that would assume that youth are already in touch with reality, regardless of their disabilities and that it is the job of youth workers to understand their equally legitimate, if varied, realities. Susan seems to confirm that Bill has interpreted Kathy’s request for an accounting accurately (i.e., that she thinks that the comment was too cynical) when she accepts his explanation in line 16 with a sarcastic confirmation of “You think?” So it would seem that at least Bill and Susan understood Bill’s joking digression to be a digression from a repertoire that would hold it to be too cynical to believe that wayward youth need reality-checks. Kathy does not necessarily confirm Bill’s accounting as sufficient, but she also does not reiterate her concern for his

27 The reader may note that this same moment was used to describe a “repair” sequence in the previous chapter. As both mark departures form an expected conversational flow, it is not surprising that the same interaction may fit both descriptive categories simultaneously.
comment. Her lack of continued concern suggests that Bill’s account was relatively satisfying to her and thus her initial problem with Bill’s statement was related to it seeming “too cynical.”

In summary, the excerpted event seems to include a participant diverging from an expected flow of conversation, or meaning-making, to the degree that his fellow participants ask him to account for it. His account, or explanation, suggests that he feels he has diverged from a more appreciative (or less cynical) way of talking about kids. The explicit acceptance of his account by one participant and the tacit acceptance of it by another suggest that others in the group interpreted his digression in a similar way. Both Bill’s account of being too cynical and Rhonda’s of “just kidding” are examples of moments of friction between an appreciative repertoire and a less appreciative way of talking.

Repair

Moments of friction such as these can also be identified and analyzed by using the construct of “repair” (Jefferson, 1974, 2007; Jefferson, Button et al., 1987; Schegloff, 1992, 1997, 2000; Schegloff et al., 1977).

An example of a repair sequence has already been described within the event just reviewed as an example of an account: “10.8.08.3 Opportunity for Reality is Too Cynical.” Similarly, Maria’s comment: “Nah just kidding around” (in line 230 within the event coded: “10.16.08.2 Donny ‘The Nudge’ vs. ‘Taking Steps’” found in Data Sample 3 in Appendix D), is an account that can also be described as a “self-initiated repair” that occurs within the “transition space” prior to the next participant’s turn (Schegloff et al., 1977, p. 366).
For the purpose of this analysis, the reason for showing these accounts as moments of repair as well, is to be able to further illustrate the presence of a discernable appreciative repertoire by building upon the meticulous empirical work that has defined these types of repair sequences. By observing these and other moments of friction as repair sequences, it is possible to further illustrate how they can be understood as an appreciative repertoire rubbing up against other cohesive linguistic repertoires. This can be done by exploring three elements of the repair sequence.

First, on a very basic level, the need for repair within a conversation is an indicator that there is rift in understanding. Repair in this context refers “to practices for dealing with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding the talk in conversation” (Schegloff, 2000, p. 207). While much of the study of repair has not explored these moments as necessarily breeches in large-scale social contract or ritual, these repair sequences have been identified as flags for moments when the agreed upon expectations of conversational flow, and thus mutual understanding or “intersubjectivity” is lost (Schegloff, 1992). In the recorded data within this study it is possible to see the loss of intersubjectivity or misunderstanding as departures from the discursive expectations of an appreciative repertoire. This is arguably the case in both of the above referenced repair sequences as Bill and Rhonda’s trouble sources are derived from their departure from an expected appreciative description of Equinox clients.
Second, these repair sequences generally end within the three turns described and usually conclude with a self-correction (Schegloff, 1997, 2000; Schegloff et al., 1977). In such cases the digression from successfully coordinated meaning to misunderstanding is brief and quickly remedied. The quick resolution found within such a patterns suggests that the error was mutually recognized and the return to an expected repertoire uncomplicated. This pattern can be seen, in both the above excepted examples. As was discussed earlier with respect to Bill’s accounting for his digression (“Might be too cynical”), the quick acceptance of his account or repair, in this case, is an indicator that the accepted and expected repertoire is rather well defined. In other words, it would not be as possible for Bill’s error to be as quickly noted as it was and his repair as readily understood and accepted if the rules of the appreciative repertoire were not at least fairly well understood by Kathy and Susan. Both Kathy and Susan first of all had to both see his comments about giving students an “opportunity for reality” as an error and further, both see it as an error because it was “too cynical.” This agreement or coordination requires that the boundaries of the expected appreciative repertoire be somewhat clear and agreed upon.

Third, when a repair sequence is initiated and does not in fact come to a quick three turn resolution, this indicates a loss of intersubjectivity that requires extraordinary efforts to repair (Schegloff, 1992). An example of this can be found during the event coded “10.8.08.2 Accountability is too Negative” which can be found in its entirety in appendix D, Data Sample 2. Here the repair initiation is excerpted:

((Group of staff members from Equinox are sitting at a table working on a poster that depicts the “Positive Core” of the program. The excerpt starts with Bill suggesting that the words “Challenge” be added to the poster as a description of one of the ways the
program works with clients. It is offered in connection to “experiential learning.” A photo of the completed poster is included in appendix D as Data Sample 4.)

13. **BILL:** <Q Challenge Q> for <Q experiential learning Q>,
14. um...<Q challenges Q>...
15. So <Q opportunities for challenge Q>,
16. like to challenge themselves to find out more about themselves.

((Lines 17-33 are taken up by a conversation where Bill’s suggestion of “challenges” is clarified as a “strategy” for working with youth and not an outcome or goal.))

34. **MARIA:** [Right].
35. [[So <Q challenges Q> is green it’s a strategy]].
36. **RHONDA:** [[So we want]]--
37. So challenge...um...Okay.
38. <Q Life challenges...[skills] Q>?
39. **MARIA:** [<Q Personal Challenges Q>]
40. **BILL:** I would say,
41. just <Q challenging opportunities Q>--
42. [err]...[ways]...chall...se--
43. **RHONDA:** [challenge]
44. **KATHY:** [[So is that]]--?
45. **SUSAN:** Maybe there is different way [to say it].

Bill’s use of “challenge” as a strategy Equinox employs when working with youth is problematic to Rhonda, as indicated in her comments in lines 36-38. In line 39 Maria demonstrates that she too is having trouble figuring out how Bill’s comment fits within the group’s shared understanding of how to talk about the program. Bill’s attempt at repair in lines 40-42 is essentially in the third turn position with regard to this topic, but he fails to achieve clarity. Instead, a continued focus on repairing or clarifying the use of the term “challenge” ensues. The group does ultimately achieve a resolution that seems to include an accepted and shared understanding of Bill’s challenge-based strategy for working with youth. This occurs in lines 62-78, during another repair sequence that is initiated and concluded in the expected three turns:
Bill’s use of “accountability” is a clear digression from the group’s understanding of how to work with youth. The term marks a distinct departure from the repertoire of terms that would be considered by the majority of the group as acceptable to describe their work. At this point almost everyone in the group joins in the initiation of repair for this term. Up until this point (lines 40-62), Bill has been offering more explanation of how he understands “challenge” to be a worthwhile technique, while Kathy, Rhonda, and Maria struggle to understand his point. His offering of “accountability” however meets with a fairly strong reaction and seems to bring to the fore a major source of the misunderstanding: there is concern that Bill’s approach is “too negative.” The other-initiated repair also helps to clarify for Bill the main reason he and the others have lost intersubjectivity and allows him to finally offer a satisfying correction. Based on this, it seems that the friction was very much associated with a perceived departure from a positively oriented repertoire. Rhonda, Maria, and Kathy were uncomfortable with
“challenging” kids because it was potentially too negative. The final repair sequence is successfully and efficiently completed because the violation of repertoire rules is finally made clear by the terms “accountability” and “negative.” These terms took the misunderstanding beyond a confused negotiation and brought it to a distinct place of friction between established repertoires. Thus providing the clarity needed for repair.

The extended nature of the repair was due in large part to the fact that Bill did not perceive his initial suggestion about “challenge” to be outside of what he understood to be the rules of the preferred repertoire and thus was not totally clear on the nature of the resistance he encountered.28 When the rules or expectations that he violated became clear, he was able to better repair the misunderstanding. This example is offered as a linguistic event that illuminates the boundaries of an appreciatively oriented repertoire; a boundary made more “visible” through repair sequence analysis.

Analyzing the recorded data with an eye toward repair initiation sequences can help to clarify where friction is occurring. Further, when the repair sequences in total are explored with respect to their expected flow toward correction it becomes possible to see

28 While unnecessary for the discourse analysis undertaken here, some additional understanding of the participants’ backgrounds offers another layer supporting this interpretation. Bill and Susan, both teachers at Equinox, were originally educated and trained as adventure-based educators, while Kathy, Maria, and Rhonda are all more “traditionally” trained and licensed clinicians. Bill brings up the idea of challenge in the context of “experiential education” (the part of the flower he was referring to). In adventure education discourses “Experiential Education” is often understood as almost synonymous with adventure-based techniques; techniques that often espouse the use of challenging participants as worthwhile and integral to developmental success. More commonly held counseling discourses are often more likely to see the role of the counselor or educator as one who supports someone through challenges. This discourse is arguably more sensitive to the idea of challenging youth in confrontational, provocative ways. It seems that based on the final agreement, that Bill did not in fact have that kind of strong-armed idea about challenging youth in mind but for the others to be ‘suspicious’ of this fits with the fact that the concern for challenge-based approaches being hurtful to youth is not a unique or uncommon reaction; see, for example, the well publicized debate between adventure professionals and other stake holders (Brown, Steele, & Roberts, 2005; Kutz & O’Connell, 2007; Russell, 2006). Add to this that Bill, throughout the entirety of the recorded data of the study, makes comments that intentionally place himself at the boundary of the supportive or appreciative repertoire. Thus, it seems that Bill is trying to express a not-necessarily confrontational use of an adventure-based challenge, that Susan understands, but that Rhonda, Maria, and Kathy think may be too negative.
how well defined the boundaries are for the repertoires in friction: well defined repertoires (and thus well defined and understood digressions from them) allow for more rapid returns to intersubjectivity. With this in mind, the current analysis of the data recorded for this study supports the idea that there is in fact an identifiable appreciatively oriented repertoire being accessed by the participants. It is a positively oriented repertoire that offers a set of guidelines for how to talk about the work being done at the Equinox program. That this repertoire exists as a distinct set of discursive practices is made even more evident by an exploration of when and how joking and laughter occur within the recorded data.

**Joking and Laughter**

Upon review of the recorded discourse, it becomes clear that joking or laughing is often (in fact, almost always) an element of these moments of friction. While there is certainly humor present at other times in the data, during the moments of friction, the joking seems related directly to the tension created between two interpretive repertoires. It is the commonly understood difference between these ways of talking that allow for these moments of juxtaposition to be funny.

For example, in an event coded “10.8.08.1 Aimless Kid & Stinging Staff Ha Ha,” (see Appendix D, Extended Data Sample 1) the depiction of clients at the program as wandering aimlessly and staff as keeping control of things through the threat of painful punishment, is understood to be funny. More specifically, in lines six, 13, and 74, Bill suggests that it would be funny to depict the typical Equinox student as a confused, lost, and somewhat blundering caterpillar. The laughter of others at these comments (Maria’s laughing and joining of joke in line 7 and Maria, Rhonda, and Susan’s laughter in lines...
75-78) suggest that the humorous nature of such a metaphor is understood by others as well. In line 35, Bill begins to suggest that it would also be funny to describe a typical staff at equinox as a bee ready to sting students who get out of line. Maria, Rhonda, and Kathy all laugh along with this as well (lines 41-49):

28. **BILL:** [I think technically -- ]
29. Oops..that’s OK--
30. Technically,
31. I think we became the bumble bee.
32. **SUSAN:** Yup.
33. **MARIA:** [XXXX the caterpillar.]
34. **BILL:** [now..now keep--]
35. **BILL:** Yeah,
36. now this--
37. You know,
38. keeping them in line,
40. @@[@@@]
41. **MARIA:** [@@@]
42. **RHONDA** [@@@]
43. **MARIA:** <@ Watch out for those stingers @>
44. **BILL:** <@ Prodding, @>
45. zzzt.
46. [@][[@@@]]
47. **MARIA:** [@][[@@@]]

Why are Bill’s depictions of aimless students and stinging staff accepted as humorous? In part, because a more positive or appreciative approach to describing the work being done at Equinox would engage the youth based on their strengths, not their shortcomings, and would position staff as partners with clients, not as threatening peacekeepers. Bill’s descriptions are provocative in the way that they depart from this more strength-based approach. And they are humorous because of how they utilize a more cynical repertoire that stands in stark juxtaposition to a more appreciative one.

Jefferson (1979) interprets laughter as often an “invitation” to others to join the speaker. The invitations are accepted when others join in the laughter offered by the
speaker, such as when Maria and others join with Bill’s invitation to describe students as aimless and staff as stinging. During the AI sessions at Equinox, joking can often be seen as an invitation to accept the apparent irony that exists between versions of events rendered using an appreciative repertoire and versions that do not. In some cases the invitations go beyond inviting others to notice this irony and instead act as invitations to others to join in a preference for a non-appreciative view. These invitations differ from one to the next in the degree to which they invite others away from appreciative viewpoints, as well as in the degree to which they are accepted.

Take for example Bill’s invitation to others to join in his description of the program as a potential “reality check” for delusional youth (lines 7 and 8 of the event “10.8.08.3 Opportunity for Reality is Too Cynical”):

7. BILL: Yeah ...(2.1) <@ reality @>.
9. What...What do you mean too much?
10. @[@]
11. KATHY: [@] <@ come on @>.
12. ...(2.5)
13. BILL: Might be a little cynical

He offers his description accompanied by laughter (lines 7 and 9); Kathy partially accepts his invitation by laughing with him (lines 10 and 11), but also asks that he “come on” (line 11). In this case, she is asking him to “come on” back to a more appreciative way of describing the work of the program, which he does so by offering an account in line 13.

Similarly, when Rhonda jokes about Donny’s repeated visits to her office during the event coded “10.16.08.2 Donny the Nudge vs. Taking Steps,” she receives only subdued laughter from one other participant (Maria’s in line 229):
RHONDA: Hmm,
So where is he coming from,
when he is in my office <HI twelve times a day HI>,
asking for attention?
MARIA: <P @@ P>
RHONDA: Nah just kidding around,
[Um] --
BILL: [He’s looking for opportunities].
MARRA: [@@]

With her invitation to see Donny as having not actually taken any real steps of progress initially rejected, she too offers an account for her departure from a more appreciative repertoire. However, Bill does choose to join the joke by offering in a sarcastic or comical way that Donny is in her office again and again looking for “opportunities” (line 232). Here he is directly making fun of the appreciative view of Donny and Equinox as he is pulling the term “opportunities” straight from the center of the groups’ flower-poster-depiction of their program (see Appendix D, Data Sample 4). His invitation is accepted more heartily by Maria, as indicated by their shared laughter (lines 233-234).

The event coded “10.16.08.7 Metamorphosis vs. Slow Caterpillar” (see Appendix D, Extended Data Sample 3, lines 62-111), includes a joke that invites a number of Equinox staff members to acknowledge an unappreciative perspective on the progress of their program. It is an invitation that is heartily accepted by almost everyone present at the time. The joke is made after Joe spends a number of minutes interpreting the positive image of the program depicted in the poster. The irony between repertoires is pointed out by Joe in line 92, when he suggests that instead of a student who will soon go through a positive metamorphosis, the caterpillar on the group’s poster may be more convincing as a metaphor for the Equinox program itself, moving slowly and humorously towards any
goals it might have. It is an irony that builds directly from the “positive core” poster created by a number of the staff and it is an irony that is clear enough to be welcomed as humorous by almost the entire group. Irony is only available and understood if distinct boundaries between discourses exist. Joe’s comment is funny because of the obvious discord between the repertoires available for describing the program.

Using the lenses of accounting, repair, and ironic humor to view the discourse during AI sessions at Equinox is useful for illuminating the presence of a somewhat bounded appreciative discourse. Upon reviewing and transcribing the data, a number of discursive events jumped out at me as moments when the boundaries of an appreciative discourse were being identified or experienced. I revisited these events using the well developed constructs of accounting and repair as well as a previously documented approach to analyzing laughter and humor. With these lenses in use, these moments of tension can be convincingly understood as moments of friction between interpretive repertoires; one of which always being more ‘appreciative’ than the other. Thus, with the theoretical aid of these analytical tools, it becomes possible to construct a valid interpretation of the data which suggests the emergence of an appreciative interpretive repertoire; a repertoire closely tied to the positive perspective and an appreciative discourse of AI.

Research question 2: The Discursive Construction of Equinox

Even if one accepts the premise that there is an identifiable appreciative repertoire at play during the AI process at Equinox, there remains the question of what impact such a repertoire has on organizational life at the program. In the words of Potter and
Wetherell (1987): “It is not however sufficient for analysis to simply identify these different forms of language in the abstract. We need to know first the uses and functions of different repertoires, and second, the problems thrown up by their existence” (p. 149).

This study’s second research question attempts to address this next level of analysis: how does the dialogue during the AI process work to construct the organizational reality at Equinox? This is, in essence, a way of framing the question of what kind of impact the AI process has on the organizational development of the program.

Within the theoretical framework of this study, the question of impact pertains to the social construction of the program as found within the discourse of the programs’ stakeholders. This framework assumes that the way stakeholders talk about one another and the way they describe their work, are essential elements of the program itself. How then, does the appreciative discourse made available at least in part by AI, work to construct the Equinox program?

While attempting to empirically address this type of question is very challenging (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b; Fairhurst & Cooren, 2004), utilizing the data collected for this study, I believe there are two valid results to share. First, in a very basic sense, one can see how a chosen interpretive repertoire offers participants distinct possibilities for describing the clients, the staff and the work of the program. Second, while one can see the positive potential of the appreciative repertoire, one can also see that its use is contested and thus any assumptions about its continued use, much less its full adoption, are called into question.
The Repertoire and Organizational Descriptions

An interpretive repertoire is the set of linguistics rules, guidelines, or resources available to a speaker. The discourse recorded for this study displays very clearly how the positive guidelines and resources offered by an appreciative repertoire have a distinct impact on the way organizational life at Equinox is described. This impact can be seen in the choices of metaphors used to identify the program, staff, and students. It can also be seen in the way individual and organizational actions are described.

Within a number of the linguistic events explored already in this chapter, one can see how the metaphors speakers choose are part of distinctly different repertoires and thus can position the organization, the staff, and the students in profoundly different ways. Take, for example, the choice between describing the program as a beautiful blooming flower or a slow plodding caterpillar (“10.16.08.7 Metamorphosis vs. Slow Caterpillar”); the decision of whether to represent staff members as stinging Bees or not (“10.8.08.1 Aimless Kid & Stinging Staff Ha Ha”); or maybe most poignantly, the options between viewing youth as aimless wandering caterpillars in need of externally provided direction, or as simply beautiful butterflies-in-wait (“10.8.08.1 Aimless Kid & Stinging Staff Ha Ha”). The positive or affirmative biases of the appreciative repertoire’s guidelines are evident in one ‘side’ of each of these examples. During another event not yet excerpted, it is clear that these guidelines do not, for example, allow for insulting terminology to be used to describe students:

((A student, Charlotte; her father, Doug; another parent, Janine; another student, Kelsey; an Equinox staff member, Maria; and a case-worker from the Department of Mental Health, Carl; all working together to write down a description of a perfect day at Equinox. Janine is writing down the group’s ideas. The event takes place during an AI meeting where staff, students and other stakeholders are working together to identify successes at Equinox on which they might try to build.))

[118]
1. JANINE: So there was a meeting.
2. MARIA: Yeah.
3. JANINE: And the group discussed--
4. CARL: On how to install the pool--
5. JANINE: Discussed--
6. CARL Put the pool together.
7. DOUG: Assembly of the pool.
8. MARIA: You know what I think would be neat?
9. not only would everyone be assigned a specific job,
10. but what if we did like a buddy system,
11. Where you ha=d..like u=m--
12. You know an adult student paring,
13. And they could sort of work side by side on a specific task?

((Begin: Event Coded: “3.6.09 Grp1.3 Brats”))
14. JANINE: Um..all right a buddy.
15. And it would be a client--
16. would be a- um--.
17. What do you call you guys?
18. CHARLOTTE: [Students].
19. MARIA: [Residents]
20. KELSEY: Or Students.
22. JANINE?: <P Residents P>.
23. KELSEY: Excu=se [me].
25. KELSEY: Positive outlook.
26. CARL: [@ @]
27. JANINE: [An adult] could either be a staff..or..[a parent].
28. KELSEY: [I Don’t think so].
29. CHARLOTTE: You got a DMH worker laughing.
((End: Event Coded: “3.6.09 Grp1.3 Brats”))

30. JANINE: So, they had a meeting.
31. The group discussed how to--

In line 15 of this excerpt Janine asks for clarification as to how she should refer in her notes to youth at Equinox. This begins an event (“3.6.09 Grp1.3 Brats”) focused on the defining of youth at the program. In response to Janine’s inquiry, the youth and staff offer “students” or “residents” and Charlotte’s dad, Doug, offers “brats.” Kelsey and
Charlotte both take issue with this and Charlotte reprimands her father by telling him to be more “positive” (line 24). Kelsey seconds the suggestion in line 25. While it is not necessarily very notable that a youth would take offense to being called a “brat,” the choice of terms for the redirection does seem notable. There are of course many ways Charlotte could have responded and of these, she chose to tell her father to try out a more “positive outlook.” This choice of terms is certainly made possible in part by the availability of an appreciative repertoire to Charlotte. She in effect, chooses to use the appreciative repertoire. The choice of repertoire thus guides the selection of metaphors or terms chosen for objects, such as the program, the staff, or in this case, the youth.

The choice of repertoire also guides the description of organizational activities and interactions and this choice of repertoire can have a profound effect on the nature of those descriptions. For example, the appreciative approach allows a group of staff at one point to describe the work of the program, work that could be described in truly an infinite number of ways, as that of “providing opportunities for growth” (see Appendix D, Extended Data Sample 3, lines 62-3 and lines 84-88). Further, within the linguistic event “10.8.08.2 Accountability is too Negative,” the expectations found within an appreciative repertoire help to explain why a staff’s work should be described as ‘teaching through challenge’ instead of as ‘challenging kids directly’ (see Appendix D, Extended Data Sample 2, lines 13-104). Similarly, as seen in the event “10.16.08.2 Donny the Nudge vs. Taking Steps,” the appreciative way of talking allows for a student’s seemingly unsuccessful or static behavior to conversely be seen as advancing through small steps (see Appendix D, Extended Data Sample 3, lines 188-245).
Another example of staff drawing on an appreciative approach to describe the actions of a student occurs within the event coded as “3.6.09 Grp2.2 Georgia's Small Steps.” During this interaction, whether or not Georgia, a student, is making progress is contested by her mother. Similar to the event where Donny’s progress is described and debated (“10.16.08.2 Donny the Nudge vs. Taking Steps”), the appreciative repertoire makes the concept of ‘taking small steps’ readily available to the participants.

((Staff members, Bill and Susan, discuss Georgia’s progress at the Equinox program with her mother, Martha. Georgia and another student, Ruth are present during the discussion. The event takes place during an AI meeting where staff, students and other stakeholders are working together to identify successes at Equinox on which they might try to build.))

1. MARTHA: I am not sure how we XXXX?
2. SUSAN: Slowly.
3. BILL: Step by step.
4. @ @ @
5. SUSAN: Yeah.
6. MARTHA: Step by step yeah absolutely,
7. but so far we haven’t made the first step anywhere.
8. I don’t think--
9. I mean--
10. BILL: Oh,
11. [I do.]
12. MARTHA: [XX][XX]
13. BILL: I would say though –
15. We’ve gotten you a notebook.
16. GEORGIA: Y’up.
17. BILL: We’ve gotten you organized.
18. [You know when you come in--]
19. MARTHA: [XXXXXX]
((Georgia, exhibits some sort of behavior that is concerning to Martha. It occurs off camera))
20. Wait a minute,
21. Georgia, that’s not polite.
22. GEORGIA: @ @ @
23. SUSAN: Georgia, put it back please.
24. BILL: But she’s--
25. She’s--
26. She’s..taking more ownership..over her...work.
27. So she has her new notebook.
28. She can come in and get it and sit down.
29. Which is big.
30. So that she is ready to do the work.
31. Um...and she --
32. <I You, you ask questions. I> ((directed to Georgia))
33. GEORGIA: Yes.
34. BILL: Right?
35. GEORGIA: [Yup.]
36. BILL: [That's a good thing.]
37. And sometimes your patient in XXX.
38. Right?
39. That's good.
40. SUSAN: <X in P.E. X> you ask for help?
41. GEORGIA: Yeah.
42. SUSAN: Yeah.
43. BILL: And are you working on not saying inappropriate things?
44. GEORGIA: Yeah.
45. BILL: So,
46. we are doing good.
47. <X a couple X> little steps there.
48. GEORGIA: And I use a calculator.
49. BILL: Yup.
50. And you compromise.
51. Right?
52. And we are going to compromise a little more on Monday?
53. GEORGIA: No=.
54. BILL: <@ Yes=. @>

The choice of repertoire and the power it can have is particularly striking here, as the object of the descriptive language, Georgia, is present. It would be hard to imagine that if sincerely engaged in, that such linguistic choices would not have a tangible effect on the perceptions of those involved. However, while this potential for positive impact is apparent, it is not clear in the data to what extent the appreciative repertoire is in fact sincerely used or accepted. During the AI activities, this appreciative repertoire is available and is even considered “primary,” but the recorded discourse also indicates that its use is contested.

**Appreciative Repertoire as Primary but Contested**
The very nature of the AI activities encourage the use of an appreciative way of talking. By “nature,” I mean that the activities were structured to encourage participants to utilize positive or appreciative ways of describing people and events at Equinox. Take for example, the types of questions asked on the interview questionnaires that were the basis of the program-wide inquiry. These interview guides ask stakeholders to think of times when students or families have made “step by step” progress, when these students have “grown” or “blossomed” or when difficult or challenging times emerged as constructive opportunities (See questions on “Appreciative Inquiry Interview Guide: Staff” in Appendix A). The questions do not ask about what is broken and needs to be fixed, or about times that were particularly discouraging. The facilitation of the recorded meetings also encouraged (or almost required) the use of an appreciative perspective. For example, the facilitator’s directions to staff present at one group meeting was to try to pick out positive events that took place during the previous week; a week that was already indicated to be a bit overwhelming or “crazy” for some of them (see Appendix D, Extended Data Sample 3, lines 165-187).

The AI process makes an appreciative repertoire primary. To participate in the activities is in effect, to use the repertoire. Digressions from the repertoire require accounts, or excuses, and are trouble sources in need of repair. However, while this accounting and repair show that the appreciative repertoire is understood by the participants as the primary or ‘expected” way of talking, a closer look at some of the repair sequences along with an analysis of much of the joking that transpires, indicates that while primary, the appreciative repertoire is not necessarily the preferred repertoire. The appreciative repertoire often does not seem to offer the tools participants want to use.
for describing their experiences accurately or for accomplishing the work they feel they need to get done.

Rhonda’s self initiated repair and correction concerning Donny (Appendix D, Extended Data Sample 3, lines 225-231) has already been described as a typically efficient repair sequence. I have argued as well that this efficiency suggests that the boundaries of the appreciative repertoire are somewhat defined. This example also portrays another pattern that has been observed within certain institutional settings. According to Jefferson (1974), when an error is recognized and corrected by the offender him/herself, the digression sometimes can be understood as an intentional flirtation with a different speech community. Often it is a flirtation with a more “habitual” or familiar “speech community” before returning to the speech community deemed more “appropriate” to the current “environment;” an act used as intentional “proffering of identity of self and situation” (Jefferson, 1974, pp. 191-193). Thus the speaker sends a message to others and attempts to positions him or herself as not fully a part of what s/he perceives to be the accepted speech community or repertoire. During the event referenced here, Rhonda sends the message that she is not totally on-board with an appreciate view of Donny and may have a more natural alliance with an alternative, less appreciative way of talking about Donny.

Not only does she express her own preference for a less appreciative way of describing Donny, through her joking, she invites others to join her. She offers her perspective in an exaggerated way: “So where is he coming from, when he is in my office twelve times a day?” And then insists that she is “just kidding around.” By offering her more cynical perspective as a joke that can joined in upon, as was noted earlier, she offers
an “invitation” for others to join her in her preferred perspective (Jefferson, 1979).

According to Jefferson, Sacks, Schegloff, Button, & Lee (1987), joking or laughter is often a speaker’s “invitation to his co-participants to produce talk together whereby they can see themselves as intimate (p160).” In this case, when Bill joins in the joke and laughs along with Maria, he, “affiliates” with the mentality of her “impropriety” (p. 169). In other words, he joins in the mentality of a non appreciative approach to the situation. Their shared laughter becomes a way to mark a shared intimacy or affiliation with an impropriety towards the appreciative repertoire. Here, and elsewhere in the data, joking is more than just a moment of friction between repertoires, but is arguably an intimate alliance between participated as they reject the appreciative way of talking about (and thus understanding) the program and their work.

A more natural alliance, or preference, for a less appreciative repertoire can be identified during a number of the other recorded episodes of joking and laughter. Up until this point, this humor has been primarily explored as requiring the presence of two distinct repertoires. By also seeing this laughter and joking as an I invitation to one of the two repertoires, one can start to see how participants can actively coordinate alliances or preferences. In fact, it may be the case that in order to be funny, joking may not only require a discernable difference between repertoires, but also this preference for one over the other. According to Mulkay and Gilbert (1982), jokes are understood by participants “by identifying two distinct interpretative perspectives and by treating one of these perspectives as interpretatively superior.” (p.603). In other words, while one way of describing things may be common or expected within a certain context, it is not necessarily preferred by the participants. Instead there may be a second description,
mediated by a different repertoire that seems to more accurately describe their experience.

During many of the events recorded for this study that include laughter and joking at the intersection of distinct repertoires, it seems that while an appreciative repertoire is often expected or primary, it is not the preferred way of describing life at Equinox. For example it is funny to be describing the program as a blossoming flower when it is more accurately described as a slow moving caterpillar; it is humorous to think of staff as supportive collaborators with youth when they are more realistically understood as bees that sting to keep students safely under control; and it is laughable to think of Donny making step by step progress, when in fact he is by no means seeking out opportunity at Equinox and recently has continued to be sort of “nudgy” (see Appendix D, Extended Data Sample 1, lines 6-78; and Appendix D, Extended Data Sample 3, lines 91-103, 218-234)

Summary

When analyzing the discourse recorded for this study, it is possible to identify moments when a positive or appreciative way of talking is notable. This noteworthiness often stems from the fact that this way of talking seems to be in friction with other ways of talking. When these linguistic events are further unpacked using the well developed constructs of accounting and repair as well as a previously documented approach to analyzing laughter and joking, the moments of friction appear to clearly delineate the boundaries of an appreciative repertoire. This repertoire makes available to the participants a set of positively oriented guidelines for talking about the program and their work done there. These include: a positive focus when describing events and people,
an emphasis on clients’ accomplishments and potential rather than their shortcomings and failures, and an understanding of the program as a place that presents opportunities to clients rather than one that tries to control or punish them.

While these guidelines are accepted as the expected mode of interaction during the AI process, they are not necessarily accepted as the most useful way to describe the experiences of the participants in the study. This is not to say that these guidelines are rejected outright but it is clear that they are not accepted without issue. Reasons why the repertoire is accepted and utilized at times and why it is the object of mockery at others will be discussed next.
DISCUSSION:
CONSIDERATIONS FOR USING AI IN OTHER SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

Introduction

This study’s first research question concerns a search for evidence of an appreciative repertoire. This is a process oriented question that seeks to empirically explore an AI process at work. The second research question is one of outcome: what new possibilities does the AI process seem to offer the stakeholders at the Equinox organization. With regard to the first question, the discourse analysis clearly identified the boundaries of an appreciative repertoire. With regard to the second question, the results show that while this kind of talk offers some clearly positive constructions of the work being done at the program, there are issues surrounding its acceptance as a preferred way to describe things.

To explore how the results of this case study can inform the use of AI at other schools and youth development programs, the two research questions each warrant further discussion. First, with respect to the identifiable emergence of an appreciative repertoire, it is important to explore a larger, complimentary discourse that likely mediated the participants’ use and understanding of AI’s appreciative repertoire. This larger mediating discourse, or Discourse, that currently permeates counseling and youth development work in the United States can be described as the “Positive Discourse.” As will be discussed, this discourse is a) wide spread and b) seems to include linguistic tools that are closely related to the appreciative, positively oriented repertoire offered by AI.
Consequently, it is likely that the Positive Discourse would have an influence on the implementation of an AI process at other youth development programs as well.

Second, with respect to the influence of AI on the organizational reality of Equinox, it is clear in the results that the adoption of an appreciative repertoire was contested. It seems the appreciative repertoire and the AI process often focused on a set of issues that were not the issues participants felt they needed to address most urgently. Upon further review of the data, Equinox program history, and the literature, it seems likely that the positive orientation and the social constructionist approach of AI’s appreciative repertoire may not fit seamlessly with the experiences of youth workers operating within stressful programmatic settings.

The Appreciative Repertoire as mediated by the Positive Discourse

The methodology of this socio linguistically informed interpretive case study is focused analysis at “micro” and “meso” levels of discourse (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b; Heracleous & Marshak, 2004). The research questions explore how micro-level interpersonal interactions are in turn part of an organizational, or meso-level, discourse. The study was designed to explore broader socio-historically developing mega-level big “D” discourses (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b; Ferdig & Ludema, 2005; Gee, 1999). It became clear, however, that it would not be capturing the whole story to interpret the moments of positively oriented talk as being exclusively tied to the AI process.

The appreciative repertoire, was certainly encouraged and developed further by the AI process, but its use was mediated by existing discourses or conversations. In this case, the participants’ engagement with AI’s appreciative repertoire was affected by a
complimentary conversation already present at the Equinox program. It was and is a conversation about “strength-based” or “positive youth development” approaches to their work. Because these pre-existing conversations included the use and exploration of positively oriented language, they are particularly relevant to participants’ utilization of the appreciative repertoire. The linguistic tools offered by the AI process were similar to the strength-based, positive youth development tools already at play at the program. In other words, the “appreciative repertoire” identified in the results of this study, was not simply a product of the AI process, but was instead also a result of an on-going conversation about a positive approach to youth development.

The Equinox school, as is the case with other youth development organizations around the US, has made organizational efforts to incorporate what is known as a “positive youth development” approach into their work (McWhinnie, Abela, Hilmy, Ferrer, & Hankin, 2008). It is a move that embraces positively oriented or “strength-based” approaches to programming and behavior management (Kaczmarek, 2006; Kalke, Glanton, & Cristalli, 2007; Ungar, 2006). Aspects of this Positive Youth Development Discourse include ideas such as: identifying assets instead of weaknesses (Benson, 2001; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000), focusing on developing resilience instead of fixing problems (E. P. Smith et al., 2004), engaging with youth collaboratively and not authoritatively (Boldt, Witzel, Russell, & Jones, 2007; Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Brockern, 1990), and addressing youth’s behaviors not their characters (Appelstein, 1998). At Equinox, an engagement with this Discourse has taken place over the last five

29 Here, again, big “D” Discourse refers to a larger discursively constructed social reality (e.g., the Discourses of the performance gap, masculinity, or illegal immigration). Big “D” Discourse is analogous to the Foucaultian sense of discourse where Discourses are “bodies of knowledge that ‘systematically form the object of which they speak’” (Foucault, 1979, p. 49; as cited in Hardy & Phillips, 2004, p. 301). Little “d” discourse refers to the local enactment of language (e.g., conversation or a written memo).
years or so and can be documented through the program’s use of strength-based staff
development initiatives. These initiatives have included trainings by Charlie Applestein
and in-services based on his work (Appelstein, 1994, 1998). They have also included on-
going staff certification in Cornell University’s Therapeutic Crisis Intervention
("Therapeutic Crisis Intervention System," 2010).

Applestein’s work is focused on a compassionate and positive view of kids in
residential treatment. One of his books used for Equinox in-service training, “The Gus
Chronicles” (Appelstein, 1994), is based on the first-hand account of a residential
program for youth by a fictitious troubled kid named Gus Studelmeyer. During trainings,
the book creates an opportunity for staff to connect compassionately with Gus. For
example, here is a quote from early in the book that features Gus writing about a surprise
roommate change:

I ask you, the reader, how would you like to drive home one night and find out
someone had moved your things across the street, and now you live with Ed
Magillicutty? You hate Ed Magillicutty! These kinds of things happen all the
time in residential treatment. Most kids have already been subjected to the
misuse of power prior to entering a treatment milieu. A lot of anger builds up
due to this. Unless staff members are extremely sensitive to this issue, they
risk maintaining a sense of alienation between kids and themselves …I’ve
always liked the staff members who didn’t yell and gave me reasons for things.
(p. 10)

This excerpt is indicative of the tone of Applestein’s work, which emphasizes working
cooperatively with youth in understanding and caring ways, as opposed to seeking
control over them through coercive or behavioristic methods. Applestein’s emphasis on
an affirming strength-based approach is clearly evident in the following statement he
made when he was asked to describe kids at an ideal youth development program:

They are kids with lots of opportunities for success…they feel good about
themselves when their strengths have been emerging. So that kind of program
has brought out - has recognized this in the kids. It has put them in a position to succeed…I think the best programs in the country are the ones that provide multiple opportunities for success for the kids each day. And deal with behavior in very respectful and understanding ways. (Appelstein, personal communication, May 14, 2007)

Applestein and his work were the basis for a set of in-service trainings at the Equinox school for multiple years prior to the implementation of the AI process analyzed in the current study. While not all of the staff members who participated in this study were part of these trainings, some of them certainly were. The administrative decision to utilize Applestein and his work along with the trainings themselves, indicate a previous and ongoing organizational engagement at Equinox, with the strength-based Positive Youth Development Discourse.

While not as blatantly strength-based as Applestein, the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) curriculum and certification process implemented by the Equinox program is part of the Positive Youth Development Discourse as well. TCI is based in part on a “caring” response to crisis where staff are encouraged to see “children’s aggressive behaviors as an expression of needs” (Nunno, Holden, & Leidy, 2003, p. 296). While oriented around maintaining safety in difficult situations, TCI includes some of the reframing of situations using a positive and hopeful approach indicative of the Positive Youth Development Discourse. For example, the TCI trainings and refresher in-services that every Equinox staff participates in every six months often begin by outlining the fact that while dangerous, crises can also be seen as opportunities.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to try to link language found in the recorded data directly to Appelstein’s work, it is worth noting the similarities between Appelstein’s description of the ideal program and the positive core of the program identified by members of the AI Advisory/Design Team (see for example the emphasis on “opportunities” in the flower poster, Data sample 4, Appendix D).
In addition to a program history involving the work of Appelstein and TCI training, the Positive Youth Development Discourse was also introduced to Equinox through program leadership. Just prior to the AI process analyzed here, the program was led for about a year by an interim director, Diane, who had returned to the youth work after years of working in corporate and municipal government settings. While in those settings, she had facilitated a couple of AI processes herself. While not documented in detail for this study, Diane’s leadership style likely reflected her understanding of AI and the Positive Youth Development Discourse. For example, she implemented regular “appreciative moments” at the beginning of staff meetings and more significantly, was instrumental in the program’s abandonment of a punitive level system that had been in use for many years (“Diane,” personal communication, August 2008). It was a controversial move within the program and one that certainly echoed the values of the Positive Youth Development Discourse.

Evidence of a pre-existing engagement with this Positive Youth Development Discourse can also be located directly within the discourse recorded for the study. For example, at the very outset of the AI process, a group of staff members were asked to describe the work of the program by creating a poster (Data sample 4, Appendix D). The flower-image they created was centered on the idea of providing “opportunities” and there was a large petal devoted to “Building Strengths.” There were not petals, for example, referencing more negative or deficit oriented language such as “fixing bad behavior,” “keeping things in control,” or “curing illness.” While the flower was put together after a set of appreciative interviews were facilitated as part of the AI process, the terminology of “building strengths” was not offered directly by the facilitator.
Instead, it is more likely that the AI process offered some new positive options but was even more effective at catalyzing the use of a Positive Youth Development repertoire that was already at play at the program.

During another AI session, the recorded words of Joel, a behavior management specialist, also indicate that the program had already been in conversation with a positively oriented youth development Discourse. As part of an AI activity, Joel was asked to identify a difficult moment that the school community was able to seize as an opportunity for growth. In his answer, Joel describes a debate held between staff members (well prior to the time period of this study) about what he felt was a somewhat punitive approach being taken with a certain student:

(Staff member Joel along with two other staff members, a parent, and student, Rima, are seated at a table. Joel describes a difficult or problematic time at Equinox that was seized upon as an opportune moment.)

1. **JOEL:** Before you became a day student,
2. Rima,
3. do you remember when we had a level system?
4. **RIMA:** No.
5. **JOEL:** Well--
6. **RIMA:** I wasn’t here when we used a level system.
7. All I remember,
8. when I was a resident,
9. they put me on R- .. um- .. O-2 or O-1.
10. **JOEL:** Oh, I see.
11. **RIMA:** That’s what they had--
12. Um.
13. **JOEL:** An opportune moment for me was … um--
14. <X we were in a staff meeting X>.
15. And we were discussing…um…the pros and cons of the level system and-
16. There was this young man whom I thought was
17. <XXXX opportunities XXXXXXX consequences X>.
18. I thought they we adjudicated rather than fair,
19. Ah= Rima,
20. And I thought they were um= given to him unfairly.
21. Okay?
22. And we had a pretty lively discussion in staff meeting, 
23. about this um particular young man. 
24. I just thought that-- 
25. RIMA: Do I know this person? 
26. JOEL: I don’t think so. 
27. RIMA: Initials? 
28. JOEL: Um…M.R. 
29. RIMA: No 
30. JOEL: I thought that maybe if he was given <X universal X> opportunities for <X individual X> success, 
31. And a more specific-- 
32. not so much behavior plan, 
33. but … an incentive plan. 
34. And not be so heavy on the consequences. 
35. XXX what was this young man telling us about himself, 
36. that he really meant, 
37. X we were not supplying him- making available to him all the resources-- 
38. so that he could be more successful. 
39. So we had a meaningful discussion about that, 
40. in staff meeting. 
41. At the end of staff meeting, 
42. we were able to respectfully agree to disagree, 
43. and then .. later to put our heads together and say, 
44. <Q wait a minute, 
45. Hmm .. you’re right. 
46. This is about a system that young people have .. um .. been encouraged to operate in, 
47. And .. earn rewards and incentives, 
48. but this system was unfair, 
49. not just for that young man, 
50. but all of the students Q>. 
51. RIMA: Oh god yes XXX 
52. They didn’t do level systems, 
53. but I know what you are talking about. 
54. JOEL: So we found new ways to incent- um .. um .. incentivize-- 
55. people able to get privileges- to get jobs, 
56. without having to jump through hoops. 
57. XXXXXXXXXXX <X get rid of X> incentives- opportunities, 
58. that were not giving young people real opportunities for them to grow, 
59. to be successful.
Joel describes here a time when he felt the program revised its previous consequence-oriented level system and embraced a more positive approach. His story clearly reflects some of the “opportunity-providing” language indicative of the Positive Youth Development Discourse. Joel concluded his description of this “opportune” moment in the program’s recent history with the following remarks:

60. **JOEL:** I felt as though--
61. given...(2.0) um= the right circumstances,
62. that this young person would excel.
63. And that we weren’t approaching him from his strengths.
64. We were approaching him from his- his deficits.

While the AI process certainly influenced the way Joel chose to relay this story, it is important to note that the debate Joel describes occurred at the program well before AI was introduced. It seems very likely that his understanding of this conversation within the program was already being framed or mediated by the presence of the Positive Youth Development Discourse. That Joel was already engaged with this Discourse and that this Discourse is likely to be associated with AI, is further evidenced by the fact that when program leaders were first approached with the idea of implementing AI, and its positive bias was described, Joel’s name came up immediately as someone who would likely support the process.

Another person whose name came up as a likely supporter of an appreciative or positively oriented process was Max, a staff at the residential component of the program. Max did not end up taking part in much of the facilitated AI process. However, at one AI meeting he was able to attend, he had some interesting things to say about the shifting language of the program. Max identifies this language shift after describing the difficulties some of the non-clinically trained direct care staff have with keeping up with
the specific language that is expected of them; expectations that were already being
developed prior to the AI process:

65. **MAX:** And the --
66. And the language is changing.
67. You know it --
68. It is changing from .. you know,
69. being directive statements to the kids,
70. to ...(1.1) ah ... questioning the kids,
71. like inviting them to outcomes,
72. instead of directing them to outcomes that you think –
73. And .. you know like … coping skills is being shifted to like resources you
   know.

Max’s comments point to the fact that there were already issues surrounding the
intentional choice of language at the program. Further, these choices included elements
indicative of the Positive Youth Development Discourse, such as “inviting” kids to
possible outcomes rather than directing them.

The language recorded on the Advisory team’s poster and language used within
Joel and Max’s comments are presented here as evidence that the program was already in
conversation with a strength-based Positive Youth Development Discourse prior to the
facilitation of AI. When these recordings are viewed alongside the program’s history
with Charlie Appelstein’s work, TCI protocols, and Diane’s administrative tenure, it
seems even more likely that the Positive Youth Development Discourse and the resources
offered within its accompanying repertoires were already at play at Equinox prior to the
Summer of ’08 when the facilitated AI process began.

While the details of how the positive youth development repertoire is used at
Equinox is specific to the program, the Positive Youth Development Discourse from
which it evolves is widespread throughout the educational field and is particularly present
in alternative school or behavior management settings. The conversation about how to
positively describe (and construct) the youth at Equinox and the work being done there is likely underway in other youth development settings. Furthermore, it is likely that this youth development conversation within schools and programs about ‘positive talk’ may be influenced by an even broader Discourse.

Positively oriented approaches exist in other human development fields as well. These include intervention strategies such as “Positive Psychotherapy” (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006), “Positive Psychology” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), “Solution Focused” therapies (Furman & Ahola, 1992; Walter & Peller, 1992), and Positive Organizational Development (K., J., & Quinn, 2003). All these together work as part of a larger “Positive Discourse” that is both drawn upon and pushed against by speakers within all of these fields.

It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate rigorously the Equinox program’s pre-existing conversations about the Positive Discourse or its pre-existing utilization of positively oriented repertoires. It was clear, however, that a preceding organizational relationship with positively oriented talk existed. While any new idea will be influenced by previous understandings and conversations, what is of significance here is how the positively oriented discursive resources of AI were so closely aligned to pre-existing, and potentially contentious, conversations about language-use at the program. Instead of representing a somewhat new and provocative idea, the appreciative repertoire introduced through the AI process intertwined closely with a pre-existing positively-oriented repertoire and the conversation about its use. This suggests that the use and understanding of the appreciative repertoire introduced through AI was mediated by the participants’ relationships with the Positive Discourse.

[138]
Because conversations with and within the Positive Discourse may be occurring at other schools and youth development programs, the decision of how to use AI in these settings should take this into account. The pre-existing interactions with positively oriented repertoires will have an influence on how AI is received, understood, and used. In the case of Equinox, for example, while the AI process was embraced in many ways, there was also dissatisfaction expressed with the tools the appreciative repertoire offered. As the results of this study show, the appreciative way of describing the realities perceived at the program did not seamlessly fit with stake holder needs and may have even exacerbated resistance to a preconceived Positive Discourse.

**Resistance to the Positive Discourse**

During Max’s description of the “changing language” of youth care work, he also mentions that the language offered by the TCI training he and his fellow direct care staff had been through, was not “used on a daily basis.” While not necessarily rejected outright, this language simply was not “common practice” (Data Sample 3.6.09 LrgGrp.1 “New Language”). In an effort to understand how AI might function as an organizational development tool at a school or educational program, it becomes important to try to understand why Max and his colleagues only partially embrace the appreciative and/or positive youth development repertoire.

The results of this study show that to some degree, a positively oriented repertoire is not necessarily the preferred way of describing the work being done at the Equinox program. While it is certainly accepted and used at times, it is also contested. On the one hand, during the AI activities, repairs and accounts are needed to compensate for
deviations from an appreciative stance, thus indicating that the appreciative or positively oriented repertoire is accepted as the expected way of speaking. However, during these same events, jokes that depend on more critical language often find purchase because of the fact that a more deprecating approach is understood as an “interpretatively superior” option (Mulkay & Gilbert, 1982, p. 603). In other words, a more critical or deprecating repertoire often seems more useful to the participants as they try to describe the world they are experiencing. Why is this so?

It would be impossible to learn of AI and the Positive Discourse (or to explore its literature) and not question the bias of its seemingly exclusive positive focus. Not surprisingly, the positive focus of AI in organizational settings has attracted such inquiry. A number of sources suggest that within an effective AI process, problems or negativity are not necessarily ignored by this positive bias, but instead are vetted in generative ways that help to provide the energy needed to deal with them (Coghlan et al., 2003; McNamee, 2003; van Bushkirk, 2002). While this certainly may be part of the story in many situations, the positive orientation may be problematic as well. As van der Harr and Hosking (2004) point out:

the claim that a ‘positive’ orientation is necessary seems to beg the question of what is positive and to assume that sufficient unforced agreement can be achieved on the matter...We are reminded of one (perhaps rather sad) response to the conventional utterance ‘have a nice day’ – ‘I’ll have any kind of day I damned well like!’” p. 1025-6

Furthermore, because this exclusively positive focus may work to silence important critical opinions (Pratt, 2002) or to covertly support the agendas of those in power (P. Rogers & Fraser, 2003), critical scholars argue that this positive focus deserves ethical
considerations (S. Grant & Humphries, 2006; van der Harr & Hosking, 2004; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007).

As a facilitator/researcher, I tried to be cautious of imposing a process rather than offering one. The goal was to learn more about AI but to do so by offering an OD process to participants that they accepted as useful. My hope was for the action research project to be shared by both researcher and participants, and to be perceived as having the potential to provide positive outcomes for both. The "reciprocity" I was hoping for would be represented by a "collaboration in labor," where my efforts were in sync with the labor needs of the program (Zigo, 2001). I wanted to avoid what some scholars of reciprocity have referred to as a not uncommon "missionary activism" that entails "intervention without invitation" and may even slip "into paternalistic imposition" (Cushman, 1996 as cited in K. M. Powell & Takayoshi, 2003, p. 395).

While it may be idealistic to assume an OD "intervention" would be whole heartedly and unproblematically accepted, my journal entries during the AI process indicate that there were times when I felt that the OD process I was facilitating involved an uncomfortable level of "forced" interactions or even "arm-twisting" (Researcher’s Journal 2/9/09, 3/4/09). These were isolated impressions but they do represent moments in which the AI process was not necessarily seen as the "labor" that stakeholders felt they needed to be doing. Two possible major contributing factors to this situation, that can be identified in the OD and AI literature as well as within this case study are: a) the potential for the process-rich constructionist nature of the AI process to be incongruous with the perceived concrete needs of the participants; and b) the difficulty of implementation.
within the often chaotic and/or crisis driven nature of many youth development programs and alternative educational settings.

**Too abstract of a process?**

It was argued in chapter 2 that AI has far more potential as an OD intervention when it is viewed and facilitated through a post modern social constructionist lens. In other words, it has more potential as a process by which participants intentionally and discursively construct their present or future organization than it does as a process that asks participants to reflect in a positivistic, if optimistic, way on the past and present organization. In this way, the positive focus can be seen not as much as an avoidance of the more problematic aspects of stakeholders’ experiences, but instead as an opportunity to locate places of excitement and energy to build from. While this approach may be theoretically appealing and potentially even more effective than a more linear approach to diagnosis and cure, it may also be a bit of a conceptual leap for participants who are oriented towards more concrete problem solving approaches. Consequently, participants may feel uncomfortable with a process that may be understood as too open-ended or unstructured (Clarke & Ryan, 2007). It seems possible that this may have been the case at Equinox.

In November of 2008, on my way to one AI session at Equinox, I encountered this discomfort. I overheard staff member Joe speaking with the recently hired Educational Director, Pam. While Joe had previously agreed to be part of the AI process and a member of the advisory team, he was commenting to Pam that he wasn’t excited about another meeting with a bunch of “talking” (Researcher’s Journal 6/15/09). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in depth Joe’s comment, it certainly indicated
a problem with how the AI process was being viewed. At the very least, in this moment
the AI process was being interpreted as less than pragmatic. If the AI process were to be
reciprocally shared labor, i.e., it was the work that stakeholders felt they needed to be
doing, then the appreciative approach would need to seem useful. More specifically with
regard to this study, the appreciative repertoire would need to be understood as the
preferred interpretive framework, and not something detached from reality. While this
certainly may have been the case at times and to degrees, the following exchange
between the facilitator/researcher and Rhonda hint at a disconnect:

((MARIA is interrupted by Kathy during an AI session who lets her know that her
babysitter is on the phone calling about an issue at home from Data Sample
10/16/08.3 “The Unappreciative Real World”))

74. MIKE: The world intervenes.
75. RHONDA: The unappreciative world.
76. MIKE: The real world.

In this situation, Mike and Rhonda find agreement on the idea that the appreciative
context of the AI meeting is not a ‘real’ context. While at times this incongruence may
be seen as a helpful departure from business as usual, it may also be interpreted as
engaging with the unrealistic or irrelevant.

Another contributor to the Positive Discourse that shares some of AI’s social
constructionist framework is the field of “solution focused” counseling (Parton &
O’Byrne, 2000; Walter & Peller, 1992) The solution focused literature also discusses the
potential for the approach’s complex or process-rich nature to contribute to a poor fit with
stressful educational and therapeutic environments. Powell (1993), for example,
specifically describes a version of constructionist “Solution Focused Supervision” for
drug and alcohol abuse counselors and points out that such an approach offers an
opportunity for helpful insight during supervision. However he also points out that it is essential that such a process to be concretely focused and to remember the ‘reality’ of the youth care worker’s job is difficult and stressful (p. 205-6).

In this vein, Devine (1999) warns of how constructionist post-modern understandings (e.g., the analysis of power offered by Foucault) can misrepresent the needs of marginalized or struggling populations. He points out, for example, that in his observation, many inner city students are not interested in liberation but in fact want more “discipline” in their schools in order to help them feel safe (p. 252-3). While the stake holders at the Equinox program were not facing the same challenges as the inner city public school students in Devine’s (1999) work, both environments are demanding and stressful and thus school developers in either case should heed Devine’s concern for theory “emanating from university milieus cut off from real world” (p. 253) considerations. To this point, Harrington and Honda’s (1986) inquiry into youth care workers at 15 separate programs found the needs staff expressed within these often stressful residential milieus were for concrete skills in crisis management, communication, and counseling. They were not necessarily for empowerment or collaboratively constructed organizational realities. This is not to say that a post modern approach to working in these environments will not be a promising route towards organizational development. It is to say that the presentation of this kind of approach may need to be tempered in order to fit the perceived needs of the staff, students, and families.
Implementation of AI in a Chaotic Environment

The priorities within many school settings, and particularly those dealing with at risk or special needs populations, are often governed by a stressful, chaotic and at times, crisis-driven environment. Issues such as staff turn-over, violent crises among students and the need for constant and attentive supervision can make the facilitation of a cohesive or thorough organizational development process difficult (Sheppard & Brown, 2000; van Bushkirk, 2002; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). This is unfortunate, as by definition these are the environments that are in most need of development. Nonetheless, these types of issues permeate many schools and programs. Equinox, at the time of this study, was no exception.

As of October 2008, in addition to the predictable daily stress at a program serving a needy and challenging population of youth, Equinox was also dealing with some significant staff turn-over. The program had just recently hired a new educational director (in charge of the school), had promoted from within a new clinical director, and was yet to fill a vacant program director position. During data collection, the Program Director’s responsibilities, which included the oversight of all residential, clinical, and educational operations, were being shared in the interim by the often absent divisional VP and the former clinical director. This transitional period, particularly significant to a program that had stable leadership for the 10 years prior, was exacerbated by severe regulatory actions taken by the Department of Education who had found the school to be out of licensure compliance. Also, during this period referrals to the school program were at historic low, adding a significant financial strain.
Trying to set aside time for reflective AI meetings within this kind of environment is difficult. Prioritizing a process that seems like a great idea can be a challenge when more immediate and pressing needs exist. At Equinox, this was particularly the case with attempts to incorporate staff and youth from the residential component of the program. The following excerpt from my journal describes the afternoon at the residence when appreciative interviews among students and staff were scheduled to take place:

On 2/23 I went to the House to try to get kids to do some interviews. I think over-all about 2 interviews were done (1 + ½ + ½). It was not very impressive. Although I had been planning this with the staff for over a month, the night before proved to be an incredibly bad night for the house and much of the planned meeting was spent de-briefing that and laying down some new guidelines and consequences. Needless to say the place was not hopping with excitement to engage in my process. (Researcher’s Journal 3/4/09)

A night of crisis is not uncommon in a residential program serving youth with mental health diagnoses and histories of trauma. While it may not be uncommon, such a night is still very trying on both staff and students. It is also certainly an event with an aftermath that is certainly not a big help to the facilitation of a contrived, if well intentioned, OD process.

In addition to the somewhat difficult, if predictable program climate, significant staff turn-over was also a barrier to residential staff participation in the AI process. At the outset of the study a few of them had expressed particular interest in the appreciative approach and they were all invited to be a part of the advisory team. As the process progressed, through e-mail and memos, the residential staff members were kept in the loop and yet none were able to participate in the planning process or the final summit activity. When their absence was bought up in an advisory team planning session, a team member made the explanation that the residence was “down four staff” (Data Sample [146]
10.16.08.4 “Radical Inclusion vs. Down Four Staff”). Or in other words, they were short staffed and busy maintaining the basic flow and needs of the program and thus not able to send a representative to the meeting.

The issues of staff turn-over and staff shortages went beyond the residence and direct care staff and teachers. During the time of the study there were significant transitions within the leadership of the entire program. These included a brand new educational Director, an internal shuffling of the Clinical Directors position, a shift in the management of the residence, and a vacancy at the program director level. This significant staffing issue made it difficult to garner the much needed support for a program-wide OD process from these administrative level staff; a level of support deemed essential for successful action research school development processes (Durrant & Holden, 2006; Oja & Smulyan, 1989).

A stressed environment may be a difficult place to try to facilitate any OD process, and it may be a particularly difficult place to introduce a positively oriented one. Asking participants to appreciatively construct an energizing image of their workplace may be extra challenging when they view that workplace as particularly troubled. Take for example the following exchange when the facilitator (Mike) asks the participants to reflect appreciatively on the previous week. In response to this request there is laughter. The staff members are struck by the humorous difficulty of appreciating a week made particularly difficult by a shortage of teachers (Event “The Flower vs. This Week” excerpted from Appendix D Data Sample 3):

((Group of staff members from Equinox are at a meeting as part of the Appreciative Inquiry process at their program. They begin by revisiting a poster that a few of them made last week at another AI meeting. Joe, who was not present when the poster was made, is given the task, to give his impression of how the

[147]
poster depicts the Equinox program. A photo of the completed poster is included in appendix D as Data Sample 4. As Joe looks over the poster, the facilitator, Mike, asks the others to look at the aspects of the positive core of the program depicted in the poster and think of a time during the previous week when they saw evidence of them at the program))

7. MIKE: And how about while Joe looks at that,  
8. so he doesn’t feel totally on the spot,  
9. give him a second.  
10. you guys look at it again,  
11. remember what you wrote.  
12. And um ... (1.0) think about a time this week ... (.8),  
13. where you saw it happen.  
14. SUSAN: (H) <WH@WH>  
15. MIKE: At least one part of it.  
16. BILL: This week?  
17. SUSAN: Yeah [@@].  
18. BILL: [@@]  
19. SUSAN: This week [[@@]]  
20. MARION: [[<X Not a good X> week]]  
21. BILL: X week @@  
22. MIKE: Yes .. then definitely this week.  
23. JOE: I guess <Q opportunity Q> is the --  
24. Is the center of this [<X taken as this X>],  
25. MARION: [XXX]  
26. JOE: <Q new growth Q> would be the a=h --  
27. w- why everybody’s here,  
28. Or [<X whether XX about the kids] --  
29. MARION: [Monday we had out <HI three teachers HI>] (Hx) @.  
30. SUSAN: [@]  
31. JOE: [Yeah].  
32. That would be the new growth .. XX new growth.  
33. Ah .. the sun .. I don’t know why that is there.  
34. MIKE: What did you say Marion .. Monday?  
35. MARION: Monday we had three teachers  
36. MIKE: <DIM O=H DIM>.

Marion, Bill, and Susan all find it humorous to try to apply appreciative terms to a week where a staff shortage made it difficult to keep up with the needs of the program and the students.

In addition to humor, the results of this study also highlighted instances of accounting and repair as moments when participants were expressing distaste for the
appreciative repertoire. These moments maybe understood not just as people rejecting a way of talking, but more dramatically as also demonstrating an allegiance to a way of being. With respect to accounts, for example, according to Scott and Lyman (1968), the divergences from an expected way of talking actually mark a divergence from a "normative structure" (p.58). The framework of understanding that is alluded to when the account is made for a digression, can be understood as a moral order. Thus, when the participants flirt with a more negative, cynical, or 'realistic' alternative to positive talk, through their accounts or repairs, they are in fact making an argument for the superiority of a different moral order – they are in a sense aligning themselves through this identity work (Jefferson, 1974, p. 193; Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 59).

Along these lines, it seemed that many of the participants in the AI process at Equinox were uncomfortable fully embracing the moral order offered by the Positive Discourse. I am arguing here that this was the case because this moral order did not fit well with the difficult, chaotic, and stressful nature of their work. In many ways, staff felt compelled by the positive youth discourse to attempt to align with this positive way of talking and being, but the difficult situations they faced complicated this.

These difficult situations and un-resolved issues can be difficult to reconcile with the positive focus of the AI process. While AI certainly has been a successful aspect of change processes within some conflicted environments (McNamee, 2003), in others its positive orientation has proven problematic (S. Grant & Humphries, 2006; Pratt, 2002). It seems possible that Equinox would fit into the latter category. Furthermore, it seems likely that there are many other schools and programs that may share some of the factors which contributed to this difficulty with AI.
The Equinox program is unique in many ways but it exists within the context of potentially thousands of programs serving similar populations of youth through similar funding schemes, referral sources, and program goals (AACRC, 2007; Broughman & Swaim, 2006; J. K. Edwards, 1994; Kleiner et al., 2002; "National Association of Private Special Education Centers," 2008; E. P. Smith et al., 2004). Many of these programs and schools likely suffer from similar difficult and stressful situations. The issue of chronic staff turn-over, for example, which was an important aspect of the Equinox environment during this study, is common throughout the youth care worker field (Larson et al., 2005). It seems likely that some of the barriers that may have caused resistance at Equinox would exist elsewhere. This is a fact that should be considered carefully by other OD facilitators and school reformers who seek to utilize AI in similar settings.

While accepted, used and even preferred at times, the appreciative repertoire (as mediated by a pre-existing positive youth development repertoire) was resisted by stakeholders at the Equinox program. Both the data and a review of the literature suggest that this resistance may have been due to the difficulty of incorporating a process rich and philosophically abstract process into a stressed and difficult environment. While the presence of this resistance was significant and robustly supported by the micro-level analysis of the data, it should not be understood as the whole story.

**Positive Outcomes and a Critical Focus**

One of the primary results of this case study was the identification of an appreciative repertoire at the Equinox program. If one considers that affecting the way people talk about their work is a major goal of an AI process, then the traction that an
appreciative repertoire found is an indicator of a very successful AI process. In order to identify such a repertoire, however, its boundaries were defined in relation to other competing repertoires, thus emphasizing the places of conflict or resistance. While the identification of this tension is also an important result of this analysis, it warrants further discussion because: A) it should not completely overshadow the successes and potentially positive outcomes of the AI process; and B) it was brought in to the research by the investigator and facilitator as a pre-conceived potential conflict.

The AI process at Equinox was not overwhelmingly embraced and did not create unequivocally striking positive change. It was successful, however, at further developing the use of an appreciative or positive youth development repertoire at the program. For example, while the event previously cited that describes the difficulty some staff had with appreciating a difficult week at work (Data Sample 10.16.08.6 The Flower vs. This Week) marks a troubled beginning to an appreciative activity, following the discussion of the staff shortage and Joe’s interpretation of the flower poster, the group engaged in a sincere and lengthy reflection on their recent work. During this time the appreciative repertoire was the expected or default mode of interpretation. AI was an effective tool for encouraging the positive construction of the youth and the work being done and thus aided in the deepening the community’s involvement with the Positive Youth Development Discourse. To the positively oriented program developer or school stake holder, a discussion held in this way represents valuable practice within the Positive Discourse.

Not only does the process involve the use of the Positive Youth Development repertoire among staff, it also can provide opportunities for positive youth development
to take place with the students themselves. For example, during the AI “Summit” at Equinox where youth, parents, and staff were present in the same small and large group sessions, the recorded data shows staff working with students to identify their strengths (Data sample 3.6.09 Grp1.1 “Nothing is Stupid”; Data sample 3.6.09 Grp1.3 “Brats”; Data Sample 3.6.09 Grp2.2 “Georgia's Small Steps”). This focus on their assets and success is done within these AI activities directly in the face of the competing, more deficit oriented interpretations of parents, peers and the students themselves. This approach to engaging youth is indicative of the values espoused within the Positive Youth Development Discourse.

In addition to providing time and activity space for positively oriented interactions to occur, it is possible that the AI process at Equinox may have resulted in some broader and organizationally important outcomes. At one staff meeting, for example, a manager from the residential component of the program spoke at length as to how the appreciative interviews the residents and staff had participated in had marked a tangible turning point for morale and behavior (Researcher’s Journal 3/4/09). This kind of positive impact may have been due to the fact that the process arguably accomplished a number of things that the social constructionist OD literature suggests can aid in effective organizational development. These included:

- Producing dialogue that “sustains and extends” through: Coherence, Affirmation, Productive Difference (K. Gergen et al., 2004)

- Facilitating the emergence of new generative metaphors (Barrett, Cooperrider, Fry, Seiling, & Whitney, 2002; Bushe & Kassam, 2005)
• Allowing for a “way of participating” that accepts or includes a diversity of voices (van der Harr & Hosking, 2004)

It is beyond the scope of this study to explore these potential positive outcomes and their theoretical causes. However, these potential outcomes are worth noting in light of the case study’s critical analysis offered thus far.

The analytical approach used in this study defined the boundaries of an appreciative repertoire by exploring in particular, the moments when the positively oriented linguistic tools offered by AI were rejected. Consequently, the analysis takes on a significantly critical emphasis. The critical assessment of AI presented in this study is also a result of researcher-bias. I brought a suspicion of how smoothly the positive approach of AI would be accepted at the program. This predetermined notion was evident in my early writing (Young, 2008, p. 56) and in my on-going concern that is repeatedly captured in my journal (Researcher’s Journal 2/9/09; 2/20/09; 3/4/09), and even within the recorded data (Data Sample 10.16.08.3 “The Unappreciative Real World”). This attention to this potential conflict was well founded in personal experience and within the AI literature, but it was also fueled by a desire to find a compelling tension for the narrative of the study.

As with any study or analysis, this one is subject to the predetermining trajectories of the investigator’s biases. This is particularly the case when an empirical research endeavor is viewed through a social constructionist lens. It is just such a lens that has led many to deeply question the ability of critical empirically based studies to really get us closer to the “truth” (K Gergen, 1999). Further, as noted in the conceptual framework of the present study, it is just such an awareness that has led some researchers and
practitioners to embrace their own inevitable affect on the results of their work and turn to AI as a way to try to focus this impact in a positive way.

To some degree, I embarked on a predetermined critical search for a problematic interaction with an appreciative repertoire. While informative, does this sort of approach lead to generative and pragmatically valuable results? What would the results have been if I had not brought this critical bias to bear and how could it have been avoided? One way to avoid it would have been to take an overtly positive bias instead: to do an appreciative inquiry into an Appreciative Inquiry. It is a path that would be theoretically consistent with the theoretical framework offered for this study and it is a path that others have already followed (Emery et al., 2007).

Using AI as a research methodology, however, may not resonate with other scholars and OD practitioners who have learned a more critical way of understanding social phenomena. In a manner not dissimilar to the way that the Equinox stakeholders may not have been ready to fully embrace the constructionist advantages of an appreciative approach, the academy may not be ready on any significant scale to accept the legitimacy of an appreciative approach to research (Bushe, 2007). Due to this mismatch of theoretical expectations, it would be difficult to present results from a strictly appreciative analysis of the data that would be generative to the thinking of these readers.

**Conclusion**

The potential for a post modern constructionist OD approach to produce valuable positive outcomes for schools and youth development programs is significant. Such an
approach would foreground an interactional nature of organizing that could reflect the
non-linear and locally driven nature of organizational change; a view that offers new
insight beyond other more often used methods relying on the hypothetical freezing of an
organization during diagnoses, followed by the development of a plan to be implemented
after an unfreezing. Action research, in the way that it emphasizes the simultaneity of
inquiry and change derived from radically participatory methods, seems particularly well
suited for a post modern approach to OD.

Appreciative Inquiry is an example of just such an approach to OD. The
assumptions underlying its development and potential for impact rest heavily upon the
post modern notion of the linguistic turn, whereby we turn away from the idea of
language as a representational index of terms and instead see it as the constantly evolving
nexus where our experiences are created. The recent and rapid growth of the use of AI as
an OD intervention in organizations (including schools and educational programs) is due
in part to the fact that its post modern constructionist roots are seen by change agents as
the source for a provocative new approach to old problems.

AI’s growth is also part of a broader emergence of a “positive” approach to
facilitated human development. This Positive Discourse stretches beyond AI into the
fields of counseling, education and psychology. It includes within its reach the
interpretive repertoires associated with the Positive Youth Development Discourse. These
Positive Discourses emphasize the power of language and they already permeate many
school and educational settings where AI may be implemented. A positive approach is
compelling and may in fact offer a new and generative path for those willing to embrace
it. For school stakeholders, however, this willingness may be complicated. This may
especially be the case for those involved with stressful programs working with special needs or high risk populations.

The analysis of the data presented here suggests that one such program, the Equinox program, accepted the appreciative repertoire during the AI process to a significant degree. It also suggests that this acceptance was influenced greatly by the programs pre-existing involvement with the Positive Youth Development Discourse and/or the broader Positive Discourse. While significant, the acceptance of AI was also challenged by the specifics of a stressful environment permeated by student crises and staff turn-over. These specifics are likely to be present at other similar programs as well and thus this study of an Appreciative Inquiry at an alternative school should be informative to other researchers, OD practitioners and AI advocates seeking to work within such settings.

Within this type of setting, this case study demonstrates through a rigorous empirical approach to discourse analysis, that an appreciative way of talking can be identified within an AI process. This result demonstrates that an AI process can facilitate the development of a certain way of talking about students and youth development work. The power of this to affect long lasting and positive change at a program is uncertain but seems certain to lie in part with an organization’s ability to consistently embrace such a repertoire as a preferred way of understanding their reality. This seems essential if the activities involved in an AI process at a school are to be accepted as the labor that needs to be done.
APPENDIX A

AI AT THE EQUINOX PROGRAM: OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

At Equinox specifically, the goal of the OD aspect of the project is to begin a self-guided sustainable and on-going positive change process built on appreciative self evaluation. More specifically, relying heavily on guidance from Whitney and Trotsen-Bloom’s (2003) practical guide, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*, the following steps are proposed:

**Initiate**
1. **Meet with administrative leadership to propose study (July 2008)**
2. **Present AI process and theory to staff at staff meeting and facilitate brief Appreciative Interviews between staff about recent summer program (August 2008)**

**Core-Group Discovery**
1. **Create an Advisory/Design Team, introduce them to the process, conduct an initial “Discovery” of the “Positive Core” of Equinox (10/8 & 10/16/2008)**
   - Half-day workshop and an hour follow up meeting which included appreciative interviews
   - From the stories told, the “Positive Core of Equinox” was described (poster of the flower was created. See Appendix D for copy of poster).
2. **Update at Staff meeting and invitation to others into the process (11/12/2008)**
   - “Equinox Positive Core” poster shared and explored by all staff present
   - Staff made aware of upcoming system-wide dialogue and invited to participate

**System-Wide Dialogue**
1. **Create Interview question guide and interview schedule with advisory team (E-mail & face to face meetings (11/2008-1/2009)**
   - Affirmative topic choices derived from “Core Group Discovery” process.
   - With affirmative topic choices in mind, interview questions and guides were created
   - Interview schedule created and confirmed with administrative, clinical, and educational leadership at program.
   - Parents received letters and phone calls describing the project and asking for permission for students/residents to participate
3. **Interviews (2/2009)**
   - 2/10 – 2/27/09: Staff interview parents in person, via e-mail, and by phone
• 2/11/09: Announcement at Lunch about the project; Announcement at TCI to staff
• 2/18/09: Staff interview each other at staff meeting
• 2/23/09: Interviews with staff and residents at residential “Community Meeting”
• 2/25/09: Student Interviews during “Life-skills Class”
• 2/27/09: Student Interviews during “Girls Group”

**Meaning-Making**

**Meaning Making “Summit” (March 6, 2009)**

- All interviewers and interviewees invited to a facilitated meaning making process using the data generated from the interviews.
- Participants included: eight staff, four parents, one outside stakeholder, and seven students
AI at the Equinox Program:

**Initiate**
- Introduce key stakeholders to AI theory and practice
- Create temporary project structures (sponsor team core group), and educate sponsor team and core group in AI theory and practice

**Innovate**
- Engage maximum possible number of organization members in conversations that enable exploration of and commitment to whatever actions, new roles, relationships, or design modifications (the social architecture of the organization) are seen as being important to support implementation of the provocative propositions
- Implement the design changes using an AI-based progress review process

**Imagine**
- Collate and share interview data and pull out themes (life-giving forces)
- Develop provocative propositions (a grounded vision of the desired future)
- Consensually validate provocative propositions with as many members of the system as possible

**Inquire**
- Conduct generic interviews (this may also be done in the Initiate phase as part of the core group and sponsor team education)
- Develop customized interview protocol, pilot and revise protocol (often this is the core group, with as much involvement by the steering committee as possible)
- Maximum possible number of client system members are interviewed

[159]
AI at the Equinox Program:
Appreciative Inquiry Interview Guide: Staff

Directions:
• Pick a partner
• Get their permission for you to interview them (read and explain to them the “Permission” paragraph below. If they have a question about the process that you cannot answer, don’t do the interview and get in touch with Michael Young at 603.862.2007 or at michael.young@unh.edu)
• Ask them the four questions below (DO not worry about addressing all parts of the question...just try to have a good conversation about the major theme and use the follow up questions if you get stuck)
• Take notes on their answers: focus on the parts of their stories that seem striking or “sticky”
• Finally, note any immediate actions or ideas that have emerged during the interview that you or the person you are interviewing could act on to help improve Solstice.

Permission:
“I would like to talk about this interview during meetings with other people connected to the Solstice program (including administration, staff members, students, families, and/or referral sources). Those meetings may be recorded for use as part of Michael Young’s research project as well as for program improvement. Your honesty is needed and encouraged but I want you to keep this in mind as we talk. Do you have any questions about this? Do you give your permission to be interviewed?”

Question #1: Opportunities for step by step success
Tell me a story about a time when you saw Solstice really provide an opportunity for a student or family to “take the next step,” even if it was a small step. When did something scary or challenging start to seem a little tolerable or even OK? What kind of activities or relationships (with staff, students, families or the community) allowed for this kind of step by step learning or progress or growth?

Question #2: Relationships
When have you seen a relationship at Solstice help a student grow or even blossom? Tell me a story about a time like this. What allowed staff to be able to be part of these relationships or to be able to take advantage of them?

Question #3: Opportune Moments
Tell me about a time when something good came out of a tough difficult situation at Solstice. How did the moment or the problem become an opportunity or a teachable moment? What allowed staff to be prepared for their role in this? What allowed them to be ready to handle or even take advantage of the situation? What would it take for Solstice to be a place where more of these difficult, tough or bad times could be used as opportunities as well?

Question #4: Self esteem, Sense of completion, Coping Skills, Affirmation
When did you see someone at Solstice grow stronger or a little less fragile? Tell me a story about how they started to seem a little more confident. How did you know this happened? What happened and why? What did it look like or sound like or feel like? What relationships, experiences, or activities were important parts of this growth or strengthening?

Are there any immediate actions worth taking that could help to improve Solstice?
List them here:

31 Similar “Interview Guides” were created for families/students and stakeholder/referral sources. Actual Interview guides were larger font and had space for note taking.
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL FOR THE STUDY

Description of the Project As Approved by UNH IRB

1. Introduction:
The purpose of this project is to analyze and explore an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) at the Equinox School, an alternative day school and residential treatment center for adolescents in northeastern Massachusetts. Starting in the late summer of '08 and spanning into the spring of '09, the AI process will consist of an all volunteer advisory team guiding the systematic interviewing of as many staff, students, and stake holders that is deemed feasible. The interviews will be designed from an appreciative stance which aims to bring out inspiring best practice experiences. The information collected through this process will be analyzed and shared through a meaning making process that is spearheaded by an Advisory Team but will involve as many others in the school community as possible.

While AI is a solution oriented organizational development (OD) strategy that has experienced a great deal of growth in recent years, it has still arguably received only limited evaluation (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; S. Grant & Humphries, 2006).

2. Specific Aims:
AI’s theoretical base embraces the idea that organizing is to a large degree, the result of the discursive practices of those involved. Consequently, as an OD intervention, it aims to effect change through discursive means (i.e., utilize an appreciatively framed discourse to reflect upon the work being done and to in turn generate new ways of thinking and acting through the organization). The aim of this study to investigate if and how elements of an appreciative discourse emerge within the organizational discourse of the Equinox program during the AI process, as such an emergence is hypothesized to be at the heart of AI’s positive potential.

3. Research Protocol
Setting: The study will take place predominantly at the [Redacted] School in [Redacted], MA. Equinox is program within the Child and Adolescent Division of [Redacted]. After an initial presentation to the staff, volunteers will be accepted for membership on the Advisory Team, which in turn will undergo an appreciative inquiry of its own to establish the interview topics and protocols for a more organization-wide inquiry.

Protocols:
• Qualitative data will be collected from recordings (video, audio) of a) “meaning making” meetings “when interview data—stories, quotes, and inspirational highlights—are formally shared and made sense of in total” (Whitney & Trotsen-Bloom, 2003, p. 165)\(^{32}\) and potentially b) organizational meetings convened to deal with the issues chosen for inquiry (e.g., if risk management is selected as an area of inquiry and the administrative team subsequently has a risk management meeting, an attempt will be made to record it). Texts produced from these meanings (e.g., memos or flip charts will be analyzed as well. Finally, the researcher will also take field notes during these same group activities as a participant observer with the goal of assessing the broader context within which the activities are being coordinated.

• Subjects will include two types of study participants: a) staff and/or students who are present at the meetings that are recorded and b) staff, students, and stake holders who are interviewed as part of the program-driven Appreciative Inquiry. Staff will be recruited to be part of the Advisory Team through a general presentation to the program (power point attached) by the researcher followed by a confidential opportunity to express either interest or non-interest in being part of a team (submission of index cards to researcher following presentation). The recruitment of interviewers for the organization-wide inquiry will happen after a presentation by the advisory team to the school regarding the results of their initial inquiry. This presentation will conclude with an invitation to anyone who would like to be an interviewer for the larger inquiry. A couple dates for interviewer trainings will be set and interested interviewers will be able to sign up to attend one of these sessions. These training sessions will be run by the researcher along with advisory team member(s). They will cover obtaining permission (including how the stories gathered from the interviews will be used), the basic philosophy of appreciative question-asking, and active-listening as well as the specific interview protocol developed by the advisory team. Staff members interviewing external stakeholders will also be trained in obtaining informed consent the “Consent” form (e.g., the training will include reviewing the form, in detail, in order to cover issues of risk and confidentiality) as it is possible that stakeholders will not have previously filled out a “Consent” form prior to the interview.

• A copy of the proposed interview protocol to be used with the Advisory Team is attached. As the Advisory Team has yet to create the interview protocol to be used during the organization-wide inquiry, this cannot be provided, however close attention will be paid to the process of interview guide development offered by Whitney and Trotsen-Bloom (2003, p150-157). This protocol will be forwarded to the IRB when it is developed and before it is implemented.

**Consent:**

• Staff members will be presented with the attached “Consent” form prior to their participation in any recorded meeting or interview. This will be done either in person by the researcher or by placing the form in their staff mailbox at Equinox. In the latter

\(^{32}\) For example, even though other “meaning making” meetings may be called for by the process that the advisory team defines, two that are likely to occur and be recorded will occur first, at the close of the advisory’s team’s initial inquiry with one another and second, towards the end of the organization-wide inquiry with as much of the school as possible.
case, a stamped envelope addressed to the researcher will be provided for return. External stakeholders will be presented with the attached “Consent” form (either in person by the researcher or by a trained staff member) prior to their participation in any recorded meeting or interview. All parent(s)/guardian(s) will be sent the attached “Parent/Guardian Consent” form. A list of students whose parent(s)/guardian(s) have consented/not consented (or not responded) will be kept by the researcher such that only students with signed “Parent/Guardian Consent” forms will be included in a recorded session or interview. Assent from these students, using the attached “Assent” form will be obtained by the researcher prior to their involvement in a recorded session or interview. Assent forms will be distributed at the school by the researcher or by a staff member who the researcher has oriented to the assent form (e.g., the orientation will include reviewing the form, in detail, in order to cover issues of risk and confidentiality). When staff members are involved in collecting assent forms they will be instructed to collect the forms in an envelope for the researcher such that it is clear to the students that the staff member is not reviewing the forms.

- While care will be taken to gain assent or consent prior to an interview or recorded meeting, because of the (hopefully) wide ranging nature of the interviewing process as well as the possibility of large meetings being recorded, prior to the use of any data for research purposes, the list of consenting/assenting and non-consenting/assenting staff and students (as well as a list of any students who are wards of the state or have become so since data collection) will be double checked to make sure only data from assenting/consenting sources will be used.

**Investigator Experience:**
This is the investigator’s first time collecting qualitative data from program staff members. The investigator does have experience with research protocols more generally through his completed PhD coursework and his work on the NATSAP Research and Evaluation Network UNH IRB #3984, as well as through program evaluation work done at North Star Adventure (a sister program to the Equinox School). The investigator is well read in the techniques of appreciative inquiry and has attended a three day professional development workshop on the topic in May ’08.

**Data**
- Confidentiality: While participant observation notes and transcribed interview recordings will be maintained on one of two investigator owned (password secured) hard drives, the majority of the data and meaning making artifacts will be constructed by participants with the informed intention of sharing the results with their organization. The interviews, for example, will not be introduced as confidential. Furthermore, interview notes will not be used by the researcher for analysis. Care will be taken to protect the identities of the participants when this data is used by the investigator for research purposes (e.g., utilization of pseudonyms and avoidance of contextual identification that would clearly reveal a subject’s identity). If a non-consenting or assenting person is present during an activity that is being observed, care will be taken to avoid recording observations of that person, to delete data derived from observations of that person or at least to strictly avoid
utilizing data derived from observations of that person. After transcription, recordings will be erased.

- **Analysis:** Conceptually, the data will be considered to be part of a contextually imbedded discourse. Analytic strategies drawn from the discourse analysis and sociolinguistic literature (Gee, 1999; Gumperz, 1992; Phillips & Hardy, 2002) as well as from the emerging organizational discourse literature (D. Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004; D. Grant et al., 2005) will be drawn upon.

4. **Risks**
There are no major risks involved in this study as the activities are not particularly active and the material explored is not necessarily sensitive. However, as this study is taking place amidst a organizational development process where employees and their supervisors are present, it impossible that employees will feel pressure to participate in ways that they may not have chosen to do so otherwise for fear of overt or tacit reprimands that could threaten their livelihood. In order to address this a commitment from the Program director, Clinical director, and Educational Director to not penalize non-participants will be obtained. This commitment will be communicated in person at the staff meeting when the project is initially introduced (which is when Advisory Team members are initially recruited, albeit confidentially). Furthermore a written letter (see attached: “Participate in Mike Young’s Study only if you want to.” letter) signed by all three administrators will be circulated to all staff members (a copy can be forwarded to the IRB if requested).

5. **Benefits**
As with many action research projects, the hope is that the benefits will be both pragmatic and scholarly. First, it is hoped that that the Equinox program and staff itself will develop and change in positive and sustainable ways. Second, it is hoped that the research aim of evaluating AI will better inform the fields of organizational development and organizational discourse analysis.
IRB Approval Letter

University of New Hampshire

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

02-Oct-2008

Young, Michael
Kinesiology, NH Hall
Durham, NH 03824

IRB #: 4353
Study: An Appreciative Inquiry at the School
Approval Date: 27-Aug-2008

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study.

Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects in this study. If your study is still active, you may request an extension of IRB approval.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects. (This document is also available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
    McNamee, Sheila
APPENDIX C

SYMBOLS USED FOR TRANSCRIPTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intonation unit</td>
<td>(carriage return or if more than a line long, second line of continued unit is indented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truncated intonation unit</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truncated word</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker identity</td>
<td>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech overlap</td>
<td>[ ], [[]]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitional Continuity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing</td>
<td>,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appealing</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lengthening</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lengthening with duration</td>
<td>= (1.2 or .8 etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pause</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long (&gt; .7 seconds)</td>
<td>...(1.2 or .8 etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (.3 &gt; .7 seconds)</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short (&gt; .3 seconds)</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal Noises</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inhalation</td>
<td>(H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glottal stop</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laugher</td>
<td>@</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other noises</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(when used as part of linguistic interaction)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laugh quality</td>
<td>&lt;@ @&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Higher pitch  <HI  HI>
Lower pitch  <LO  LO>
Loud (forte)  <F  F>
Soft (piano)  <P  P>
Diminishing  <DIM  DIM>
   (diminuendo:
   gradually softer)
Whisper  <WH  WH>
Quote  <Q  Q>

Transcriber Perspective
   Transcriber comment  (( ))
   Uncertain hearing  <X  X>
   Indecipherable syllable  X

Special Notations
   Embedded intonation unit  <I  I>
   (i.e., an aside to a larger
   intonation unit)
APPENDIX D

EXTENDED DATA SAMPLES

Note: transcription symbols are described in Appendix C

Extended Data Sample 1

Recorded 10/8/08

((Group of staff members from Equinox are sitting at a table working on a poster that depicts the “Positive Core” of the program. This activity was part of a multi-faceted three hour AI meeting. The transcription excerpt begins about 33 minutes into the audio recording of the activity. The excerpt starts with Maria asking where a cut-out caterpillar should be placed. It has been suggested that the caterpillar should represent a student at the program who will go through a metamorphosis into a butterfly. A photo of the completed poster is included in this appendix as Data Sample 4.))

1. MARIA: Should the caterpillar be near the chrysalis?
2. Or does it not--
3. I thought the butterfly was going over there.

((Begin: Event coded: “10.8.08.1 Aimless Kid & Stinging Staff Ha Ha”))

4. BILL: Wandering this way would be fun.
5. RHONDA: That’s true--
6. BILL: With no direction @@
7. MARIA: [<@ With little arrows on either side of him @>]
8. BILL: [@ @@]
9. RHONDA: <F What if we put him here? F>
10. BILL: Huh?
11. RHONDA What if we put the caterpillar in there?
12. SUSAN: Becau=se--
13. BILL: I think it would be funnier to have him roaming around without direction.
14. @@
15. NORMA: [XXXXXX]
16. RHONDA: [Because we- he starts out in the chrysalis,]
17. he goes through the flower,
18. he’s the butterfly.
19. BILL: Well no,
20. he starts out as the [wandering--]
21. RHONDA: [Oh..right.]
22. BILL: [@@ Aimlessly. @]
23. @@]
24. MARIA: [Then he goes through] the chrysalis,
and becomes the butterfly on the other end.

So we can put him up here,

and have him moving in [<F that F> direction.]

I think technically --

Oops..that’s OK--

Technically,

I think we became the bumble bee.

Yup.

[XXXX the caterpillar.]

[now..now keep--]

Yeah,

now this--

You know,

keeping them in line,

Bzzzt.

@@[@@]

[@@]

[@@]

[@@]

[@@]

[@@]

[@@]

[Allright.]

<P @@ @ P>

This way? ((trying to figure out how to put the caterpillar on the poster))

<P Metaphors are funny. P>

Nope.

Now he is [XXXXX--]

Any which way you like.

Nope.

Oh..Okay.

It could be on the ground.

That’s true

Well [XX--]

[<F Well, F>

I thought that was where the butterfly was going,

[in that corner.]

[I think--]

Yeah.

We could put him right here.

Do we want him heading this way towards the chrysalis though,

so he comes and does a loop?

It doesn’t matter.

I think [we should just get some question] marks above his head—
70. SUSAN: [He can’t do that]
((SUSAN says this as she decides against a possible caterpillar placement that she is trying out))
71. RHONDA: <@ He can’t do that @>
72. SUSAN: He can’t do that.
73. ...(1.45)
74. BILL: Or maybe a little bubble that says <Q Do de do Q>
((BILL seems to be referring to the caterpillar wandering around in a dopey sort of way)).
75. RHONDA: @@[@]
76. MARIA: [@@]
77. BILL: [@@]
78. SUSAN: [@@]
79. What does Bart Simpson say?
80. <Q Doh Q>
81. MARIA: <Q Doh Q>
82. BILL: [Q Doh Q]
83. RHONDA: [Q Doh Q]
84. MARIA: That’s Homer.
85. RHONDA: Yeah.
86. BILL: Yeah that is Homer.
87. RHONDA: Alright.
88. BILL: <Q Bite me. Q>
89. @@[@]
90. KATHY: [@@]
91. MARIA: [@@]
((End: Event coded: “10.8.08.1 Aimless Kid & Stinging Staff Ha Ha”))
92. Alright,
93. are we attaching the Butterfly?
94. KATHY: Yup.
((meeting continued from here but further lines of transcript are omitted from present extended data sample))
Recorded 10/8/08

((Group of staff members from Equinox are sitting at a table working on a poster that depicts the “Positive Core” of the program. This activity was part of a multi-faceted three hour AI meeting. The transcription excerpt begins 3 minutes after the previous data sample ends, about 37 minutes into the audio recording of the activity. The excerpt starts with Rhonda suggesting that the words “Life Skills” be added to the poster. A photo of the completed poster is included in this appendix as Data Sample 4.))

1. RHONDA: <Q Life skills Q>
2. MARIA: <Q Education, life skills Q>...are you ready? <Q Social Skills Q>.
3. RHONDA: Um, ah, what were we saying? Something about a job, we were talking about--
4. MARIA: <Q Vocational Q>--
5. RHONDA: skills
6. MARIA: <Q Vocational training Q>.
7. BILL: I would say we could get better at that.
8. MARIA: Well that’s the focus we are moving in to.
9. BILL: Though I would say the house does that--
10. RHONDA: Yeah they definitely--
11. BILL: And that’s Equinox programming and they do a lot of that
12. RHONDA: um--

((Begin: Event coded: “10.8.08.2 Accountability is too Negative”))
13. BILL: <Q Challenge Q> for <Q experiential learning Q>,
14. um...<Q challenges Q>...
15. So <Q opportunities for challenge Q>,
16. like to challenge themselves to find out more about themselves.
17. MARIA: ...Which color should that be?
18. In blue or green?
19. BILL: I didn’t really listen to what blue or green represented,
20. [<>to tell you the truth<>].
21. MARIA: [@@@]
22. SUSAN: [@@@]
23. BILL: [@@@]
24. SUSAN: [[ Your not a good listener]]
25. RHONDA: [[<F I think blue – blue was about F>]]--
26. Blue was about things that we were hoping they would kind of gain,
27. And kind of work through.
28. I think green would be more kind of [the ways we would do it].
29. MARIA: [The strategies].
30. BILL: <Q Challenges Q>,
31. Yes. @

[172]
32. Because @ we don’t want them to come out <@with challenges@>.

33. [We want them]--

34. MARIA: [Right].

35. RHONDA: [[So <Q challenges Q> is green it’s a strategy]].

36. RHONDA: [[So we want]]--

37. So challenge…um…Okay.

38. <Q Life challenges.[skills] Q>?

39. MARIA: [<Q Personal Challenges Q>]? 

40. BILL: I would say,

41. just <Q challenging opportunities Q>--

42. [err][[ways]]...chall...se--

43. RHONDA: [challenge]

44. KATHY: [[So is that]]--?

45. SUSAN: Maybe there is different way [to say it].

46. BILL: [There is a different way to say it],

47. definitely.

48. ...Because like experien--

49. like for me…(1.4)

50. % % a chance for them to grow [by challenge so that]--

51. MARIA: [like stretching ] --

52. like stretching themselves?

53. BILL: Stretching their comfort levels,

54. or challenging them..um [X]--

55. MARIA: [<Q challenging their limitations Q>]? 

56. SUSAN: <Q Goals Q>? 

57. Um.

58. KATHY: What about--?

59. BILL: <Q Challenging their self Q>--

60. Challenging … um--

61. SUSAN: @

62. BILL: <Q Increasing accountability Q>,

63. [[@ would be @]>] a way .. [um ]--

64. MARIA: [mmm] ((distastefully))

65. KATHY: [[X]]

66. SUSAN: uh.. [<X I like <Q challenges Q> X>].

67. MARIA: [That is sounding a little more negative though].

68. KATHY: Yeah.

69. RHONDA: <WH You could say..um WH>

70. X--

71. BILL: For opportunities…(1.0) for learning,

72. I would say that my--

73. my biggest thing is--

74. is to challenge the students,

75. who are--

76. in a lot of those different ways, you know --

77. RHONDA: Yeah.
I totally get what you [mean] --

[[In relationships]],

[[I do that at the end of each one of my reviews]].

like challenging them to take the next step.

Challenging them to .. you know,

((KATHY thanks NORMA for something related to drawing on the poster))

SUSAN: Push, um --

((MARIA inquires into Kathy and Norma’s interaction))

SUSAN: Push, um --

...(4.9)

BILL: Challenges.

We offer --

We give them opportunity to learn through challenges.

RHONDA: <Q Learn through challenges Q>,

[BQ learning through challenges Q].

BILL: [BQ Learn through challenges Q].

SUSAN: Yes=.

BILL: Say it the exact same way with more words.

[[@@]

MARIA: [@@]

SUSAN: [@@]

X: [@@]

MARIA: Defines it a little bit more.

BILL: ...(2.5) <Q Learning through challenges Q>. yeh.

...(3.0)

((End: Event coded: “10.8.08.2 Accountability is too Negative”))

MARIA: So we want them to get <Q vocational skills, life skills, education, social skills Q>--

RHONDA: <Q Identity Q>

BILL: Yes

RHONDA: Do we want put that under <Q reflection Q>? 

BILL: <Q Relationships Q>

MARIA: Yes, Identity. Put it in Blue.

((meeting continued from here but further lines of transcript are omitted from present extended data sample))
Extended Data Sample 3

Recorded 10/16/08

(Group of staff members from Equinox are at a meeting as part of the Appreciative Inquiry process at their program. They begin by revisiting a poster that a few of them made last week at another AI meeting. Joe, who was not present when the poster was made, is given the task by the facilitator, to give his impression of how the poster depicts the Equinox program. A photo of the completed poster is included in this appendix as Data Sample 4.)

79. JOE: Yeah, I can’t --
80. A=\h I don’t know.
81. I can see like ah --,
82. <\I Not a good day for me to try to decipher this I>,
83. But ah .. <\Q opportunity \Q> .. <\Q DIM sense of completion .. experiential learning DIM Q>,
84. ...(8.2)

((Begin: Event coded: “10.16.08.6 The Flower vs. ‘This Week’”))

85. MIKE: And how about while Joe looks at that,
86. so he doesn’t feel totally on the spot,
87. give him a second.
88. you guys look at it again,
89. remember what you wrote.
90. And um … (1.0) think about a time this week … (.8),
91. where you sa=w it happen.
92. SUSAN: (H) <\WH@WH>
93. MIKE: At least one part of it.
94. BILL: This week?
95. SUSAN: Yeah [@@].
96. BILL: [@@]
97. SUSAN: This week [[[@@]]]
98. MARION: [[<\X Not a good X> week]]
99. BILL: X week @@
100. MIKE: Yes .. then definitely this week.
101. JOE: I guess <\Q opportunity Q> is the –
102. JOE: Is the center of this [<\X taken as this X> ],
103. MARION: [XXX]
104. JOE: <\Q new growth Q> would be the a=\h --
105. w- why everybody’s here,
106. Or [<\X whether XX about the kids] --
107. MARION: [Monday we had out <\HI three teachers HI>] (Hx) @.
108. SUSAN: [ @ ]
109. JOE: [Yeah].
110. That would be the new growth .. XX new growth.
111. Ah .. the sun .. I don’t know why that is there.
112. MIKE: What did you say Marion .. Monday?
MARION: Monday we had three teachers.

MIKE: <DIM O=h DIM>.

((End: Event coded: “10.16.08.6 The Flower vs. This Week))

JOE: The bee .. I am not sure what that is all about.

Be part of this?

SUSAN: Mmm. ((interested/approving but non committal))

BILL: Mmm. ((interested/approving but non committal))

JOE: Be part of this.

U=m (1.1) this must be talking to ... working with the <Q relationship Q>,

working with the kids and <Q peers and community and families Q>,

So as a stem I guess we are all supposed to work together.

And then um .. this is a big flower here,

so I guess this is all the different a=h layers that you guys are talking about.

A=nd <Q connecting .. reflecting .. next step .. ownership .. building strengths .. teachable moments .. experiential learning .. sense of completion and skills building Q> ... ,

(1.5).

So I am not sure if it has to do with the staff or the kids,

I am guessing that has to do with the kids a-.

And then u=m ... (1.5) the next layer would a- <Q positive outlook .. preparing and planning for the future .. social skills .. coping skills .. confidence .. life skills .. goals .. learning through challenges .. environment .. vocational skills .. affirmation .. self esteem Q> and <Q education Q>.

It’s all things we need to work on together,

so that we can have opportunity .. here at Equinox.

... (1.7)

That’s X,

That’s what I have.

NORMA: ((Enters room))

SUSAN: Mhm.

BILL: That’s pretty good.

JOE: Anyone want to tell me now?

SUSAN: Yeah.

((Begin: Event coded: “10.16.08.7 Metamorphosis vs. Slow Caterpillar”))

BILL: Yeah basic- a=h opportunity is ... (.9),

Like what w=e .. offer here.

And we do it through relationships with peers .. family .. and community.

JOE: OK

BILL: And then these are <I the bigger ... petals I>.--

[176]
A=re .. kind of .. (.5) how we deliver the more significant --

Messages?

For the kids.

So like the goals,

We do it through strength building .. through teachable moments ..

through .. experiential learning.

So this is kind of the--

the vehicle, ((pointing to big petals on the poster))

where this is kind of the objective. ((pointing to smaller petals))

OK

So we kind of use .. ownership and the next step,

for .. planning and different things.

And yeah we’re --

you got the Bee on there. Be--

[Opportunity provides XX ].

[Opportunity].

[And by doing that],

[oh .. yes]].

We have opportunity for new growth.

So we are looking for change,

... (1.2) by using these tools,

for them to have the opportunity to --

for new growth.

I see.

U=hh [I can’t rem-] ((points to petals on poster)) --

[X],

But we are moving right now .. like a caterpillar--

Yeah ..we’re --

Towards our goals.

Ah yes,

<@ Slow and steady right @?>?

Slow and steady.

That’s the crysalus so --

Eventually that’s going to turn into a [<X butterfly X> ]

<X butterfly X> |

[@@]

[Yeah Hopefully its] --

X <X in the cheek X> ((pounds fist into other hand)) [right into] a XXX,

| I ah | --

((Pounds fist into other hand going along with joke))

[@@]

[I couldn’t XX] --

((Enters room))
MIKE: [Deep breath. Deep Breath]
((End: Event coded: “10.16.08.7 Metamorphosis vs. Slow Caterpillar”))

SUSAN: [Bill ]--
Bill,
I can’t remember .. the two different colors.
What was that?
BILL: A=h Rhonda,
Two different colors for it?
SUSAN: (Hx)@ Rhonda,
[put her on the spot.]
NORMA: [XX]
BILL: <@ I X @>.
NORMA: XXXXXXXXX
SUSAN: OK
BILL: A=h [the two different ] colors green and yell--
RHONDA: [the two different] --
<F Oh F>.
Um .. the green were things we were hoping to ga=in,
and the blue were the way we were going to .. <DIM sort of gain them DIM>.
BILL: Oh yeah,
so this is like life skill is like something you can .. like do,
where goal is something you would set.
Right?
RHONDA: Right.
The things we want the- --,
Yeah .. like learning .. <DIM the environment DIM>--
Yeah.
It was--
Yeah.. these are all --
Yeah .. things were are going to u=se,
to get the blue things,
BILL: Yeah.
RHONDA: or the green ones.
BILL: So we are going to set goals,
for life skills.
We’re gonna --
RHONDA: Right.
We are going to do learning through challenges,
[XXXX environment].
BILL: [It’s another break down to this].
So it goes like here to green and then <P XXXXX P>.
MIKE: So ... we were just getting Joe up to speed,
as far as what we did last week.
Um .. Joel was there for the beginning,
Um .. but this is basically after we interviewed each other .. Joe, around ... um ... the -- when we thought we were .. succeeding here at Equinox.

<I Uh .. yeah .. go ahead and peel that up XXX I> ((helps peel poster off table so group can hand it around))

Um ...(1.0) these guys kind of took -- <HI interviewed each other about that HI>, took the results, and created this ... (.9) design, which they’re saying it -- it sort of represents the positive core of Equinox.

MARION: Sure.

MIKE: So the first thing we are going to do, just to do a quick check-in, is to take a look at this—

<f I And it sounds like it was a little bit of a crazy week for some folks I>,

Um ... but to look at this, and to think about wh=en d=id .. this -- part of this happen ... (1.4) um, this week. So think about your week. Look at what you guys wrote down. <I If it is hard for you guys to see, there’s a picture I>. Um ... (.8), and just think about <HI some time during the week HI>,

where you saw this positive core ha=ppen at Equinox. And I know Joe and Joel you are looking at it for the first time, don’t worry about being .. sort of accurate to what they did. Just Interpret it for yourself. And think about a time, based on this idea of .. opportunity at equinox being the positive core.

When did --

When did this happen this week? It could be a very little time too. If you can think about that. And we will use that as kind of a quick check-in, and then we will move on to these other things.

((Begin: Event coded: "10.16.08.2 Donny ‘The Nudge’ vs. ‘Taking Steps’"))

SUSAN: Uh, I can think of a time.. [that] --

MIKE: [Uh] Susan,

I am just going to ask, does anyone need a little more time? Or do you have some?

Everybody ... (2.1) ready to roll?
272. ... (8.8)
273. <WH OK, thanks, Susan @WH>.
274. SUSAN: <@yeah@>
275. Um .. just with u=m Donny and Act One,
276. he would always –
277. .. like last year he would either be like the film guy or --
278. just either be there for five minutes and come back,
279. going in and out.
280. But today or --
281. Last week he was um --
282. He did one skit.
283. Now this week he participated the whole --
284. <@the whole time @>.
285. Where he had a fan on and a hat,
286. and was acting things out so --
287. JOEL: That’s good.
288. That’s very [good (CLAPS) ].
289. MARION: [@@]
290. SUSAN [yeah].
291. JOEL: That’s awesome for Donny.
292. SUSAN: Yeah X.
293. JOEL: Wow.
294. [Awesome].
295. SUSAN: [@ @]
296. MARIA: [ I was going to X mention to you too],
297. Rhonda,
298. on the same note,
299. that I have noticed that although he got up once today for water,
300. and once on Tuesday to go to the bathroom,
301. he is doing a much better job remaining in groups,
302. and not being as nudgy and staying focused.
303. RHONDA: Hmm,
304. So where is he coming from,
305. when he is in my office <HI twelve times a day HI>,
306. asking for attention?
307. MARIA: <P @@ P>
308. RHONDA: Nah just kidding around,
309. [Um] --
310. BILL: [He’s looking for opportunities].
311. [@@@]
312. MARIA: [@@@]
313. MARION: [Or a XXXX]
314. SUSAN: [I think certainly],
315. he’s gained some self esteem,
316. while he is at Equinox,
317. and ... um ... (1.9) definitely--
also like .. um just being down there at Act One, seeing what it’s all about, and is taking little steps to reaching his goals.

X: Mm hm (affirming)).

SUSAN: And feeling comfortable in ...(1.1) the environment. (2.2)

BILL: I had ah .. four presentations in the life skills class, so I think it would fall under .. <Q life skills Q> or <Q preparing- Q> I think depending on who it was <Q –for their future Q>.

And a=h .. both Ricky and PJ created powerpoint presentations, which were .. really well done um .. either put together really well, or had .. all of the information that they needed for it.

So .. I saw that as .. really a next step for .. them, being able to.. use something that they might need to use in the next step in their life.

Using a tool. Being able to reflect, research about schools, or <X often X> about themselves. Make outlines of-- Um .. I know when we started the process .. they were pretty shaky on .. their outlining, and now their making Powerpoints, and organizing information. It is a good <F life skill F>, first step, and <DIM XX DIM>

((meeting continued from here but further lines of transcript are omitted from present extended data sample))
Extended Data Sample 4

Photographed 10/8/08

((Following a conceptual introduction to Appreciative Inquiry, appreciative interviews with one another, and a de-brief of those interviews, a group of six Equinox staff created this poster depicting the program's “Positive Core.”))
References


[187]


Kalke, T., Glanton, A., & Cristalli, M. (2007). Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: Using Strength-Based Approaches to Enhance the Culture of Care in


