

■ Privileged opportunities

We have been fascinated by the possibilities that develop when using the principles of the appreciative approach. We are especially drawn to the way in which changes happen through transformation of *what is*, rather than simply creating solutions. We are attracted by the way changes begin to happen, the simultaneity dimension of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider 1999) from the moment you ask appreciative, dream or future oriented questions. Using this way of questioning people tells us they find that, not only does the problem disappear, but that through the experience of enquiring appreciatively, they spontaneously develop new ways of relating and dealing with problems, dilemmas and difficulties.

In our work we coined a phrase "*every problem is a frustrated dream*". We like to work with the idea that the dream comes first; that is why there is a problem. No dream – no problem! That is our starting point. When asked to consult we inquire into what children, parents and teachers most want to change and what they want to create and then we work with that as our focus. We keep very close to the problem through keeping in the language of the desired dream. So when the head teacher of a school where there had been some violence invited us to work with the school, we asked, "What do you want to create?" This is one way that we have found that leads into a future orientation in the conversation and frees us from a negative problem orientation. She said that she wanted to create a non-violent school. Looking at that hope we are aware that by using the word *non-violent* we are still in a conversation predicated on the notion of violence. We have to go beyond that to get to the positive picture that will make it possible to visualise the change and create it. So we asked, "What would a non-violent school look like?" We then engaged in a free association of possibilities and collected together ideas and words that create positive images of the dream that would come out: "mapping" the dream on a white board (see Figure 1). As we engaged in this together, one word came up repeatedly. It was the word "safety". So we

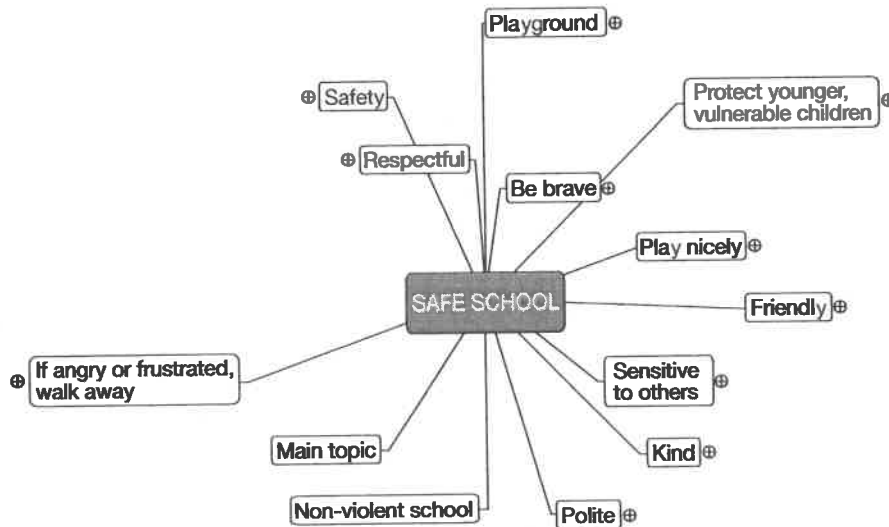


Figure 1: Mind map – school atmosphere/safe school

followed this lead and began to create some headlines, which were the beginnings of a dream. The head teacher began to describe her picture of such a school: “a safe school ... a kind of school ... where everyone respects one another. An environment where children are polite to each other and to the teachers and the teachers are also polite and respectful to one another and the children”. Safety and respect are two themes we accepted that we could explore through appreciative questioning to create such a school. This would then be the basis on which we worked.

Mind maps

- There is an ocean of meaning in a drop of grammar (a loose paraphrase of Wittgenstein).
- Mind mapping is a way of exploring the richness of meanings and actions in a word or an idea. See the work of Buzan (1982).
- Words are explored so there is a better understanding of what is in the word, the multiple meanings, different for each of us, the actions, the emotions, relationships and the internationality and morality.
- If a word like non-violent is mentioned ask about what that would look like and then focus the questions around words that create positive images like safety or respect.
- Write down every idea suggested in a positive way by asking to which words already written up it should be connected.
- Keep asking questions that will expand and enrich meaning.

- It is a communal picture created by words and associations and helps expand children's grammars and creates possibilities for new or different action.
- It also helps teachers and parents understand what their child means when using a certain word.

■ Getting started

In the school for 8 to 12-year-olds, where the head wanted to change the language and attitude of school and community, we felt an Appreciative Inquiry approach was totally appropriate. We needed to encompass the whole and create the productive energy for the youngsters that would change everything. We needed to find the positive core, all the occurrences of generous behaviour; we needed these stories to be the dominant ones in the school. Yes it was possible!

With a group of teachers we brainstormed ideas of what they wanted to create in their classrooms, the playground and the school. Similar words kept being repeated: respect, dignity, valuing, and safety. Each time negative words were brought up like "no swearing" we looked for words they could use to describe the desired behaviour; for example, "talking politely to one another". Teachers came up with themes on which that they would focus their questions.

As this was new, teachers were concerned that the children would need help and training in the interviewing process. Their fear was that both at school and at home there had been very little dialogic conversation. Children acted so fast, they were mainly given commands. We decided to have an experimental day, so no one could fail but be helped and encouraged. It was immensely useful in its effect.

We started the day by interviewing the head teacher in morning assembly (the gathering of the school, first thing in the morning). The whole school had been invited – cleaners, dinner ladies, parents who helped, administrative staff, teachers and children. One of us interviewed the head teacher while the other encouraged the children's curiosity in framing questions to find out more about the story he was telling. We also asked the children to spot the headmaster's abilities as they emerged. When asked what gave him most pride in life, a most amazing but unexpected story was told. A wonderful story emerged of the joy he had when planting and caring for his potatoes. His care of plants and ability to notice different things about plant growth and maturation that few of us knew much about became apparent. His abilities and values were spotted as they emerged and questions were asked as to what

other areas of his life he demonstrated this care, tenderness and observation. The children were very touched by the story and the analogies made about his values of growth, tenderness and care of each and every individual plant were brought forth and connected to his concern for each and every child in the school. There was silence! And in that moment things changed. (The AI principle of simultaneity.) His relationship with the children changed; it became more personal. He became more present to and for the children and he was able to ask appreciative questions of the youngsters.

After this very moving interview we worked with the whole school with the adults in the room each going to a classroom to join interviews with the children.

The children and the school staff interviewed in pairs and threes, taking turns in different roles, everyone being interviewed and interviewing. The interviews were quite thorough – up to 45 minutes in length – so that the children could practise and experiment with questions. They found their questioning was sustained, fired by their curiosity and imagination. They questioned about experiences when they had been kind or someone had been kind to them, as well as episodes of pride when they had done more than asked or expected of them. We encouraged them to be curious and ask questions to help paint a very detailed picture of an event, like ‘number painting’. We would say “look for the little gaps and if there’s a little gap that hasn’t got a colour, go in and ask details about it; really use your curiosity”. So the picture that was painted generally captured that richness of the whole episode. During training some children used the metaphor that it felt as though they could almost see the episode as if it were a video or film. In this learning phase we also asked the children to ask the person they interviewed, “What else would you like me to ask you about? What else are you proud of?” This proved very helpful, as the culture in many parts of Europe is that modesty is a value and you should only give information about your competence when asked. As a result, things the children were dying to be asked about, but had felt too inhibited to raise initially, could now be included in the story with pride.

While listening to the story, the interviewers were asked to try to bring out the values, skills or abilities as they became visible in the described episode. They were also asked to question about three dreams or wishes they had that would make school an even better place.

As consultants to the projects, we did quite a lot of training and coaching in ways of interviewing so as to stimulate the ability to question in an enthusiastic and child-like way that encouraged story telling rather than focusing on factual answers. Teachers or other adults participated and helped in the children’s first few interviews, but after a while the children were more than

comfortable asking the questions and conducting the interviews. We gave each pair of children post-it notes. We asked them to write on the notes the abilities, particularly the interpersonal ones, they experienced as the story was being told and then to stick the post-it notes on the person they had interviewed. The post-it notes were a great success. The effect was instantaneous. Friendships were forged with care and kindness, and a seed had been planted that they could do more than they had been asked to do.

The children became delighted and proud of all the 'post-it' notes they had received and given, and they walked around the classroom wearing them. Lists were made of all the abilities that the children had identified and these were put on a chart in the classroom. Whenever one of the abilities was noticed during classroom interactions a star was placed beside the particular ability on the list. New abilities were added as they were spotted in interactions. This meant that the children could watch their abilities grow. A list was also given to the parents and they were asked to place a star next to the abilities they noticed being demonstrated around the house. Imagine the changes this little intervention had on the school's relationships with the children and the children's relationships with their parents, and the children with the children.

■ Dreaming the ideal classroom

Teachers were impressed by the consequences of these interviews and decided to effect changes in all aspects of the school using Appreciative Inquiry methods.

Within the classrooms, children were invited to create mind maps of what makes a classroom a good learning context. In small groups, they explored when it was best; what was the atmosphere; what the teacher was doing; how was everyone behaving; what made it good? Potential difficulties like how to manage over-active or restless children were introduced so as to ensure these children also experienced a good learning environment and were given dignity. Each child was asked to think about a specific time they felt there was a very good learning opportunity. They interviewed each other in pairs to bring out stories about these experiences. They were encouraged to spot abilities. In groups of six, each of their stories was told by the interviewer while the other members spotted even more abilities. Then they dreamed what their dream classroom would look and feel like. They drew pictures and wrote proclamations about their dream classroom. These proclamations and the pictures were put up on the walls. They then decided they would all try to act in such ways that would enable them to fulfil the things they had dreamed. The children felt responsible for maintaining the proclamation they had created. They found ways of helping some of the more disruptive children by asking them

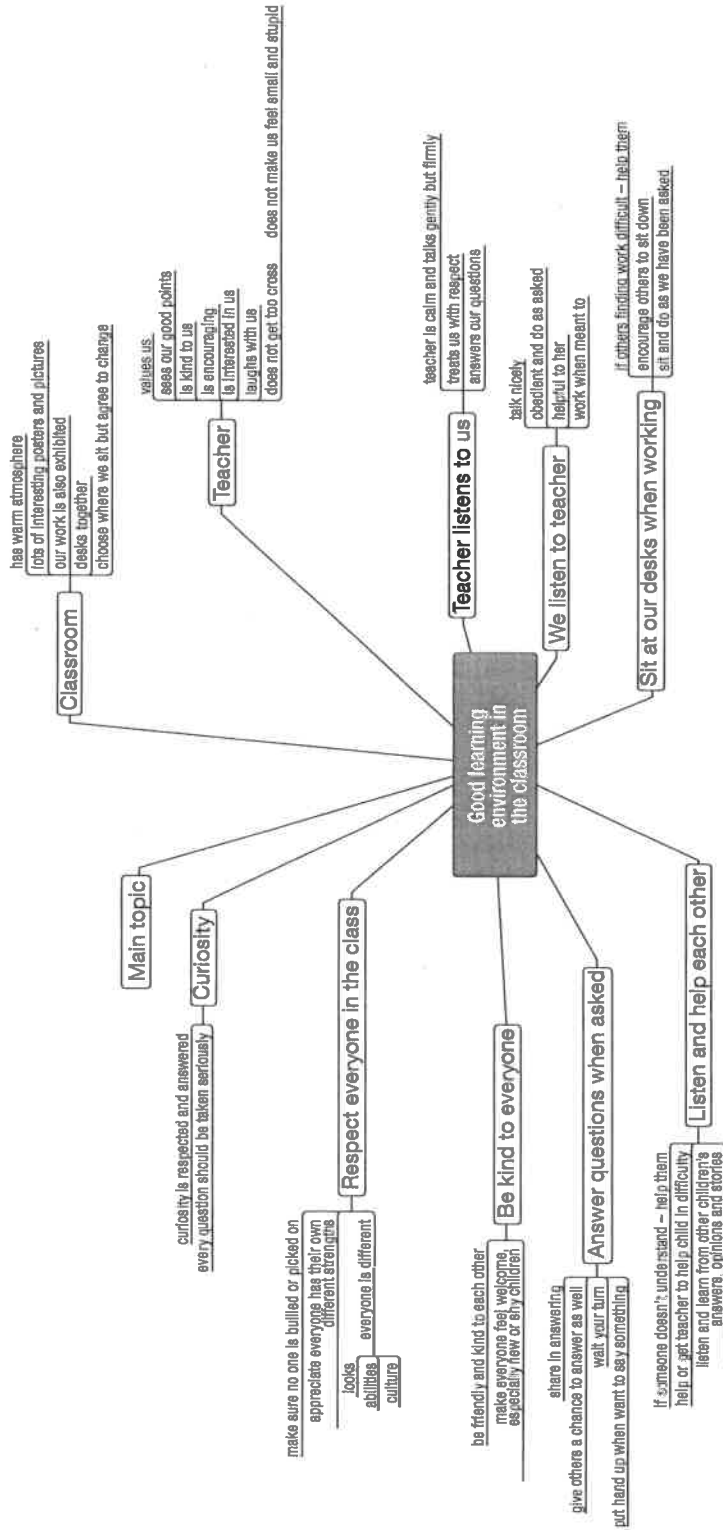


Figure 2: Mind map – good learning environment in the classroom

to sit next to them and by giving them help. One child felt it was important to have flowers in the class, and took on the responsibility to pick them from her garden or to ask who could bring them next time when they had died.

The teachers started asking questions every day such as: "What was the most exciting thing you learnt at school today?" or "What did you enjoy doing at home this weekend?" Stories of pleasure, joy, and accomplishment began to be told.

An age 11 year group asked to interview everyone in the school (children, dinner ladies, cleaners, administrative staff, teachers, and parent helpers) about their dreams of the school playground and when they had already had experiences of any part of that dream. These interviews explored many details including, what it was about the person being interviewed that had contributed to positive playground experiences, what it was about others, what it was about the school? The children wrote up the stories they had heard. The class then presented a picture of the dream playground to the morning assembly when everyone in the school was gathered together. They had proclamation statements and pictures of what the dream playground looked like. All the children were asked to interview a child from a different class for 10 minutes about their good experiences in the playground and what had helped them to feel safe.

The learning and inspiration gained from these interviews influenced how both children and adults related to the playground. In some respects the children already felt confident of how to play and include others and feel safe, as they had rehearsed this in their dreaming. The children were put into smaller groups to create proclamations about the playground. The sorts of proclamation statements were as follows. 'Our playground is a place where people are kind to one another'. 'If someone is sitting alone they will be invited to join a group if they want to'. 'If there are fights they will be asked to stop as this is not being kind'. 'Our playground is a safe place where everyone is respected and included'. Many others were created and each was put onto the school walls.

In the interviews, the children had dreamed up some concrete things that would make the playground a dream place, including play and climbing equipment. The head teacher offered to try to find funds to help fulfil the children's dreams.

Proclamation statements

These can be created when children have engaged in appreciative interviewing. In small groups children begin to share high points of the story they listened to, spotting more abilities, as the story is re-told. They then share

their dreams and hopes for the classroom or playground using their abilities and values as the motivator of their dreams. They begin to meld all the dreams into a statement about their dream playground or classroom. These usually begin – **Our classroom is ...** The children having created them then take the responsibility for making sure this is the way everyone behaves. They are helped and encouraged to do this respectfully.

■ Examples from the classroom

Teachers are often immensely imaginative in ways of creating appreciative and valuing atmospheres in the classroom. Small appreciative practices can make a significant difference. Starting each Monday morning with every child commenting on what they had enjoyed most over the weekend, or the teacher shaking each child's hand and greeting them in a respectful way, can create a difference as to how children and teachers relate.

Another class engaged in some appreciative inquiry between the children about times they had really enjoyed at home as a family. The 'ingredients' for these enjoyable family times were seen to be feeling safe, accepted, loved, comforted, etc. The children were then asked when they had experienced some of these things at school, and if so how they could dream a better and happier classroom. As a result, the classroom decided to create small groups of about five children (they called these groups 'families') who would stay with one another throughout the year. These groups looked after one another, stuck up for one another in times of stress or bullying, and looked after those children who were shy. It was understood that the children were to comfort and help the others in their 'family'. Conversations were shared about how it was good to have friends outside the family, and how it was important to be able to play safely outside the security of the family, but how the 'family group' ought to be somewhere to return to when things felt tough.¹ This idea caught on elsewhere in the school and was extended to the very young children as well as the ten-year-olds.

In another class they picked out of a hat the names of two children to be the star students of the week. A big star was drawn and then everything each child was good at or appreciated for was written in the star. During the week whenever the child did something that was positive and helpful, it was

¹ This idea of 'family groups' evolved from the conversations with children themselves. In talking about families, we try to take care that the ways in which we talk about families do not make it more difficult for children to talk about negative experiences of family life that need to be addressed (e.g. experiences of abuse), or experiences of family that are different from two-parent heterosexual nuclear families.

written up. Imagine being that child – so much positivity grew during the week and more and more was written up as everything they did was noticed. What was also important was the child had witnesses to their good and helpful behaviour and that meant that even after the week was over the behaviour continued. Parents were asked to come in at the end of the week to hear about their star child. Stories of goodness and value began to be told about even the so-called naughty children.

One enterprising teacher used the introductions of visitors or new pupils joining a class as opportunities for appreciative reflection. When introducing a new pupil, the teacher took care to emphasise that this was a welcoming and friendly class and to describe some of the ways that students tended to go out of their way to welcome and care for new people. As a result, the class swelled with pride and tended to take greater care in making the new child welcome.

Questioning to create stories

Whatever the questions asked, as soon as the children realise that the idea of the interviews is not to go in to get answers, but instead to create stories, to help people value their own competences, to build relational connections and to look to the future, a real productive energy is created. Anything becomes possible. The project begins to snowball – the teachers start talking, the children start talking, people begin talking to each other. They begin appreciating each other's stories differently. They collaborate and cooperate, enjoying each other's successes.

We have been able to observe the significance that this had for everyone. Interviews have created a relationship with the persons being interviewed. People have felt more appreciative of their interview partner of them and have found themselves more interesting than they did before the interview started. The relationship between them has felt closer and subsequently more positive comments and friendships have been made.

■ Conclusion

In this section of the chapter we have looked at ways that teachers and children have dreamt their classrooms and playgrounds/school yards. They have then made proclamation statements that they own and so have taken responsibility to ensure they are adhered to. They have lived the proclamations. Teachers have also used other interventions using appreciative language and actions innovatively. We will look at how these ideas have been used in kindergartens in the next part of this chapter.

TAKE AWAYS

- Always start with the idea that every problem is a frustrated dream. Work with the dream not the problem. Imagine that the dream came true and then guide the conversation back from the dream to the present. All the time talking about the future in the present tense as if it were the here and now.
- Imagine the dream in detail so that patterns of behaviour emerge which will create questions that can be asked to bring forth the desired behaviour so that the dream is more likely to be realised. For example, what does friendly look like?
- Craft the questions (tell me a time when...) and set up interviews.
- Interview about episodes of desired behaviour. Interview, in detail, so you can see the patterns of interaction as if a video playing. Bring out what it was that they and others were doing to create it.
- Spot the abilities, skills and values being demonstrated and give the person 'post-its'.
- Interview in detail as this is when people begin to become more aware of their values and how they have created the desired situation – through acting in accordance with their values.
- Having spotted the abilities inherent in the behaviour, amplify times when this value, ability or skill is used, so it becomes part of the new identity of the person.
- Encourage people to come up with ideas of their dream playground/ classroom.
- Get them to share their stories of pride in groups of 6, giving more 'post-its' of abilities noted. Others learn and get new ideas through others stories.
- Elaborate and expand the dream melding the ideas together. Create a Group Proclamation. Our class is...

■ Kindergartens and preschools

The principles of what can be done in playgroups or kindergartens are very similar. We have used many of the practices previously described. It is vital to have close collaboration with the parents and for the parents to learn some of the practices to use at home. However, many of the kindergarten teachers who were present at the teacher training days felt they needed to think about a different way of working. They did not think it would be possible for the children to interview each other or for the teachers to help them create mind maps of words to expand ideas and find lots of other words to use to describe their dreams.

Immediate specific ability spotting

When working in the context of these younger children, we have concentrated our efforts on creating positive attitudes in the classrooms and ability spotting. Teachers have used the ability spotting idea by giving the children 'post-its' when they spot an ability in any play or interaction with another child. It is important for young children that you are *very specific* and also *very immediate* and *enthusiastic* in your ability spotting, so the child is fully aware of what you are delighted by. Stern's ideas of mirror neurones that pick up and imitate responses as well as the importance of responding in the "present moment" in order to develop a sense of responsiveness and empathy is relevant here. They will want to get the same delighted response from you and will often repeat the behaviours. The abilities are written on a board and when the same ability is spotted again, a star is put next to that ability. As new abilities have emerged they are added to the list. The children can see their abilities grow and will often come and tell you when they have done something positive that you did not notice. One toddler came up and told us he had built brick towers and his younger brother had knocked them down and he had not got cross, but built some more for him to knock down. He had also tidied away the bricks. We spotted lots of abilities of being able to build, being generous to his brother and playing very nicely with him, being patient and being tidy. This was a first of many future enjoyable interactions between the previously rivalling brothers.

Even though some of the children cannot read, they are acutely aware of what is being noticed and valued. The children will often take parents straight to the board where the abilities have been written up.

The teachers in pre schools usually have a close cooperation with the parents, who are encouraged to have similar lists of abilities at home that they add to and put stars on. They can share and talk about all the wonderful things the child has done. Both teachers and parents have been trying to ignore any negative behaviours and focus warmly on all the good behaviours.

Emotion as an invitation

They have been trying to see emotional outbursts as invitations to someone to do something and then helping the child to put it into words. An example we were told about was when a child, who had frequent temper tantrums, was on the verge of having one, the teacher went up to her and asked her what had just happened to make her so cross. She said that another child had broken her leggo house because she would not let her play with any of the leggo bricks. The teacher asked her what she wanted the other child to do. She said,

"I want her to say sorry; she was not nice". The teacher got the other child to apologise, initially reluctantly, as she felt the other girl deserved it. But when the teacher asked the first child if she felt good about not sharing the bricks, she said, "No". She was then able to apologise and the two played happily together. The tantrums diminished as this girl learned to say to anyone who upsets her, "Say sorry".

Co operation with parents

Conversations between the parents and teachers have been kept positive, sharing the joys of the day. Any stories of difficulties have been explored and the different aspects of the events have been more fully developed as positives like determination, being strong-willed and how best to manage these abilities. Parents have reported feeling proud of their children and not having to defend them. As one mother said, "When I used to come to school I dreaded it as there were always complaints about my son. I love him so much I am the only person who can criticise him! When the teachers did, I used to fight them and feel so protective of him. I never wanted to send him to school. I knew he was sometimes difficult but I hated it being shoved down my throat. Now the teachers are so positive about him. I love coming to the school. I have even offered to help, when I am not working, and he is so much happier and so am I."

Rituals

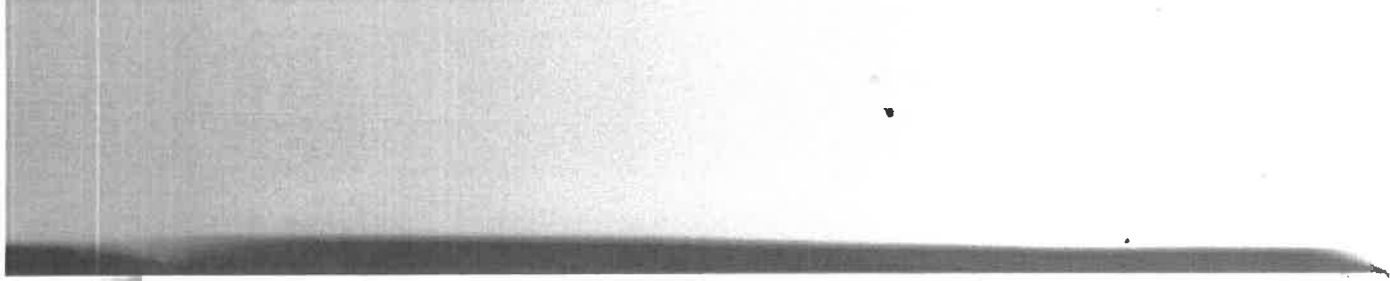
One teacher created a cosy corner in her classroom where she lit a candle every morning and started the day with each little child telling the group of something they had enjoyed or had made them happy the previous day and one thing they wanted to do this day. She also got them to sing a song. Her feeling was that she created an atmosphere where children felt safe and encouraged them to talk more about themselves and to listen to and be interested in others. Listening to others also broadened the horizons (grammars) of the children as they learned from each other's experiences and dreams.

As stated in the previous chapter, the family idea has been used in pre-schools as has the star pupil projects.

This section of the chapter has looked at how some of these ideas can be adapted and modified to work with younger children using immediate ability spotting, close cooperation between home and school and creating appreciative rituals in the classroom. The next chapter will look at some of the more complex challenges that arise in a school, where patience is tested and solutions seem impossible without punishment.

TAKE AWAYS

- In pre-schools, similar principles can be used.
- Create close collaboration with parents.
- Ability spotting both at school and home and watch them grow.
- Ability spotting needs to be immediate and specific.
- Feed back all the stories of positive behaviours so parents feel proud of their children. Collaboration grows!
- With problem behaviours try to find the whole story rather than acting on a snap shot.
- See emotion as an invitation.
- Rituals – star pupil, family groups, cosy corners.



4

Fulfilling dreams in complex situations

Schools all over the world are faced with complex situations that diminish opportunities to teach and opportunities for students to learn. The difficulties we will discuss in this chapter are those where the usual, common sense ways of managing them have not worked, and other strategies have been used. The principle behind many of these strategies is to maintain dignity for all concerned. The aims of the way we have been working with them is to try and find some clues that will help those involved to change and to make those changes as quickly as possible. When children misbehave they are usually aware that they are doing wrong by parental or societal ideals, but in their moment of action there were reasons for doing what they did.

■ Moral orders

As we described in the introductory chapter we have an idea that we live stories which make up our sense of identity and guide what we may do, what it is forbidden for us to do, what it is obligatory for us to do and what is undecidable as we feel our ways with relating. So we would say that everyone has a morality in the story and stories which we live out in the moment-by-moment interactions with each other. To help children and adolescents and parents to change, we might say that what may make change possible, involves connecting with people's reality and the stories that they live. So we connect with some "morality" in their stories, still clearly keeping a position that makes it clear that what they have been doing is unacceptable and does not fit with the culture of the society and school and family in which they live. So in this way we tune into their morality. By tuning into their morality we can often tune into and develop a sense of potential responsibility, through which they are more likely to be responsive to acting differently. If accused they may well justify the behaviours, defend what they have been doing and repeat the unwanted actions. We keep a clear position that what they have been doing is contrary to how we live. At the same time we maintain a sense of dignity through the curiosity of our questions which enable us to create different

ways forward. In addition, getting young people to dream their futures will often lead to more responsible behaviour. This chapter will discuss some of the ideas behind the ways this can be done and will illustrate the principles with examples.

■ Looking at what works

Much of the western world has focused on the philosophy of learning from our mistakes. Certainly you can learn from mistakes but learning becomes much more energised and confident when the focus is on looking at what works and what we do well. In these episodes of success or competence, we discover that we already have the skills to do things. Realising you have the skills, creates a confidence to use the abilities and skills more frequently and in other contexts. It also raises self-esteem, as you believe you can do things you might not have been aware of being able to do. With all these abilities and skills possibilities and options for the future increase. Looking at these episodes creates an awareness of the context and relationships around you, and creates the possibility of more desirable futures for all concerned.

■ Appreciative Intelligence

Adler & Fagley (2005) identify four dimensions of appreciation that relate to aspects of appreciative intelligence that are useful to bear in mind. They are:

- A “have” focus: paying attention to what you have rather than what you do not have; we would see this as rejoicing in your abilities, skills and resources;
- “Present moment” appreciation: thoughtfully and deliberately engaging in the experience at hand with an open mind;
- Awe: provides a person with a special experience that stands out in contrast to ordinary experiences. Appreciative Inquiry looks at moments of pride or superlative moments, which makes these moments special;
- Ritual: the routines or structures that enhance appreciative faculties by prompting us to stop, reflect and take notice of what is positive around us.

The half-full glass

Reformulating difficulties as challenges and opportunities has been inspiring in the way that it has led to imaginative action and more creative possibilities. One example was when a head teacher, two other teachers and a school social

worker approached us to see if there was anything we could do in a situation of difficulty which had gone on for some time relating to three adolescent boys. The boys would come to school for some lessons, leave for others, sometimes leave in the middle of a lesson, and generally create uncertainty for teachers and other children. The teachers, social workers and psychologists had tried a number of different responses to this situation, none of which had been successful.

When they approached us, we engaged in a discussion around changing the focus in a manner consistent with appreciative inquiry. We decided in our conversation to focus on how much time these young boys were actually in school and participating in classes and learning. This was done rather than being interested in why they missed so much, or walked out of school from time to time. This was an important shift from the focus that everyone had taken so far.

We discovered they were in school in the region of 55% of the total time. This was exciting. A new plan was created. The head teacher wrote a letter to the boys informing them of the discovery that they attended so much school life. They were then invited to a meeting with the head teacher and the schoolteachers to discuss and understand more fully what was so attractive that they attended school for 55% of the time. What made it possible to attend so much?

We enjoyed imagining what these young people would think when they got a letter through the post, addressed to them personally, labelled "Personal, Private and Confidential". How would they experience such an enquiry and would it offer a new way of behaving in the future? What would be the experience of being affirmed, which was quite different from the way they had been approached before?

The response was dramatic. The morning that they received the letter, they were outside the head teacher's office well before he arrived at school. They said that they wanted to discuss the ideas in the letter because they were now being asked something that they had not thought about before and they wanted an answer to this important question. In the discussion, an animated exploration ensued in which the young men talked of what made lessons interesting, which attitudes from teachers made the learning possible and what attracted them to school. The teachers began to discuss what more could be done in similar terms.

Then the most exciting things happened. The three boys offered to do a project interviewing other members of the class about what would make life at school rewarding, attractive, compelling and fulfilling of dreams. They asked for some coaching in the AI methods and help with creating the questions. Then they interviewed other class members about high points in

the school day, best learning opportunities, moments of affirmation, experiences of achievement and pride, and what interactions between teachers and pupils created this. They then wrote an appreciative report for the head and the teachers. This included suggestions of what was really working well and what could be done to make school even more enjoyable, and learning more possible. The teachers and pupils used this research and report to initiate an active co-operation in doing more of what was valued and this has taken their relationships into new dimensions. Focusing on what works can often be, as Bateson noted, the 'difference that makes a difference' (Bateson 1973).

Doing the unexpected – focusing on abilities and interests

In another school, where a group of children had been vandalising the computers and had broken hardware and destroyed software, the teacher in charge of the computer department inspiringly chose these particular boys to become the computer monitors as they were the ones who seemed to want to play with and spend so much time on the computers. After a local computer firm had trained the boys in computer maintenance, they were put in charge of the computers. This appreciation of the boys' abilities to enjoy computers resulted in all the machines in the school working nearly all of the time and an absolute commitment from the boys to the computers. Their computing abilities were enhanced, as was their sense of responsibility and pride in doing a good job. When the time came for these young men to finish school it was their responsibility to find another group of young people who were interested, and to train them to take over their role of computer monitors. This too worked well.

Believing that everyone wants to be appreciated

In yet another school we were asked to work with a whole a class of 11–12-year-olds, as there were so many difficulties. The teachers had lost control; the children were rude and aggressive to them as well as very disobedient. There was violence among the children and gang warfare between different groups. Bullying was rife and the class proudly told us when we arrived that, "none of the teachers like teaching us, as we are the worst class in the school". There was a school outing for a weekend coming up and the staff did not want to back down and cancel it, as it would be saying that they could not cope, so they wanted us to help them urgently.

We had invited the whole class in addition to as many adults involved in the school as could spare the time, plus any parents who could attend. Each child was paired with an adult and in some cases there were two children

with one adult. In these small groups the children were interviewed about what they were proud of in their lives at school. Their abilities were spotted as they were noticed in the episodes they talked about. Then they were asked to reflect on all their abilities and what sorts of hopes and dreams of their own futures did these abilities stimulate. Most of the children came up with ideas of jobs and careers they would like to follow.

We then put them in groups of six, to tell their pride stories and dreams. With everyone beginning to feel excited and valued, we then asked them about how they were going to achieve these careers and what would the ideal classroom be like for them to achieve what they wanted. They came up with plenty of ideas of how they could behave and help one another. We asked lots of questions about how they might manage youngsters who did not conform to what they imagined. They came up with interesting solutions that we ensured gave respect and dignity to all, as this was something they had said was important.

With energy levels high and children feeling valued and listened to, we suggested that in their small groups they should dream the outing as a really good and positive experience for all – staff and children. After they had all shared their dreams with the bigger group, they were intently questioned about the details of their dreams as if they were living it now. What time was lights out? How were they managing the projects they were doing? How were decisions being made? How were they showing respect for the teachers and how were the teachers showing respect for them?

At the end everyone was feeling good and positive and excited about the forthcoming outing. We had made a game of it and suggested they told no one that they had changed to become the best class in the school. They loved the idea of surprising everyone with their new behaviour.

There was, however, one youngster who said it would never work. He was a child who had been badly bullied and his mother was constantly telling him she wanted to change his school and was fighting the authorities to do so. He stubbornly stuck to all the old negative stories even though he had actively participated during the day. This fascinated us and we tried to make sense of his position. We took Maturana's (1985) ideas of everything being coherent or part of a "perfection" at any point in time for that context – that there is always a coherent explanation for any social behaviour. This is a useful idea to work with when trying to understand something that does not seem to make sense. The boy had participated and enjoyed the day, gone along with all the dreams. Why was he now being so negative? How can we understand him and the morality of the whole set of relationships he is living in? When Maturana talks about the "perfection" of the system he is talking about all living systems as "fitting" and that there is a sense of coherence in their actions and ideas.

So we hypothesised: what if this young man was being loyal to his mother's stories that this was not a good class for him, and she had to be in a fight with the teachers to get him into a different school, the child would be obligated to support her story. If there was some fit or coherence in this hypothesis or story for this boy and his mother, then there was no way of making this class a good class that would work for them. So we surmised perhaps he could not change his ideas unless and until his mother could change too. There is a "moral order" that creates the coherence in the interactions in the group of people involved in the situation. For him the overriding moral order was that he must be loyal to his mother, so we had to include his mother in this change. The staff agreed to talk to the mother that evening to discuss what had happened. As long as the coherence is understood and affirmed then the people can move on with dignity.

The following Monday, with great pride and delight, the children reported they had had a wonderful weekend outing. All the behaviour had been respectful and dignified, with no fights. The class teachers did some appreciative questioning about what each child had been proud of over the weekend and how they were going to use these abilities and skills to create their dream/ideal classroom.

■ The social construction of emotion

What has been liberating and exciting has been the whole way that we worked using some social constructionist methods. Harré (1996) has introduced new possibilities through an innovative way of relating to emotions. We have found this extremely useful when we view emotion as socially constructed in our work with schools. This way of "living" emotions has some novel elements. These include some of the following commitments. As we are born and then grow in relationships with others we learn to behave with emotional abilities within a cultural context and we enact them culturally. There are culturally specific emotions that are reflected in the language with stories that maintain their existence. For instance, in Denmark there is the emotion of "Hugge", which entails lighting candles, and creating a cosy situation that you can relax into. In Sweden there is an emotion of "lagom" which has patterns of action and feeling that are part of how you behave in certain situations. For example, when living this emotion in particular situations you should not be too much or too little, but just in the middle, just "lagom".

There are stories about emotion reflecting the meaning of, for instance, happiness or grief. The stories of happiness are about joy and pleasure with what you are doing or someone you enjoy being with and who enjoys you, you smile and laugh and feel good. In grief, there is sadness at the loss of

someone or something, the lost person is remembered and missed, you may cry or feel abandoned or feel angry. Emotions have recognisable expressions and actions. Most usefully, emotions are an invitation to someone to do something. They embody a moral judgement within the invitation to the person they are inviting into an action. For example, if we take anger, the moral judgement is frequently that an injustice has been done, my dignity has been violated and I have been humiliated. Anger may be inviting an apology or to be treated differently or understood. "It is unfair" we often hear children cry. They may feel that what has happened is unfair, and want someone to somehow see it and make it right. The moral judgement involved in such a situation may be to draw our attention to the experience of humiliation and invite the person you are angry with to restore your dignity.

This has been a very useful way of working with children in school when teachers have found it difficult to understand the emotions being expressed by young people.

The angry child

We had been asked to work with a young person given a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). There had been a major incident in the classroom and this child had totally lost control, He had smashed up his classroom and terrified the staff and other children. He had pulled over a bookcase and was then throwing books at the teacher and children. Then he had taken a chair and broken off the legs and was hitting tables with them. The school saw him as a real danger and wanted him out of their school, into a special school. Two days later when everyone was a bit calmer, we had a meeting with the teachers, his parents, a couple of the pupils and the boy. We asked him what he was feeling – just to make a list of all the feelings that he had while he was doing the smashing. He answered ANGRY ANGRY ANGRY. We then asked him to whom he had been trying to say something, through his feelings, emotions and actions. He told us it was his parents because they were ashamed of him, the teachers because they treated him like a dog, shouting one word like SIT at him, and some of the children in his class because they ignored him or bullied him. These in a sense were his moral orders – that people were being unfair to him or humiliating him. We then asked him what invitation he was offering to the three groups of people. As it were, we asked him to identify the moral judgement that he was making in the angry and violent scene. What did he want recognised by each group? This also gave us important clues as to what, when it was honoured, would make the change to enable him to go on in a dignified way. Our questioning included the notion

of what is the morality that he was living when he became so destructive in the classroom.

He wanted his parents to see that he is not always bad. He wanted them to see his good side. He wanted the teachers to talk to him politely not shout at him. And his friends to be kind to him and play with him. We worked with him as to how he could more usefully put these invitations into language that would allow others to understand what he was trying to tell them, rather than through acting out. The consequence of doing what he had done was that everyone got even angrier with him for being so out of control. The parents, teachers and children listened to his story, and ways that would help him express his invitations were discussed so that everyone could understand his sense of unfairness; ways that he might behave that would help the others respect him more were also talked about. If he was more obedient and helpful at home his parents agreed to give him "post-its" with his abilities on and thank him and be proud of him. The teacher would also notice when he was sitting down; and smile at him. If he got restless he could ask if he could get up to stretch his legs. He would also try to play the games the other children were playing, rather than trying to change their games to ones he liked. He was enthusiastic to learn the negotiating skills we discussed. The teachers became skilled at sensing times when he felt he was being treated unfairly and were able to help put his invitation into language.

■ Conclusion

This chapter has looked at some of the more complex difficulties schools might face. In addressing these issues there have been a number of central ideas that have informed our practice. When challenged in these situations it is helpful to keep the focus on the half full glass, and what young people do well. Young people know what they have done that is wrong so give them dignity and an opportunity to go on without the humiliation of going over their misdemeanours. Appreciating and affirming young people as well as having discussions that explore new ways of behaving so that they act in a way that honours their values will create paths to a more fulfilling future. And finally, using the ideas of the social construction of emotion when you do not understand what is happening emotionally will create a way forward for all.

In the next chapter we will look specifically at ways that bullying and anger outbursts in schools have been addressed by us.

TAKE AWAYS

- It is essential to keep a focus on what works in the life of the child and using that as the lever to change unwanted behaviours.
- Transforming problems as challenges and opportunities and managing them in a different way.
- Focusing on children's abilities and strengths and naming them so they can be used as a resource.
- Recognition that the naming of undesirable behaviours also creates identities and a determination to live into them, hence the pride in saying, "we are the worst class in the school and the teachers don't like teaching us".
- Understanding emotion, as an invitation to someone to do something has been very helpful to teachers so they feel they can act more effectively in these situations. They have learned to help young people put the invitation into words so that it can be responded to.

