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The Promise of Appreciative Cities

Compelling the Whole to Act

Barbara Lewis
Karen Roney



Inside this issue

Welcome to November 2013 issue of AI Practitioner

"The Promise of Appreciative Cities: Compelling the Whole to Act" is full of detailed examples where cities have applied AI: in Police, Fire, Purchasing and Transportation departments; community engagement in major regeneration initiatives and local initiatives supporting a region's long-term vision. Editors Barbara Lewis and Karen Roney, who live in the United States and have been involved in award-winning work in this area, describe how cities have embedded AI over many years and set out the promise of even greater AI use.

In the Feature Choice, Dayle O'Brien in Australia describes a change and transition theory, Four Rooms of Change, that she has found invaluable in her coaching practice. Taking a strengths-based approach to the model, she describes how people move through the Rooms and learn to love change.

In this Research Notes, Jan Reed says "Goodbye and keep going" as she feels it is time to hand over to others. We thank her for her skill and wisdom in developing the column over four years. Showcased in the

column is a study of Caravaggio's paintings using AI as the research framework.

In AI Resources we welcome a new editorial team: Matt Moehle (USA), and Roopa Nandi and Hardik Shah (India). They bring their research, academic and consulting backgrounds to develop the next phase of this column.

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Compelling the Whole to Act

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Tim Slack and Suzanne Quinney, co-directors



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Jan Reed, B.A, Ph.D., R.N.
Jan has been involved in research for many years. She has a nursing qualification, and teaches and supervises healthcare students at Northumbria University. She is well known for her ground-breaking book, *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change*.
Contact: jreedhexham@gmail.com



Neena Verma, Ph. D.
Neena is a scholarly practitioner and educator of AI passionate about developing and promoting AI's application for "sustainable collective value" and generative OD, enabling creative collaboration between AI and problem-solving approach. She writes extensively on developmental possibilities of individual and organizational relevance.
Contact: drneenaverma@gmail.com



Appreciative Inquiry Research Notes

edited by Jan Reed and Neena Verma

Appreciative Inquiry Research Notes carries news of AI research developments. We'd like to make it as collaborative and appreciative as we can – we know that many of you are working and thinking about the relationship between academic research and AI, and that you have news, comments and questions which we'd like you to contribute.

The Research Notes column in this issue of *AI Practitioner* is unique and special in two important ways. First, this showcases a study which explores a fascinating topic in a novel way. The topic is the paintings of Caravaggio, and it is explored with Appreciative Inquiry forming the research backdrop. The study is undertaken with the author's personal appreciation of Caravaggio, and with Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the research framework. His methodology ranged from a reflective view of the artworks, reading discussions of the same, and most importantly, conducting an appreciative interview with a museum guide and quite intriguingly with himself.

The topic may seem outside the concerns of organizational development, as it is about the work of one individual, and that the uniqueness of the work itself requires this individual to have talent and insight. AI is often about groups of people in an organization, with differing skills. This paper shows us how the AI perspective can enhance our understanding of an individual's contribution.

The paper details how this understanding was enhanced by reading, experiencing and reflecting. One of the messages that the study gives us is that a careful, systematic approach can make a considerable contribution to understanding, where impressions are questioned and conclusions are challenged. An important highlight is about the methodology where at one stage the researcher donned multiple hats, becoming both interviewer and interviewee, and his smooth transitioning back to researcher. His experience validates the inherently improvisational nature of AI. We hope this column will encourage many more AI enthusiasts to experiment with it as a research methodology for unique topics like the one covered in the present column.

This column is also a farewell from Jan Reed, as she is handing over to editors who are more actively engaged in AI work. The AI Research Notes column owes much of its growth and evolution to Jan, who has been anchoring it since its inception. She, along with her former colleague Lena Holmberg, has sculpted the column from its infancy to its mature and much sought-after present day version. Jan feels her time as editor here has been fantastic, and much of this was due to you, the contributors and readers. As Jan says “Goodbye and keep going!”, Neena feels a rush of emotions ... admiration, inspiration, responsibility and many more. She offers her deep appreciation and gratitude to Jan and wishes her well in all her future endeavours.

Neena Verma and Jan Reed



Chalk portrait of Caravaggio by Ottavio Leoni, circa 1621 © Wikipedia

A Personal Appreciation of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) with AI as research framework

Jannie Pretorius

University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

pretoriusjph@ufs.ac.za

Genesis of the study

After reading Andrew Graham-Dixon's biography (Graham-Dixon, 2010) of the Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and seeing his breath-taking paintings, I felt the need to know more about him. I wanted to learn from his work and life to bring about my own personal and professional growth. An opportunity to appreciate his paintings on location in Rome injected energy into my engagement with the artist's life story and his works.

AI has proven to be an excellent academic framework for this study. Kelm (2005; 2008) argues that, although AI has traditionally been used to transform organizations, it is equally transformative in the context of individuals. Living appreciatively means that we create our personal identity and reality with others – in my case, with Caravaggio. She says it means becoming more aware of our internal and external dialogues and intentionally shifting them to focus on what we want more of. Kelm calls this adaptation of AI Appreciative Living. I utilized the five classic principles of AI to apply them to the defined positive theme of this study: to appreciate the life and paintings of Caravaggio on a personal level.

Methodology

During the Discovery phase, I studied the biography of Caravaggio to serve as a substructure for the visit to Rome. This phase was continued in Rome, where I studied 17 of his paintings. I knew that I had to conduct at least one appreciative interview for the research to be of any significance – Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) are quite emphatic about the value of the appreciative interview: “The starting point and essential component of any Appreciative Inquiry process is the appreciative interview. AI would not be AI without appreciative interviews. Without



Figure 2: The author, an academic beggar-researcher in front of the Galleria Borghese in Rome

appreciative interviews there is no inquiry, no openness to learn, and little potential for transformation.”

But where would I find someone to appreciate Caravaggio in a city where few people could apparently speak English fluently? I decided to follow an unconventional strategy because Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) also said: “... Appreciative Inquiry is improvisational. It is not a singular methodology because it is not based on one firmly established way of proceeding. Like great jazz improvisation [...] each Appreciative Inquiry is a new creation, an experiment that brings out the best of human organizing...”

I crafted an open invitation on a piece of cardboard to invite passers-by to participate in my research and waited like an academic beggar on a bench in front of the Galleria Borghese, where six of Caravaggio’s paintings are displayed (see Figures 2 and 3).

I was relieved when a friendly admirer of Caravaggio volunteered to participate in the appreciative interview: a museum guide from the Galleria Borghese. The following positive questions were put to him and his responses recorded:

- What is your earliest or most pleasant memory of Caravaggio?
- What do his paintings mean to you on a personal level?
- Which painting is your favourite one and why?
- What, in your opinion, is the one thing that enlivens his paintings – without what they imply would not be the same?
- What would you wish today’s painters could learn from him?

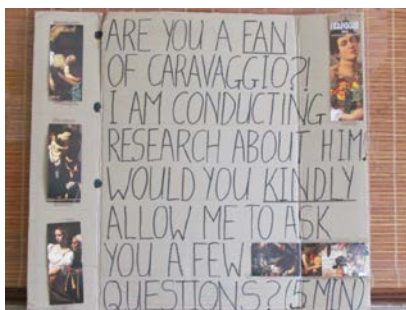


Figure 3: The crude – but effective – open invitation to an appreciative interview

Since I wanted to formulate my own responses to the questions in my mother tongue – Afrikaans – I decided to put the questions to myself. I sat in a coffee shop in Rome and recorded my responses. The academic freedom to treat myself as both the researcher and a participant in my research was provided by the words of Kelm (2005): “We can design and answer these questions alone, [...]” and those of Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010): “Questions, whether they are posed to oneself or to another, can create identities [...]”

I enjoyed every second of it: as far as I know this was the first time that it had been done in this fashion, and I was hopefully adding to the possible applications of AI on an intuitive level. At the same time I was aware of my responsibilities towards the different roles I played: those of interviewer/researcher and respondent. That is why I recorded my verbal responses to the questions on a voice recorder, and transcribed it afterwards. In that manner, I viewed my role as respondent to be a separate and brief one, and I returned to my more important role as researcher immediately after the completion of the personal interview. The Discovery phase was concluded when I transcribed the two interviews.



Figure 4: The Entombment, 1604
Vatican museums and galleries. 300 cm x 203 cm (Graham-Dixon 2010:xii, illustration 36). Oil on canvas © Wikipedia

Findings

I analysed the two interviews and identified the following three positive themes:

- Caravaggio's superior workmanship and the way he uses the interplay between light and shadow. The Positivist principle enabled me to focus on his superior workmanship and on the elements of light in his work and life – so I could have more of that in my own life as a professional educationalist. I was fully aware of the darker elements of his life – he even committed a murder – but I made a conscious decision to focus on the more positive aspects of his life. I must mention, though, that the darker elements that led to his downfall and death have also endeared him to me.
- Three of his paintings in which Jesus is pictured: as a corpse after his crucifixion (The Entombment – see Figure 4); as a baby boy (The Madonna of Loreto – see Figure 5); and as a small boy (The Madonna dei Palafrenieri, Figure 6). The multi-perspective eye of Caravaggio, clearly an explanation of the Poetic principle, implies that Caravaggio was able to choose what he wished to study and paint.
- The exceptional earthy realism in his paintings. The Anticipatory principle challenges us to make our images of a preferred future a real part of the lives we live. In the case of this research, the dreams I dreamed about some of his paintings being beautiful parts of my academic manuscript had to be realized on paper – and they were indeed included in the final published manuscript (Pretorius, 2013).

I considered the process of the identification of the three themes to be the Design phase of this AI. The three themes provided the conceptual framework for a theoretical analysis of Caravaggio's life and work, and the effects thereof on my personal development. I have to present a few brief examples of this process to illustrate the unfolding of my research. I shall start with two of the three paintings that I mentioned above.

The Entombment

Graham-Dixon (2010:279) describes the Jesus in this painting of Caravaggio strikingly: "Caravaggio's dead Christ is punishingly unidealized. He truly is the Word made flesh: a dead man, a real corpse weighing heavily on those who struggle to lay him to rest." I bought a copy of this painting in Rome, and it is hanging in my room. The more I look at it the more it creates the illusion that Jesus is "handed" from the painting to the onlooker (me), as if the people in the painting are asking: "Will you please accept responsibility for Him?"

The Madonna of Loreto

Graham-Dixon (2010:290-1) emphasizes the accessibility and simple, yet powerful message of the scene: "The work is a tour de force of naked religious populism:



Figure 5: The Madonna of Loreto, 1604. Cavaletti Chapel, Sant'Agostino Church, Rome, 260 cm x 150 cm (Graham-Dixon 2010:xv, illustration 63). Oil on canvas © Wikipedia

spare to the point of banality, blatant in its appeal to the masses.” To me, this simple message is also one of the main ones presented by AI: everybody is important in AI; everybody’s experiences are valid and extra-ordinary, and all contributions are welcomed and considered.

The article reached its ultimate destination (the last phase of this AI) when it was accepted for publication by a local academic journal (Pretorius, 2013).

Summary

For the duration of the study – a period of almost six months – I applied the principles of AI to my life. I followed the Simultaneity principle, for example, by putting unconditionally positive questions to the museum guide and myself. By doing that I created and entered the positive environment and framework of my personal appreciation of the artist. In the process I was able to develop an exceptional, intense and enjoyable learning experience for myself.

I used the two appreciative interviews to create and re-create the realities of my research and my personality. I started to accept the elements of light and darkness in my life. I realized that I might harm myself by focusing too much on the darker elements, and that I should appreciate myself on a more regular basis. As explained earlier, I lived the other principles to the best of my ability.

Because of my engagement with Caravaggio’s paintings – especially The Entombment – my spiritual awareness has increased and I have realized that we all have to learn to live with feelings of disappointment and rejection. Jesus is a greater reality in my life. The study of Caravaggio’s extra-ordinary craftsmanship has inspired me. Standing within inches of his paintings has made me realize that I should pay attention to even the smallest detail of the lectures I present. I simply must reflect the realities of my education students’ future careers – a demanding school and classroom with energetic, sometimes disruptive teenagers – in an authentic manner.

Pointers for future researchers

The South African AI research community has developed a tradition of carrying out appreciations of exceptional living people. This appreciation of Caravaggio was the first appreciation of someone who lived hundreds of years ago. The unusual format of self-interviewing and a single additional appreciative interview has provided me with enough qualitative data to articulate an AI framework for personal appreciation. If the museum guide had spoken Afrikaans, I would have preferred that he conduct the appreciative interview with me, though. I did not have a problem holding multiple roles – in fact, since circumstances led me into following such an unconventional research strategy, I really cherished the opportunity. In the process I hopefully provided an example of how AI might be used to study art in a structured and scientific manner.



Figure 6: Madonna dei Palafrenieri (Madonna and Child with Saint Anne) 1605-1606, Galleria Borghese, Rome 292cm×211cm Oil on canvas © Wikipedia

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AI Practitioner Editor/Publisher

The editor-in-chief and publisher is Anne Radford. She is based in London and can be reached at editor@aipractitioner.com

The postal address for the publication is:
303 Bankside Lofts, 65 Hopton Street, London SE1 9JL,
England.

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7633 9630

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Shelagh Aitken is the issue editor for AI Practitioner.

shelagh@editorproofreader.co.uk

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