

STORIES OF APPRECIATION



MAIN FEATURES

Strengthened skills	CONSTRUCT, LEAD, SUPPORT
Suitable for	Teachers, Students
Difficulty level	Medium-High
Individual setting	Yes
Group setup	Yes
Minimum number of participants	1
Average duration	30 - 40 minutes
Special Equipment	No
Online version	Yes

1. DESCRIPTION

Appreciation Stories, also known as the appreciation survey technique, focuses on a person's strengths based on their previous experiences and learnings. It's about the best in people, the way they live, behave, work and engage with their community. Through sharing one's own story, attention is brought to what worked rather than what didn't work in the previous stages of the person's life, thus reinforcing the idea of a better scenario or future.

According to David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastava (1987), who developed the main contemporary concept of appreciation survey (AI), this exercise can help to:

- Build the fundamental strengths of a group that works together.
- Shift your focus from your weaknesses to your own strengths (or group strengths).
- Let individuals stick to their core principles.

2. PURPOSE/BENEFITS

- It shifts the perspective from students' weaknesses to their strengths and successful past experiences, focusing on important and positive moments from past experiences. It also allows to visualise the possible future for young people better;
- It helps to build stronger and more trusting relationships between the teacher and students, as well as between students. By encouraging students to share life stories that mean something to them and can inspire others, they understand that their experiences are valuable to others. Stories create a sense of cohesion among students who motivate each other to move forward by sharing their stories and listening to others;
- It helps to generate more empathy and better understanding among peer students.

As a teacher, by focusing on your successful experiences, you can learn more about yourself and your work, notice your strengths, and identify potential areas for improvement.

3. CLUSTERS OF RELATED COMPETENCIES

The nature of the exercise is very much linked to the sense of action, belonging to a group and building and maintaining relationships. It is closely connected to BUILDING.

The group dynamics within the exercise make it closely related to LEADERSHIP.

But above all, the exercise is closely connected to SUPPORT, as it helps to generate empathy among the group members and helps to avoid guilt and suspend judgment. It can also help generate an attitude of curiosity in the comparisons of other members of the group.

4. HOW TO DO THE PRACTICE

Data

It is necessary to explain how to prepare and present the exercise to the participant.

According to psychologist Madhuleena Roy Chowdhury, the practice of "stories of appreciation" can be proposed as a 4-step storytelling model, the so-called 4-D cycle of AI (BJ Seminars International, n.d.):

- Discovery - recognise and appreciate what "is" (strengths, skills, etc.);
- Dream - imagine and appreciate what will be (one's idea of success, the ideal self, what the desired future might be, etc.);
- Design - decide what "should be" and how it would be possible to make it real from the dream version. How can success be achieved?
- Deliver - build ways to realise the dream and apply the necessary strategies to do so according to your strengths and skills. He also takes his steps: learning from past stories, executing the strategies designed and, communicating his dream, asking for feedback if necessary and, then, repeating again.

However, for this exercise, only the first three steps of the 4-D cycle will be considered, since the last phase – Deliver – would require follow-up and long-term planning that cannot be done in a single session with the young person.

Although the exercise can be used in an individual environment and with a small group, the exercise in the next steps focuses on working with a group. It can be adapted for a larger group, but this requires a certain level of maturity of the students, as they will do the exercise in pairs and then share the experience with the larger group.

The following steps are written there for delivery in a small group. When you work on a group as a teacher, you can guide and provide more personalised food for thought for the student's situation.

Step 1/ Discovery

At the beginning of the exercise, instruct students to think of something they want to change, a direction they want to take in their future lives. This is the discovery phase of the 4D cycle model, since the goal is to find out what "is", what the student wants or expects.

Then ask them to reflect on the factors relevant to this change and think of an experience or time in their lives that demonstrates that they have the skills, knowledge or resources they would need to bring about the desired change. This personal success story should demonstrate the strengths of the desired vision.

Tell your students to think of skills such as resilience, self-confidence, people in their support network that have contributed to their growth in the past, education or learning in a particular area, etc.

Step 2/ Dream

In this passage, ask your students to imagine the desired future, what ambitions they would like to experience in their lives, how they would like to achieve these changes, and what previous learnings and skills they already have to achieve this goal.

This step is identified with the second point of the 4D cycle model presented above, where the student focuses on their strengths from previous experiences to imagine and appreciate their ideal future scenario.

This is the moment when the student reflects on the "dream" and how it relates to his story of appreciation.

Final Step / Design

(MANDATORY to explain what needs to be done to complete the exercise)

To conclude this exercise, ask each student to share their thoughts on their strengths already developed. Think about how these exceptional skills and knowledge can contribute to the realisation of the "dream" or future or desire.

You can ask the rest of the students to do the same for each of their peers.

This is the last step identified with the Design phase mentioned above; it is the moment of reflection on how the desired change could be achieved within the available resources of each student.

You can ask some questions like:

- Can you think of a personal story where a learning experience has profoundly influenced your life?
- A story in which you could openly accept responsibility for making a mistake? What did you learn from that?

- Can you think of any early success stories that can guide your strategy for the future?
- What did this experience mean to you when you lived it? What would that mean today?

After this reflection, students share their stories in a group conversation, normally in a circular setting. Keep your students' attention span in mind when doing this part of the exercise.

5. FINAL REFLECTION

Depending on the level of maturity of the group, you can ask the group to share their thoughts on the stories told by the different members of the group, perhaps highlighting a strength or skill that they feel is very important or positive for the change they want to make.

As a teacher, you can highlight the stories' different aspects, strengths, skills, and competencies that demonstrate that the student has the necessary resources to bring about change and achieve the desired vision or future. This should be done as a group-level analysis, but individual examples can support the analysis.

As a final point, you should ask them if they feel differently about their future or what they want to change when comparing their perceptions from before the exercise.

6. SPECIFIC MATERIALS

- A piece of paper/or a whiteboard for note-taking if necessary;
- Pencil/pen/marker.

7. TIPS AND TRICKS

For a group activity, always remember to create a welcoming and trusting atmosphere among all students. Remind them that their personal stories of appreciation will not be judged and that stories, unless otherwise agreed, remain confidential. However, stories can be a source of inspiration for others beyond the group, and if the group decides that they can share their stories with others.

This exercise can be an exciting icebreaker to stimulate and strengthen relationships between the students in the group. It stimulates peer learning, mutual respect and community building.

During the session with your students, always focus on the positive factors, on the solutions rather than the problems. It emphasizes the skills, strengths and knowledge they already have and guides their reflection process towards how these factors can contribute positively to their future.

8. ONLINE VERSION

For a single session, an online version can work correctly, following the same steps as the offline version. In this case, you need to use a video conferencing tool to have a thoughtful conversation with the student.

Although the exercise can potentially be done in the same way for a small group, the use of videoconferencing reduces the ability to "read" your students' nonverbal communication and react to them since it is essential that no one make judgments. To monitor non-verbal communication better, it is recommended to carry out the activity for a group in a face-to-face environment.

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY - SITOGRAPHY

- 4 Tools, exercises and appreciation survey activities ([link](#) to the article).
- What is Appreciative Inquiry? A brief guide to the model and appreciation application process.
- Appreciative Inquiry.