Creating Healthy Work Environments 2019

Thinking Positive: An RN-BSN Leadership Course Preparing Students to be Change Agents Through Appreciative Inquiry

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Background: The Institute of Medicine’s progress report on The Future of Nursing (2015) challenges the discipline to increase the number of BSN-prepared nurses who are able to lead initiatives to improve healthcare systems. With many pathways into the profession, the RN-BSN option provides an opportunity for nurses to build on their clinical expertise to develop leadership skills to become transformative change agents. One nursing program created a new RN-BSN course: Creating Healthy Work Environments with appreciative inquiry as the change model. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based model used to promote organizational change. AI provides strategies and skills to address the work place climate and culture through a positive lens that is empowering for employees to approach change from the bottom-up rather than top-down. This can lead to a true change in the organizational culture (Andresen, 2017). AI is helpful in interrupting the negative dialogue about problems and deficits. Additionally, AI looks at change and transformation through assets, building capacity and self-determination (Butani & Plant, 2016; Wall, Russell, & Moore, 2017).

Significance: The purpose of the class was to help nurses find their voice, gain a sense of empowerment and regenerate their enthusiasm and passion for nursing. With newly acquired skills in appreciative inquiry, they were able to see possibilities where they once saw burdens, barriers and bureaucracy. They were able to use the appreciative inquiry model to develop change projects to create safer environments for themselves and their patients. This eight-week course includes four on-line learning modules that cover: 1) Building a safe work environment – start with strong footings, 2) Laying the foundation – teamwork and group dynamics; 3) Framing the organization – exploring the structural elements, and 4) Building a safer workplace – blueprints for change.

Implications: Nurses are skilled problem-solvers trained to quickly assess, diagnose and formulate a plan of action. This approach to clinical decision-making can trickle into the organizational culture, looking at what is wrong and how to fix it. An alternative is the positive asset-based method of appreciative inquiry, which instead highlights successes, strengths, and best-practices (Ramage et al., 2017). Using the 4-Ds of AI: Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny, nurses can promote a compassionate and caring healthcare environment. Like many quality improvement models, AI is a cyclical generative process of examining ‘what is working well’ to co-creating and co-evolving plans for “what can be” (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). AI has been used to cultivate interprofessional collaboration, transform negative work environments (Kahn, Rivera, Manzano & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Ramage et al., 2017) and promote passion and commitment in nursing (Halm & Crusoe, 2018).

Conclusion: There is growing interest in the appreciative inquiry model and how it can be used by nurses in practice to improve the healthcare environment for patients and employees. The utility of the AI model requires the development of a different skill-set, so there is a need for education to fill the gap in skill development. For AI to truly be transformational, the process needs to engage all of the stakeholders (Watkins, Dewar & Kennedy, 2016). This helps promote positivity and gives all those involved a sense of empowerment to co-construct new possibilities to enhance care and services within an organization. It is critical that nurses are adequately trained not only as competent clinicians by savvy change agents as well.

It is critical that nursing schools provide students with basic organizational and systems improvement skills to become transformative change agents for healthcare and professional nursing practice. In the academic setting, the AI model can be incorporated into a variety of courses, such as a leadership
course, or an asset-based capacity-building community health class. For one nursing program, the course on *Creating Healthy Work Environments* addressed several areas of the BSN Essentials (AACN, 2008) including quality care and patient safety, interprofessional collaboration, professionalism and promoting the professional values of caring. With the appropriate training in appreciative inquiry, nurses are destined to compassionately design and deliver healthier work environments.

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**Title:**
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**Keywords:**
appreciative inquiry, capacity building and change agent

**References:**


**Abstract Summary:**

Explore how one nursing program developed an RN-BSN leadership course based on appreciative inquiry. The focus was to help nurses gain a sense of empowerment and regenerate their professional
passion. Students used appreciative inquiry to develop change projects to create safer environments for
themselves and their patients.

**Content Outline:**

**Objectives:**

1. Describe the elements of the appreciative inquiry process.

2. List two examples of how appreciative inquiry can be used incorporated into nursing courses or to change the practice environment.

**Outline:**

1. Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry
   a. describe application of the AI Model to change
   
   b. Explain the 4-D approach (Discover, dream, design, destiny)
   
   c. benefits of using the AI model

2. Application to Nursing
   a. example of use in RN-BSN Leadership course
   
   b. BSN Essentials
   
   c. Use to transform the healthcare environment and a healthy workplace

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**Professional Experience:** Dr. Tiedt has 35 years’ experience in nursing from neonates to end-of-life care. Has 22 years’ experience in higher education teaching in undergraduate, graduate and doctoral nursing programs both on-ground and on-line. Has received several faculty teaching awards and continues to serve as a mentor to new faculty in the Department of Nursing. Areas of research include diabetes in Native Americans, cultural competency, nursing stress and burnout and online education.

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