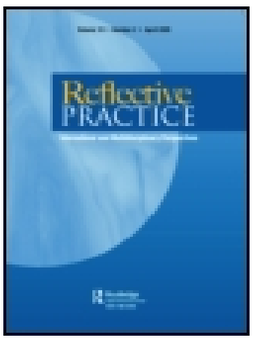

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Appreciative student voice model – reflecting on an appreciative inquiry research method for facilitating student voice processes

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to describe and discuss Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a research method to facilitate student voice in school research. The paper sets out a model for conducting AI in schools. The research questions identified are: What are the researcher's reflections when using Appreciative Inquiry in school research? What challenges and opportunities can be found when using Appreciative Inquiry in research processes with students? An application of the model will be presented and problematised. The conclusions indicate the importance of inviting students to participate in the process of defining research topics, and of using multimodal methods for facilitating students' exploration of school experiences. It is also vital that adults support students in imagining and articulating visions on how to improve the school, as well as plans designing for enacting visions. Finally, a 'whole school approach' is emphasised for contributing to sustainable appreciative student voice work in schools.

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Appreciative inquiry; student voice; research method; reflection; school improvement

Introduction

Educational research has a long-standing tradition of exploring contexts from an adult perspective. However, there has been increased interest in bringing forward students' perspectives, for example, through the body of research called 'student voice' (Mitra, 2004). This kind of research emphasises students' competences and abilities to contribute to research on a matter affecting them: their education. In addition, students' opportunities for participating in research processes are also part of this concept. Student voice can be used in research as well as school activities (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006).

There are many methods for research within schools. Identifying and analysing problems in schools represents a traditional research method (Reed, 2007). A problem-based methodology can be a restrictive starting point, as it focuses on fixing and getting rid of problems. The problems and negative feelings associated with them, might lead to distrust and resignation (Ghaye et al., 2008). In presenting another way of researching educational practices, we suggest – following Ghaye (2008) – an alternative to the

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widespread emphasis on methods exploring deficiencies. Instead, we propose the benefit of using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in educational research as suggested, for example, by Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011), Calabrese, San Martin, Glasgow, and Friesme (2008) and Willoughby and Tosey (2007). Research of this kind focuses on exploring the possibilities instead of the problems – identifying strengths and positive aspects – where the assets may function as reformulation of the current situation in order to find new ways for positive change, which support human flourishing and well-being (Ghaye et al., 2008).

The rationale behind using AI is founded on views that the world is socially constructed, complex and subjective, which leads to appreciating multiple possibilities and different ways for bringing about change. Problems can be solved through valuing the best of what is and envisioning how the future might look like. AI acknowledges the relational nature of the world, and therefore, collaboration and participation lie at the heart of processes (Bushe, 2011; Watkins Magruder, Mohr, & Kelly, 2011). AI can be seen both as a method for organisational improvement as well as a research method (Reed, 2007).

In this paper, we focus on *AI as research method* and the findings of the study presented here as an example is reported on in another article (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2017). The concept of AI revolves around two aspects: appreciation and inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). *Appreciate* means to value; to recognise the best in others and the world in which we live; to confirm strengths, successes, and opportunities; and to discover aspects that give life and health. *Inquiry* entails discovery and explorations, posing questions and being open to view new possibilities (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Originally, an AI process contained four phases – a 4-D cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). However, researchers have added one additional phase in the beginning of the process, making it a 5-D cycle (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011: Watkins Magruder et al., 2011): *Define, Discovery, Dream, Design*, and *Destiny*.

- Define: the process starts with agreeing on the topic for the inquiry – what people want to know more about from a strengths-based point of view.
- Discovery: discerning 'high points' of a context, what people value and discuss why situations are important.
- Dream: going beyond status quo and formulating visions and documenting future scenarios.
- Design: planning for improvement through setting goals, building on the previous two phases.
- Destiny: formulating activities contributing to reaching the goals and continuous development in alignment with the vision and values. An AI process can take many forms of expressions in different contexts (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins Magruder et al., 2011).

Over the years, since AI was developed in the 1980s, it has received critique. Bushe (2011) has reviewed the critique. For example, one problem that might occur is that the negative and problematic aspects of organisations are overlooked. Sometimes, discussions on, for example, injustice needs to take place, but these conversations are not

focused on in AI. Other problems entail that AI might reinforce a dualistic view of negative/positive experiences, therefore polarising experiences to these endpoints. This leads to a one-sided focus, and therefore, AI needs more reflexivity to avoid the either/or perspective. Moreover, as AI values relations and the interconnectedness between people, it has been described as a challenge to ensure that all people are involved and engaged in the process. Watkins Magruder et al. (2011) stress the importance of finding strategies for different voices to be heard, it is not created automatically, by itself. Further problematising of AI will continue when discussing the application of AI as a research method with students.

Aim and research questions

The aim of this paper is to describe and discuss AI as a research method to facilitate student voice in school research. The paper sets out a model for conducting AI in schools. The research questions identified are: What are the researchers' reflections when using AI in school research? What challenges and opportunities can be found when using AI in research processes with students? An application of the model will be presented and problematised.

Appreciative student voice model

Our research model *Appreciative student voice model* (ASVM), builds on the body of research in two areas, namely student voice and AI, and it has been employed in empirical research with students as described and examined in the following model (Figure 1). The model should be seen as inspiration for facilitating student voice processes with AI and not a recipe to follow slavishly. In this paper, we focus on the research process, but it can be used in teaching as well if it is modified to the specific context. We acknowledge that considering the context is important; any model must be applied to – and adapted to – the context at hand. The activities described and reflected on in this paper are our own experiences and should be seen as examples; the procedures of an appreciative student voice model can differ, but have the same goal of facilitating student voice and students' active participation in the research process.

Theoretical underpinnings of the appreciative student voice model

In the ASVM, there are four central theoretical underpinnings: student experience, student-based practical advice and activities, student-based reform work in classroom, and sustained student voice (see Figure 1). On a basic level in student voice processes, adults invite students to talk about their experiences on different topics (Kostenius & Bergmark, 2016). The first aspect in ASVM is *student experiences*, corresponds to the AI 'define' and 'discovery' phases. This aspect focuses on curiosity and openness from researchers in exploring student experiences. Rudduck (2007) argues that researching student experience can enable understanding of how learning – or other aspects in school – are constituted from the perspective of different students or groups of students. It is fruitful to explore students' experiences – not solely their opinions,

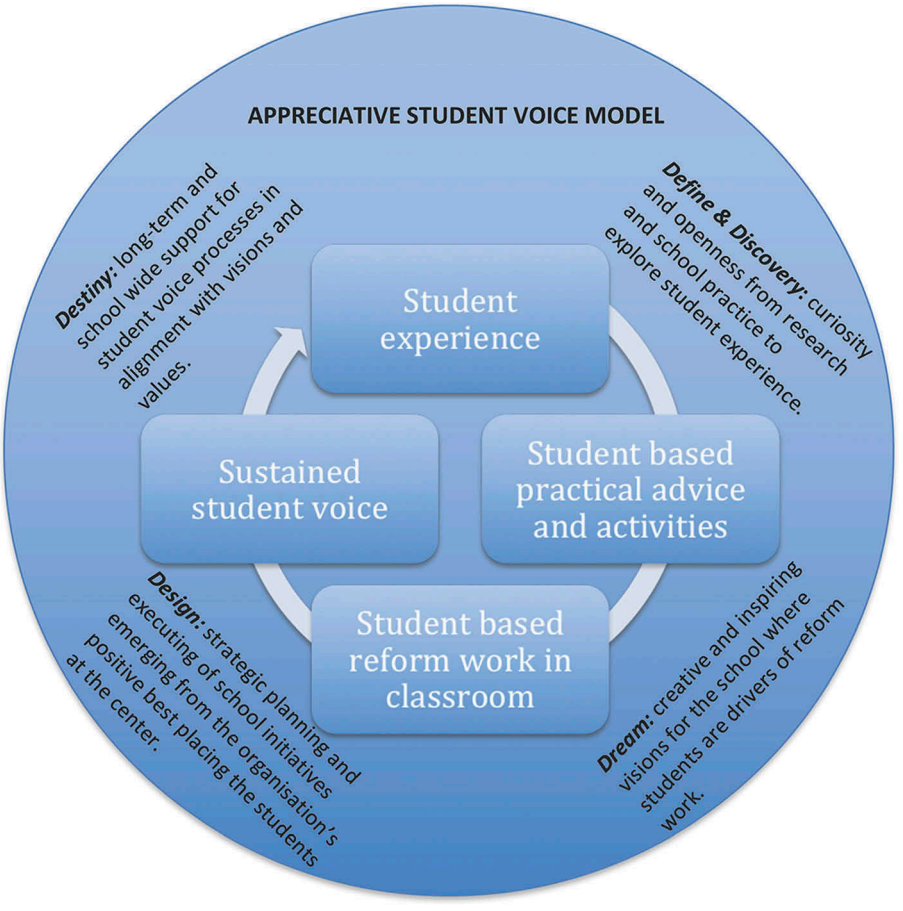

Figure 1. Appreciative student voice model.

perceptions, and views – paying close attention to what students really have experienced in life (Van Manen, McClelland, & Plihal, 2007).

The second aspect of the ASVM is *student-based practical advice and activities*, corresponds to the AI 'dream' phase. This aspect focuses on creative and inspiring visions for the school, where students are the driving force behind reform work. Mitra (2004) claims that besides exploring student experience, student voice can also involve adults listening to students' experiences and opinions on matters that are important to them. This means that adults consult students and value their input. Students have a unique viewpoint that neither teachers nor other adults in a school can simply assume (Levin, 2000). Listening to student feedback is one way to engage students in the wider school community and to increase their ownership of their schools (Mitra, 2004). When students participate in decision-making in schools, they learn about and apply civic procedures, which is important for living in a democratic society (Alerby & Bergmark, 2015).

The third aspect of the ASVM is *student-based reform work in classroom*, corresponds to the AI 'design' phase. This aspect focuses on strategic planning and execution of school initiatives emerging from the organisation's positive best, and places the

students at the centre. In student voice processes, students can also have an active role, contributing to reform work (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2009; Mitra, 2004). It is important to emphasise students' ability to be involved in change, and that they are given the opportunity to participate more frequently (Rudduck, 2007).

The fourth aspect of the ASVM is *sustained student voice*, corresponds to the AI 'destiny' phase. This aspect focuses on long-term, school-wide support for student voice processes in alignment with visions and values. School leaders and teachers have vital roles in sustaining student voice initiatives in schools. Some aspects of sustaining student voice initiatives – for example, having a clear vision of student voice incorporated deeply in the school's day-to-day operations, and letting teachers shape their teaching according to their own teaching philosophy and the vision of student voice (Mitra, Serriere, & Stoicovy, 2012) – have a definite impact. In addition, it is also important to consider that how teachers implement a vision of student voice in the school will vary across contexts, thus discouraging a one-size-fits-all approach (Brezicha, Bergmark, & Mitra, 2015).

An application of the appreciative student voice model

The development of the appreciative student voice model

The Appreciative Student Voice Model was developed by the authors of the paper, based on previous literature on student voice and AI. The model was further developed through application in a school context by us as researchers, as well as by teachers and students, in a process of school improvement. The authors continuously made reflections during the development of the model. Accordingly, the ASVM is not only based on research but has been put into practice in school. In the following section, we will present and discuss the model.

Context of the research and participants

This study was part of an international EU funded project with the purpose to promote health and well-being in children and youth in the Barents region focusing on empowering processes. Researchers, school staff, students, and parents from Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden participated. We were invited to come to one of the two participating municipalities in the northern region of Sweden based on the Head of Schools interest in psychosocial aspects of educational practice. The engagement in such questions were also expressed by the principal and teachers in the chosen school, which was situated in a village in northern Sweden with approximately 1700 inhabitants. In the school with about 110 students attending preschool class to grade 6, the students in grade 3 were invited to partake. Of the 16 students (10–11 years of age), 15 agreed to partake in the study and their parents gave their informed consent. This study, conducted from 2014 to 2015, aimed at exploring students' experiences of meaningful school situations and how these experiences could guide educational improvement. The project was approved by the Regional Ethics Review Board (2013). One report on the study, which focused on the content of students' meaningful school experiences, has appeared in publication (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2017). In this paper, the emphasis is on methodological issues, relating to AI and student voice.

The students made drawings, multimodal productions (digital narratives, posters and skits); the first author interviewed the students and recorded field notes. An overview of the theoretical underpinnings (student voice concepts), activities and outcomes in the

Table 1. Overview of the theoretical underpinnings, activities and outcomes of the 5D cycle.

Student voice concepts	5D phase	Activity	Outcome
Student experience	Define	Researchers present topic based on previous research	Research based on students' perspectives
Student experience	Discovery	Drawings and discussion Multimodal productions Individual interviews Data analysis with students	Four themes about meaningful situations: * Growing and achieving * Learning in different places and spaces * Being free and having fun * Sharing and caring
Student-based practical advice and activities	Dream	Letter to student teacher Share the dream with others	Practical advice and activities for further development
Student-based reform work in classroom	Design	Activities with the classroom teacher	Real impact in the classroom
Sustained student voice	Destiny	Tell the researchers about future plans	Pass it forward, sustainable student voice, implications

5D cycle is given below (Table 1). The first author participated in all phases of the process, and the second author participated on two occasions during classroom work and when meeting teachers and parents. Both authors reflected on the research process and analysed the data, thus contributing to the development of the ASVM.

Define

In the define phase, the aim was to emphasise and build on student experience. The first author presented a topic for the study: 'meaningful school situations' for the classroom teacher. When the first author met the students, they learnt about the topic. The outcome of this phase was conducting research based on the students' perspectives. When studying qualitative data of meaningful situations – what students' value, appreciate, and find important for their learning and development – it is essential to discern the root causes of why a situation is perceived as meaningful (Reed, 2007). Both researchers also met with the students' parents to inform them about the study, allowing them to ask questions and getting to know us a bit.

Researchers' reflections and critical review. The topic 'meaningful school situations' was chosen for the project based on previous educational research that emphasised the need for studying qualitative school data – for example, students' own experiences of schooling, as well as for researching aspects in schools that students find positive for learning (Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2004). In hindsight, the students should have had a more active role in negotiating and defining the topic, in order to foster engagement in line with Cook-Sather's (2009) argument for including students in supporting school reform efforts. Our inclusion of participants was to some extent sufficient, however, as our choice of topic was firmly grounded in the needs of school practice: the principal and the classroom teachers had expressed interest in the research topic. Parents were also invited to participate in a meeting with both researchers. However, to truly ensure that students have a say in matters concerning them – as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) – an invitation from the very start of the research project would have been preferable. One opportunity to do so could have been during the meeting the parents were invited to. Additionally, we found in our own earlier studies that when students are included in a social context and able to feel part of the 'we',

they thrive in school (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009). Bushe (2011) explains that the participatory aspect is common in conventional organisation development but generally involves a small group of stakeholders speaking and acting on behalf of those not included. 'AI, in contrast, seeks to uncover and stimulate new ideas from stakeholders … Ideally, all stakeholders participate in gathering and making sense of the ideas and views of other stakeholders and participate as theorists, dreamers and designers' (p.7). Based on our experience, we identified one major challenge: ensuring that students' participation at the very beginning of a project is not overlooked while planning the research and getting it accepted on so many organisational levels (for example, the financial sponsor, the university, the school organisation, the municipality, and the ethical vetting committee).

Discovery

In the discovery phase, the aim was also to emphasise and build on student experience. The activities consisted of making drawings, discussions, multimodal productions and individual interviews. This phase focused especially on how students portrayed the meaningful situations.

The first author met the students in their classroom, explaining the purpose of the study and what research in schools is about in general. All activities aimed for elucidating students' experiences of meaningful school situations ('high points') and reflecting on them through different methods. To facilitate students' understanding of the topic of the study, the first author facilitated a discussion with the students on the meaning of the words 'meaningful situations'. The students gave synonyms like 'important' and 'care about' (field notes). They also defined the words by explaining the opposite: 'don't care' and 'ignore something or someone' (field notes). At this initial stage, they gave examples of meaningful aspects in school: 'friendship', 'having fun', 'scoring a goal in soccer', 'playground' and 'completing the math book' (field notes). After that initial discussion, the students were given the following task:

(1) Work in pairs.
(2) Try to remember some meaningful situations in school. What happened? Who was involved? Why do you think you remember it? Did you learn something? If so, what? How did you feel? Tell each other.
(3) Draw pictures about the situation.

All students discussed meaningful situations with their friends and then individually made drawings depicting the events. The first author and the classroom teacher supported the students in their drawing process, asking open questions like: 'Can you remember an important situation where somebody cared for you?', 'Who were you with?', and 'How did you feel at that time?'.

The next step occurred two weeks later (still in the discovery phase). The students were given a new task: create a multimodal production, still depicting meaningful situations in school. They could work with the same event that they drew the pictures about, or choose a new one if they preferred that. They could pick from these methods: digital narrative, photo exhibit, movie, song, poem, dance, skit, or poster. They ended up creating digital narratives, skits, and posters.

The first author interviewed all students individually. The interviews took place in an adjacent room to their ordinary classroom. The drawings functioned as starting point for the interview. Follow up questions were: 'Can you explain what you have drawn?', 'Where were you, what did you do, who was there?', 'Why do you think you remember this situation?', 'How did you feel at that time?', and 'What do you think you learned?'. The interviews lasted from 2 to 13 minutes and transcribed verbatim.

The data analysis done by both authors resulted in four themes: growing and achieving; learning in different spaces; being free and having fun; and sharing and caring. At a meeting in the school, the students had the opportunity to discuss and respond to our analysis. For each theme, the students provided additional examples of meaningful situations.

During the project the first author asked the students what they thought they learned through working with meaningful situations in school. Some students responded as follows:

Researcher: What can be learned through talking about meaningful events? You have been writing and now you are producing a lot of things. Why are we doing this?
Student 1: For our project.
Researcher: What do you mean?
Student 1: I don't know.
Student 2: Yes, because you want to know how it is in school for us and some fun situations we've experienced in school. You want to know what we think about school.
Researcher: What is the benefit of knowing what you think about the school?
Student 3: How you can improve it (fieldnotes).

This dialogue pinpoints the fact that elucidating meaningful situations can contribute to school improvement, but it also addressed the fact that all students were not totally aware of why we were doing these activities.

The outcome of this phase was obtaining four qualitative themes that encompass students' experiences of meaningful situations in schools. The outcomes were then used in subsequent activities with the students, thus becoming a driving force for school improvement in the classroom.

Researchers' reflections and critical review. In the discovery phase, the main challenge was the lack of experience of an appreciative thought process among teachers and students equally. To overcome this obstacle, the power of positive questions was utilised in line with Ghaye et al. (2008). Questions posed in an appreciative direction were helpful, as some of the students found it especially challenging to identify meaningful school situations. Using a multimodal approach was another way of enhancing the AI process. According to Wennås Brante (2014) and Holsanova (2012), a multimodal approach strives to go beyond language to activate our senses (taste, smell, sight, hearing, and touch) and can be seen as an alternative mode for communicating meaning. To warm up to the topic of meaningful school situations, the students were invited to draw a picture; they were then free to choose the way in which they wanted to further explore and present their experiences. The time aspect seemed to play an

important role for the success of the project – especially in the discovery phase, as the process of appreciative thought required practice. Time for reflection is necessary, echoing Barnett and O'Mahony (2006), who underline the need for creating a culture of reflection – both individual and collective – on student learning. The authors brought forward the significance of school leaders and teachers facilitating reflection, which we also find crucial. However, in line with student voice literature (for example, Cook-Sather, 2002; Rudduck, 2007), we also want to stress the students' perspectives, which in this case means actively promoting their own reflections on life in school. Reflection on practice carried out by teachers and students – and in our case, also together with us as researchers – can in itself be empowering, as the reflection relates to lived experiences (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998). Such reflection creates possibilities for re-framing existing situations (Ghaye, 2008).

Dream

In the dream phase, the aim was to create student-based practical advice and activities. There were two activities: (1) 'Letter to student teacher' and (2) 'Who do you want to tell about your dream?' In the first activity, the first author read a fictive letter from a student teacher:

> My name is Linnea and I am in the final semester of the teacher education program. I have heard from my university teacher that you have worked on meaningful encounters and events in school. You have created works of art, performed theatre, made PowerPoint presentations, and talked about the events. How interesting that sounds! I will soon start working as a teacher, it feels so exciting! I will be with students like you every day at school! I think it's hard to know what you as students think is important in school, so therefore I have a small task for you! Why don't you write me a letter in which you give me advice on how I should be as a teacher, based on what you find is meaningful and good in your class? How would you like it to be in the classroom, on the playground? What is important to you? You may also give tips on what activities you think I should do with my students. Because I like pictures, it would be fun if you also draw a picture in your letter to me!

The students then responded to this task, writing letters to the teacher student accompanied by drawings, which resulted in poster presentations. These posters were then subsequently shown to the first author's student teachers.

In the second activity, 'Share the dream with others', the students were asked to look at their meaningful experiences they discovered and reflect on who they wanted to tell about their experiences and visions. They listed parents, teachers, local and national politicians (fieldnotes). The outcomes of this phase were practical advice and activities for further development.

Researchers' reflections and critical review. The dream phase focuses on visions of the topic at hand, which according to Kurland, Peretz, and Hertz-Lazarowitz (2010) increase motivation.

> Creative tension comes from seeing clearly where we want to be, our 'vision', and telling the truth about where we are, our 'current reality'. With creative tension, the energy for change comes from the vision, from what we want to create, juxtaposed with current reality. With creative tension, the motivation is intrinsic (p.8).

Dreaming and wishing freely can be a way to go about forming a vision, yet it can be perceived as a challenging task. The researchers and the teachers worked together as partners with the students to help them 'think outside the box', as Jordan and Thatchenkery (2011) describe it. Changing perspective was used as a way to introduce the students to a position where they had the power to not only envision the work in the classroom but also had a mandate (though an imaginary one) to make decisions for positive change. This activity gave them an opportunity to imagine that they could give advice to the student teacher about how they wanted her to teach and to build a learning environment in and outside the classroom. Accordingly, the responses in fictional letters represented a way for the students' voices to be heard as 'real' student teachers received their advice. Based on our experiences in the classroom, we suggest helping the visionary process with an assignment anchored in the reality of the context, thus permitting the participants to take on an empowering role. We found, however, that the students' visions were achievable and close to their 'current reality', which may imply that it was difficult for them to 'think out of the box'. In a study about children's dream school it seemed like the children were able to become 'dreamers'. Each child was interviewed with their drawings as the point of departure; questions were asked to widen the scope of the child's visionary ideas by for example asking 'What is this?' (pointing at a detail in the drawing) and 'What do you think about that?' in order to show interest in their dream and support the child in talking about their visionary ideas (Kostenius, 2011). A conversation appreciating the child's contribution and probing into the drawing, or multimodal productions with focus on *unfolding the dream* may help the students become more visionary.

Design

The aim of the design phase was to facilitate student-based reform work in the classroom. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) note that brainstorming is a central aspect when designing for the dreams. Based on the four themes of meaningful situations that students had experienced and wanted more of, they and the classroom teacher discussed different ideas, planned, and completed practical activities in the classroom. In one email we received, the teacher described some of the activities they performed after the students talked about their meaningful situations. Examples of activities included more field trips and practical work connected to different teaching units. They went into the woods exploring traces of natural forces – for example, frost heaves and erosion. In relation to their work on sustainable development, the class went with their teacher to the recycling unit in their village, talking about how to recycle. In addition, the class participated in a competition, 'the battery treasure', a successful unit with a lot of practical work where the class counted and weighed their collected batteries (teacher email).

The outcome of this phase was real impact in the classroom based on the students' own experiences of meaningful situations they wanted to see more of in the school.

Researchers' reflections and critical review. As said earlier, the students were quite realistic in the dream phase; the design of their dreams therefore also lay close to their current reality. It was a challenge not only to enable the students to 'think out of the box', but also to 'design out of the box'. In this process, support from adults is important

as the students are not always used to taking the lead, which they were asked to do in this research process (Brady, 2006). Together with the teachers, we researchers saw ourselves as catalysts in the research process, supporting students where they needed help. Analysis of the data revealed to us that the students may have needed additional support in the dream and design phases, in order to enable them to think and act even more creatively. Helping the students to *unfold their dream*, as mentioned above, may help the students not only become more visionary but also enable them to discuss how their dream can be achieved – a sort of dream-reality travel. A question like 'If this is your dream, what do you think needs to take place/to be done for it to come true?' may help to unlock the dream path.

Destiny

The aim of the destiny phase was to foster a sustained student voice. Activities were 'Tell the researchers' and 'Skype meeting with student teachers'. The students had the opportunity to tell the researchers what they had done since their last visit, relating to the meaningful situations they had identified and wanted to amplify. The students also reflected together with the teacher on how they would continue their work at school. In addition, the students also received responses on the letter they wrote to the fictive student teacher: real letters written by the first author's student teachers. In addition, the first author organised a Skype meeting between the elementary school students and the student teachers. The young students prepared questions for the student teachers, for example: 'Where do you live?', 'When do you start school in the morning?', 'How old are you?', and 'What is a good teacher according to you?' (fieldnotes). In addition to these two student activities, the researchers gave feedback on the research process to all the school's teachers, not just the two teachers who had been involved in the classroom activities. The intent was to spread the word about students' meaningful situations in this particular school, thus potentially inspiring additional teachers to incorporate students' experiences into their teaching and thereby facilitating school improvement.

Researchers' reflections and critical review. In the destiny phase, the goal is to connect student voice to the school's systematic improvement work. We experienced differing levels of interest among the school staff in the research project about meaningful school situations; both classroom teachers directly involved, however, were engaged in the project. Equally, support from the principal helped endorse the project. Shuaye (2014) concludes that successful implementation of AI requires commitment from the decision-makers who have the authority and power to implement the visions of the stakeholders. Under ideal circumstances, the results could have been presented to the decision-makers in the municipality so when the researchers left the school the AI work would continue. The young students were thus given the opportunity to meet student teachers through letters and online conversations, fostering a feeling that their voices are valued by adults. In addition, the student teachers received first-hand school experiences that could inform their future teacher role.

Schools with school leaders and teachers who advocate for AI and student voice will facilitate opportunities for including students, but other schools with less enthusiastic teachers and principals will not. Kidd and Czerniawski (2011) suggest implementing student voice in school activities that empowering students by placing emphasis on

relationships between different groups in schools: students, teachers and the administration. Further, Jordan and Thatchenkery (2011) noted that leadership based on AI helps schools thrive when including motivational aspects, removing barriers that hindered staff in performing their daily job tasks; 'the leader empowered and included all to share' (p.189). The pivotal role of the principal in advocating for student voice initiatives is further emphasised by Mitra et al. (2012). One successful strategy for enabling student voice was that the principal, together with the teachers, formulated a school vision and implemented it in practice. Other strategies were the principal encouraging teachers' opportunities to 'shape their teaching to align with their own talents and student needs' (p. 107) and that the principal understood that implementation of a vision – in this case, enabling student voice initiatives – would look different across contexts in the school. This understanding opened the way for the teachers' own autonomy in the implementation. Enactment of a vision can be compared to the 'whole school approach' based on empowerment, endorsed by research as a way to improve different aspects in schools (Thomas & Aggleton, 2016). A whole school approach means looking beyond formal, curriculum-based education to consider the interdependence of the school organisation, structures, procedures, and ethos, and its relationships with families and the wider community in order to align physical, social and cultural settings with educational activities (Thomas & Aggleton, 2016).

Conclusions and recommendations

When developing the Appreciative Student Voice Model, we have drawn conclusions that can serve as recommendations for other researchers interested in using the model. We have discovered both challenges and opportunities when using Appreciative Inquiry in research processes with students. In the *define* phase, one challenge was that the students had limited influence on defining the topic. Next time we use the model, we will strengthen students' perspectives in this phase. At the same time, however, it is important to emphasise that topics for studies need to be aligned to what needs to be researched, as identified in previous literature. It is about negotiating between matters that are important to students and research interests on a more general level.

One challenge in the *discovery* phase was getting the students to reflect on meaningful experiences, as they seemed somewhat unused to such reflection. However, our multimodal research design and the fairly long time span of the research process contributed to the exploration of meaningful school experiences. The descriptions of the experiences were both deepened and broadened over time.

In the *dream* and *design* phases, one challenge was enabling the students to 'think and act out of the box'. The students presented realistic wishes and practical activities regarding what they wanted more of in school, which indicated that they were not engaged in visionary thinking beyond the perceived norms of how school should be. This can also be seen as an opportunity, however, since it is possible to implement the students' wishes and practical activities in school, which will foster a feeling among the students that they have a say in matters affecting them.

Lastly, one challenge in the *destiny* phase, was creating sustainable appreciative student voice work in the school, after the researchers had left the site. Support from different levels

of the organisation is needed: the administration, the teachers, and the students themselves. As stated in the beginning of the paper, AI can be carried out as both a research method (which we have explored here) and a method for school improvement. Teachers who participate in such a research process are given resources and experience in facilitating school improvement processes themselves, learning from the research processes.

To summarise, we find it important to invite students to participate in the process of defining research topics and to use multimodal methods to facilitate students' exploration of school experiences. It is also vital that adults support students in dreaming and articulating visions on how to improve the school as well as designing for enacting visions. Lastly, a 'whole school approach' is emphasised in contributing to sustainable appreciative student voice work in schools.

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