

Paper Abstracts

Suzanne Grant – This paper introduces a conceptual framework to demonstrate how application of critical appreciative processes can assist our understanding of concepts and contexts. Drawing on the social construction of social enterprise as the example, the potential paradox between ‘social’ and ‘enterprise’ is examined through a critical appreciative lens; in this instance considering the 4D cycle of appreciative inquiry as well as Habermas’ theory of communicative action. Through such analysis key themes such as policy capture, heroic and deliverance claims and increased marketization are identified as shaping our understanding of social enterprise.

Graham Duncan - This paper describes a three-year action research project that used Appreciative Inquiry to work with marginalised Pakistani women living in Sheffield. The research encountered many of the difficulties and dilemmas that have been previously identified in the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry. However it was also successful in bringing about a significant transformation in the ability of participants to develop critical thinking; enabling them to subvert and challenge the identities that had been constructed for them by sources of power within their community and culture. The paper describes the innovative application of Appreciative Inquiry whilst bringing a new theoretical perspective which responds to the need for Appreciative Inquiry to critically address issues of power as it plays out in the life of a community.

Rory Ridley-Duff - Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was developed in the late 1980s as a process to encourage social innovation by involving people in discovering the ‘best of what is’. Recent research has suggested that AI practitioners’ focus on positivity is now inhibiting AI’s focus on generative theory. This paper responds by asking the question “what is critical appreciation?”, then seeks answers by studying the critical turn in a Big Lottery Research project. By tracking the narratives of research assistants (RAs) as they describe the ‘life worlds’ and ‘systems’ in their community, we clarify the recursive processes that lead to deeper levels of appreciation. We contribute to the development of critical appreciative processes (CAPs) that start with a critical inquiry (CI) to deconstruct experience and then engage critical appreciative processes during the remainder of the AI cycle to construct new experiences. The initial CI establishes which system imperatives colonise the life world of participants whilst subsequent critical-appreciative processes build participants’ aspirations to design new social systems.