

Re-Storying School Culture Through Appreciative Inquiry

Authors : Allison Tucker, Carolyn Clarke

Abstract : This study arose from the understanding that school cultures are shaped by the stories of school as known by teachers, students, and families. These sometimes-conflicting stories, based on a myriad of influences, present challenges to school culture. Layered on stories of school are the policies, developed often from central jurisdictional agencies, that direct schools on their daily operations from things such as curriculum to schedules and school calendars. This study investigates the stories of one Canadian school with the teachers, students, and families of the community. Using appreciative inquiry to consider the influence stories of school have on the ways policies are interpreted and lived in their school community, participants interrogate the stories that currently overarch the school community, and explore ways they might actively foster a school community whose lived experience aligns with what they dream for their schools. Paradigmatic analysis was used to reveal commonalities in participant responses. The findings of the study indicate that schools face challenges in creating a cohesive school community due to related to conflicting interpretations of school stories and the attempts to integrate jurisdictional policies in ways that reflect and make sense in their communities. Differing beliefs about the structure of school, misalignment in what was felt was the purpose of school, diverse understandings of curriculum, and even disparities regarding what the role of each group was in the school community, all create barriers to the creation of a well-connected school community that shares a common purpose. Results from the study, assist the school community to more effectively respond to the impacts that stories from the community and factors external to the school have on the community, and by extension the daily lived experiences of teachers and students in the school. It also offers other school communities a framework through which they could respond sensitively to the lived experience and stories of the teachers, students, and families of their schools.

Keywords : school community, appreciative inquiry, school policy, school culture

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