

Appreciative inquiry asks a simple question, “How can we be better?” In a sense, this question is all that really matters. Children go to school to be better people, people go to work to build better lives, and we’re all on this path of betterment together. Surprisingly, though, very few groups are able to ask, or answer, this question. So how can we be better at getting better?

In a classroom, for example, as teachers we know that we could create a better learning environment and a stronger community. We may even have some ideas of how to accomplish these goals. But, there are papers to grade and lessons to plan. Sometimes you just have to decide that it’s good enough.

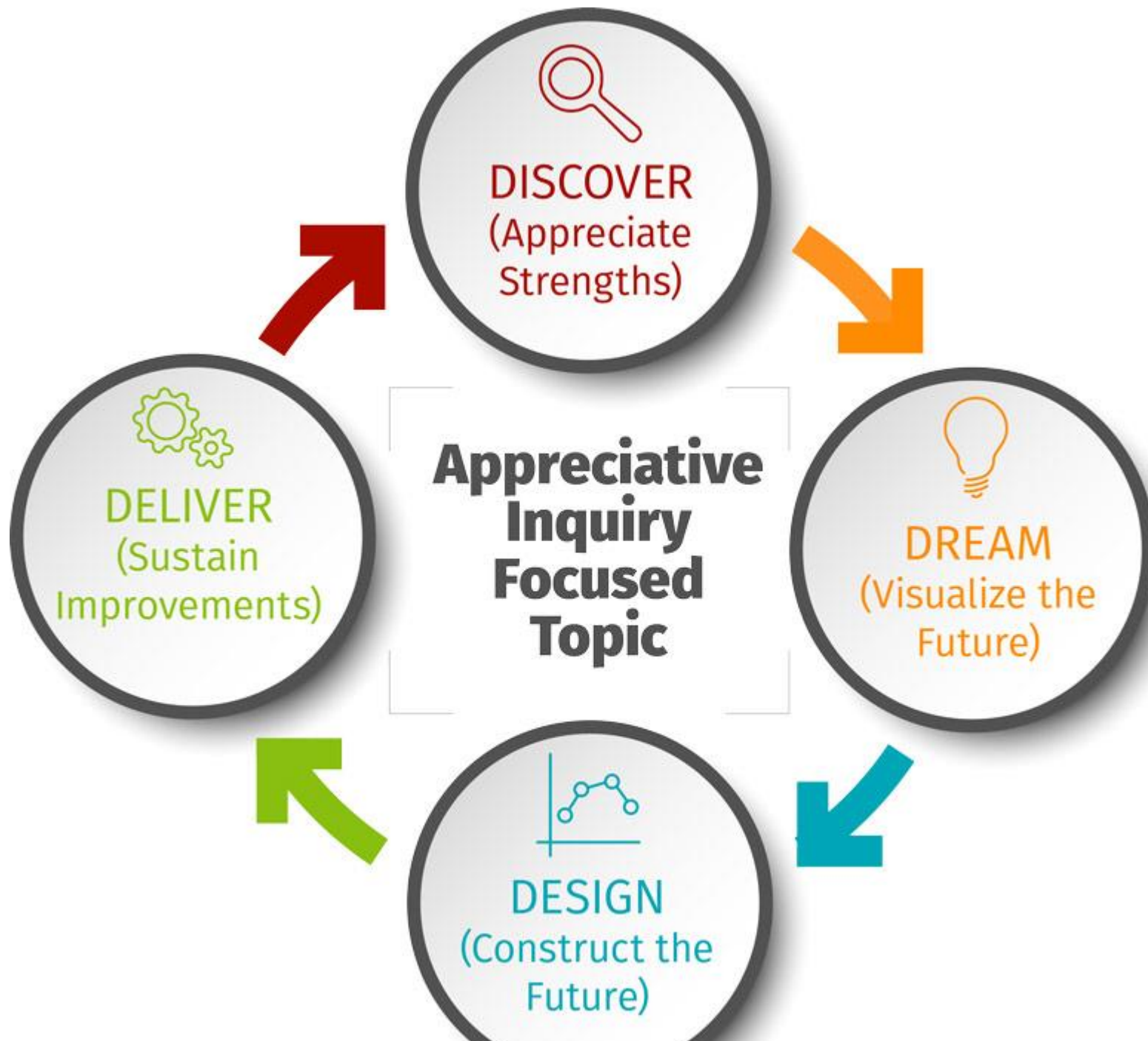
Appreciative inquiry is a proven process that empowers any group to find what’s working, create an ideal vision for the group, and design a way to get there together.

You may think that sounds like a lot of work, but I’m here to tell you that teaching appreciative inquiry is totally worth your time. In fact, because appreciative inquiry makes groups like classrooms more effective, the time you spend teaching appreciative inquiry will be made up and then some.

When you ask your students, “How can we be a better classroom?” you might be amazed to see that nearly all your students have great ideas for improvement. What’s even more amazing, though, is that you’ll find that your students take on a sense of ownership over the classroom. When you ask your students to help you make the classroom better, they feel a greater sense of ownership, which leads to higher engagement and achievement.

Appreciative inquiry identifies the strengths of a group and then pushes the group to develop ways to capitalize on those assets. With this [growth mindset](#), a group of students can find unique solutions to challenges instead of dwelling on them.

So how do you teach appreciative inquiry? It’s all about the 4 D’s.



Appreciative Inquiry: Discover, Dream, Design, Destiny.

#### Discover

The first phase of appreciative inquiry is to discover what's working. A class can accomplish this by creating a list of peak moments in the history of the group. When did the classroom feel the most energized and focused? What were some moments of great joy?

The important part of this phase is that the group focuses on the positive. When one student shares a story about a personal success, the rest of the class should validate that achievement. In this way individual appreciation becomes collective appreciation. During the discovery phase, you and your classroom are creating a list of strengths, but you're also building rapport. You're looking back at past accomplishments and saying, "hey, we're pretty cool. We can do awesome things."

#### Dream

Once you and your classroom have discovered your positivity, now it's time to dream about what's possible. This is really where appreciative inquiry hinges on the collective creativity of the group. Keeping in mind all of your students' successes, ask yourselves what might make you an even better classroom.

The dreaming phase really hinges on the group's excitement about what's possible. [What does the ideal classroom look like for each student? What does the ideal classroom look like for you as a teacher or administrator? How might your classroom's improvement improve the whole school, the community, even the world?](#) The sky's the limit here and there is no dream that's too ambitious or idealistic to share in this phase.



Dream big.

Design

Now it's time to wake up from the dream and make it a reality. With your classroom vision becoming more concrete, you and your students must design concrete activities that will move you towards your collective vision of the ideal classroom.

In the school setting, these ideas will often take the form of the delegation of certain responsibilities to students. As teachers relinquish control of certain responsibilities, it not only frees them up to focus on teaching, but it gets students more involved. With the creation of this new community-driven learning, students are invested and teachers aren't burned out. During the design phase, we encourage you and your students to brainstorm ways that the group can work together to learn more and achieve their vision from the dream phase.





Students working

together.

## Destiny

The final stage of appreciative inquiry is when you and your students commit to the aspirations that you agreed on. The key here is sustaining the energy and inspiration that you built up during the discover and dream phases.

During the destiny phase, it's helpful to categorize some of the actionable items that you developed during the Destiny phase. This will help you and your students craft concrete roles for themselves moving forward.

The Destiny phase may not have a concrete end. During this final phase, you will be continuously learning, adjusting, and improvising, staying focused on your collective strengths and vision for the future. It's an ongoing process that will inevitably bring you back to the beginning as you discover what's working from your appreciative inquiry, develop new dreams, and design revised processes.

The strengths-based approach of appreciative inquiry has been shown to ["increase positive feelings, the positive talk ratio, and make generative thinking and acting more likely"](#) (Bushe, 2007). With your students, you will learn to approach learning as a collaborative process in which everyone has a say in how things are done. Appreciative inquiry offers us an opportunity to truly collaborate towards a better future within the classroom and beyond.