

APPRECIATIVE ADMINISTRATION: HOW THE APPRECIATIVE EDUCATION  
THEORY-TO-PRACTICE FRAMEWORK IS BEING INFUSED INTO HIGHER  
EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

by

Meagan Elsberry

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of

College of Education

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Jennifer L. Bloom, Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, and has been approved by all members of the supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dr. Bloom, the course of my life changed when I met you. You truly walk the Appreciative talk. Over these past few years, you continue to show me kindness, a double-dog dare to try something, opportunities to grow professionally, and opened my eyes to a new community of practitioners that value the importance of kindness and relationship building. You spend a lot of your free time and weekends working with your students, including myself, and being “bloomed” was something I looked forward to because it was coming from a place of love and took my work to the next level. I consider you and Steve family (so you can’t get rid of me once this doctoral journey comes to an end), and I can honestly say that if it were not for your encouragement and kindness I would not have finished this program.

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During the second half of my doctoral journey, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic shed a light on how important relationships were. You could no longer meet up once a month for dinner to catch up but had to become creative with technology to stay connected. During this time, I was thankful for friends that would still continue to check-in. My dear friend Sandy Chan made sure that we caught up over Zoom once a month, to not only talk about work and school, but also check in on each other as friends. I appreciated this opportunity to vent, get life advice, and most

importantly laugh. I am so thankful that these check-in dinners have continued and now moved to being in person.

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### **Participants**

I was blown away by the immediate response to my request for interviews with people. The world was just a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic and people were eager to assist in my research. What is hard to portray in this dissertation is the smiles that always met me on Zoom. Participants were so kind, caring, and thoughtful in their responses to my questions. I left every interview in awe of the amazing work, even in challenging circumstances, that was being done by people in higher education. As I learned more about how they were using Appreciative Education I would pick up pieces

from each person that challenged me to do and be better. My participants inspired me to finish this study, and for that, I will be forever grateful.

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## ABSTRACT

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Title: Appreciative Administration: How the Appreciative Education Theory-to-Practice Framework is Being Infused into Higher Education Administrative Practices

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This qualitative grounded theory study updated the framework, including a definition, of Appreciative Administration. Bloom et al. (2013) first introduced the concept of Appreciative Education in a *New Directions for Student Services* article. Appreciative Education's framework is harnessed by the power of the organizational development theory of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), the relationship-building theory-to-practice framework of Appreciative Advising (Bloom & Martin, 2002; Bloom et al., 2008), and an Appreciative Mindset. Bloom and McClellan (2016) coined the phrase Appreciative Administration to describe how higher education administrators could lead their organizations by harnessing the power of Appreciative Education. To date, there is no research on how higher education administrators are using Appreciative Education in their administrative practices.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily

administrative practices. The study included 21 professionals, who met the following criteria: (1) had at least one full-time person reporting to them; (2) had participated in a formal Appreciative Education training. The experiences of the 21 study participants were captured through semi-structured 60-minute Zoom interviews. Subsequently, eight of the 21 participants participated in a focus group via Zoom to provide feedback on the study's initial themes and sub-themes. Data was analyzed through three rounds of coding: (1) initial coding, (2) focused coding, and (3) theoretical coding.

Three themes emerged from the analysis to develop the updated framework for Appreciative Administration showing how higher education administrators are infusing Appreciative Education into their daily administrative practices: establish trusting relationships, foster relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals, and “positive restlessness” (Kuh et al., 2005). After synthesis, I offer a new definition of Appreciative Administration. Appreciative Administration is, “fundamentally situated as a human experience and involves the intentional, consistent, and aspirational practice of establishing trusting relationships in which team members’ strengths and skills are identified and leveraged to co-create and achieve personal and organizational goals.”

The findings of this grounded theory study may be helpful for higher education institutions and administrators looking for a framework to lead their institutions. This study may also inform administrators with information about how to provide professional development, recognize employees, create policy changes, make time to build trusting relationships, and develop pockets of greatness.

*Keywords: Appreciative Administration, Appreciative Education, grounded theory, higher education*

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, friends, and all those that strive each day to make the world a little kinder.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

According to Godwin (2021), “In order to thrive in today’s disruptive world, leaders must adopt a reinvention mindset that ensures all stakeholders are involved in and committed to co-creating improvements for today and tomorrow” (para. 18). The COVID-19 pandemic that was officially declared in March 2020 has disrupted nearly every industry. Godwin (2021) noted, “Leading in these turbulent times requires not only embracing change but fundamentally rethinking it. . . . Leaders are realizing that the classic theories and models of change are no longer sufficient to address the sustained change in our modern world” (para. 2). Today’s leaders of higher educational institutions are tasked with devising creative solutions to issues they face while performing their duties under formidable circumstances. Although the challenges facing university administrators are significant, so are the opportunities (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). In a fast-changing and turbulent fiscal environment that demands higher education administrators to be creative and innovative, it can be challenging to do so when an organization focuses solely on the challenges being faced instead of the opportunities. Rosenthal (2009), cited in his *New York Times Magazine* article that Stanford economist Paul Romer said in 2004, “A crisis is a terrible thing to waste” (para. 2).

### **Background of the Study**

Bloom et al. (2013) introduced the concept of Appreciative Education in a *New Directions for Student Services* article. The authors described Appreciative Education as

a way to “deliver high-quality education on both an individual and organizational level. It provides an intentional and positive approach to bettering educational enterprises by focusing on the strengths and potential of individuals and organizations to accomplish co-created goals” (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 5).

Appreciative administrators can harness the power of Appreciative Education’s framework by combining the organizational development theory of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), the relationship-building theory-to-practice framework of Appreciative Advising (Bloom & Martin, 2002; Bloom et al., 2008), and an Appreciative Mindset. By harnessing the power of Appreciative Education, Bloom and McClellan (2016) coined the phrase Appreciative Administration and shared that its purpose was to:

Create appreciative work environments where employees feel their contributions are valued and where they are empowered and encouraged to contribute their ideas for optimizing their organization’s performance and fulfilling the institution’s purpose amidst the challenges of the higher education environment.  
(p. 198)

For the purposes of this research, I use the term “Appreciative Administration” to describe how higher education administrators are using Appreciative Education in their administrative practices.

Taking an appreciative approach to leading organizations is not a new concept. For example, Whitney et al. (2010) used the term Appreciative Leadership, defined as “the relational capacity to mobilize creative potential and turn it into positive power-to set in motion positive ripples of confidence, energy, enthusiasm, and performance-to

make a positive difference in the world” (p. 3). Whitney et al.’s (2010) work focused on how to use the Appreciative Leadership approach in corporate settings while the Appreciative Administration framework focuses on how to operationalize the Appreciative Education framework in higher education and K-12 settings. Another difference is that instead of the six-D phases that support the Appreciative Administration framework, Appreciative Leadership uses the Appreciative Inquiry 5-I framework: Inquiry, Illumination, Inclusion, Inspiration, and Integrity. Whitney et al. (2010) define their 5-I framework as: Inquiry lets people know that you value them and their contributions. Illumination helps people understand how they can best contribute. Inclusion gives people a sense of belonging. Inspiration provides people with a sense of direction. Integrity lets people know that they are expected to give their best for the greater good, and that they can trust others to do the same.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Albert Einstein (1946), in a *New York Times* article, appealed to Americans that a new type of thinking was needed if mankind was to survive and move toward higher levels. His words have been translated to mean we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them. In a fiscal environment that demands higher education administrators to be creative and innovative, it can be challenging to do so when an organization focuses solely on the challenges being faced instead of the opportunities. Lehner and Hight (2006) highlighted the prevalence of a deficit-based approach when talking about higher education employees who: “often find themselves focusing on what is wrong with their organization rather than what is right. Most are guilty of criticizing their organization and its leadership about what needs to be done



differently” (p. 141). It is understandable that in the face of this criticism that higher education administrators feel obligated to adopt a deficit- and problem-based approach to fixing the issues. There is often such a focus on “the problem” that time for creating innovative solutions becomes limited and the stereotype of higher education as being a slow to change culture is reinforced (Bloom & McClellan, 2016).

However, higher education administrators do not have to stick to leading their institutions from a problem-based approach. Instead, administrators can adopt a more strengths-based approach to leading their institutions. One such framework for guiding the leadership efforts of administrators is Appreciative Administration (Bloom & McClellan, 2016). Appreciative Administration is a theory-to-practice framework that has theoretical roots in positive psychology, organizational development theories, and constructivism.

Although there is research demonstrating the viability of both Appreciative Inquiry as an organizational development tool and Appreciative Advising as a way to enhance relationships with others, to date there is no research on Appreciative Education or Appreciative Administration as theory-to-practice frameworks. A reason for the lack of research could be that the theory-to-practice frameworks of Appreciative Education and Appreciative Administration are relatively new terms, meaning there may not be a lot of exposure to these topics. Also, the primary audience for Appreciative Education and Administration is practitioners who often do not have time to pursue this type of research. The lack of research on these topics explains why there is a need for this grounded theory study to specify the ways that higher education administrators are infusing Appreciative

Inquiry, Appreciate Advising, and an Appreciative Mindset to adopt Appreciative Education in their administrative practices.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative grounded theory study was designed to elicit the stories of higher education administrators who were infusing Appreciative Education into their daily administrative practices. The research questions that guided this study include the following:

1. How do higher education administrators use the Appreciative Education framework in their administrative practices?
2. What do higher education administrators that use the Appreciative Education framework find to be:
  - a. The benefits of using this framework?
  - b. The challenges of using this framework?

### **Significance of the Study**

Appreciative Administration is a relatively new field of study, which may be why no research has been conducted to date. Only three peer-reviewed articles have been written on this topic (Beorchia, 2021; Bloom & McClellan, 2016; Proctor, 2021). Bloom and McClellan (2016) wrote the initial article titled, “Appreciative Administration: Applying the Appreciative Education Framework to Leadership Practices in Higher

Education.” While there has been much discussion, review, and writing around Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Advising, there has been relatively little written about the practice of Appreciative Education and Appreciative Administration in higher education settings, and no research studies have been conducted on how higher education administrators are using Appreciative Education in their administrative practices.

Higher education institutions are tasked with multiple missions, including the preparation of leaders who can engage in the complex challenges of a changing world. Ayman et al. (2003) suggested, “as our universities stretch beyond traditional academic subjects to focus on leadership, personal growth and development, and even values, higher education is positioned to play a more pivotal role in the development of a leadership culture in our society” (p. 220). Ironically the organizational systems within higher education institutions are often resistant to transformative change. Leaders in administrative and academic roles can easily fall into patterns of technical problem-solving approaches towards adaptive challenges, as opposed to mobilizing new patterns of thinking and working.

Change is often a central focus in the study of leaders and leadership; indeed, dealing with change is a core task of a leader. Pink (2006) echoed a societal shift in thinking from logical to conceptual, from specific, task-oriented thinking to inventive, big picture thinking capabilities. Adaptive leaders are needed to respond to complex change through culture shaping efforts that help organizations thrive, give people enough challenge to approach change without fear, and to develop leadership capacity (Heifetz et al., 2009). Leaders must do more than just respond to and manage change; they must engage and facilitate transformational efforts at multiple organizational levels.

Higher education administrators need to be able to form supportive, inclusive, and trusting relationships with employees. Employees help influence positive change in the organization. If administrators are not able to create a culture of inclusion and value for employees, a toxic culture could form. In a toxic culture, new ideas cannot thrive, people cannot be honest, and high performers will quit (Denning, 2019). In contrast, a non-toxic culture allows administrators and staff to work together, hold people accountable, and create a thriving culture where people feel included. Administrators play a critical role in creating a culture where staffs feel trusted, people are respected, development opportunities are given, and strengths are valued to form a thriving culture of high performers.

Consequently, Appreciative Administration in higher education is ripe for research and development. In a fast changing and turbulent environment, providing higher education administrators with a theory-to-practice framework for leading their institutions could help these leaders and the institutions they serve not just survive but thrive.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Appreciative Education involves a combination of Appreciative Inquiry + Appreciative Advising + the Appreciative Mindset (AI + AA + AM = Appreciative Education (AE)) (Bloom & McClellan, 2016, p. 198). Together, these components allow Appreciative Administrators to “deliver high-quality education on both an individual and organizational level. It provides an intentional and positive approach to bettering educational enterprises by focusing on the strengths and potential of individuals and organizations to accomplish co-created goals” (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 5).

## **Appreciative Inquiry**

A core component of the Appreciative Education framework is Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which was first introduced by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987). AI emerged from Cooperrider's dissertation research when he found that the questions he asked people about their organizations determined the responses he would receive. Appreciative Inquiry maintains the best of the organization while challenging the organization to perform beyond the status quo. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) stated, "Appreciative Inquiry implies a search, a willingness to discover, and an openness to learn" (p. 12). Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) proposed four phases of Appreciative Inquiry (see Figure 1) as a means for optimizing the success of organizations: Discover, Dream, Design, and Deliver.

### ***Discover***

Discover is about identifying the best of "what is." The discover phase is about focusing on times of organizational excellence and disclosing positive capacity with an appreciative eye focused on distinctive strengths and potential (Hammond, 2013; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). At the heart of the discovery phase is the appreciative interview. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) stated, "Appreciative interviews bring out the best in people and organizations. They provide opportunities for people to speak and be heard. They ignite curiosity and learning, and in so doing enhance organizational knowledge and wisdom...illuminating the distinctive strengths and potentials" (p. 147). Examples of discover phase questions include: "Without being humble, describe what you value most about yourself, your work, and your organization." Or, "tell me about a moment at work that was a high point, when you

felt most effective and engaged? Please describe how you felt and what made the situation possible.”

### ***Dream***

Once the appreciative interviews have been conducted as part of the discover phase, groups begin to dream about “what will be” as they envision a shared future. The dream phase invites people to lift their sights, exercise their imagination, and discuss what their organization could look like if it were fully aligned around their strengths and aspirations (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The dream phase calls for people to listen carefully to moments of organizational life at its best and to share images of their hopes and dreams for their collective future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Hammond, 2013; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The dream phase allows for stories to come forward that are grounded in the organizational history, yet also seeks to expand the organization’s future potential.

### ***Design***

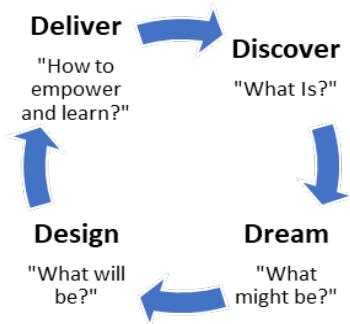
The design or “what will be” phase is the decision-making phase where ideas from different participants are brought together to provide direction to achieve the agreed upon future (Hammond, 2013). The future is designed by writing provocative propositions. Provocative propositions are a series of statements that describe an ideal state of circumstances that will foster the environment to do more of what works (Hammond, 2013). Provocative propositions are grounded in history, tradition, and facts and are reality-based. The idea behind having the group create the propositions together is to move the individual will to the group will level.

## ***Deliver***

The final phase of Appreciative Inquiry is the deliver phase “how to empower and learn” where the group creates ways to deliver on the new images of the future. Deliver is ongoing and involves unleashing self-organized innovation, through which the future is made real. Decisions that need to be made in this phase include: How will we learn about the gains we have already made? How will we celebrate? What are parameters for self-organized action? How will we support success (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 218)? With a positive core established it can empower employees to connect, cooperate, and co-create changes for the future.

## **Figure 1**

*The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle*



*Note.* Adapted from Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative Inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

## **Appreciative Advising**

Appreciative Advising (see Figure 2) evolved from the Appreciative Inquiry model. Bloom and Martin (2002) first demonstrated how the four phases of Appreciative Inquiry could be adapted by academic advisors to enhance the effectiveness of their interactions with students in both individual and group settings. Later, Bloom et al.

(2008), proposed the addition of two phases to Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) initial four phases: Disarm and Don't Settle. "Disarm suggests the need for the establishment of trust in the relationship and Don't Settle, focuses on the need to support students' persistence in achieving their dreams" (Bloom & McClellan, 2016, p. 196). Appreciative Advising requires that individuals go against the societal norm of approaching life as a series of problems and instead look at life as a series of opportunities.

## Figure 2

*The Appreciative Advising 6-D cycle*



*Note.* From the Office of Appreciative Education. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.fau.edu/education/centersandprograms/oae/about/>

Appreciative Inquiry combined with Appreciative Advising provides an intentional and positive approach that focuses on the strengths and potential of individuals and organizations to accomplish co-created goals. This framework for delivering high-quality organizational and individual learning, change, and improvement is labeled as Appreciative Education. Table 1 below compares the six phases and how they are defined within Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) and Appreciative Advising (Bloom & Martin, 2002). Administrators can use both frameworks and definitions as they incorporate Appreciative Education into their organization.



**Table 1**

*Comparison of Phase Definitions*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Appreciative Inquiry</b>	<b>Appreciative Advising</b>
Disarm		Make a positive first impression with a student, build rapport, and create a safe, welcoming space.
Discover	Appreciating the best of ‘what is’ to find ‘what works’ and helps organizations rediscover and remember their successes, strengths and periods of excellence.	Asking positive open-ended questions that will help learn about students’ strengths, skills, and abilities.
Dream	Imagining ‘what could be’ and using past achievements and successes to discover ‘what is best’ to project their wishes, hopes and aspirations for the future.	Inquire about students’ hopes and dreams for their future.
Design	Brings together the best of ‘what is’ together with ‘what might be’, to create what should be the ideal.	Co-create a plan for making their dreams a reality.
Deliver	How design is delivered, and how it’s embedded into groups, communities and organizations.	Encourage and support a student as they deliver on the plan created during the design phase.
Don’t Settle		Advisers and students need to set their own internal bars of expectations high.

**Appreciative Mindset**

Underlying the Appreciative Education framework is the Appreciative Mindset. The Appreciative Mindset creates positive interactions by actively seeking out the best in other people. Higher education administrators can use an Appreciative Mindset with students and staff both in groups and individually to set the tone for interactions. Bloom et al. (2008) in *The Appreciative Advising Revolution* book, shared that by embracing the

Appreciative Mindset one can care and believe in the potential of each person; appreciate the good fortune to positively affect other people's lives; acknowledge that one can always become better; remember the power people perceive you possess and how to best use that power; truly be interested in others around and enjoy learning from them; and be culturally aware and responsive in interactions with others. These six ideals are rooted in Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Advising, both utilizing an Appreciative Mindset to form relationships that can help transform institutions.

### **Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

*Appreciative Mindset:* According to Bloom et al. (2013), the Appreciative Mindset “involves looking for the best in others and in organizations instead of using our default tendency to look for the worst” (p. 198).

*Appreciative Inquiry:* Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) developed an organizational development theory that “provides a positive rather than a problem-based lens on the organization, focusing members’ attention on what is possible rather than what is wrong” (van Buskirk, 2002, p. 67).

*Appreciative Advising:* According to Bloom et al. (2008), Appreciative Advising is “a social-constructivist advising philosophy that provides an advising framework for advisors to use in optimizing their interactions with students in both individual and group settings” (p. 19).

*Appreciative Education:* The Appreciative Mindset combined with the practices of Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Advising form the foundation for Appreciative Education. This combination creates a “framework for delivering high-quality education

on both an individual and organizational level. It provides an intentional and positive approach for bettering educational enterprises by focusing on the strengths and potential of individuals and organizations” (Bloom, et al., 2013, p. 6).

### **Chapter Summary**

In a fast changing, turbulent, and fiscal environment that demands higher education administrators to be creative and innovative, it can be challenging to do so when an organization focuses on the challenges being faced instead of the opportunities. Appreciative Administrators could offer a creative new approach to leadership that helps higher education organizations not just survive but thrive. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices. As discussed in chapter one, there has not been any research conducted on Appreciative Education as a whole, however there is research that demonstrates the viability of the different components of Appreciative Education. The review of the literature will focus on the research that has been conducted on the two theoretical foundations that have deeply influenced Appreciative Education - Positive Psychology and Social Constructivism - before reviewing the research literature on the components of Appreciative Education: Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Advising and the Appreciative Mindset. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an overview of the Appreciative Leadership and Appreciative Administration literature.

### **Theoretical Roots of Appreciative Education**

The theoretical roots of Appreciative Education and its three subcomponents (Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Advising, and the Appreciative Mindset) (Bloom & McClellan, 2016) are positive psychology and social constructivism.

#### **Positive Psychology**

During his term as president of the American Psychological Association (APA), Martin Seligman initiated the field of positive psychology. In reviewing the APA's

history of research, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) found that the field of psychology had veered far from its original goals to identify what is best in human beings, to heal the sick, and to help people live better, happier lives. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) suggested that positive psychology was a way, “to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities” (p. 5). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) encouraged psychology researchers to shift their focus from fixing what was wrong with people to understanding what was going right with people who had a strong sense of well-being.

Seligman proposed, as an alternative to deficit-based thinking, a pursuit of optimal human functioning and the building of a field focusing on human strength and virtues (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Psychologists have recognized that human systems move in the direction of what they study. What was needed was to develop a vocabulary of joy, hope, and health to revolutionize the way we live, work, and organize our communities and businesses. Bloom et al. (2008) stated, “Increasingly, research findings indicate that positive psychology and wellness strategies foster healthy human development. Positive psychology also can be employed to implement strategies for institutional change that can impact both the system and the individuals within it” (p. 14).

### ***Well-being***

Seligman (2011), in his book *Flourish*, spoke about how initially the field of positive psychology focused on happiness and increasing life satisfaction. However, Seligman (2011) argued that well-being, not happiness alone, forms the roots of positive psychology. No single measure defines well-being exhaustively, but several things

contribute to it; and each element is measurable (Seligman, 2011). Seligman (2011) stated that well-being encompasses five elements: “positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA)” (p. 16).

In Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model, positive emotion is the first element and cornerstone of well-being theory. Positive emotion is the ability to be optimistic, satisfied with life, and happy. Engagement is about being absorbed in the present moment creating a ‘flow’ of immersion into an activity. Positive relationships and social connections are two of the most important aspects of life. Having strong relationships can provide support to individuals during difficult times. Meaning is feeling that they belong and serving something they believe is bigger than the self. Lastly, achieving accomplishments helps push people forward and flourish. The five elements of PERMA work synchronously to provide a foundation for a “meaningful life,” an overall sense of well-being (Seligman, 2011).

### ***Positive Emotions***

Fredrickson (2001) found that positive emotions are worth cultivating, not just as end states in themselves, but also as a means to achieving psychological growth and improved well-being over time. Fredrickson’s (1998) broaden-and-build theory is notable for drawing explicit attention to the positive and showing that insights result when we do something more than simply look for the absence of the negative. Positive emotions have a broadening effect on the momentary thought-action repertoire: they allow us to discard automatic responses and instead look for creative, flexible, and unpredictable new ways of thinking and acting (Fredrickson, 2004). By broadening our perspectives and actions, we tend to build important and lasting physical, intellectual, psychological and social

resources. People might improve their psychological well-being, and perhaps their physical health, by cultivating experiences of positive emotions at opportune moments to cope with negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2000).

Fredrickson (2009) discovered that a 3-to-1 positivity-to-negativity ratio is an important threshold to foster living in an optimal range of human functioning. This ratio came about when a nonlinear dynamical model developed to describe flourishing business teams by Losada (1999) came about. Losada (1999) observed 60 management teams in one-hour meetings as they crafted their annual strategic plans. Behind one-way mirrors, trained coders rated every speech act on three opposing pairs: positive-negative, inquiry-advocacy and other-self. Losada used this data to identify which teams were flourishing. Analyses of the observed data led Losada (1999) to develop the nonlinear dynamics model to capture the interaction patterns observed within the different levels of team performance. Losada's (1999) work resonated with Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory and found the most potent single variable within his mathematical model to be the ratio of positivity to negativity. After data collection this turns out to be a ratio of positivity to negativity of about 3-to-1 in all cases examined (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1374).

After Fredrickson and Losada's article was published in 2005, people began to question how the 3-to-1 equation was formulated. Nick Brown, a graduate student at the University of East London, read the paper as part of a course and found that the paper by Fredrickson and Losada (2005) made unsupported claims. Brown et al. (2013) published a critique of the paper:

we find no theoretical or empirical justification for the use of differential equations drawn from fluid dynamics, to describe changes in human emotions over time; furthermore, we demonstrate that the purported application of these equations contains numerous fundamental conceptual and mathematical errors. (p. 801)

After the Brown et al. (2013) paper was published, Fredrickson withdrew part of her original paper with Losada and responded with claims that parts of the paper are unaffected by the correction notice, notably “the data was drawn from independent samples, and the finding that positivity ratios were significantly higher for individuals identified as flourishing relative to those identified as nonflourishing” (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 817). Despite the 3-to-1 ratio formula not standing up to scrutiny, Frederickson’s broaden-and-build theory is still considered a well-tested model backed up by later studies (Wadlinger & Isaacowitz, 2006).

Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) suggested that experiencing negative emotions reduced peoples’ ability to be creative, socialize, deal with complexity, and take risks. Experiences of positive emotion, on the other hand, encourage people to look and think broadly, to interact with others, to try new things, and to be creative. Focusing on nurturing positive emotions is a vitally important component to traditional, deficiency-focused approaches, and is likely to make a more significant impact on human achievement (Mather, 2010). While the broaden-and-build theory was developed to explain the role of positive emotions in general, the theory can be applied to organizational behavior in a very practical way. Workplaces that understand the power of positive emotions are more likely to have dedicated employees who cooperate with each



other and complete the tasks at hand (Celestine, 2016). A leader plays a vital role in shaping company culture; the broaden-and-build theory can provide a framework for leaders to build the emotional environment. Thus, leaders interested in engagement need to create a learning environment that encourages growth and trust.

### ***Gratitude***

Gratitude is a positive emotion that has been demonstrated to positively impact people who practice it and is a tool that leaders can utilize to enhance their effectiveness. Administrators who foster a culture of gratitude can help create a positive culture amongst their teams. All the gratitude research to date has confirmed what many people learned from their parents and churches, that counting our blessings is good for us and those around us. For example, Seligman et al. (2005) invited participants in an online study to write and hand deliver a gratitude letter to someone who had been especially kind to them, but who they had never thanked properly. The researchers followed participants for six months, periodically measuring symptoms of both depression and happiness. Out of the 577 participants who completed the baseline questionnaires, 411 completed all five follow-up assessments. The study found participants who did the gratitude visit showed the largest positive changes in their happiness levels. This boost in happiness and decrease in depressive symptoms were maintained at follow-up assessments one week and one month later (Seligman et al., 2005). “When we feel gratitude, we benefit from the pleasant memory of a positive event in our life. Also, when we express our gratitude to others, we strengthen our relationship with them” (Seligman, 2011, p. 30). He found that participants were immediately happier and less depressed, and that these gains were maintained for a month after the gratitude visit.

Howells et al. (2017) investigated the effect of gratitude practices between doctoral students and their supervisors. Their qualitative case study explored the impact of gratitude as an intervention, following eight Ph.D. students and their two supervisors in the schools of physical sciences and medicine over a six-week period of focused attention on practices of gratitude. Findings revealed that all participants (Ph.D. students and supervisors) noted a positive impact in the areas of communication, social and emotional well-being. “Greater attention to gratitude has been shown to contribute to building and maintaining healthy relationships, enhancing social behaviors, and promoting interpersonal bonds” (Howells et al., 2017, p. 622).

### **Social Constructivism**

Appreciative approaches are rooted in social constructivism. Social constructivism adopts the belief that education is not simply a process of telling and receiving objective knowledge, but rather a subjective process of constructing knowledge based upon current schemas and past lived experiences (Dewey, 1916). Social constructivism points to the power of language not as an individual tool, but rather as the vehicle by which communities of people create knowledge and make meaning together. Social psychologist, Kenneth Gergen (1999), describes social constructivism as:

What we take to be knowledge of the world grows from relationship, and is embedded not within individual minds but within interpretive or communal traditions. In effect, there is a way in which dialogues celebrate relationships as opposed to the individual, and connection over isolation. (p. 122)

The essence of social constructivist theory is the understanding that new knowledge is not automatically driven by forces of nature, but is actively constructed based on prior

knowledge and learning through personal experiences and social interactions (Bloom et al., 2008; Gergen 1985). The social constructivist sees language, communication, and speech as playing the central role of the interactive process through which people understand the world and themselves. An example of social constructivism would be daylight savings time; this is a law created by the federal government based on past experiences to provide people one more hour of daylight in the afternoon and evening during the warmer season of the year to make better use of daylight and to conserve energy. However, not all states observe daylight saving time. Daylight savings time is an example of a practice constructed by society based on past experiences and current schemas being used to create knowledge and meaning of a law.

Social constructivist perspectives have been used to support a variety of practices in the fields of education, health care, community work, conflict resolution, and organizations. Social constructivism has enriched a variety of research and knowledge with a generative vocabulary, allowing innovative practices to emerge (Gergen & Gergen, 2012). Generativity is, “the capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is taken for granted, and thereby to furnish new alternatives for social action” (Gergen, 1978, p. 1346). Some of these practices include a focus on strengths and what is already working well instead of on problems and how to fix them. It also promotes theoretical and practical reconstructions through generative theories and Gergen (1978) stated that it can, “challenge prevailing assumptions regarding the nature of social life and to offer fresh alternatives to contemporary patterns of conduct” (p. 1344). Gergen’s (1978) concept of generative theory is central to understanding

Appreciative Inquiry, as he proposed that a generative approach would spark new ideas and provide creative ways to view existing social structures.

Social constructivism informs the understanding of the learning process, while positive psychology challenges the deficits-based, problem-solving oriented mentality across organizational development. The assets-based shift in higher education is largely rooted in positive psychology and organizational development. David Cooperrider (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) proposed that most organizations have an inherently positive core and that, if they are able to tap into that core, they can use the positive effect to generate success (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

### **Subcomponents of Appreciative Education**

Bloom and McClellan (2016) stated that Appreciative Education is comprised of three components: Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Advising, and Appreciative Mindset (AI + AA + AM = AE). This section of the literature review will highlight the research that has been conducted on all three of these subcomponents.

#### **Appreciative Inquiry**

As a doctoral student at Case Western Reserve University, David Cooperrider first developed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a means to engage people across a system in renewal, change, and focused performance (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). First introduced as an alternative to the managerial deficit-based, traditional organizational development methodologies, AI invited holistic participation from the entire organization to create positive-based shared dreams and visions to form a positive core to serve as the foundation to the change agenda. Appreciative Inquiry is based on the premise that organizations should build upon their strengths rather than efforts to fix weaknesses

(Bloom et al., 2008). Cooperrider and Diane Whitney (1999) believed that the positive assets that an organization already possesses, often through its employees, would provide the best solutions to the problems the organization faces.

Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) defined Appreciative Inquiry as “the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them...AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to heighten positive potential” (p. 10). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) further emphasized that, “Appreciative Inquiry is the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best” (p. 1). The AI approach to personal and organizational change assumes that questions and dialogue about strengths, success, values, hopes, and dreams are themselves transformational. Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2012) stated that, “when people are recognized for their strengths, successes, and effective work, they are energized into doing more of that instead of being discouraged by the focus on their weaknesses and failures” (p. 14). Appreciative Inquiry is a shift in the way we think about and approach organizational change. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) asserted, “Appreciative Inquiry aims to uncover and bring forth existing strengths, hopes, and dreams: to identify and amplify the positive core of the organization. In so doing, it transforms people and organizations” (p. 15).

Ken Gergen (1978) proposed that a generative approach would spark new ideas and provide creative ways to view existing social structures. These advances would spur organizations to identify solutions that were previously not considered or imagined. Further, he argued that because the solutions were internally generated, they would provide intrinsic motivation for employees to implement the solutions. According to

Bushe (2007), Appreciative Inquiry can have generative potential in a number of ways because, “it is the quest for new ideas, images, theories and models that liberate our collective aspirations, alter the social construction of reality and, in the process, make available decisions and actions that were not available or did not occur to us before” (p. 30). When successfully applied, Appreciative Inquiry generates spontaneous and self-organizing organizational change toward a better future.

Further research has demonstrated that AI is a powerful approach for creating positive change in businesses, non-profit organizations, and most recently educational institutions (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). In a meta-case analysis answering the question, “when is Appreciative Inquiry transformational?”, Bushe and Kassam (2005) investigated 20 cases of companies using Appreciative Inquiry to change their social and educational environments. The most powerful and transformational changes they found occurred in only seven of the 20 cases where: 1) there was a focus on changing how people think rather than on what people do, and 2) where there was support for and freedom for staff to innovate and organize themselves to follow new ideas. AI allows people to build relationships, have their voices heard, be positive, choose how they will participate in the change effort, and then feel supported for their efforts (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Appreciative Inquiry provides a platform for individuals to become positively engaged in the organizational change process.

Appreciative Inquiry has several underlying assumptions. One of the first assumptions is that “in every society, organization, or group, something works” (Hammond, 2013, p. 14). This assumption means that groups and organizations can explore what is working well and how they can do more of what is working well already.

Hammond (2013) states that what we focus on becomes our reality. If we emphasize what is wrong or what is missing, we tend to see everything through that filter or frame. The filter or frame is our unconscious set of assumptions, sometimes called mental models. Senge (1990) explained that mental modes are “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Very often, we are not consciously aware of our mental models or the effects they have on our behavior” (p. 8). Leaders need to focus on “frame-breaking change, which is focusing on shifts in direction, procedures, and culture that enable organizations to work more effectively” (Pisapia, 2009, p. 37). It can be challenging to break the frame of negativity, which was one of Cooperrider and Srivastva’s (1987) inspirations as he created Appreciative Inquiry. When these underlying assumptions become part of the organizational culture through the process of Appreciative Inquiry, positive organizational development happens.

### ***Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education Research Studies***

While the literature that pertains to using the Appreciative Inquiry approach in higher education is still sparse, the body of research is steadily growing. Recognition that higher education is facing new realities and new challenges that require new ways of thinking has helped spur this growth (Mather, 2010).

Appreciative Inquiry provides higher education student affairs departments with an alternative and generative approach to improving their organizations’ processes and culture. For example, Lehner and Hight (2006) did a single case study within an Office of Residence Life that focused on practical applications to help spur organizational change. Appreciative Inquiry offers a new focus and energy when considering change. Lehner

and Hight (2006) state, “Institutions of higher education and divisions of student affairs encounter multiple opportunities and needs for change, and AI provides a way to discover what is right in the organization and a plan to build a positive future” (p. 149).

Appreciative Inquiry values the organization as a community and the individual members’ contributions to this community. Using AI as a tool for positive change affords student affairs professionals the opportunity to model good organization development processes.

Employees are an important part of organizations, including higher education institutions. When employees do not experience job satisfaction, there is a drop in their levels of engagement at work, their stress levels increase and their chances of burning out become much higher. Therefore, it is critical to enhance the well-being of employees in every possible manner (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; van Straaten et al., 2016). In the van Straaten et al. (2016) study, the research participants were support services staff purposefully selected from a total of 480 support services staff members within the entire institution. The sample size was 20 for this single case study. Participants took part in an Appreciative Inquiry workshop to discuss optimal well-being. This study explored, by means of Appreciative Inquiry, the strengths of a South African higher education institution that drive the well-being of its support services staff. “It eventually became evident that AI, with its focus on identifying the strengths and the positive core of organizations, can be an effective tool in identifying driving forces for transforming organizations and improving the well-being of their staff” (van Straaten et al., 2016, p. 9).

So how does emotionally intelligent leadership affect the organizational climate? Yoder (2005) conducted a qualitative study based on interpretive research using



Appreciative Inquiry, “emotions are considered a soft area and have often been thought of as a detriment in the workplace” (p. 45). One hundred leaders from a large, urban community college were invited to complete the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, and then participated in an Appreciative Inquiry session using the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle. All participants served the institution in some leadership capacity. A total of 281 responses from 68 individuals were generated by the Appreciative Inquiry conversations. Eight emotional intelligence competencies (developing others, teamwork and collaboration, organizational awareness, building bonds, visionary leadership, empathy, respect, and open communication) constituted 75% of the responses (Yoder, 2005, p. 51). Based on the results, Yoder (2005) recommended encouraging and empowering people to engage in simple conversations. Community is established through simple conversations and often-transformational ideas emerge from these conversations. The second recommendation was to encourage wholeness among employees. After all, it is the whole person who best leads, learns, teaches, and works.

In a case study of five educational administration doctoral students’ who represented three different programs, Calabrese et al. (2007) identified and described the positive core experiences and perspectives regarding their doctoral program studies and dissertation process. Calabrese et al. (2007) had two findings: “(a) the student’s perception of the level of caring in the doctoral program by program faculty influences the student’s perception of program quality; and (b) the caring relationship between the faculty and the student extended to the students’ work context” (p. 10). Calabrese et al. (2007) stated:

The AI perspective of discovering the stories held by those within the focus of inquiry identifies undiscovered strengths and peak moments that may serve to stimulate generative growth for the program, the faculty, and the students.

Engaging in an AI approach may assist those concerned with change and/or reform of educational administration programs to reduce defensiveness and facilitate the co-construction of educational administration programs based on program strengths. (p.25)

Appreciative Inquiry is frequently used to achieve a positive revolution, to identify the “root causes of success,” and to promote transformative change in a person or a group (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 6). Harmon et al. (2012) designed an Appreciative Inquiry summit for the University of Virginia School of Nursing to bring all staff, faculty, student representatives, and members of the community together to rewrite the school’s strategic plan. One hundred thirty-five participants engaged in the appreciative, 4-step Appreciative Inquiry process of discovering, dreaming, designing, and creating the school’s future. Harmon et al. (2012) found that an Appreciative Inquiry summit could be employed to build relationships and create a shared vision among a diverse group of individuals. According to Harmon et al. (2012):

Summits can be held to evaluate programs, revise curriculums, or achieve any goal that requires cooperative change. Participants feel they have a voice at the planning table and see themselves as partners who support the vision that they helped create. (p. 123)

Medicine Hat College (MHC) also took a creative approach to strategic planning by infusing Appreciative Inquiry into the strategic planning cycle. MHC was going

through challenging times having received a scathing audit on their international education operations that led to the President being fired and escorted off campus. People were hurt and damage had been done to the school's reputation. Easter (2016) conducted an interview with Jason Openo who worked for Medicine Hat College and who was one of the facilitators during the strategic planning. Easter quoted Openo, "Appreciative Inquiry can play a powerful role in initiating and managing change through the process of asking generative questions. Appreciative Inquiry increases the possibility of introducing successful and transformative change at all levels within an organization" (Easter, 2016, para. 1). Appreciative Inquiry gave MHC employees a chance to not look at failure but to reimagine what being at their best was. Openo mentioned that if the college had focused solely on problems that operations and staff moral could have gotten worse (Easter, 2016, para. 6). Over 350 college employees came together for a College Day Summit where the strategic process began and the group worked through the discover, dream, and design phases. Openo mentioned that the day did have some challenges and that for the future they would make sure to thoroughly and totally explain to people why certain things were being done and why people were assigned seats and put outside their comfort zone.

Easter (2016) concluded:

It is important to remember it is a practice; that some days we will not be able to focus on our strengths, our opportunities, and our dreams. That's OK. But at the same time, if we think about what it takes to bring out the best in our teams - the best in people - is to focus on positive and strengths-based stories. (para. 38)

He and Oxendine (2019) also conducted a study exploring the application and impact of Appreciative Inquiry in a Canadian institution's strategic planning process. He

and Oxendine (2019) used a phenomenological approach to interview seven stakeholders involved in the strategic planning process to explore their transformative experiences and the generative impact of using Appreciative Inquiry in the strategic planning process. Using Appreciative Inquiry in the strategic planning process allowed for the focus to be on individual and institutional strengths, assets and resources, and the discussions led to transformative experiences for stakeholders and generative impact at both the individual and institutional levels. “The strategic planning process became an opportunity for a positive cultural shift at the institution and a process to promote engagement and empowerment” (He & Oxendine, 2019, p. 229).

The articles reviewed above have several consistent themes. First, they use a constructivist framework to move the way that individuals construct their knowledge in a positively skewed direction. As Dewey (1916) noted, social constructivists adopt the belief that education is not simply a process of telling and receiving objective knowledge, but rather a subjective process of constructing knowledge based upon current schemas and past lived experiences. Appreciative Inquiry research is based not only on the underlying assumption that concepts are invented, but that they can be altered by choosing one’s mindset. Finally, these studies began with acknowledgement of a problem that prompted the research, but then moved away from a problem-focus to an asset-focus.

### ***Critiques of Appreciative Inquiry***

A criticism that has been leveled against Appreciative approaches is the focus on the positive. Critics have argued that such a stringent focus on what works is not a realistic approach to most change issues. They argue that real problems exist and must be addressed, or they will eventually cause damage. It may be helpful moving forward to

reframe some of the language as neither positive nor negative, but rather to view changes as movement towards optimal functioning at an organizational level. Bushe (2007) brought up concerns that managers practicing Appreciative Inquiry do not seem to understand the importance of generativity as an important outcome of Appreciative Inquiry. “Many people get blinded by the positive stuff, after years of focusing on problems and deficits and dysfunction they get entranced with focusing on the positive and equate this with Appreciative Inquiry” (p. 30). Bushe and Kassam (2005) observed that people need to change the way they think before they change the way they behave. Appreciative scholars believe that reality is rooted in choice. If one chooses to look for the best or chooses to look for the worst, they will find exactly that.

### **Appreciative Advising**

Bloom and Martin (2002) took Cooperrider’s four phases of Appreciative Inquiry (Discover, Dream, Design, and Deliver) and demonstrated how they could be adapted by academic advisors to enhance the effectiveness of their interactions with students. “It provides an intentional and positive approach to bettering educational enterprises by focusing on the strengths and potential of individuals and organizations to accomplish co-created goals” (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 6).

Appreciative Advising is a social constructivist advising framework with an approach that is rooted in the organizational development theory of Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Advising seeks to optimize advisor interactions with students. Bloom et al. (2008) shared one can intentionally use positive, active, and attentive listening and questioning strategies to build trust and rapport with others (Disarm); uncover strengths and skills based on their past successes (Discover); encourage and be inspired by others

stories and dreams (Dream); co-construct action plans with others to make their goals a reality (Design); support them as their plans are carried out (Deliver); and challenge both themselves and those around them to do and become even better (Don't Settle).

### ***Appreciative Advising in Higher Education Research Studies***

The Appreciative Advising model has been successfully used to positively impact retention rates at institutions such as the University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG), the University of South Carolina, and Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (Bloom et al., 2009). These early successes with the Appreciative Advising framework have produced a growing body of literature that has helped propel use of the model's six phases beyond advising to residence life, student staff training, disability services, conduct, and other areas traditionally considered co-curricular or administrative (Adams, 2018; Cuevas et al., 2011; Fippinger, 2009; Lehner & Hight, 2006; Ormsby, 2010). While strengths-based researchers draw from a wide-variety of theoretical roots, Appreciative Advising is a specific framework that provides a positive, student-centered, and multi-layered approach to guide interactions with students as well as create, manage, and deliver academic content and out-of-class experiences (Bloom et al., 2013). The six phases of Appreciative Advising have been used to enhance the effectiveness of interpersonal interactions across institutional offices.

### ***Impact of Appreciative Advising on Students***

The research has steadily increased on Appreciative Advising since Bloom and Martin's (2002) initial article on the topic. While many of the early articles written on Appreciative Advising were based more on opinion and personal experience, there is an emerging body of research-based studies that demonstrate the impact of Appreciative

Advising on students and advisors. In addition, the use of the Appreciative Advising framework has broadened beyond the field of academic advising.

One of the first research studies that demonstrated the impact of Appreciative Advising on student success was conducted by Hutson and He (2011). Hutson and He (2011) conducted a quantitative study to shift the perspective from finding out “what is wrong” to illustrating how the Appreciative Advising Inventory (AAI) and discovering “what works” can be used in student success programs to identify students’ assets and strengths to promote a successful transition to college. The AAI helps individuals to identify both external assets and internal assets and was designed specifically for post-secondary students. Hutson and He (2011) used the AAI as a self-assessment tool for students to identify their own assets and strengths before and after the program in the Strategies for Academic Success (SAS) program. The SAS program assisted students on academic probation to recover good academic standing at a large public institution in the southeast United States. The SAS program was designed around the six phases of Appreciative Advising, with a curriculum that was not deficit-based and included course activities and assignments that aligned with the six phases both structurally and philosophically. Participants included 124 first-year or continuing students who were placed on academic probation during the Spring 2010 semester. The results of this study “not only confirmed the reliability and usefulness of the AAI instrument, but also shed light on how colleges and universities could leverage students’ assets in order to facilitate their transition to college and maximize students’ potential for academic success” (Hutson & He, 2011, p. 32). The study also pointed out the need for college administrators and instructors to shift their assumptions about students who are placed on

academic probation to an alternative perspective. While this study focused on first-year students who have experienced academic challenges, it provides evidence for the expanded use of the AAI to other aspects of college student orientation and transition services.

Hutson (2010) conducted a quantitative study describing the outcome-based evaluation of a first-year experience course, which used the Appreciative Advising theoretical model. The study focused on the impact of the course on students' attitudes and perceptions towards their academic ability, their actual academic achievement, and student retention. During the fall of 2005 a total of 325 participants at a public, urban, residential university in the southeast United States completed a first-year experience survey at the end of their University 101 class (Hutson, 2010). Overall, Hutson's (2010) findings indicate a positive correlation between the inclusion of the entire Appreciative Advising framework and increases in student GPA, retention rates, and indications of dedication, confidence and relationship building within first-year students.

Butler et al.'s (2016) findings showed how the implementation of the Appreciative Advising framework had decreased the number of undergraduates from the University of Southern California who were academically disqualified. The Academic Review and Retention Office began implementing the Appreciative Advising framework for their students who are on academic probation because their cumulative GPA had fallen below 2.0 beginning in 2013 and then, fall of 2014. During the first meeting, the counselor and student identified the student's strengths and challenges, what caused the student to be placed on academic probation, and devised a plan of action to clear probation. During the second meeting, the counselor and student reviewed the student's



progress to clearing probation (Butler et al., 2016). The students who met twice with an Appreciative Advisor each semester persisted at a 50% higher rate compared to previous students who were enrolled before the Appreciative Advising framework was implemented. However, a weakness of the study is that there is no mention of how many students took part of either group or specifics related to the 50% decrease in the number of students who were academically dismissed.

Butler et al. (2016) found that utilizing Appreciative Advising on the in-person students that were on academic probation at the University of Southern California improved the number of students dismissed. Miller et al. (2019) in a quantitative study addressed the gap in academic advising support for online students who were on academic probation by utilizing an advising initiative created for residential students. The variety of educational offerings and delivery methods at this private, liberal arts, master's degree-granting college in the Midwest prompted a general question by Miller et al. (2019): Can student support initiatives deemed beneficial for students in one setting be redesigned and successfully implemented with students in another setting? Initial analysis revealed that a high percentage (>45%) of online students were suspended one term after being placed on academic probation (Miller et al., 2019). College administrators decided to adapt the residential appreciative advising initiative for use with online students, they adapted a communication strategy comprising of three scheduled, proactive outreach efforts via e-mail and phone calls aligned with the six appreciative advising phases. Students who responded to at least one of the communications were placed on continued probation at a higher rate than students who did not respond: 30.7% compared with 19.7%, also a significant difference was found in the year-over-year comparison of

academic statuses of online students, an increase in students removed from probation from 16.6% in 2014-2015 to 23.9% in 2015-2016 (Miller et al., 2019). The study did show short-term gains for students such as impact on academic status and GPA after one academic session. The study also demonstrated that leaders at colleges and universities can adapt advising initiatives used with residential students to support students taking classes online. No longitudinal success factors were assessed; therefore, the methods used in this study may not influence long-term student success metrics. Additional research is needed to confirm the benefits of these types of outreach and the impact they have on metrics such as retention and graduation rates.

Higher education institutions have policies in place to suspend or dismiss students who do not meet academic standards, along with procedures for these students to petition to return. The cost to re-enroll a former student is much less than the cost to recruit a new student (Black, 2001). These former students also are familiar with the programs and have likely already fulfilled some of the requirements towards graduation. Sanders and Hutson (2012) recognized the “importance of examining the details of students’ experiences once they are readmitted, and the environment and support factors that predict their academic success” (Sanders & Hutson, 2012, p. 1). At a large public university in the southeastern United States, a Student Success Contract program was introduced to support students who reenrolled after experiencing academic suspension or dismissal. Students were required to enroll in the program. Participants in this study included every one of the 145 students who returned from academic suspension or dismissal. The aim of the program was to assist students in identifying their strengths, discover their purpose, and align assets with plans for the future. The program required

monthly meetings with a professional advisor, one-on-one meetings with each of their class instructors, a one-on-one consultation with a support office representative, and participation in the strengths-based self-discovery workshop, in hopes of earning above a 2.3 term GPA at the end of the semester. Participants in this study demonstrated significant academic achievement over the course of the semester, 92% met the criteria to continue enrollment (Sanders & Hutson, 2012).

In order to enhance college student academic achievement, it is important that students are adequately supported. These studies expanded the discussion on how students who have experienced poor academic performance transition back into college and explored the support and services that can be provided to facilitate and maximize students' academic successes. The Appreciative Advising framework offers a model for those who are interested in applying strength-based theoretical framework into their daily advising practices and advising programs.

### ***Impact of Appreciative Advising on Advisors***

Two dissertations to date have focused on the impact of Appreciative Advising on academic advisors. Nancy Howell's (2010) dissertation involved interviewing advisors at four-year institutions and Christine Damrose-Mahlmanns' (2016) dissertation involved interviewing community college advisors who had adopted the Appreciative Advising framework. In addition, Kaplan (2020) conducted a quantitative dissertation study on how attending the Appreciative Advising Institute influenced academic advisor wellbeing.

Howell (2010) conducted a qualitative study exploring the perceptions of nine academic advisors using the Appreciative Advising approach in three different

institutions of higher education to identify ways and to what extent using Appreciative Advising affected their advising practice and their job satisfaction. Work motivation has been studied extensively, especially in the business world. The Hawthorne Studies, conducted from 1924 to 1932 by Mayo, found that employees were not solely motivated by money and that employee attitude played a part in employee behavior, motivated employees were more productive (Linder, 1998). In other qualitative studies of academic advisors, advisors strongly emphasized that the student-advisor relationship and contact with students and co-workers were central to the advisors' job satisfaction levels (Epps, 2002; Murrell, 2005).

While there has been research into the effectiveness of Appreciative Advising with students, there was no research about how Appreciative Advising has affected the lives of academic advisors prior to the Howell (2010) and Damrose-Mahlmann (2016) studies. However, anecdotally, advisors and staff using Appreciative Advising reported greater levels of job satisfaction (Bloom et al., 2009). Howell's (2010) study found that the nine academic advisors believed Appreciative Advising had positively impacted their position and relationships in four ways: a) enabled them to better utilize their strengths, skills, and talents; b) provided a framework that enabled them to be more effective academic advisors; c) had enabled a stronger advisor/student relationship, resulting in greater job satisfaction; and d) positively impacted relationships outside of the advisor/student relationship with co-workers, family, friends, and others.

Damrose-Mahlmann (2016) conducted a similar qualitative study that involved 10 academic advisors from a multi-campus community college in the southeastern United States. Advisors for this study had knowledge of Appreciative Advising through

attending a previous Appreciative Advising Institute, had employed the Appreciative Advising model for at least one year, and had utilized a different advising model prior to using the Appreciative Advising model. Damrose-Mahlmann (2016) found that participants experienced improved self-efficacy, which deepened their connection to their students and fellow advisors. She also found that participants reported increased motivation levels because of their improved comfort level and confidence in their performance as academic advisors. Damrose-Mahlmann (2016) found that participants were using the Appreciative Mindset, language, and phases, which resulted in a more collegial and positive office culture. However, Damrose-Mahlmann (2016) recognized that the small sample size of ten academic advisors from one institution limits the generalizability of her findings.

Kaplan (2020) conducted the first quantitative study measuring the influence of attending the Appreciative Advising Institute on participants' wellbeing using Seligman's PERMA Model (2011) of wellbeing. Results from Kaplan's (2020) study suggests that attending the Appreciative Advising Institute positively influences advisors overall and workplace wellbeing. The Appreciative Advising Institute can be a valuable option for higher education institutions seeking to increase their academic advisors' overall and workplace wellbeing.

### **Appreciative Mindset**

To date there is no research on the Appreciative Mindset itself, it is only mentioned as a component of an appreciative approach. Having an Appreciative Mindset means finding what is right about a situation and the people in it to view strengths, successes, what we want more of, possibilities, the positives (Cockell & McArthur-Blair,

2012, p. 80). The Appreciative Mindset challenges our often deficit-based mindset that starts with a focus on weaknesses, problems, gaps, what we do not want, and negatives that pervade our worlds.

Bloom et al. (2013) explains how an Appreciative Mindset plays into creating positive interactions with others:

It posits that if people are looking for the worst in others, they will find the worst. Many of us have been conditioned to identify quickly the faults in others; the appreciative mindset reminds us to instead actively seek out the best in other people. (pp. 7-8)

We have been trained, especially in higher education, to focus on the problems. Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2012) state, “this works in many situations, but not human-based systems” (p. 80).

### **Appreciative Leadership and Appreciative Administration**

It is challenging to be an educational administrator in today’s fast-paced, ever-changing environment. “More and more demands are being placed on educational institutions, yet public financial support is waning. The complexity of educational institutions necessitates a flexible framework for leading and managing these enterprises” (He et al., 2014, p. 4). To be competitive in the long run, higher education administrators need to create work environments that encourage and empower all employees to contribute to devising and implementing creative solutions to the challenges facing higher education.

In their book, *Appreciative Leadership*, Whitney et al. (2010) defined the subject reflected in the title of their book as, “Appreciative Leadership is the relational capacity

to mobilize creative potential and turn it into positive power, to set in motion positive ripples of confidence, energy, enthusiasm, and performance to make a positive difference in the world” (Whitney et al., 2010, p. 3). Mann et al. (2018) published *The Journey of Appreciative School Leadership: A Guide for Strengths-based Change* to be a positive counterpoint to problems-based, deficit-focused school leadership practices. They concede that K-12 school leadership can be challenging and complicated but argue that it is “made much simpler when leaders acknowledge and build upon what they are already doing well instead of focusing only on what they need to do better” (Mann et al., 2018, p. 3). The role of an appreciative leader is to be a catalyst of change and to look for and nurture the best in others (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney et al., 2010).

Whitney et al. (2010) identified what they call five core strategies of Appreciative Leadership: Inquiry, Illumination, Inclusion, Inspiration, and Integrity. Each of which meets a different need that people have for high performance:

To know they belong; to feel valued for what they have to contribute; to know where the organization of community is headed; to know that excellence is expected and can be depended upon; and to know that they are contributing to the greater good. (pp. 23-24)

Bloom and McClellan (2016) coined the phrase “Appreciative Administration” to provide “higher education administrators a theory-to-practice framework, based on the Appreciative Education model, for leading institutions and addressing challenges within higher education” (p. 196). Bloom and McClellan’s (2016) article focused on how higher education administrators can harness the power of the Appreciative Education framework to:

create appreciative work environments where employees feel their contributions are valued and where they are empowered and encouraged to contribute their ideas for optimizing their organization's performance and fulfilling the institution's purpose amidst the challenges of the higher education environment. (p. 198)

Appreciative Administration uses the 6-D framework instead of the 4-D's used in the Appreciative Inquiry framework. The 6-D framework of Appreciative Education includes strategies for administrators to build trust (Disarm), identify core strengths (Discover), facilitate the co-creation of shared visions for future possibilities (Dream), create a socially constructed action plan from the shared vision (Design), execute the plan (Deliver), and continually strive for improvement (Don't Settle). The six phases of Appreciative Education represent an "iterative as opposed to single use process. Therefore, appreciative administrators actively practice utilizing the six phases as a guiding framework, knowing full well that the end goal is not achieving one goal and setting the framework aside" (Bloom & McClellan, 2016, p. 207). Appreciative Administration is a lifelong journey where one strives to get better in order to enhance the potential of both the individual and the organization.

Although there are books by Whitney et al. (2010) and Mann et al. (2018) that put forth the tenants of Appreciative Leadership and how it might be applied, to date there have been no peer-reviewed research studies conducted on the topic of Appreciative Leadership. Similarly, while Bloom and McClellan (2016) laid out the principles of Appreciative Administration, there have been no peer-reviewed research studies on Appreciative Administration or Appreciative Education. Therefore, this study seeks to fill



the gap in the literature on Appreciative Administration and Appreciative Education. This grounded theory study aims to discover how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework in their daily administrative practices.

### **Chapter Summary**

Although there is research that demonstrates the viability of both Appreciative Inquiry as an organizational development tool and Appreciative Advising as a way to enhance relationships with others. This chapter covered Appreciative Education's theoretical roots, positive psychology and social constructivism, before sharing the research on the three subcomponents of Appreciative Education: Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Advising, and the Appreciative Mindset. This study begins to fill the gap in the research literature on Appreciative Education and Appreciative Administration.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Although there is research that demonstrates the viability of both Appreciative Inquiry as an organizational development tool and Appreciative Advising as a way to enhance relationships with others, until this study, no research has been conducted on Appreciative Education or Appreciative Administration. Due to the lack of research of these topics explains why there is a need for this grounded theory study on examining how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design used in this qualitative grounded theory study, as well as the methodological approach, philosophical assumptions of the study, the recruitment of participants, data collection and analysis procedures, trustworthiness criteria, delimitations, and limitations of the study.

The research questions that guided this study include the following:

1. How do higher education administrators use the Appreciative Education framework in their administrative practices?
2. What do higher education administrators that use the Appreciative Education framework find to be:
  - a. The benefits of using this framework?

b. The challenges of using this framework?

### **Methodological Approach**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices. Since I focused on understanding and describing, qualitative research methodology was the most valuable and appropriate. According to Merriam (2009), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). Qualitative research, in contrast to quantitative research, is distinguished by the role the researcher takes within the study as an instrument in gathering the information and then interpreting and presenting the findings (Creswell, 2007).

There are a variety of approaches to conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative research process starts with the research questions themselves. In general, a study of how or why things are a certain way would indicate a qualitative approach would be most suitable (Gay & Airasian, 2003, pp. 8-9). Eliminating approaches that are exclusively quantitative only narrows the field of potential methodologies slightly. I have included a brief discussion on several forms of qualitative research that were considered for this study: case study, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and a grounded theory approach.

A case study approach can be about an individual, group of people, a school, a community, or an organizational policy. The major strength of the case study approach is the ability to use multiple sources of data and multiple methods as forms of triangulation

(Yin, 2009). A core component to using a case study approach is that it involves “an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).

This study is not bound by a common system such as all of the participants are from the same institution or hold the same position, thus it was not chosen as the approach for this study.

Ethnography is another qualitative approach that could be considered for this project. Gay and Airasian (2003) define ethnography as “a qualitative approach that studies the participants in their natural setting” (p. 16). This definition seems appropriate for the given study, as the researcher wants to know how practitioners seek to use Appreciative Education in their natural work setting. However, the focus is on setting the individuals’ stories within the context of their culture group. This requires intensive fieldwork and research immersion into the culture being studied (Patton, 2002). As Groat and Wang (2002) elaborated:

Although it emphasizes in-depth engagement with its subject...the researcher’s aim is not to create an explanatory theory that can be applied to many settings.

Rather, ethnographic research culminates in a rich and full delineation of a particular setting that persuades a wide audience of its human validity. (p. 182)

This level of detail and focus on the context, while potentially interesting, are not what the researcher is seeking in this instance eliminating ethnography as a suitable methodology for this study.

Phenomenology is used when you want to describe the essence of an event, activity, or phenomenon. In a phenomenological study, the researcher primarily relies on interviews, but can also use other methods such as reading documents, watching videos,

or visiting places and events, to understand the meaning participants place on the phenomenon being examined (Patton, 2002). The research relies on the participants' perspectives to provide insight into their motivations. Because phenomenology looks to describe an activity or event and not explain the theory behind the event, phenomenology was not selected to guide this proposed study.

The narrative approach weaves together a sequence of events, usually from just one or two individuals to form a cohesive story (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative stories often contain turning points or specific tensions or transitions or interruptions that are highlighted by the research in the telling of the stories (Denzin, 1989). Narrative as a research method involves telling stories, recounting how individuals make sense of events and actions in their lives. The researcher wants to look beyond the participants' individual lives, thus a narrative approach was not selected to conduct this study.

Instead, a grounded theory approach was the most appropriate as the researcher is seeking to explain how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework in their daily administrative practices; in other words, a framework of how this is done in actual practice. Creswell (2002) explained that the grounded theory approach is appropriate "when you want to develop or modify a theory, explain a process, and develop a general abstraction of the interaction and action of the people" (p. 456). This study's research problem and questions suggest the need for a grounded theory approach over other qualitative methods because I was constructing a framework of a social process from emerging patterns that were grounded in data after it had been collected and analyzed. I was not looking to prove or disprove a theory.

## **Grounded Theory History and Development**

The grounded theory approach employs a systematic process that enables the researcher to develop a theory that is directly “grounded” in the data from which it was derived (Charmaz, 2000, 2008a; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Grounded theory methodology was initially developed via a collaboration between sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, as presented in their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) presented four requirements for the development of grounded theory: *fit* the substantive area in which it will be used, be *generalizable* to other situations or circumstances of the phenomenon, be *understood* by lay person and practitioners concerned with the area or phenomenon, and allow for *control* as the phenomenon changes over time.

Grounded theory is a generative and inductive process. It is a design that attempts to understand the experiences of individuals with respect to a certain phenomenon. The capacity of the grounded theory method to generate relevant and modifiable theory for future contributions to the field is another reason for selecting this form of qualitative methodology. “Grounded theory arrives at relevance because it allows core problems and processes to emerge,” resulting in a contribution for both scholars and practitioners (Glaser, 1978, p. 5) that promise fit, grab, and relevance (Charmaz, 2006) with both theory and practice.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) later differed in their approach to grounded theory, primarily in the areas of data analysis and the role of the researcher. Strauss, working in collaboration with Juliet Corbin, favored open, axial, and selective coding methods, which Glaser (1992) emphasized a “looser process of generating connections and ideas

and explaining them theoretically” (p. 71). Glaser (1992) criticized Strauss and Corbin’s focus on axial coding as too fragmented and argued that this process forced a preconceived conceptual framework on the data. In contrast, Glaser (1992) advocated using only open and selective coding procedures and placed greater emphasis on the concept of “emergence,” or allowing concepts and theoretical understandings to arise directly from the data. Further, Glaser emphasized a more passive and unbiased role for the researcher, whereas Strauss viewed the researcher as a “participatory interactant” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 278).

Grounded theory continues to evolve and is considered a highly flexible and adaptable research methodology. The creative and inductive nature of grounded theory methodology enables the researcher to interpret data and apply insights that will result in “novel theoretical formulations” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 31). Additionally, Charmaz (2008a) stated that creativity, problem solving, and “imaginative interpretation” are essential elements of grounded theory (p. 157). Kathy Charmaz (2006) a constructivist researcher felt that both Glaser and Strauss were too systematic and emphasized a need for less structured strategies and procedures.

### **Three Approaches to Grounded Theory**

The grounded theory design can take three primary approaches: the systematic procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998); the emerging design of Glaser (1992); or, the constructivist approach of Charmaz (2000). These three approaches were influenced by a difference in opinion for the degree of structure needed for applying procedures among qualitative researchers. For instance, Glaser and Strauss created the systematic approach together in 1967, but in 1992, Glaser criticized Strauss for placing an

overemphasis on rules and a preconceived framework for theoretical categories.

Accordingly, Glaser developed a more flexible emerging design while Charmaz (2006) posits a constructivist design that presumes theory is created from the subjective realities of the participants and that researchers as well as the participants are the ‘writers’ of the ‘story.’

### ***Systematic Design***

The systematic approach to grounded theory focuses heavily on inductive thinking and assumes there are actions and interactions between personal conceptions and knowledge of the world and includes a conceptual model or diagram (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher starts with the most specific information they collected and summarize and move to the most abstract characteristics they were able to find through analyzing the data. This experience involves three steps in the coding process: open, axial, and selective coding to develop a theory (Miller & Salkind, 2002).

### ***Emerging Design***

Emerging design was in many ways a reaction to the systematic design. Glaser (1992) had issues with the systematic design created by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998). He considered it too rigid and strict, with an emphasis on rules and procedures. The emerging design involves a more flexible design with abstract levels instead of specific categories (Creswell, 2008). Glaser asserts that a grounded theory cannot be forced into categories (Miller & Salkind, 2002). Glaser viewed grounded theory as the process of abstracting to higher and higher levels rather than only describing a process. Furthermore, to be considered as a good grounded theory it must meet four criteria: fit, work, relevance, and modifiability (Creswell, 2008).



### ***Constructivist Design***

Constructivist grounded theory adopts the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original statement. Charmaz (2006) asserts that a constructivist approach does not assume that data simply awaits discovery in an external world or that methodological procedures will correct limited views of the studied world. Nor does it assume that impartial observers enter the research scene without an interpretive frame of reference. Charmaz (2008a) stated, "The constructivist position views research as an emergent product of particular times, social conditions, and interactional situations" (p. 160). Glaser (1992) would concur, stating, "Grounded theory allows the relevant social organization and social psychological organization of the people studied to be discovered, to emerge in their perspective" (p. 5). A constructivist approach to grounded theory perceives the researcher as an active research instrument that makes decisions about the categories through the process, brings questions to the data, and advances personal values, experiences, and priorities (Miller & Salkind, 2002). Simply, all individuals, including the researcher, co-construct reality and make meaning of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Charmaz (2006) emphasized the importance of including both the researchers' and the participants' views, beliefs, and feelings, while deemphasizing complex use of jargon, diagrams, or systemic approaches when executing a constructivist grounded theory research study.

The researcher also holds perspectives and possesses knowledge of this field prior to deciding on the research topic; however, classic grounded theorists (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978) advocate delaying the literature review until after completing the analysis. The intended purpose of delaying the literature review is to avoid importing

preconceived ideas and imposing them on your work. Now grounded theorists increasingly recognize that a lack of familiarity with relevant literature is unlikely and untenable (Charmaz, 2014). Robert Thornberg (2012) opposes the position of dismissing extant theoretical and research literature, he states:

An informed grounded theorist sees the advantage of using preexisting theories and research findings in the substantive field in a sensitive, creative and flexible way instead of seeing them as obstacles and threats. Constructivist GT can also work in tandem with Glaser's as well as Strauss and Corbin's versions of GT as long as the researcher rejects pure induction and the dictum of delaying literature, uses the logic of abduction during the whole research process, and recognizes his or her embeddedness within a historical, ideological and socio-cultural context, and hence that data always are social constructions and not exact pictures of reality. (p. 249)

Abduction leads grounded theorists to go beyond induction. You consider all possible theoretical interpretations of your data but maintain a critical, skeptical stance toward these theories (Charmaz, 2014). Abduction provides an important path for interacting with data and emerging analysis. The researcher must seek to understand how concepts that are grounded in the data related to existing knowledge. Abduction allows for the search of possible explanations of what is going on. I had to engage in the process of formulating an explanation pertaining to what brought about the patterns observed in the data.

My study used the constructivist grounded theory approach because it is the most suitable given the focus on understanding a process where meaning is held and created by

the participants (Charmaz, 2006). A constructivist grounded theory does not limit the role of the researcher in making decisions about the categories throughout the process and argues for the researcher to use a literature review to engage the material critically and comparatively during the entire research process. In addition, the constructivist grounded theory approach is congruent with the principles of Appreciative Education. Lastly, grounded theory approaches are seen as generative in nature and adding future contribution to the field.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

My position on the philosophical assumptions in this study support the beliefs of constructivism. As a researcher, I start with the assumption that “social reality is multiple, processual, and constructed, then we must take the researcher’s position, privileges, perspective, and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality. It, too, is a construction” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). In qualitative studies, the researcher brings their own worldviews and beliefs to the research project (Creswell, 2007). Charmaz (2014) emphasizes that the constructivist approach perspective shreds notions of a neutral observer and value-free expert. Not only does this mean that researchers must examine rather than erase how their privileges and preconceptions may shape the analysis, but it also means that their values shape the very facts that they can identify.

Bensimon et al. (1989) suggested researchers using the social constructivist paradigm tend to put an emphasis on “interpretation, multiple realities, meaning making, perception, and subjective experience as they are important to understanding leadership” (p. 20). The constructivist perspective fits well with the thinking that Appreciative Education is situational and contextual and people may have very different interpretations

of this concept. The goal of analyzing data from the perspectives of the participants is to create a depiction that provides an understanding of the phenomenon and to use this newly found understanding to generate ideas that advance current theories about related topics to the overall research questions.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher for this study, I was strongly connected to the topic because I participate in monthly Appreciative Deans' and Directors' calls along with facilitating the online Appreciative Administration course through the Office of Appreciative Education at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). As such, I had certain assumptions and predictions about the study based on my own lived experiences. My assumptions and predictions during this study were around the ideas that participants would be able to name and explain how they used each piece of the Appreciative Education framework. I also assumed that my participants were using the Appreciative Education framework in their administrative practices and by putting Appreciative Education into practice, administrators would positively impact those they supervise. In addition, I assumed that my participants would have a positive outlook on their administrative role in higher education. It was important for me to recognize that my experiences are not necessarily the same as what others have experienced and that I needed to allow participants to tell their own stories free of influence from my experiences or assumptions. To maintain the reliability of the study, I drew upon Charmaz's (2014) reflexive memo-writing concept and set aside my experiences which allowed me to stay close to my data. To mitigate any potential influence on the study, I reflected on my assumptions about the experience and the findings which I expected in my reflexive memoing. Interview questions were crafted

to be general and open-ended as to not lead participants to give expected answers. Finally, I sought to refrain from conversation or commentary with participants during the interview and focus group discussion as much as possible and used a semi-structured protocol to guide each interview. Overall, I used rich, thick quotes to create an updated framework on how higher education administrators were putting the Appreciative Education framework into their administrative practice while leaving all previous biases out of the research (Creswell, 2013). I tried, as much as possible, not to fill in any blanks in the research with my previous experiences. Again, rich, thick data, rather than my previous experiences, was used to create the updated framework.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection on your biases, theoretical dispositions, and so on (Schwandt, 1997), as well as the entire research process. I am a higher education administrator employed by a private four-year institution. I am in a unique position to conduct a grounded theory study of the phenomenon of the conceptualization of Appreciative Education within higher education administration. I have been an administrator for ten years and have extensive knowledge of the Appreciative Education framework and use pieces in my daily administrative practices.

The role of the researcher in a constructivist grounded theory study is reflexive and interactive. Charmaz (2006) referred to the researcher as a “variable in the research process itself” (p. 128). The reflexive nature of constructivist grounded theory actively locates the researcher directly within the research process (Charmaz, 2008b; Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008). As the researcher I was embedded in the research rather than a distant observer.

During the study, I viewed data through my own lens and through interaction with others and interpreted meaning based on participants' perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon (Grbich, 2007). As the researcher, I engaged in inductive reasoning to generate concepts and themes and to raise these to the level of theoretical constructs (Charmaz, 2006). "The theories are always traceable to the data that gave rise to them within the interactive context of data collecting and data analyzing in which the analyst is also a crucially significant interactant" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 278). However, I am also a reflective observer, allowing "patterns to emerge and indicated by the data" (Glaser, 1992, p. 12). I took time to saturate the data and dive deeply into the experiences of the participants. Saturating the data allowed me to produce a theory based on the interview data.

### **Research Process**

This qualitative study used a constructivist grounded theory method. Grounded theory is an appropriate design for seeking to generate or discover a theory for a process or an action. Creswell (2013) described a grounded theory study as a design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants" (p. 83). A constructivist grounded theory is less structured and incorporates the researcher's views; it uncovers experiences with embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theorists acknowledge that the theory that is formed is grounded in the experiences of the participants; nevertheless, the researcher helped co-create the theory based on their interactions with the participants (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theorists "do not attempt to be objective in their data

collection or analysis, but instead seek to clarify and problematize their assumptions and make those assumptions clear to others” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 4).

Bloom et al.’s (2013) Appreciative Education served as the conceptual framework and guide for this study. One of the components of Appreciative Education is Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), and a principle of Appreciative Inquiry states that human knowledge and organizational destiny are interwoven. We are constantly involved in understanding and making sense of the people and the world around us (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Because of the prior knowledge I bring to the study and how I co-constructed knowledge with participants, I find an Appreciative Education lens is appropriate in constructing the grounded theory. For these reasons, I have decided that a constructivist grounded theory approach and using a conceptual framework was appropriate for exploring the research questions.

### **Research Participants**

Researchers must demonstrate intention and thoughtfulness when sampling in a grounded theory study. Morse (2007) identified three important principles for grounded theorists to consider when creating samples for study: (1) excellent research skills are essential for obtaining good data; (2) it is necessary to locate “excellent” participants to obtain excellent data; and (3) sampling techniques must be targeted and efficient (p. 230-233). In my dissertation study, purposeful and theoretical sampling guided how I selected participants.

### **Sampling Criteria**

For constructivist grounded theory, sampling is designed to assist in the development of the theory rather than for population representation (Charmaz, 2014).

The researcher purposively selects participants that can answer the research questions. Therefore, sampling used in constructivist grounded theory is purposeful. With purposeful sampling, I found participants that had experienced the phenomenon of study, which aided in “determining the scope of the phenomena or concepts” (Morse, 2007, p. 236) and yielded “excellent” participants who demonstrated aspects connected to the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 1990). The goal of using purposeful sampling, then, was also to ensure that participants would provide different perspectives within similar experiences of the phenomenon. A type of purposeful sampling is criterion sampling (Morse, 2007). Criteria-based sampling identifies and selects participants that meet a predetermined criteria. For this study, I defined “excellent” participants as those who met the following sample criteria: (1) had at least one full-time person reporting to them; and (2) had participated in formal Appreciative Education training. The criteria helped to ensure that participants could answer the research questions. The interview protocol asked for examples of how a higher education administrator were using Appreciative Education with those they supervise, which is why the criteria of having at least one professional reporting to them was stated. Also, asking that participants participate in at least one formal Appreciative Education training ensured that all participants had the same common language and knowledge base around Appreciative Education. I also used theoretical sampling alongside purposeful and criterion sampling. Theoretical sampling involves intentionally selecting participants who can support emerging concepts and theory (Charmaz 2006; Morse, 2007).



## **Sample Recruitment**

Grounded theory methodology recognizes the importance of collaborative and trusting relationships between the researcher and study participants. Collaborative and trusting relationships are essential, as the researcher must rely on the experience and input of the participants before a theory can emerge. Participants must feel comfortable letting the researcher into their subjective world so that the researcher can best understand the participants' experiences and perspectives as seen through their eyes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I used several strategies to recruit participants for this study, including expert nomination, snowballing, and my professional network. The first strategy I used was expert nomination. I worked with the Office of Appreciative Education at Florida Atlantic University to obtain a list of participants that met my criteria to use as a way to recruit participants. The second strategy I used to recruit participants was the snowball technique (Charmaz, 2014), which allowed me to connect with prospective participants based on the recommendation of a current participant who was well informed about the study. Lastly, I used my professional network. I participate in monthly Zoom Deans and Directors meetings attended by administrators who are utilizing the Appreciative Education framework to talk about current trends of higher education and brainstorm about ways to help each other implement the Appreciative Education framework in our respective areas; these professionals fit the criteria for this study.

## **Sample Size**

The sample size of a grounded theory cannot be determined in advance (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Research

continues until the study reaches a point of theoretical saturation. That is, data gathering continues until the research participants repeat themes and concepts developed from data provided by previous participants. While there is no defined sample size, some authors have provided guidelines on the expected number of participants in a grounded theory study. According to Creswell (2007), most grounded theory studies require between 20 and 30 research participants to reach saturation. Specific to constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2006) asserted that conducting interviews with fewer participants could provide data-rich information and could lead to theoretical saturation. I aimed for an initial sample of 20-30 participants with a plan to engage in theoretical sampling at 15 participants. The collection of data from these participant interviews served as the primary source used to develop the grounded theory model for this study.

As the research progresses, specific participants become the focus of investigation based on “emerging theoretical concepts” (Currie, 2009, p. 25), this is known as theoretical sampling. Glaser (1978) calls it the “process of data collection for generating theory” (p. 36). In grounded theory, theoretical sampling allows the researcher to obtain data from participants that aids in the development of a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, the researcher “decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop the theory as it emerges” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). Rather than being used for verification of preconceived hypotheses, it will be used to check on the emerging conceptual framework (Charmaz, 2006). Because grounded theory utilizes a constant comparison method to analyze data and determine relationships among data as it is being collected, theoretical sampling is very useful in attaining more data that is useful for developing a theory. Theoretical sampling keeps a study grounded by guiding the

researcher back into the field to gather data to check and refine emergent themes (Charmaz, 2008b).

### **Constant Comparison**

Constant comparison is a systematic process whereby data is continually compared incident to incident and incident to category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Examples of constant comparison in grounded theory research include (a) comparing data between individuals, (b) comparing data within individual narratives, (c) comparing incidents with other incidents, and (d) comparing categories with other categories (Charmaz, 2000). Constant comparison is pervasive in grounded theory research and is the driving force behind data collection, data analysis, and development of theory. “New data is constantly compared to emerging concepts unto no new themes, categories, or relationships are discovered” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 157). Throughout the process of constant comparison, it was important to stay self-aware. I had to continually maintain attention on the processes involved (selection of interview questions, theoretical sampling, coding, memoing, and sorting), which will be discussed later in the chapter, as the process is iterative and the theories can continuously change and develop (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Theoretical Sensitivity**

Data analysis in grounded theory requires ‘theoretical sensitivity,’ described by Glaser (1992) as “the researcher’s knowledge, understanding, and skill, which foster the generation of categories and properties and increase his ability to relate them into hypotheses” (p. 27). Theoretical sensitivity is reflected in grounded theory research by the processes of inductive reasoning, reflection, memoing, and writing the theory. An

informing concept is an aspect of theoretical sensitivity in which the researcher recognizes an emergent concept that guides further exploration leading to development of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978).

### **Theoretical Saturation**

Theoretical saturation is the aim of data collection. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe saturation as the point during research that gathering more data in a category will cease to yield any further insight into that category. It is at this point in grounded theory research that data collection ends for that category; otherwise the researcher is simply collecting useless data that will decelerate the process (Charmaz, 2006). Selecting participants based on theoretical relevance ensures that data collection is clear and unhindered rather than a “waste of time” due to the over collection of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 52). Based on the collected initial interview data, I found that theoretical saturation occurred in the original data set of 21 interviews, where no new data emerged.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

A grounded theory researcher must be able to discern what kinds of data need to be collected and what aspects of data, already collected, are important to the study. Interviews are the most common form of data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Methods of data collection in a grounded theory study are intended to provide detailed and descriptive information about the participants’ point of view and lived experience of the phenomenon under study. The substantive theory that is generated in grounded theory study is “grounded in the data which explains its subjects’ main concerns and how they are processed” (Glaser, 1992, p. 14). The method employed in this research study was semi-structured interviews and a focus group conducted over Zoom.

Before conducting interviews, I sent out a brief survey (Appendix A) in order to capture demographic data from the participants to determine whether potential participants meet the selection criterion. The data captured gender, institution type, current position title, when their current position started, number of people they supervise, and the Appreciative Education training they had attended. I used this demographic questionnaire to give me a basic understanding of the participants and their context and enable me to start each interview in a conversational manner informed with background knowledge.

### **Interviews**

The primary method of data collection used in this grounded theory study was semi-structured interviews (Appendix B). I sent all participants a calendar invitation containing a Zoom link for the agreed-upon date and time along with the Informed Consent form (Appendix G). After starting the Zoom call and accepting the participant into the Zoom room, I warmly greeted the participants to build good rapport, I explained the interview protocol, checked I had the consent form, and asked if I could record the interview. I then began asking the interview questions. To maintain confidentiality, each participant provided me with a pseudonym, and I removed identifying information from Chapter IV. During the interview, I maintained a friendly and disarming demeanor while not indulging in extra conversation or commentary to avoid any researcher biases.

Each participant interview concluded in a single interview session, lasting between 50 and 80 minutes in duration. The interviews allowed the participants to express their narratives fully, describing how they infused Appreciative Education into their daily administrative practices. The interview questions also allowed participants to

share the specific actions or steps they were taking to put Appreciative Education into practice. The average interview time was 60 minutes in duration. The interviews were audio-recorded (with permission) and transcribed. After the interview, I asked if I could follow up with any additional questions after the transcript review. After everything was complete, I thanked the participant again for their time. After cleaning up the interview transcripts, I sent the transcripts to all 21 participants to review.

### **Focus Group**

After initial categories and themes started to emerge, I reached out to a sub-sample of participants (Appendix E) to participate in a focus group. Eight out of the 21 participants participated in a 60-minute focus group on Zoom (Appendix C). The purpose of the focus group was to present my preliminary themes to the participants for discussion as a form of validation and to collect richer data. With the permission of the participants, the focus group was audio recorded. Focus group data is important because of the interactive discussion between participants, thus yielding data that could not be collected through individual interviews (Hennink, 2014). I found that the focus group participants felt the initial themes were congruent with how they infused Appreciative Education into their daily administrative practices.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Interview transcripts served as the primary data source for this constructivist grounded theory research study. I applied the constant comparative method to the transcribed interview transcripts (Charmaz, 2014). Further, to identify an emerging theory, I applied three critical steps of data analysis through coding: (1) initial coding, (2) focused coding, and (3) theoretical coding. Additionally, I used memo writing throughout

the data collection and data analysis processes to help me move analysis from codes to theoretical concepts (Charmaz, 2014).

### **Coding**

The coding process aids the researcher in thinking about their research in a way that differs from their participants by joining analytic thought, disciplinary training, and empirical data (Charmaz, 2014). In grounded theory, coding links data and the emerging theory. Specifically, through coding, the researcher defines and makes meaning of what is happening in the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). Charmaz identified three coding levels that reveal theory from data: (1) initial coding, (2) focused coding, and (3) theoretical coding. In constructivist grounded theory, coding is done in two phases, phase one included initial coding, which involved naming words, sentences, or segments to make sense of the data (Charmaz, 2014). This initial phase of coding can be used via In Vivo (using participants' words) or Process (actions) codes.

The second phase used focused coding, which allowed me to synthesize and integrate large amounts of data to develop categories. I had to re-code initial codes using words or phrases that best represented the same meaning or experience across interviews. For focused coding, I followed Charmaz's (2014) suggested questions about the data:

1. What do you find when you compare your initial codes with data?
2. In which ways might your initial codes reveal patterns?
3. Which of these codes best account for the data?
4. What do your comparisons between codes indicate?
5. Do your focused codes reveal gaps in the data? (pp. 140-141)

Theoretical coding was used in the later stage of analysis. Theoretical codes, using constant comparison, described how prior identified codes related to each other forming an emergent theory (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical coding was completed after data collection and data analysis of the first 15 participants. I used themes and categories identified in the prior phase and analyzed them in the theoretical coding phase to form a coherent theory (Charmaz, 2014). I continued to collect and analyze data ( $n=6$ ) until I reached theoretical saturation, and a theory emerged. Theoretical saturation was found after interviewing 21 participants. At this point, I did not find new patterns in the data.

### **Memo Writing**

In addition to coding interviews, I took notes summarizing responses and recorded memos to capture any impressions of the interview responses in real-time (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Memo writing also helped to capture analytic thoughts by “elaborating on the coded categories that developed during the data analysis” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 169). In constructivist grounded theory, memos are the building blocks and form the core of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014, p. 191). Charmaz shared, “[Memo-writing] encourages you to stop other research activities, such as gathering data without analyzing them” (p. 170). Specifically, writing memos aided me in seeing the relationships between emerging categories, keywords that participants used, and the connections among concepts that I interpreted as significant to the study.

### **Trustworthiness Criteria**

As a contributor to the educational field, a researcher needs to ensure a study is trustworthy and will contribute meaningful insight for further research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative researchers can enhance the reliability of their research methods by



using a variety of data collection techniques and accurately analyzing the data (Lewis, 2009). Credibility can be enhanced by demonstrating integrity in data collection, competence in analyzing data, and demonstrating the legitimacy of the research methods (Ha, 2011). To ensure trustworthiness I used member checking, reflexive memoing, and purposeful sampling. Together, these strategies can enhance the credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability of the results of this study.

### **Member Checking**

Researchers primarily use member checking in qualitative studies to ensure trustworthiness and establish credibility. Time spent conducting interviews should achieve engagement in the field, and I used member checking with participants to confirm findings. Member checking, for example, can involve participants reviewing transcripts for accuracy. In grounded theory methodology, member checking is useful in identifying gaps, conflicting data, and areas for further development (Harry et al., 2005). Out of the 21 participants, six did not respond to my request to review their transcript and provide any feedback, thirteen stated their transcript looked good, and two provided minor corrections to add information to examples they shared.

### **Reflexive Memoing**

Reflexive memoing aids a researcher in uncovering their own assumptions, biases, and suppositions about their data (Charmaz, 2014). Through writing about the research experience, parsing data, and capturing questions about the process, a researcher can interrogate their own thinking about their study. Charmaz (2014) emphasized the need for a researcher to be clear about how they are relating to their data and not import assumptions or interpretations. Reflexive memoing responds to the need to be clear about

how the researcher is relating to their participants and increases the dependability of the research study. Reflexive memoing allowed me to pause during data collection and analysis. Reflexive memoing reminded me to go back to my data when I tried to fit the data collected into the individual 6-D phases of Appreciative Education instead of looking from a broader perspective from what the data was telling me, and I was also able to write down my feelings of how I would respond if a supervisor put the themes emerging into practice with me, allowing me to bring forth my assumptions during the study.

### **Sampling**

Transferability requires that findings are meaningful to the reader (Jones et al., 2013). To ensure transferability, I selected participants who represented diverse perspectives of higher education administrators, while also representing various institutional types. Together, each of these strategies helped to guarantee that the research process was consistent, data collection was thorough, and the research findings from this study are valid and useful.

### **Delimitations**

This study will be delimited to administrators in higher education who supervise at least one professional. The study was further delimited to higher education administrators who had participated in at least one Appreciative Education training. Administrators were selected to support the accuracy and depth of information for the interviews.

## **Limitations**

This study was limited to participant interviews, meaning that all of the data was self-reported from participants in the interviews and focus groups. This presents a limitation because interview participants may not accurately recall information, or they may give false information. Some participants may have responded in a manner they feel they should respond, given the topic of the study. In addition, this grounded theory may not be transferable to other populations.

Another limitation of the study that became clear pertained to the sampling criteria. This study used purposeful sampling and required participants to supervise at least one full-time staff member and participate in at least one formal Appreciate Education training. Two participants were eliminated after filling out the background survey because they did not have any full-time staff reporting to them, even though they had extensive training experience with Appreciative Education.

A final limitation was how closely I, as the researcher, was connected to this study because I participate in monthly Appreciative Deans and Directors Zoom meetings, and I also co-facilitate the online Appreciative Administration course through the Office of Appreciative Education at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). Recognizing this limitation, I wrote reflexive memos regularly during the research process about how I, researcher as instrument, was impacting the research process.

## **Chapter Summary**

This grounded theory study aimed to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices. This chapter described the methodological approach used,

philosophical assumptions of the study, sampling, data collection and analysis procedures, trustworthiness criteria, delimitations, and limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices. This chapter will provide an overview of the 21 participants interviewed for this study, including their career path and how they discovered the Appreciative Education framework.

### **Participants and Appreciative Education Training**

A total of 21 higher education administrators participated in this study. All 21 participants had participated in formal Appreciative Education training and have at least one person reporting to them. The formal training opportunities that the interviewees participated in included the Appreciative Advising online course, Appreciative Advising Institute, being faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute, the Appreciative Administration online course, and/or participating in the Unleashing Greatness Retreat. These formal training opportunities are described below.

The Appreciative Advising online course is a six-week asynchronous class allowing participants from all over North America and the world to come together, focusing on a new phase of the Appreciative Advising framework each week. Participants watch videos, read assigned readings, and respond to posts each week at their own time and pace. Someone trained in the Appreciative Advising framework facilitates and serves as a resource for the course.

The Appreciative Advising Institute is a four-day interactive, hands-on, and synchronous professional development experience full of practical suggestions for translating the theory of Appreciative Advising into practice. Participants learn how to use the six phases of Appreciative Advising: Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle to help their students optimize their educational experiences and to help participants optimize theirs as well. During the course, participants are placed into groups with various institutions, nations, and positions to bring a diversity of experiences and perspectives to enrich learning. Someone trained in the Appreciative Advising framework facilitates each small group.

The Appreciative Administration online course is a six-week asynchronous class covering a range of topics through an Appreciative Education lens. The course provides community members with an opportunity to learn specific skills, techniques, and practical applications for becoming an effective Appreciative Administrator. Topics in the course include appreciative onboarding, appreciative staff meetings, appreciative supervision, appreciative strategic planning, and appreciative assessment. Participants watch videos, read assigned readings, respond to posts each week, and complete a portfolio activity applying what they learn each week back to their respective roles or institutions. Someone trained in the Appreciative Education framework facilitates and serves as a resource for the course.

The Unleashing Greatness Retreat was an invitation-only professional development opportunity held in 2019. Through this unique casual weekend retreat format, participants were able to engage actively and collaborate with 15 institutions from all over the world that are employing Appreciative Education to create a plan for

unleashing greatness on their campuses. Each institution could bring four key members (a senior administrator, a mid-level administrator, a faculty member, and a student leader) to participate. The retreat consisted of keynote sessions, engaging and practical breakout sessions, and networking opportunities.

Looking at the 21 participants, ten had participated in one formal Appreciative Education training; ten had participated in two to four formal Appreciative Education training opportunities; and one participant had participated in all five formal Appreciative Education training opportunities. Table 2 provides the background information for all participants.

**Table 2***Participant Profiles*

Participant	Gender	Institution Type	Current Position	Current Position Started	Number of People Supervised	Appreciative Education Training Experience
Ben	Male	4-year, Public	Director	2016	8	Appreciative Advising online course Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty Unleashing Greatness Retreat
Johana	Female	Community College	Vice President	2019	100	Appreciative Advising online course Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Participant
Elizabeth	Female	4-year, Private	Director	2013	6	Appreciative Advising online course Participant Appreciative Administration online course Participant Unleashing Greatness Retreat
Dr. J	Male	4-year, Public	Director	2017	7	Appreciative Advising Institute Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty
Taylor	Female	4-year, Private	Associate Director	2018	1	Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty
Lorena	Female	4-year, Public	Director	2015	7	Appreciative Advising online course Participant
Jess	Male	4-year, Public	Director	2010	9	Appreciative Advising Institute Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty Appreciative Administration online course Participant
Nicole	Female	4-year, Private	Academic Director and Professor	2011	2	Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty
Lyle	Male	4-year, Public	Director	2013	3	Appreciative Advising online course Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Participant



Participant	Gender	Institution Type	Current Position	Current Position Started	Number of People Supervised	Appreciative Education Training Experience
Lauren	Female	4-year, Private	Assistant Dean	2016	1	Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty
Ann	Female	4-year, Public	Director	2015	12	Appreciative Advising online course Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty Appreciative Administration online course Participant Unleashing Greatness Retreat
Sylvia	Female	4-year, Public	Faculty Development Specialist	2009	5	Appreciative Advising Institute Participant Unleashing Greatness Retreat
Tatiana	Female	4-year, Public	Assistant Director	2019	3	Appreciative Advising online course Participant Appreciative Administration online course Participant
Mr.	Male	4-year, Public	Assistant Dean	2013	35	Appreciative Advising online course Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty Appreciative Administration online course Participant Unleashing Greatness Retreat
Jake	Male	4-year, Public	Associate Dean	2019	5	Appreciative Advising online course Participant
Benji	Male	4-year, Public	Associate Vice President	2018	12	Appreciative Advising online course Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Participant Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty Appreciative Administration online course Participant
Richard Green	Male	4-year, Private	Associate Director	2018	1	Appreciative Advising Institute Participant Appreciative Administration online course Participant
Rogue	Female	Community College	Associate Director	2015	5	Appreciative Advising Institute Participant
Claire	Female	4-year, Private	Director	2016	7	Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty

Participant	Gender	Institution Type	Current Position	Current Position Started	Number of People Supervised	Appreciative Education Training Experience
Charlie	Male	4-year, Public	Director	2016	6	Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty
Beth	Female	4-year, Public	Assistant Dean	2015	10	Appreciative Advising Institute Faculty

In addition to the background information provided in Table 2, I will provide an in-depth profile of each participant, including their title, institution type, educational journey, initial exposure to Appreciative Education, and the specific Appreciative Education professional development opportunities the person has engaged in to date.

### **Ben**

Ben has spent his career working in academic advising and academic support services. At the time of the interview, Ben was serving as the Director of Student Affairs within a College of Education at a regional public institution. After the interview, he moved into a Dean of Student Success role at a four-year private institution. He earned a master's in Higher Education and is working on his doctorate in Higher Education. Ben first learned about Appreciative Advising taught by Dr. Jennifer Bloom while enrolled in a course on Academic Advising in his Master's degree program. This academic training was supplemented by hands-on experience and a week-long training in his graduate assistantship (GA). His GA office used the Appreciative Advising framework as the theoretical infrastructure for their work, and his supervisor was an Appreciative Advising proponent. After graduating with his master's degree, Ben has participated in the Appreciative Advising online course and the Appreciative Advising Institute, served as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute, and also participated in the Unleashing Greatness Retreat.

### **Johana**

Johana is currently Vice President of Enrollment Management at a community college. She holds a doctorate in Executive Leadership. As Johana entered a new institution and new role in enrollment management she was tasked with creating a unified

advising model. At the time, nine different advisement areas were reporting to three Vice Presidents. While Johana was researching different advising approaches, she came across Appreciative Advising. Through a grant, she brought a team of people working with Appreciative Advising to her campus to present on the topic. Over time, roughly 600 people from advisors to executives on the President's cabinet were trained in Appreciative Advising to provide a unified approach to working with students. Johana has also participated in the Appreciative Advising online course and the Appreciative Advising Institute.

### **Elizabeth**

Elizabeth started her career in Residence Life. After 17 years, she then made a career move into academic affairs and is currently serving as the Director for Academic Success Programs and Advising at a four-year private institution. She earned a master's degree and is working on completing her doctorate. When Elizabeth started her last position, she was charged with centralizing academic advising on her campus. One of the associate directors looked into Appreciative Advising and attended the Appreciative Advising Institute. After attending the Institute, the Associate Director returned to campus and showed Elizabeth how the Appreciative Advising model would benefit the institution. When working with staff, some felt they were already using Appreciative Advising techniques, but the leadership emphasized using the Appreciative Advising principles more intentionally. The Appreciative Advising framework has framed advisors' relationships with students and their relationships with fellow staff members at her institution. Elizabeth has participated in the Appreciative Advising online course, the Appreciative Administration online course, and the Unleashing Greatness Retreat.

**Dr. J.**

Dr. J. originally started his career in the seminary but realized his love of academics was strong. Dr. J is the Dean of the Honors College at a four-year public institution. Dr. J currently holds a doctorate in History. While teaching, he was tasked with putting together a committee to develop a plan to improve the undergraduate program, which happened to be in the form of an honors college. Dr. J. realized by leading an honors program that he could still maintain very close connections to students in various ways while also teaching. Dr. J. worked with Dr. Amanda Propst Cuevas, a practitioner of Appreciative Advising and the current Director of FAU's Office of Appreciative Education, and was introduced to Appreciative Advising and how to be mindful of what they were doing with students and, to a larger extent, each other. Dr. J. has since participated in and served as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute.

**Taylor**

Taylor served as the Associate Director of a tutoring center at a four-year private institution when interviewed and has since moved into a visiting faculty role at a four-year public institution. She holds a master's degree and is working towards her doctorate in curriculum and instruction. She has had a career within different functional areas of higher education, from student success and academic coaching to supplemental instruction. Taylor first learned about Appreciative Advising in her Master's program. During her first semester of graduate school, she had a class with Dr. Jennifer Bloom and had the chance to participate in training for her graduate assistantship that was rooted in Appreciative Advising. Since learning about Appreciative Advising, Taylor has served as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute.

**Lorena**

Lorena serves as a Director of Student Success at a four-year public institution. She earned her doctorate in leadership and innovation. Lorena started her career working in a nonprofit organization but needed to move closer to home for family reasons and ended up doing health and wellness work at her alma mater. Realizing she missed the one-on-one support for students, Lorena was able to move into a position doing TRiO work. While doing work for the TRiO office, Lorena met an Assistant Vice President who was doing an action research dissertation around Appreciative Advising and Appreciative Inquiry and sent Lorena articles on the topic. The topic resonated with her interests in social work frameworks and seeing the full potential in people. Since learning about Appreciative Inquiry and Advising, Lorena has participated in the Appreciative Administration online course.

 **Jess**

Jess is currently the Director of ACCESS and University Advising Services at a four-year public institution. After finishing his master's degree in Counseling, Jess went back for a doctorate in Higher Education. Jess originally started his career in School counseling for K-12. During Jess's master's program, he received an assistantship with Advising Services and realized he enjoyed the higher education setting. During his doctoral program, an opportunity arose where a grant was written to focus on second-year retention, and Jess was tapped to oversee that project. A few years into working with the grant, a new administrator was hired to oversee all first- and second-year advising. During Jess's first meeting with his new supervisor this new supervisor mentioned he was doing many things tied into Appreciative Advising. Jess was handed the

*Appreciative Advising Revolution* book to read more about this new concept, and he says the rest is history. Since learning about Appreciative Advising, Jess has been a participant and now serves as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute and has participated in the Appreciative Administration online course.

### **Nicole**

Nicole was one of the few participants who always dreamed of being a college professor. Nicole is currently a Chair and Professor of Management at a four-year private institution and the Director for a center focused on Appreciative Inquiry. She earned her Doctorate in Organizational Behavior. Nicole wanted to be on the teaching side of things and has always been in higher education. During her time of completing her master's degree, Nicole took a course titled consulting for organizational change. During that class, she expressed interest to her professor in starting a doctoral degree program. The professor had mentioned a program in the Midwest and felt it would resonate with Nicole's approach and passions. During her doctoral work, Nicole met and worked with David Cooperrider and learned about the language and framework for Appreciative Inquiry. Nicole leads Appreciative Inquiry summits and has served as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute.

### **Lyle**

Currently, Lyle is a Director of Admissions, Recruiting, and Advising for a College of Optometry at a four-year public institution. Lyle started out working for a University library after his undergraduate degree. While working at the library, his employer paid for him to advance his education. Looking at graduate programs, he thought back to what brought him joy as a student and how much he loved his

extracurricular experiences, such as being an ambassador or recruiter. He earned his master's degree in Counselor Education with a concentration in Student Affairs. In his current position, his supervisors encourage the staff to take advantage of professional development opportunities. Lyle discovered the appreciative approach through a random google search and found a video about the Appreciative Advising Institute. He knew the appreciative approach was aligned with his approach to work. Lyle has since participated in the Appreciative Advising online course and Institute.

### **Lauren**

Lauren originally had an interest in journalism and public relations as an undergraduate, leading to her current position as Assistant Dean in a School of Communication for a four-year private institution. She has earned her master's in Higher Education. Lauren was an over-involved college student and enjoyed interacting with student organization advisors, and being a student ambassador was a big part of her life. Being involved allowed her to see the behind-the-scenes of her institution and piqued her interest in how those working outside the classroom got into their fields. Dr. Jennifer Bloom was the incoming program director during Lauren's first year in the master's program. Through classes and being advised by Dr. Bloom, she learned about Appreciative Advising. During her second year of graduate school, she did an independent study with Dr. Bloom working on Appreciative Advising projects such as research and writing articles; this experience got her hooked. Lauren has served as faculty member for the Appreciative Advising Institute.



## **Ann**

Over five years, Ann worked her way up to be the Director of University Advising and most recently took on the new role of Director for University and Exploratory Advising at a four-year public institution. She holds a master's in Psychology-School Counseling. Ann started her career working in a residential treatment facility for women and girls with eating disorders and had maxed out her growth potential. During Ann's time at the residential treatment facility, her boss referred her to a job in the advising office on a college campus. One of Ann's roles includes being responsible for advisor training. While researching advising theories, Ann's boss mentioned Appreciative Advising and that this framework would be the focus of practice. Appreciative Advising was aligned with her boss's advising framework preference and the institution subsequently has adopted Appreciative Advising as its academic advising framework. Since learning about Appreciative Advising, Ann has participated in the Appreciative Advising online course, served as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute, participated in the Appreciative Administration online course, and participated in the Unleashing Greatness Retreat.

## **Sylvia**

In Sylvia's current position, she has taken on a Faculty Development Specialist role, assisting with course design and academic advising at a four-year public institution. Sylvia has worked in different education settings, starting with working in primary school, high school, and then for the Board of Education overseeing schools. Sylvia completed her doctorate in Educational Leadership and Administration. As Sylvia was working with academic advising, she realized her University did not have a formal

approach to delivering academic advising services, so she started to do her research to help formalize the University's process. In looking online, she came across Dr. Jennifer Bloom's work on Appreciative Advising. Sylvia paid to take the Appreciative Advising course on her own and was mesmerized by this approach. Since finding Dr. Bloom's information online, Sylvia has participated in the Appreciative Advising Institute and the Unleashing Greatness Retreat.

### **Tatiana**

Tatiana is currently the Assistant Director of Academic Success at a four-year public institution. She did not realize that she wanted to work in higher education until her experience as an orientation leader. She sat down with her academic advisor to discuss this possible career choice. Tatiana worked part-time as an academic advisor and pursued her master's in School Counseling. She is now pursuing her doctorate in Higher Education Administration. While in graduate school, Tatiana had the opportunity to attend a NACADA conference. She attended a presentation on Appreciative Advising by Dr. Jennifer Bloom at the NACADA Conference. It was not until a few years later, under a new supervisor, that Tatiana used what she has learned about Appreciative Advising to help develop a new coaching model she was tasked with designing. Since learning about Appreciative Advising, Tatiana has participated in the Appreciative Advising and Appreciative Administration online courses.

### **Mr.**

Mr. is currently the Assistant Dean for University Advising at a four-year public institution. Mr. started his career in Residence Life, where he was introduced to academic advising. He earned his master's degree in Human Resources. In his first role running a

residence hall, the hall director also was the academic advisor for all the students living in that hall. He was able to get training in advising and move into that role full-time on a regional campus. Mr. was searching for a philosophical framework for what he was doing and got involved with NACADA as a national chair. During a national conference, Mr. was able to speak with Dr. Jennifer Bloom, the incoming NACADA President. Dr. Bloom invited Mr. to dinner with a group of practitioners to discuss Appreciative Advising and what it could look like on a large scale. Mr. has served as one of the founders for bringing Appreciative Advising to life. Since Mr. met Dr. Bloom, he has participated in the Appreciative Advising online course, the Appreciative Advising Institute, served as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute, participated in the Appreciative Administration online course and participated in the Unleashing Greatness Retreat.

### **Jake**

Jake is the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education at a four-year public institution. He holds a doctorate in Higher Education. Jake's career started in marketing, public relations, and communication. The company he worked for was downsizing, and he was thinking about what to do next. During that same timeframe, Jake's mentor reached out about a job working with a mentoring program. It was a natural fit to be able to craft programs, work on assessments, and have direct contact with students. This new position in higher education provided Jake with a great transition opportunity to leave the corporate world. Jake stumbled upon Appreciative Advising when he was investigating ways to train academic coaches. He found it was an easy framework to put into practice as most components already fit with the coaching practice. Since learning about

Appreciative Advising, Jake has been a participant in the Appreciative Advising online course.

### **Benji**

Benji is currently the Associate Vice President for Student Success at a four-year public institution. He first got involved working as an undergraduate student worker for an advising center. After working all four years in the advising center as an undergraduate, his supervisor hired him immediately after graduation to run a science and math advising center. Benji earned his master's degree in Adult and Higher Education. Benji had met Dr. Jennifer Bloom through NACADA, and when leaving one position, he met Dr. Amanda Propst Cuevas, who was coming in to take the role Benji was leaving. Dr. Propst Cuevas looped Benji back into the Appreciative Advising circle. Benji attended the first Appreciative Advising Institute. On opening night of the first Institute, he was able to talk with Dr. Bloom and mentioned the idea of putting the training online. Dr. Bloom was excited about this idea, and Benji started to help the appreciative national team with the first iterations of the online course. Benji has since participated in the Appreciative Advising online course, the Appreciative Advising Institute, served as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute, and participated in the Appreciative Administration online course.

### **Richard Green**

Richard Green is the Associate Director of a University Advisement Center at a four-year private institution. Richard Green started his career path as an aerospace engineer. He then wanted to serve on a mission for his church and left the field for a few years. When Richard Green tried to go back, the company was on a hiring freeze, and it

was at this point he decided to go back to school to take business classes. During his time back in school, he was hired in a temporary position working with students to collect paperwork. He then moved into an advising role, and his career progressed rapidly. Richard Green decided that he wanted to teach and went back to school for a second master's degree and a doctorate in Instructional Psychology and Technology. The institution he was pursuing his doctorate at had an opening for an advisor role that also involved some teaching and Richard found the position was the best of both worlds. Richard Green was involved with the American Evaluation Association and discovered appreciative evaluation based on David Cooperrider's work, and this was his first exposure to the appreciative approaches. After attending a NACADA conference, he heard Dr. Jennifer Bloom speak about Appreciative Advising and was excited by her work. Richard Green has since been a participant in the Appreciative Advising Institute and the Appreciative Administration online course.

### **Rogue**

Rogue is currently the Associate Director of Advising at a community college. Rogue became an advisor after gaining experience working in the credentials office, admissions office, and selective entry program. She holds a master's degree in Educational Leadership. Originally, Rogue wanted to be a nurse and then started to pursue social work. Both fields had elements that Rogue felt would be a challenge and would not bring her joy; instead, she decided to pursue a career in academic advising. It was in her master's program where she read the *Appreciative Advising Revolution* book. Rogue's Dean knew Dr. Amanda Propst Cuevas and brought her to campus to present an Appreciative Advising workshop. Rogue followed the tenets of Appreciative Advising

when helping to build the advising office. Rogue has since been a participant in the Appreciative Advising Institute.

### **Claire**

Claire is currently the Program Director of Civic Engagement at a four-year private institution. She holds a master's degree in Student Affairs and a doctorate in Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development Claire and decided instead of going the faculty route to stay working in the service area. In her first professional position, she worked at a nonprofit based on a college campus due to a lack of office and staff space. During Claire's time on the campus, she was exposed to Student Affairs, which helped her decide to pursue her master's degree in that area. Claire ended up at a southeast institution for her master's where Dr. Jennifer Bloom was the program director. Claire approached Dr. Bloom about needing more out of her assistantship. Dr. Bloom was working on an Appreciative Advising Institute and asked Claire to help plan it out. During Claire's years as a graduate student, she would have conversations about moving towards Appreciative Education instead of Appreciative Advising because Claire was not doing hands-on advising work but found a lot of administrative overlap. Claire has since served as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute.

### **Charlie**

Charlie is currently the University Director of Assessment at a four-year public institution. Charlie has an extensive history as a licensed teacher, a faculty member, working in student services, faculty development, academic advising, and retention work. He holds a doctorate in Higher Education Administration. In researching different approaches to assist in student academic recovery, Charlie stumbled across a piece by Dr.

Jennifer Bloom on how Appreciative Inquiry could be used in Academic Advising and has since served as a founding professional for Appreciative Advising. Charlie started to restructure the curriculum for the academic recovery program around this and found great results. Charlie showed that the Appreciative Advising approach positively impacted student outcomes for first-year students and students on academic probation. Charlie continues to assess and show evidence of positive impacts when using an appreciative approach. Charlie also serves as faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute.

### **Beth**

Beth currently is the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Advisement at a four-year public institution. Beth was the only participant who grew up on a college campus as her dad was a college professor. She earned a master's degree in Student Affairs and her doctorate in Higher Education Administration. During her final year as an undergraduate, she had an internship in the academic resource center. A faculty mentor saw potential in her and her ability to work with college students and mentioned a possible master's program in college student personnel. Beth knew she wanted to keep doing this line of work during her graduate assistantship and had no desire to leave. After graduation, she had the opportunity to be the coordinator of academic coaching, the stars aligned, and she has been in the same line of work ever since. Beth met Dr. Jennifer Bloom and was invited to a site visit of another institution to learn how Appreciative Advising was used with students on probation. Beth and Dr. Bloom were able to take these practices back to the University and worked together to change how they approached probation students. Beth has served as a faculty member for the Appreciative Advising Institute.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter shared the stories behind the 21 participants and their journey into higher education, and how they learned about Appreciative Education. Their stories showed that most ended up in higher education by accident and that meeting Dr. Jennifer Bloom put them on a path to realize what they valued or had a passion for aligned with the appreciative approach; they just did not have a name for it at the time. This chapter cannot show the participants' eagerness, smiles, and excitement during the interviews as they told their stories. Those practicing Appreciative Education are part of a larger community that values relationships and wanting to give back in any way possible. The interviews took place during the summer in which we were facing a global pandemic, and administrators were navigating through unprecedented change and uncertainty. I will be forever grateful that even with full plates, they said yes to this study and shared what brings hope and joy into their worlds and how they are putting the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices.



## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices. The study included 21 professionals who met the following criteria: (1) had at least one full-time person reporting to them; (2) had participated in a formal Appreciative Education training. The experiences of the 21 study participants were captured through semi-structured Zoom interviews that took place over a five-month period (June - October 2020). The interviews provided insights into how participants were putting the 6-D's (Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, Don't Settle) and the Appreciative Mindset of the Appreciative Education framework into practice. Subsequently, in March 2021, eight of the 21 participants participated in a virtual focus group via Zoom to provide feedback on the study's initial themes and sub-themes. All data collected through individual interviews, a focus group, and memo-writing helped answer the two research questions of this study:

1. How do higher education administrators use the Appreciative Education framework in their administrative practices?
2. What do higher education administrators that use the Appreciative Education framework find to be:
  - a. The benefits of using this framework?
  - b. The challenges of using this framework?

The findings emerged from listening to the raw interview data, reviewing the transcribed interviews and memos, and studying the transcription from the focus group using Charmaz's (2014) three coding levels, which included initial, focused, and theoretical coding. Over the course of the individual hour-long interviews, participants shared stories of how they were infusing the Appreciative Education framework in their daily practice. Chapter V will detail the themes and sub-themes that emerged from higher education participants in how they use Appreciative Education and the benefits and challenges of using this framework in their daily administrative practices. In addition, each participant was asked how they would define Appreciative Administration during the interview. Data collected that helped shape the definition are provided at the end of this chapter.

**RQ1: How do Higher Education Administrators Use the Appreciative Education Framework in Their Administrative Practices?**

The first research question for this grounded theory study was: How do higher education administrators use the Appreciative Education framework in their administrative practices? The interview protocol was designed to ask questions around each of the 6 D's and the Appreciative Mindset so that the researcher could understand how higher education administrators were infusing Appreciative Education into their daily administrative work. During analysis, three themes emerged from participants on how Appreciative Education showed up in their daily administrative practices: establish trusting relationships ( $n=18$ ), foster relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals ( $n=17$ ), and actively engage in "positive restlessness" ( $n=16$ ). The theme of establishing trusting relationships includes sub-themes of walk the appreciative talk first,

provide support, include all voices, ask powerful questions, and “really” listen. The second theme of foster relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals includes sub-themes of seek buy-in, empower without micromanagement, and walk side by side. The third theme of “positive restlessness” includes sub-themes of celebrate accomplishments, perfectly imperfect, and continue to foster relationships.

### **Establish Trusting Relationships**

Eighteen out of the 21 participants shared that the cornerstone for their work as higher education administrators was centered on proactively building relationships with their fellow employees and within their institutional community. Fourteen participants shared that establishing relationships, specifically trusting relationships, is the foundation for putting Appreciative Education into practice and that building relationships is a primary source of joy in their work. Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, stated, “I know that under everything that is successful is a trusting relationship.” A benefit to starting with establishing trusting relationships is that the participants earned power and were able to accomplish tasks more effectively and efficiently. For example, Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, stated, “I really value relationships, I have learned over my career, that that is really where the joy of the work comes from, and it is also where a lot of power and opportunities to get things done comes from.” Often when participants were sharing ways they were putting Appreciative Education into their administrative practice, they would also give examples of how they put it into practice during their interactions with students. By participants mentioning students as examples

during the interviews showed that the Appreciative framework can have a positive cascading effect on their relationships with not only their direct reports.

Participants spoke more frequently about how the first two phases of the Appreciative Education model (Disarm and Discover) impacted their ability to form relationships more than the last four phases. Participants further noted that the Disarm and Discover phases were crucial to establishing trust so that together they could then Dream, Design, and Deliver on projects. Jess, a Director of nine staff at a 4-year public institution, explained, “the nuts and bolts, we all know how to do that. But in order for that to be effective, you have to connect with the people that you're working with or else the Design is not going to be effective.”

Participants mentioned that using the Appreciative Mindset along with the Disarm and Discover phases, assisted them in being curious about individual stories and understanding the importance of spending time getting to know people as individuals. For example, Lauren, an Assistant Dean who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, stated, “I feel so validated in my work, because I feel like I’m making an impact on people whose names and stories I actually know.” Being curious about individual stories created a strong foundation for building relationships centered on trust and mutual sharing. For example, Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, stated, “it goes back to relationships. I think the key is creating a bond of trust, mutual sharing, and then honoring those relationships, honoring that trust in that confidence over time.” Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, expanded on building a foundation for a trusting relationship by sharing that “it doesn't matter the process as long as we're putting

people first, and that's what's going to help us support our folks in the best way so that they can support our students in the best way.”

Being self-aware as an administrator assisted in building relationships centered on trust, which required putting people before process. Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, provided an honest example that highlighted a time when she did not prioritize building relationships built on trust with her supervisees and how that negatively impacted her effectiveness as an administrator:

A couple of years ago, I just had my nose to the ground, I had a lot to do, we were starting a new unit. I was really focused on getting that done. I really lost sight of the people on my team, and rather than bringing people to the table and asking questions and co-designing experiences, I would just quickly say this task needs to be done, will you do it and let me know when it's finished.

Ann noted that her actions could have led her staff to believe their supervisor did not trust them or value their contributions and that no one wants to work in that type of environment.

Participants shared in their interviews the importance of valuing those around them and helping them do the hard work. Jake, an Associate Dean of five staff at a 4-year public institution, stated, “it is important to know people as humans, not just as employees.” Participants had self-awareness about the role they play in establishing trusting relationships and how to anchor conversations in the personal before jumping to the next organizational fire that needed to be put out and how much more you can accomplish if relationships are developed first. Five sub-themes emerged when participants were describing strategies they used to help build relationships centered on

trust: (1) *Walk the appreciative talk first;* (2) *Provide support;* (3) *Include all voices;* (4) *Ask powerful questions;* (5) *“Really” listen.*

### ***Walk the Appreciative Talk First***

Twelve out of the 21 participants shared the importance of role modeling the Appreciative Education framework behaviors when building relationships with fellow employees. They noted that role modeling was a practice and that they must first walk the appreciative talk before asking other to do so. Benji, an Associate Vice President of 12 staff members at a 4-year public institution, mentioned, “I think a lot of it too, is actually modeling it and not just talking about it.” Mr., an Assistant Dean who supervises 35 staff at a 4-year public institution, made the connection to Appreciative Advising when he stated, “You cannot do Appreciative Advising to a student, you have to do it with them. You can’t lead appreciatively unless you live appreciatively.” The same principle applied as supervisors, as Appreciative Administrators they had to first consistently role model using the Appreciative Education framework first before expecting their supervisees to do so. For example, Ben, a Director of eight staff members at a 4-year public institution, mentioned the importance of consistency: “It’s the consistent messaging, being consistently supportive, being transparent. Actions speak louder over the long period of time.”

Participants mentioned that they were aware that they were not always perfect in role modeling using the Appreciative Education framework, but intentionally worked to be better at doing so every day (Don’t Settle). Charlie, a Director of six staff members at a 4-year public institution, mentioned that leading appreciatively “doesn’t necessarily come naturally, there’s a habit in mind that you have to work at, you try to model that for

other people.” Participants walked the appreciative talk first, they were vulnerable about being imperfect, and in turn, created a culture that encouraged and supported staff to always give it their all and not be afraid to ask for help when needed.

### ***Provide Support***

Eighteen of the 21 participants mentioned providing support and encouragement to staff as an important aspect to building trusting relationships. Lorena, a Director of seven staff members at a 4-year public institution, mentioned, “Staff need support to be able to be of service to others, and they often need to be inspired and reminded of what their strengths are and how great they are.” The participants mentioned feeling that an important aspect of their role as supervisors is to positively reinforce their supervisees’ behaviors that align with the Appreciative Education framework. Beth, an Assistant Dean of 10 at a 4-year public institution, mentioned, “You do that by building people up, not breaking them down, you do that by offering encouragement, just as often as you offer challenge. You let them know that this is a team effort, they’re not on an island by themselves.”

On the flip side, the participants also mentioned the importance of supporting their supervisees when they made mistakes. For example, Sylvia, a faculty development specialist with five staff at a 4-year public institution, stated, “As an administrator, allow them to go and do things knowing that there are risks, and if they fail, it’s not the end of the world. If they fail, we can make it right.” Participants realized that their supervisees’ mistakes were not fatal and that as Appreciative Administrators, their job was to help their supervisees devise a plan to correct their own mistakes and learn from the experience. Taylor, an Associate Director of one staff member at a 4-year private

institution, mentioned, “You have to learn how to provide space and you learn not to be a helicopter parent, when I’m supervising, letting people be resilient and to fail is important too.”

Participants mentioned wanting to also create an office culture where people not only feel safe making mistakes, but also a culture where people enjoy coming to work. One participant, Mr., an Assistant Dean who supervises 35 staff at a 4-year public institution, who has a background in human resources stated,

I want to support them in their goals and mission because ultimately, you get the most out of an employee who loves their job, who loves their co-workers, who feels empowered to make a difference. It is a win-win situation.

In other words, participants found that when they were able to create an office culture where reflection, listening, and trusting relationships are valued that both the office and individual employees benefit.

### ***Include All Voices***

Once the Appreciative Administrators built trusting relationships with their employees, they mentioned the importance of actively and intentionally ensuring that all the voices in meetings are heard. Sixteen of the 21 participants shared how they attempted to not only bring voices to the table when decisions were being made, but also how important it was for everyone to really listen to each other. Dr. J, a Director of seven staff at a 4-year public institution, shared, “you ask for voices to be heard, and for everybody to listen to them. It is a constant process, because the moment you think you’ve got that done, you suddenly discover that there’s another voice that hasn’t been heard.”



Participants mentioned that really listening to the voices of all members of the team was crucial to setting the expectation that everyone on the team is a co-creator of the work done by the office, which gives staff members a sense of ownership in the work which carries the responsibility that they have been hired for their expertise and ability to deliver on projects. Lorena, a Director of seven staff members at a 4-year public institution, mentioned, stated she is the kind of leader “that does not just give a list of transactional items and expect her staff to perform like robots.” Lorena wants to create a culture where her employees take initiative and are creative. In the spirit of the Don’t Settle phase, the participants noted that ensuring that all voices are heard, especially those of historically marginalized populations, takes continuous effort. For example, Nicole, an Academic Director with two staff at a 4-year private institution, mentioned, “There’s been many voices that we have not brought to the table systemically in our organizations. Working and playing with people across different things helps remind me there’s always some other voice that needs to be brought to the table.”

### ***Ask Powerful Questions***

Eleven of the 21 participants mentioned the importance of asking good, generative questions as a strategy to build and maintain trust with their supervisees. Participants specifically noted that asking generative questions was especially helpful when dealing with complex situations that do not have clear-cut solutions. For example, Ricard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, said, “Let’s ask the thought-provoking questions. Instead of sitting across from people, we sit side by side with them and try and just sit in that ambiguity together and navigate things together. So, we’ll ask a lot of questions.”

Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, mentioned that asking questions of employees when they bring problems to her was more effective in the long run than simply fixing the problems for the employee:

Before I was thinking about appreciative practices, when issues would come up, I would really just see those through my lens. I might invalidate someone, like that is not a big deal. I might think, why are you bringing this concern to me, this is not a big deal. And when I don't ask the right questions, or when I only see things through my own lens, then I can never really get at the heart of how I can best support the person on my team that's bringing that concern to me. And so, I've really flipped my approach when a concern does come my way, I now just ask better questions. When I ask better questions, rather than trying to be the person that solves everything, I can actually bring the right players to the team in order to get to the bottom of whatever it is that we need to solve and also, it helps us share ownership for the result.

Tatiana, an Assistant Director with three staff at a 4-year public institution, elaborated on Ann's point about the benefit of asking questions of employees and bringing them into the conversation rather than solving their problems for them when she shared "how questions lead to me understanding their hopes, desires, and how to best support."

Lastly, some participants felt there were personal benefits associated with asking good questions. For example, Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, stated, "I feel most alive when I am asking thought provoking questions and finding out the stories of my team." Jess mentioned, "The questions I ask are intentional to help give me more perspective on where their core

is, and understanding them better is very fulfilling.” Others were able to role model asking good questions to help their team learn a new skill.

### ***“Really” Listen***

Twelve of the 21 participants mentioned the importance of not just going through the motions of listening and instead they emphasized “really” listening to others as a strategy for establishing trusting relationships. Ben said, “Try to really spend time, genuine time, listening and hearing what their desires are.” Elizabeth, a Director of six staff members at a 4-year private institution, captured the importance of listening and using what is learned from others to make decisions, “It’s about listening, but then taking what they say seriously, and trying as best as possible to incorporate those opinions into the decisions I make as a leader.”

Before participants could listen to their supervisees, they had to carve out time to meet with their supervisees. Johana, a Vice President with 100 staff members at a community college, mentioned that when she recently accepted a new leadership position that she made time to meet with her new supervisees a priority by having “one on one’s with everyone and attending staff meetings. I like to embed myself in the department and areas so that I can know everyone and they get to know me.” The obligation to really listen is not only for new administrators. Claire, a Director of seven staff members at a 4-year private institution, who has been in her position for four years, mentioned how she intentionally tries to create space in which “people felt like if they came and they needed to share something, that I was going to hear them and engage with it.”

Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, talked specifically about the importance of listening without

judgment, “We always listen, we try to understand where they're coming from. One key bit of advice we give everybody is there may be something that we're not seeing and so, let's withhold judgment and let's ask the thought-provoking questions.” Administrators do not have to have all the answers, sometimes by asking good questions and “really” listening to the answers that creative solutions emerge.

### **Foster Relationships to Achieve Personal and Organizational Goals**

The second theme that emerged from 17 out of the 21 participants during the interviews was how they could continue to foster relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals. Once Appreciative Administrators have established trusting relationships with their supervisees, they are positioned to use the Dream, Design, and Deliver phases of the Appreciative Education framework to harness the values, talents, and strengths of their team to achieve individual and organizational goals. Participants gave examples of how they aligned individual and organizational goals when working on projects. For example, Mr., an Assistant Dean who supervises 35 staff at a 4-year public institution, mentioned that he identifies the passions and interests of his staff to leverage those for the outcomes that he, the institution, and the students want. Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, mentioned that understanding the why allows for those trusting relationships to grow and that her whole organization uses this method in conversations to harness the strengths and desires of the team: “We have intentional conversations about that a lot. Why is this important to us?”

Fostering relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals can start from the hiring and onboarding processes for new employees. Jess, a Director of nine staff at a 4-year public institution, mentioned, “Identifying interests and passions can start with

your hiring, then onboarding effort, making sure that they get to know the office and culture as much as possible during that process so that it's the right fit for both parties.” Participants mentioned that the hiring process was a place to set the stage for building relationships based on trust. Ben, a Director of eight staff members at a 4-year public institution, shared, “I use conversation time with candidates to discuss how we are as an office, how I am as a supervisor, and this is not just a one-way street. I try to match how we can help each other out.” Interviews that were based in Dream questions set the stage for building relationships from the beginning. Johana, a Vice President with 100 staff members at a community college, also gave an example that during her first one-on-one with a staff member she tries “to see where their dreams fit into my specific organization.” How can administrators help move a staff member forward with their dreams, while still helping the office or division? As participants were talking about the importance of fostering relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals, three sub-themes emerged: (1) *Seek buy-in*; (2) *Empower without micromanagement*; and (3) *Walk side by side*.

### ***Seek Buy-In***

The first sub-theme for fostering relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals was the importance of seeking employee buy-in. Eight of the 21 participants mentioned how they sought to seek buy-in with their supervisees by sharing the why behind projects. For example, Benji, an Associate Vice President of 12 staff members at a 4-year public institution, provided an example about how he got his direct leadership team to “buy into what it is we're doing and where we're going and the trust factor, especially during COVID in this pandemic, there is an amazing amount of trust

that has to go into the leaders in your campus.” One strategy participants employed to seek buy-in with their team is to stand with them. For example, Johana, a Vice President with 100 staff members at a community college, shared,

It's about trying to realize what your ultimate goal is, trying to get buy-in from your constituents, and letting them know that you're in the fight with them, using inclusive pronouns of we're in this together. This is our team.

Participants reported that seeking buy-in started most often in the Dream phase. In particular, when dreaming with a team on initiatives and projects participants noted the importance of sharing the narrative that the idea for an initiative emerged from a suggestion by a staff member or even a student. Lyle, a Director of three staff members at a 4-year public institution, found that by bringing it back to “appreciating the ideas from his team and showing the trust with new projects, the staff had buy-in and were energetic to support each other.” This Appreciative approach contrasts with traditional management, where ideas emerge from senior leaders and employees are only responsible for carrying out the leader’s vision.

Seeking input and buy-in from employees from the beginning helps employees become more invested in the project and allows them to better understand the benefits of the project succeeding. For example, Jake, an Associate Dean of five staff at a 4-year public institution, mentioned he gets buy-in by “framing a project or goal in a way that's beneficial to their bottom line or their department or unit objectives, has been really successful.” Making time to demonstrate to employees the connection between individual and organizational goals and purposes increases employee buy-in. As Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, mentioned earlier, explaining the

why behind projects and initiatives can help foster trusting relationships with employees and also help align employee interests with specific projects.

One way to align personal interests with projects for buy-in is to ask employees who has the capacity to take on a particular role. For example, when Claire, a Director of seven staff members at a 4-year private institution, gets a new project, she brings it to her entire team, “Unless there's a really compelling reason that it should go to one of them, I open it up to them and say, who has capacity? Who has interest? And then let's figure out where it should sit.” Administrators identified the importance of giving staff autonomy in selecting their work. By asking staff who would like to take on a project, Appreciative Administrators are helping employees have a greater sense of ownership about what they are doing in their work.

### ***Empower Without Micromanagement***

A second sub-theme of fostering relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals involved the importance of empowering employees without micromanaging them. One way to empower employees is to assign tasks that play to individual team member's strengths to enhance their sense of ownership on projects. Fourteen of the 21 participants mentioned that completing tasks is a team approach and does not require that the administrator does all the work themselves. Ben, a Director of eight staff members at a 4-year public institution, shared that he “approaches each person, trying to figure out what can you do to help the team and what can I do to help you? I like that I don't have to be in control, that I can let good leaders lead.” Beth, an Assistant Dean of 10 at a 4-year public institution, empowers her staff by giving them ownership of projects:

I'll kick start it, I'll throw out some ideas, I'll try to get them going and give them enough of a framework so that they understand what it is, but then I turn it over, you know, I get out of their way. Of course, if they run into any roadblocks, then I want them to come back and ask for help, or guidance, or whatever it is that they need. But I think the best way to get somebody energized is to say, hey, here's this new idea, are you interested? And let them run with it, let them take ownership of it, let them put their own stamp on it.

When allowing the team to pick up projects that align with their interests, participants shared that establishing clear expectations and role clarity was a tactic to avoid micromanagement.

Very similar to Beth's idea of throwing out ideas at a staff meeting, Taylor, an Associate Director of one staff member at a 4-year private institution, expanded on when someone asks to pick something up, that they co-create together by "outlining roles and responsibilities, setting deadlines, and delegating so that the two-way communication is fluid and everyone knows who's doing what, because it's a team-based decision. So, a very collaborative approach but very clear with who's doing what." The combination of free choice along with the structure of clear expectations and role clarity is a powerful way that participants help their supervisees build their confidence in their ability to successfully carry out projects they have chosen.

Bringing people in and inviting them to select their project roles, pointing out past examples where employees have succeeded, and then co-creating a vision of success all help keep employees energized and engaged. Participants saw that when people have the creativity and freedom to bend their interests and their ambitions toward what the



organization needs that it allows employees to use their curiosity and strengths to help solve problems and complete projects. However, the participants also noted the importance of also providing clear expectations and to consistently communicate those expectations.

### ***Walk Side by Side***

The third sub-theme under fostering relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals was the importance of walking side by side with employees. Six out of the 21 participants shared stories and values about not sitting across the table when working with others but sitting side by side. Sylvia, a faculty development specialist with five staff at a 4-year public institution, mentioned,

I am very good at planning and conceptualizing, finding the correct people to work with me on projects. As a leader, I find that with projects it is important to be in the trenches doing things, along with my team.

Participants knew the importance of not just jumping in and doing the work yourself even though it may be easier. Claire, a Director of seven staff members at a 4-year private institution, shared, “You will never be successful if you show up and say you need to do these things differently, here's how it can be better. You have to spend time doing things with and not doing things for.”

Although the participants tried to assign tasks based on each employee's interests, they recognized that there may still be some tasks that no one is interested in completing. Yet, these tasks still need to be accomplished. Ben, a Director of eight staff members at a 4-year public institution, handles these types of situations where nobody volunteers to take on a duty by creatively brainstorming with his team about how they might work

together to accomplish these projects: “Rather than, you know, suffer in isolation, let's do this as a team. Let's do this as a group and let's try to get through it, maybe we can get through it faster, or we can do it better.” The participants helped their teams understand that sometimes they need to work together to get projects accomplished even when the projects are not aligned with individual team members’ strengths and interests.

### **“Positive Restlessness”**

The final theme that emerged from the data of how higher education administrators are using Appreciative Education came from 16 out of the 21 participants when they expressed a desire to continue learning and improving in their skills as an administrator or having “positive restlessness” (Kuh et al., 2005). “We are never perfect, we are never there,” was how Mr., an Assistant Dean who supervises 35 staff at a 4-year public institution, described being a leader and never being satisfied with their performance, or understanding that when you stop learning, you stop growing, and they aspire to be better than that. “Positive restlessness” showed up when speaking about the Don’t Settle phase and participants feeling a commitment to continuous learning and improving. Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, shared an example of how his desire to be better, also lead to a lesson in celebrating and appreciating what was being accomplished. He stated:

You loop from Don't Settle back to Discover all the time. It's kind of this nonlinear loop. I did have an administrator once in my review, he said, we love your work, just be patient, though, and don't get discouraged. I was always asking these questions about what are we going to do next? And how can we do this better? And how can we improve this? I guess I was coming across as what we're

doing isn't good enough. And so, that was one thing I took away from the Appreciative Advising Institute, you have got to celebrate and appreciate before you can dream, otherwise it leads to burnout.

Every participant stated that using Appreciative Education is a practice. Nobody said they were perfect, and each participant recognized that they are still working on getting better at using the Appreciative Education framework. There is always one more thing that can be done to help people, whether they are students, colleagues, supervisors, or the general public. Three sub-themes under the “positive restlessness” emerged: (1) *Celebrate accomplishments*; (2) *Perfectly imperfect*; and (3) *Continue to foster relationships*.

### ***Celebrate Accomplishments***

The first sub-theme of “positive restlessness” is celebrating accomplishments to let staff know how much they are valued. Eighteen of the 21 participants shared stories of valuing their teams and wanting to provide sincere praise to celebrate the accomplishments of the work that they do. Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, mentioned that she tells her team daily how incredibly important to her they are, and that “she cares about their growth, success, and safety. This is how we deal with uncertainty is actually talking first about, I value you, you bring so much to this team, you belong here with us.” Similarly, Lorena, a Director of seven staff members at a 4-year public institution, mentioned, “Praise is really helpful, giving credit where credit is due, asking them, where do they want to contribute, connecting it to a larger context.” Administrators can challenge staff to bring their A game, because there is belief that they can do it. Mr., an Assistant Dean who supervises 35 staff at a 4-year public

institution, said, “It’s part of our office culture.” Having staff understand and believe they are the best, and when talking about the staff, making sure that the limelight is being shared when it is most deserving.

Participants mentioned that they did not wait to give positive reinforcement to employees until a large project or goal had been achieved. Benji, an Associate Vice President of 12 staff members at a 4-year public institution, shared “one of the really important things is the ability to get smaller successes and then celebrate and then swirl them up.” Participants noted that sometimes when a goal is large and/or elusive, that celebrating small wins along the way to accomplishing the larger goals can help prevent burnout amongst the team. Participants made mention that the work can sometimes feel overwhelming and one way to help employees stay engaged is to remind them that the work their team does matters every single day. The participants work hard to show up for their team and for their students by celebrating the small victories along the way.

### ***Perfectly Imperfect***

The second sub-theme of “positive restlessness” was normalizing that all people are perfectly imperfect. Sixteen out of the 21 participants shared that they are not looking to be perfect, but instead, as Charlie, a Director of six staff members at a 4-year public institution, mentioned, strive to “continue to grow and evolve professionally in the work that they do.” Participants were self-aware and reflected that they could always find ways to improve and grow in terms of how they infused the Appreciative Education framework into their administrative approach. Lorena, a Director of seven staff members at a 4-year public institution, stated, “It is a commitment to continuously learning and improving. A constant commitment to reflecting. Then what does that mean moving forward and in

continuous improvement for self and for the institution that you work for in your role?” “I’m a firm believer that we are never going to fully arrive,” said Benji, an Associate Vice President of 12 staff members at a 4-year public institution.

The participants mentioned that they used the questions associated with phases of the Appreciative Education framework to guide their own personal and professional reflections. Beth, an Assistant Dean of 10 at a 4-year public institution, stated, “I think that providing an opportunity for reflection, very often enables the person to maybe shift their thinking or come up with a solution, but it's providing time for reflection.” Charlie, a Director of six staff members at a 4-year public institution, expanded upon reflecting and learning through professional work:

As professionals, we develop through our experience doing our professional work, we develop reflective practices, we become more metacognitive about what we do. Working with students, I think we sometimes becomes somehow more salient, you know, as a faculty member, or as an advisor, you know, you start reflecting on experiences that go well, and trying to identify what about it went well. Watching and learning from interactions with your students to become more cognizant about your biases, in order to self-monitor these things.

When participants felt stuck, the habit of asking reflective, appreciative questions helped them get unstuck and work through ambiguity. Developing a practice of reflection and examining what went on with an experience can be professional growth. Jake, an Associate Dean of five staff at a 4-year public institution, shared, that by allowing yourself and others time for reflection you are “allowing for space to figure things out and a space to discover new possibilities.”

Role modeling “positive restlessness” was a way to create a culture where employees felt safe and supported to take risks without the fear of failure. When working with their teams, participants felt everybody was trying to do their best, and approaching situations with that mindset allowed for conversations to flow freely and provide support to the team. Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, works with her team to know that it is acceptable to not be perfect at everything already. “In my unit from day one, we're always talking about what your career goals are. We always know that we're never there, we're always learning and always growing.” Sylvia, a faculty development specialist with five staff at a 4-year public institution, went on to add that, “it is about putting your confidence in them to do things and be there as a leader just in case.” Participants provided spaces for their teams to take risks and try something new because they understood that the process of navigating change is accompanied by personal and professional growth. Participants were very self-aware, and they shared stories of intentionally noting how they could have completed a task in a better way. Using the Appreciative Education framework was a way for participants to name a behavior, correct mistakes, and share what they learned from the situation. They tried to normalize mistakes by role modeling that it is o.k. to be perfectly imperfect.

### ***Continue to Foster Relationships***

The third and final sub-theme for “positive restlessness” was focused on intentionally continuing to foster relationships. Eight of the 21 participants brought up networking and mentoring as ways to get support and a sounding board for dealing with new challenges and opportunities. Participants did not just work to initially build

relationships and then stop doing so, they were able to apply the “positive restlessness” principle to ensure that they continue to nurture those relationships.

What is the real work that needs to be done before me? And how do I get strategic about that and connect with other people to do that work? These were questions participants asked themselves when looking at forming collaborative relationships with others. Sylvia, a faculty development specialist with five staff at a 4-year public institution, found that, “Having a mentor was essential for me. If there is a moment of uncertainty, doubt, if I'm unsure, you know, if I need guidance, I reach out. And he's there.” Participants stressed the importance of keeping engaged with others. Higher education is always changing, and by having a “personal board of advisors, you are able to tap into the expertise of others to be a sounding board for growing and navigating uncertainty,” said Nicole, an Academic Director with two staff at a 4-year private institution.

Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, said, “Having intentional meetings with my mentors, and people I see doing great work. Maybe once a month, I try to have a meeting with someone who I value, and I ask questions about their leadership style.” Participants sought out others doing great work to understand what they valued and what was underneath so they could be the best leaders. Another participant, Johana, a Vice President with 100 staff members at a community college, talked about having dinner dates with coworkers and colleagues across institutions to hear what is happening on their campuses, ask questions, and most importantly, be a support system for each other.

## **The Appreciative Education Framework in Action Summary**

The first section of this chapter shared the data from 21 higher education participants about how they put the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices. Three themes emerge from the data: establish trusting relationships, foster relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals, and “positive restlessness.” The participants also shared that the first theme of establishing trusting relationships was the bedrock foundation, which needed to happen before participants could achieve the two other themes. Participants also shared that once the foundation of a trusting relationship was established, it was easier to foster relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals, and continue to practice “positive restlessness.” As participants shared how they were putting the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices, I as the researcher was also able to identify from the data, benefits and challenges, with using the framework.

### **RQ2a: What Do Higher Education Administrators That Use the Appreciative Education Framework Find to Be the Benefits of Using This Framework?**

The second research question for this grounded theory study was: What do higher education administrators that use the appreciative education framework find to be the benefits of using this framework? During analysis of the data, two themes emerged concerning the benefits of using the Appreciative Education framework to guide their administrative work: the adaptability of the framework ( $n = 14$ ) and employee development ( $n = 15$ ). The theme of adaptability of the framework includes sub-themes of Appreciative Education providing a toolkit for dealing with uncertainty and change, providing an intentional framework for building better relationships and organizations,



reframing problems into opportunities, and providing a common language. The theme of employee development includes a sub-theme of well-being.

### **Adaptability of the Framework**

Fourteen of the 21 participants mentioned that an advantage of using the Appreciative Education framework to guide their administrative work was that it provided a common language, a way of being, and more intentionality in their work. Participants reported the six phases of Appreciative Education as well as the Appreciative Mindset provided them with an array of principles and tools to draw upon as needed. Tatiana, an Assistant Director with three staff at a 4-year public institution, noted that one thing she appreciated about the framework is that the variety of tools associated with the Appreciative Education framework meant that you did not have to rely on just one single technique every time. During the focus group discussion, the participants discussed how the Appreciative Education framework does not give you the answers but guides you as you devise your own answers. Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, also mentioned how the framework was helpful not only in building relationships, but also to guide projects and dealing with the unknown, “Appreciative Administration is bigger than the one to one. It is how we manage projects, change, uncertainty, and dissatisfied employees.” The following sub-themes will provide insight into how the participants adapt the framework to meet different demands by providing: (1) *a toolkit for dealing with uncertainty and change*; (2) *an intentional framework for building better relationships and organizations*; (3) *a way to reframe problems into opportunities*; and (4) *a common language*.

### ***Provides a Toolkit for Dealing with Uncertainty and Change***

Twelve of the 21 participants mentioned using the Appreciative Education framework provided a helpful toolkit for dealing with uncertainty and change. Because the interviews for this research study were conducted a few months after the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic in March 2020, participants spoke about how the Appreciative Education framework helped them deal with the uncertainty and changes that occurred at the onset of the pandemic. Johana, a Vice President with 100 staff members at a community college, mentioned that COVID-19 was not the first time her institution had faced uncertainty and change. Johana used the Discover and Dream phases of the Appreciative Education framework to help lead her executive team and staff members:

How have we done this in the past? This is not the first time we have been through a crisis. This is not the first time we have been through this type of thing. You have been here 20 years. So, tell me what happened, 15 years ago when we had a flood from a hurricane, which we had to close down the college, we lost IT services, we had to work through uncertainty. When we remember those types of crisis and the pandemic now, there are many similarities about how we are managing personnel, how we are managing processes, communications to students and the community at large. So, tell me about your experience going through that and let me learn from that as we move forward and take that as a foundation to build upon.

The Appreciative Education phases gave Johana and other participants tools to build on past successes during uncertain times (Discover) and to dream about how they might be

able to make the most of the uncertainty. Discover and Dream questions helped participants to build on the best of the organization and to create a new and improved future for the organization while keeping the core of the organization intact. Nicole, an Academic Director with two staff at a 4-year private institution, said,

I mean, it's just like all these things that had been concretized were all of a sudden melted away and this realization of we have to figure out how to do things differently because we don't have any other choice right now. I think this invited people to this openness to rethink how we do everything, which I actually think is a good thing.

Participants noted that even in non-pandemic times, there is a lot of uncertainty and gray involved in leading higher education institutions, especially when dealing with issues related to policies, practices, and societal pressures. Rogue, an Associate Director with five staff at a community college, stated, “being open to the gray zone is helpful.” Ambiguity and uncertainty require administrators to think outside the box. Elizabeth, a Director of six staff members at a 4-year private institution, said, “I think a lot of it is that people feel uncomfortable knowing that just because something is ambiguous or uncertain, doesn't mean it is bad, this gives you an opportunity to fill a gap.” The Appreciative Education framework promotes the strategic use of reflective questions to guide administrators as they reflect on ambiguous situations. Appreciative Education also provides a framework for helping to differentiate between what is in their control versus out of their control, and how to best use their time, energy, and efforts to influence the desired outcomes.

Administrators do not always have the answers and rely on the people around them to deal with uncertainty and change. Participants noted that because Appreciative Education had helped them build trustful relationships prior to the pandemic, they already had connections in place to deal with the uncertainty associated with the pandemic. For example, Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, mentioned:

One of the things that I really relied on through COVID is actually kind of backwards, like those trusting supportive relationships that I have built with my staff have actually buoyed me up and actually helped me deal with the chaos and the uncertainty.

The trustful relationships participants built before the pandemic helped them personally deal with their own mental health. In addition, the Appreciative Education framework also provided them with tools to help their supervisees deal with the ramifications of the pandemic.

***Provides an Intentional Framework for Building Better Relationships and Organizations***

Fourteen of the 21 participants mentioned that Appreciative Education provided an intentional framework for building better relationships and organizations. Nicole, an Academic Director with two staff at a 4-year private institution, mentioned, “what we focus on grows, that is where I come from with intentionality, it is not about not talking about stuff or not doing stuff, but it’s the intentional framing and intentional way that you come about addressing issues,” referring to being intentional with people or the organization as a whole. Participants also mentioned being human and getting distracted

by everyday life, but Appreciative Education provided them a framework to practice intentionality with others. Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, realized:

The whole time what has drawn me to Appreciate Administration really is people before process; I just didn't have the language for it. It's not that we're ignoring a process and it's not that we don't hold our people accountable. This strategy or this framework for supervising or being an administrator, it's actually allowed me to hold folks more accountable, because they're part of the design of what the goal looks like. They're part of the design of the programming. They helped set the expectations and they want to meet that. And so, utilizing Appreciate Education as my framework for Appreciative Administration actually has helped, I think has helped the performance on our team.

Taylor, an Associate Director of one staff member at a 4-year private institution, further reiterated that administrators can “use the six phases and the Appreciative Mindset to create an inclusive space where staff is bringing different perspectives to the table.”

Nicole, an Academic Director with two staff at a 4-year private institution, mentioned, also shared the importance of being intentional with using Appreciative Education when it comes leading the organization as a whole, “it is the intentional application of Appreciative Inquiry based practices to create sort of a generative management practice. That entails the focusing on the what's working, the lifting up.” The Discover phase of Appreciative Education gives tools to administrators to ask questions that help identify and appreciate the best of what is. As administrators,

managers, and leaders, Discover type questions are intentional and generative to help build up the organization.

### ***Reframe Problems into Opportunities***

Elizabeth, a Director of six staff members at a 4-year private institution, stated that practicing using Appreciative Education is not always easy but can “give you a framework to look at it from a different perspective.” Thirteen of the 21 participants shared how Appreciative Education provides them with tools to reframe problems into opportunities. This notion of reframing problems into opportunities comes from National Geographic photojournalist Dewitt Jones (1999) in his film *Everyday Creativity* and was a standard part of Dr. Bloom’s presentations on Appreciative Advising. This reframing allows for people to look at multiple perspectives to discover new opportunities.

Participants mentioned that over time they often came to realize that they cannot make everyone happy and that one alone cannot solve all the world’s problems, there is no easy solution to every situation, and often it requires one to adapt to the situation and look from a different perspective. Elizabeth continued, “I used to say that there were times in which you just couldn't be appreciative. And then a colleague challenged me once, she said, no you always can. There are times where it's just harder.” So, reframing how one tackles challenges is important. Nicole, an Academic Director with two staff at a 4-year private institution, mentioned that “what we focus on grows, and it's not about not talking about stuff or not doing stuff, but it's the intentional framing and the intentional way that you come about addressing problems, addressing issues.” The focus group participants also stressed the Appreciative Mindset to set the tone with staff and in challenging situations.

The Appreciative Education framework gave participants tools to adapt to situations as they arose by encouraging participants to reframe their inner dialogue, which allowed participants to shift their mindset and understand they do not have to be the lone superhero. Claire, a Director of seven staff members at a 4-year private institution, talked about the tension between what it meant to make it better during a challenging period or a time of discourse with people. Claire used to feel her job was to solve the problem and always make it better, and when she stopped thinking about it in that way (reframing) and started thinking about her job was to get to a good outcome in the end, that is what will make situations better. In practicing how to reframe her inner dialogue, she discovered her job was not to find something right in this moment that would make anyone happy but instead on how to focus on opportunities and the co-creation of solutions with others.

### ***Provide a Common Language***

Another benefit of using Appreciative Education that 11 of the 21 participants expressed is that the six phases of Appreciative Education and the Appreciative Mindset provided their organization with a common language and framework. Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, stated, “naming things is powerful, because then you can make the idea explicit, you can work on it, you can control it, you can achieve it.” Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, expanded, “It provides a framework to validate your experiences. For a long time, I was like, oh this is just my intuition, it’s just how I am, but no, there is an actual framework.”

Participants shared that the Appreciative Education framework resonated with them internally, but that once they understood the six phases of Appreciative Education that it helped them explain the framework to their staff. Benji, an Associate Vice President of 12 staff members at a 4-year public institution, shared, “I understand this may not be the framework that you use every day, but we need to at least have a common language. I think there's a component of saying, this is a tool and not a dictatorship.” Rogue, an Associate Director with five staff at a community college, explained that she slowly started to add in the Appreciative Education language when working with her team and that it was a “slow build, adding the language to many different places and sharing why and how it is helpful.” Having a common language amongst a team is beneficial when having discussions or trainings and everyone understands when you use terms such as Disarm or Discover. Appreciative Education provides a formalized framework to create a shared language amongst people.

### **Employee Development**

Fifteen of the 21 participants mentioned that a benefit of using the Appreciative Education framework was how it positively impacted employee development. Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, stated, “I love to help them see that they're capable of things that they may not initially think they're capable of. And then to see them, try and experiment and grow.” Participants mentioned that as an administrator one can impact someone’s life, and hopefully through the kindness of one’s actions that the person they are helping will go forth and pay it forward to others. Participants also mentioned that as administrators, one can lead others by example, and by influence, and in a way that brings out the best in



them, and that unleashes their potential. Taylor, an Associate Director of one staff member at a 4-year private institution, stated, “administrators can help staff recognize and appreciate the talents and strengths in themselves and all the good that they have to offer.”

As mentioned in the theme of establishing trusting relationships, participants felt most alive when working with people. Participants understood that a benefit of using Appreciative Education was helping people grow, develop, and progress to really unlock their potential. Jess, a Director of nine staff at a 4-year public institution, stated:

Helping them develop, and then really from the beginning understanding that we don't want this to be their last stop, that we want to help them develop and move forward. I want everybody that works with me, for me, in any which way to have the opportunity to move in the direction that they want. I want them to have as many opportunities as possible. So, I think if you're always working and looking through that lens, you're looking at helping maximize their opportunities and capacity.

Mr., an Assistant Dean who supervises 35 staff at a 4-year public institution, expanded on employee support and development by stating, “I want to support them on their goals and missions because ultimately you get the most out of an employee who loves their job, their co-workers, and who feels empowered to make a difference.” Participants reported that using the Appreciative Education framework was a win-win situation for participants and their employees.

Participants also shared how culture can impact employees. Lyle, a Director of three staff members at a 4-year public institution, stated, that the culture in his office

allowed for flexibility and trust, “You need to take an afternoon and talk about a project and you want to do it over at the coffee shop, do it. They are trusted that they will come back with positive results, whatever that is.” Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, further shared, “One thing that can get in the way of folks being resilient is fear to try something new, afraid of what will happen if you make a mistake, so you don't want to take the first steps.” Participants wanted to create a culture where employees knew they could make a mistake, and still know that the participants would still support them and help them learn from the mistake.

Allowing and encouraging professional development was also discussed by participants as a way to show you want to invest in your people. Participants shared they wanted their staff to have as many opportunities as possible. Jake, an Associate Dean of five staff at a 4-year public institution, shared, “this goes into the positive restlessness, encouraging your staff to keep their skill and knowledge base fresh. Professional development is essential to an effective workforce.” Benji, an Associate Vice President of 12 staff members at a 4-year public institution, shared that professional development allowed for individual growth and, “when we grow individually we oftentimes will grow collectively as an organization.”

### ***Well-Being***

The phases of Appreciative Education were initially used as a structure, but about half of the participants shared that the phases become innate and what they do naturally and helped grow self-awareness. Participants in the focus group shared that Appreciative Education allowed them to practice self-awareness because, as Mr., an Assistant Dean who supervises 35 staff at a 4-year public institution, stated, “it starts with me.” Eleven of

the 21 participants mentioned how an administrator's level of self-awareness and accountability can contribute to employees' well-being. For example, Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, stated:

It really starts with self-awareness and I think it's me taking responsibility for my behaviors, and me being aware of how does a supervisor contribute to burnout, and knowing that. It's about the behaviors that I'm engaging in. Am I emailing people at 11 o'clock on a weekend? Is my poor time management putting pressure on the people on my team to perform in ways that aren't aligned with wellness and care as an employee? And so motivating folks always starts with my own behavior and checking myself and putting boundaries in place that I don't email my team on weekends.

As participants discussed how they established trusting relationships with their team, a benefit of building trustful relationships was being in tune or in sync with who report to you so you can support in the best way possible. Jake, an Associate Dean of five staff at a 4-year public institution, stated, "sprinkle some empathy and awareness in the lives of your direct reports. While it may not change the decisions, you're going to have to make, it might allow you to rephrase how you're going to share that information." Participants and those in the focus group emphasized that one size does not fit all when it comes to supervising. By working alongside, administrators can role model that each employee's voice matters and that employees help co-create the vision of the department, which reinforces employees feeling valued.

## **RQ2b: What Do Higher Education Administrators That Use the Appreciative Education Framework Find to Be the Challenges of Using This Framework?**

The second research sub-question for this grounded theory study was: What do higher education administrators that use the Appreciative Education framework find to be the challenges of using this framework? Two themes emerged from the participant interviews: it is messy and hard to live out the Appreciative Education framework ( $n=11$ ) and it takes consistent practice to implement it ( $n=16$ ). The first theme of it is messy and hard includes sub-themes of educating people and misperceptions about the framework. The second theme of it takes consistent practice did not have any sub-themes.

### **Messy and Hard**

Eleven of the 21 participants shared that a challenge of using the Appreciative Education framework is the amount of time it takes to educate and correct the misperceptions other people have about Appreciative Education. Charlie, a Director of six staff members at a 4-year public institution, stated, “The Appreciative approach feels like it should be just this really sweet, nice thing, you know, all lollipops and unicorns, but no, this is really hard work.” Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, further elaborated, “it takes a lot more effort, it takes a lot more introspection, it takes some fundamental changes to the way you operate.” Participants shared that human nature makes it very easy for everyone to complain all the time. The appreciative approach works different muscles in the brain to reframe and look at what we want more of, which can be hard. Nicole, an Academic Director with two staff at a 4-year private institution, shared:

If I really am a social constructionist at heart and believe that all these things matter and that bringing voices to the table it's like I have to do that. And it's messy and hard and it takes more work and energy sometimes. It results in making me a better teacher and facilitator for it.

Charlie, a Director of six staff members at a 4-year public institution, shared, “you may have really brief interactions with someone throughout the day, you build some of these appreciative aspects into it, it's hard work, because you had to be metacognitive about doing this.” The following sub-themes will provide insight into how the participants explained how using the Appreciative Education framework is messy and hard with (1) *educating people*; (2) *misperceptions about the framework*.

### ***Educating People***

Eleven of the 21 participants mention the difficulty inherent in educating constituents at work about the Appreciative Education framework. Participants shared that people who do not know about Appreciative Education tend to worry that because it starts with the word Appreciative that the framework is just about being positive all the time. Nicole, an Academic Director with two staff at a 4-year private institution, stated, “How do we show people that there is a mindset and skill set that can actually help us create more generative outcomes than we've had in the past. More humane, generative outcomes that the world's calling for right now?” Educating others came down to finding common language. Although some participants shared that people around them knew the six phases, the question became how do we go deeper? Ben, a Director of eight staff members at a 4-year public institution, shared that, “I knew this office embraced the Appreciative culture. Coming in, I had a lot of that buy-in. I think in ways that was

challenging was going beyond the basics. Like, okay, you know, the six phases, let's go deeper.”

When participants faced resistance or doubt from colleagues about the Appreciative Education framework they would lean into finding a common ground. Sometimes when conflict or discomfort happen it could be that both parties want the same thing, they are just using different vocabulary. Nicole, an Academic Director with two staff at a 4-year private institution, shared that she “had to be intentional in those challenging conversations, figuring out what is the question that I want to get clarity on?” Engaging in authentic dialogue can be challenging, learning how to honor each insight while understanding each individual paradigm can be an effective tool for finding common ground.

### ***Misperceptions About the Framework***

Participants talked about never fully arriving and knowing that things can always be improved upon. Eleven of the 21 participants talked about the misperceptions that staff had about the Appreciative Education framework. For example, as participants talked about “positive restlessness,” they shared stories of how “positive restlessness” could sometimes be perceived as never satisfied with the department or people. Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, shared that a staff member was very honest with him about his desire to always learn and improve and stated, “Never fully arriving can sometimes be seen as nothing is ever good enough, and I have to take a moment to step back and celebrate the successes otherwise it can lead to burnout.”

Participants noted that some of their employees perceived Appreciative approaches as only focused on the positive and lacked accountability. Ann, a Director who supervises 12 staff at a 4-year public institution, stated:

We have to be more intentional about describing is that there's actually a lot of accountability built into the process. But rather than the boss, the supervisor, pushing accountability onto the employee, the Appreciative approach actually helps the employee to be accountable to themselves and accountable to the institution and the office they're working in. So, I think that's the thing that I have to explain, when folks are worried about, oh, this is just about positivity. It is a different way, but it doesn't ignore failure. It doesn't ignore weakness. It doesn't ignore areas of growth. It just approaches the way that we do that from a different angle that builds trust and allows for vulnerability.

Sometimes participants had to spend time in the Disarm and Discover phases to break down barriers around the perception that the Appreciative approach was focused solely on the positive. Benji, an Associate Vice President of 12 staff members at a 4-year public institution, shared, “Appreciative Education is about building relationships in a way that when you need to have tough conversations, it may sting a little bit, but parties involved recognize it needed to happen in order to move forward.”

### **It Takes Consistent Practice**

The second theme that emerged from the data was that Appreciative Education takes consistent practice which can be challenging. Sixteen out of the 21 participants shared that using the Appreciative approach is something they must be intentional about and practice daily. Taylor, an Associate Director of one staff member at a 4-year private

institution, mentioned, “Appreciative Education speaks to my values, it speaks to how I want to be, and sometimes it’s tough.” Lauren, an Assistant Dean who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, also shared that, “in times of discomfort. So, I think that when I feel threatened or distrusted, I can easily go into defense mode, which will shut down those lines of communication.” Being intentional about conversations can be hard. Jess, a Director of nine staff at a 4-year public institution, shared, “Intentionality is really the most challenging of all the aspects, because life keeps happening around you, and it is easy to get comfortable with no news is good news.” Participants noted that being intentional was often one of the first things they stopped doing when they felt stressed or under pressure, but participants recognized that being intentional about the little things was the most important.

Participants shared they are human and not perfect, but by consistently using the framework participants are walking the talk, providing a common language, and building trust in order to harness the power of Appreciative Education. Ben, a Director of eight staff members at a 4-year public institution, mentioned, “It's being consistent, keep going, or it's going to take a long time to earn trust. It’s the consistent messaging, being consistently supportive, being transparent.” Administrators shared that their actions tended to speak louder over time.

Consistency can provide an understanding and a language of vocabulary to talk about these ideas. Benji, an Associate Vice President of 12 staff members at a 4-year public institution, also mentioned, “I think a lot of it is actually modeling it and not just talking about it. I think if we said, this is what we're going to do, and then what we did didn't resemble it at all, I think we'd have more problems.” There needs to be a



connection between what administrators say is their philosophy and then how they lead. People respect consistency. During interviews the participants that had many years of using Appreciative Education understood that one size does not fit all, that this is not a panacea that if you do once it solves everything, but instead it was something they consistently worked on every day.

### **Defining Appreciative Administration**

During each participant interview, I asked how they would define Appreciative Administration. Some answers shared by participants included that the Appreciative Mindset was in always being practiced, that it is about identifying passions and leveraging those for outcomes, it is about the intentional approach of leading others, you never arrive, and that one must have a genuine interest in people. One participant, Richard Green, an Associate Director who supervises one staff member at a 4-year private institution, stated that Appreciative Administration, “Is an approach to leading others. Intentionally leading others by example, by influence, and in a way that brings out the best in them, unleashes potential, and helps them recognize and appreciate all the good they have to offer.” These themes that emerged were used to help create an updated definition of Appreciative Administration.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I answered the two main research questions by sharing stories of the 21 higher education administrator participants who are infusing Appreciative Education into their daily administrative practices. In summary, the three themes emerging from the first research question about how higher education administrators are using Appreciative Education, included establish trusting relationships, foster

relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals, and “positive restlessness.” Additionally, data suggested two challenges in using Appreciative Education including it is messy and hard to live out the Appreciative Education framework and it takes consistent practice to implement it. Additionally, data suggests two benefits of using Appreciative Education including the adaptability of the framework and employee development.

## CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices. To date, no research has been conducted on Appreciative Education or Appreciative Administration as theory-to-practice frameworks, so this study helps to fill the gap in the research on these topics. This chapter will situate the findings of this grounded theory study within the previous literature on Appreciative Education and Appreciative Administration, provide implications for policy and practice, make recommendations for future research and research design, highlight strengths of the study, and end with an overall personal reflection.

Using a purposeful sample, a total of 21 higher education administrators participated in this grounded theory study that met the following criteria: (1) had at least one full-time person reporting to them; (2) had participated in a formal Appreciative Education training. The formal training opportunities that the interviewees participated in included the Appreciative Advising online course, Appreciative Advising Institute, being faculty for the Appreciative Advising Institute, the Appreciative Administration online course, and/or participating in the Unleashing Greatness Retreat. Over half the participants ( $n=11$ ) had participated in two or more formal training opportunities. All participants were interviewed on Zoom, during the summer and fall of 2020, which was

also during the beginning months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The two research questions that guided this grounded theory study were:

1. How do higher education administrators use the Appreciative Education framework in their administrative practices?
2. What do higher education administrators that use the Appreciative Education framework find to be:
  - a. The benefits of using this framework?
  - b. The challenges of using this framework?

### **Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature**

This section will situate the findings from my grounded theory research study within the previous literature on Appreciative Administration and Appreciative Education and highlight the consistencies and unique contributions between my findings and the previous relevant literature. The current research literature on Appreciative Education and Appreciative Administration is shallow. To date, only three peer-reviewed articles (Bloom et al., 2013; Bloom & McClellan, 2016; He et al., 2014) have been written on these topics. While the literature on Appreciative Education as a whole is limited, there has been continued growth in research and literature on the specific components, Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Advising. Although most of the early research studies used qualitative methodology, over the last few years, there has been an increase in the number of quantitative Appreciative Advising research studies. Since 2019 there have been four research studies (Delich, 2021; Kaplan, 2020; Kenrick, 2019; Pittman, 2019) and seven peer-reviewed articles (Burks, 2022; Dial, 2019; Hande et al., 2019; He et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2019; Siu et al., 2021; Yonker et al., 2019) that cover topics

related to Appreciative Advising that range from enhancing academic major satisfaction, validating faculty advising through assessment, and academic recovery for students on probation.

My grounded theory study on how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices was consistent with prior literature regarding social constructivism, the importance of building relationships, adaptable framework, that it is a practice, and having “Positive Restlessness.” My study also contributed to the literature by expanding on the benefits and challenges of infusing Appreciative Education into daily administrative practices.

### **Consistencies with the Previous Literature**

My grounded theory study was largely consistent with the prior literature on Appreciative Education and Appreciative Administration. Consistencies or similarities include social constructivism (Bloom et al., 2008; Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Dewey, 1916; Gergen, 1978; Gergen, 1999), the importance of building relationships (Bloom et al. 2013; Bloom & McClellan, 2016; He et al., 2014; Seligman, 2011; Yoder, 2005), adaptable framework (Bloom et al. 2013; Bloom & McClellan, 2016; He et al., 2014), it is a practice (Bloom & McClellan, 2016; Easter, 2016), and having “Positive Restlessness” (Bloom et al., 2013; Bloom & McClellan, 2016; Kuh et al., 2005).

As explored in Chapter 1 and in the literature review, Appreciative approaches are rooted in social constructivism. Social constructivism adopts the belief that education is not simply a process of telling and receiving objective knowledge, but rather a subjective process of constructing knowledge based upon current schemas and past lived

experiences (Dewey, 1916). Social constructivism points to the power of language not as an individual tool, but rather as the vehicle by which communities of people create knowledge and make meaning together. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) first introduced Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as an alternative to the managerial deficit-based, traditional organizational development methodologies. AI invited holistic participation from members of organizations to create positive-based shared dreams and visions to form a positive core to serve as the foundation of the change agenda. The existing literature stresses the importance of co-creating a shared vision. This grounded theory study confirmed that Appreciative Administrators the importance of shared dreams and specifically highlighted the importance of aligning strengths to achieve individual and organizational dreams.

As explored in Chapter II, the research literature bares out the importance of positive relationships and social connections to well-being. Individuals can lean on positive relationships to provide support to individuals during difficult times. Yoder (2005) conducted a study on how emotionally intelligent leadership affects the organizational climate. Based on the results, Yoder recommended encouraging and empowering people to engage in simple conversations. The participants in my grounded theory study specifically discussed the importance of making time to get to know employees through engaging in simple conversations and asking appreciative questions. They also mentioned that it was important to “really” listen to the answers to employees’ answers to the appreciative questions and to remain open and curious about their employees’ stories. In fact, participants in my study felt that the key to being successful as Appreciative Administrators was be first establishing trusting relationships with their

supervisees and other constituents. Participants found that by building trusting relationships, they could better navigate as a team to handle change and uncertainty.

Consistent with the literature on Appreciative Education, the participants in my study cited one of the strengths of the Appreciative Education framework is its adaptability. For example, He et al. (2014) stated that “More and more demands are being placed on educational institutions, yet public financial support is waning. The complexity of educational institutions necessitates a flexible framework for leading and managing these enterprises” (p. 4). Further, Bloom et al. (2013) advocated that “Appreciative Education celebrates the development of a framework that is interactive, transformational, adaptable, and can be used to guide both individual interactions and organizational efforts” (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 8). Participants from the study confirmed that Appreciative Education provided them with a toolkit in the form of generative questions, a common language, and the Appreciative Mindset that equipped them to nimbly handle the unique challenges they faced.

Another similarity between the previous literature and this study’s findings was the emphasis on the intentional practice of putting Appreciative approaches. For example, Easter’s (2016) article on an Appreciative Inquiry Summit that Medicine Hat College had hosted that, “It is important to remember it is a practice; that some days we will not be able to focus on our strengths, our opportunities, and our dreams. That’s OK” (para. 38). Bloom and McClellan (2016) also stated that Appreciative Administration is a practice in which the goal is not to achieve perfection or achieve one goal and set the framework aside. Instead, they noted that Appreciative Administration is a continuous journey to get better and optimize the potential of individuals and organizations. Participants in this

study confirmed their commitment to practicing infusing the Appreciative Education framework without the need to feel that they will ever perfect doing so. The participants in this study were self-aware enough to know that as human beings perfection is never something they will be able to fully achieve as leaders. Without the need for perfection, the participants in this study were able to be more creative and adaptive as leaders.

Similarly, this study was also congruent with the literature on the importance of Kuh et al.'s (2005) notion of "positive restlessness" (Bloom et al., 2013; Bloom & McClellan, 2016). Participants specifically spoke about how they sought to achieve "positive restlessness" by committing to continuously learning and improving their skills. The participants were aware that higher education, students, and circumstances are changing more rapidly than ever, which meant that they could not afford to think they knew everything. Yet, they were confident in their ability to use the Appreciative Education framework and their own curiosity to be able to ask the right questions and learn new information that would enable them to handle new challenges as they arose.

### **Unique Contributions to the Literature**

Although my grounded theory study was largely consistent with the initial article on Appreciative Administration by Bloom and McClellan (2016) literature, there were new contributions to the literature that arose from my findings. For example, an element of this study that had not been covered in Bloom and McClellan's 2016 article was identifying the benefits and challenges of using the Appreciative Education framework in their leadership positions.

One of the benefits identified by participants was how using Appreciative Education positively impacted employee development and well-being. In the



Appreciative literature, there is a consistent emphasis on the importance of building relationships with individual team members, but what this study has uniquely found is how satisfying it was for the participants in the study to help people develop and realize their full potential. Participants mentioned how they realized that as administrators they had the opportunity to positively impact their supervisees' lives by using the Appreciative Education framework. In addition, they hoped that their supervisees would be inspired to use the framework to positively impact their students because their supervisor had role modeled the appreciative approach for them.

One of the challenges that participants identified in using the Appreciative Education framework is that employing it could be time-intensive up-front. They noted that the Appreciative Education framework requires an upfront investment and intentional attention to establish trust with co-workers and to educate people about the framework. Participants noted that educating people about the Appreciative Education framework necessitates addressing common misperceptions that others often have about the framework. For example, participants reported that the word "Appreciative" can be misperceived as Pollyannaish and all about rainbows and sunshine. Charlie mentioned in his comments that, "The Appreciative approach feels like it should be just this really sweet, nice thing, you know, all lollipops and unicorns, but no, this is really hard work." Nicole shared that she "had to be intentional in those challenging conversations, figuring out what is the question that I want to get clarity on?" Participants reported that engaging in authentic dialogue about the Appreciative Education framework can be challenging, but that by carefully listening to the concerns of others that they were able to educate people that the Appreciative Education framework is focused on setting clear and high

mutual expectations as is highlighted in the Don't Settle phase of Appreciative Education. The Appreciative Administrators in the study mentioned that it was important for them to invest time to clarify what the Appreciative Education framework is and is not to those who may be initially skeptical about this approach.

Another challenge that participants in the study mentioned was the challenge of seeking to consistently implement the practice of Appreciative Education into their daily work. One participant shared that because of the Don't Settle phase's emphasis on continual improvement sometimes other employees misperceived that no matter what they accomplished, it was not enough. However, Benji discussed the importance of Appreciative Administrators balancing celebrating accomplishments along the way with also continuing to strive to do better: "One of the really important things is the ability to get smaller successes and then celebrate and then swirl them up." Participants noted that sometimes when a goal is large and/or elusive, that celebrating small wins along the way to accomplishing the larger goals can help prevent burnout among team members. Another challenge with living out the Appreciative Education framework in day-to-day work that participants mentioned was that they needed to "walk the talk" of the framework by consistently role-modeling how to use the framework.

### **Bringing it all Together - Appreciative Administration: A Theory-to-Practice Framework**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to examine how higher education administrators infuse the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices. Through this grounded theory study, I was able to add to the limited literature on Appreciative Education by answering the research questions, as

explored in Chapter V, and updating the framework including a definition of Appreciative Administration which will be explored below.

### **The Framework of Appreciative Administration**

After carefully analyzing the themes for this grounded theory study on how higher education administrators are infusing Appreciative Education into their daily administrative practices, I am presenting an updated framework of Appreciative Administration that is congruent with much of what Bloom and McClellan (2016) originally laid out in their original article on Appreciative Administration. Figure 3 below provides the updated framework, Appreciative Administration: Putting Appreciative Education into Higher Education Administrative Practices.

**Figure 3**

*Appreciative Administration: Putting Appreciative Education into Higher Education Administrative Practices*



The themes found in this grounded theory study linked back to Appreciative Education's 6-D phases (Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, Don't Settle). Appreciative Administrators understood and used the pieces of Appreciative Education's

theory-to-practice framework as a toolkit for establishing trusting relationships, fostering those relationships to achieve personal and organizational goals, and for continuously striving to improve as individuals and organizations.

The themes from this study overlapped with the individual 6-D phases which is why I placed this study's themes outside and over the different phases. Administrators use techniques and questions associated with the Disarm and Discover phases to establish trusting relationships with their team members, thus building a strong foundation for their work together. The Disarm and Discover phases in Appreciative Education help administrators remember to intentionally create a foundation in which individual voices are heard, each person feels that they matter, and individual strengths are maximized. Participants noted that accomplishing organizational objectives is more challenging if trusting relationships are not first cultivated and established. Ann stated, "I know that under everything that is successful, is a trusting relationship." Participants from the study shared that the cornerstone of their work as higher education administrators was centered on proactively building relationships with their fellow employees and within their institutional community. While acknowledging that it takes time to do so, one of the benefits of building trusting relationships is the joy doing so brought to the work of the Appreciative Administrators. Richard Green stated, "I really value relationships, I have learned over my career, that that is really where the joy of the work comes from, and it is also where a lot of power and opportunities to get things done comes from." Participants noted that the Disarm and Discover phases were particularly crucial to establishing trust by equipping administrators with questions designed to help them learn more about team members and reminding administrators of the importance of being curious about co-

workers' individual stories.

The Dream, Design, and Deliver phases in Appreciative Education help administrators to create and achieve both personal and organizational goals by working side-by-side with team members to co-create a vision for the future. Participants gave examples of how they intentionally sought to align individual and organizational goals when working on projects. For example, Mr. mentioned that he identifies passions and interests of his staff to leverage those for the outcomes that he, the institution, and the students want. Johana also gave an example that she tries "to see where their dreams fit into my specific organization." Appreciative Administrators seek to help staff members achieve their dreams while also helping the organization to achieve their goals.

Finally, participants noted the importance of the Don't Settle phase as a means of continuously reflecting both individually and as a team about how they can learn from both their mistakes and successes to enhance future initiatives. Administrators spoke of the importance of living out Kuh et al.'s (2005) concept of constantly striving to get better and innovate in a positive way, called "positive restlessness," which reminds administrators and their team members of the importance of continuing to strive to improve. Participants in the study consistently emphasized that using the Appreciative Education framework is a practice and that nobody is perfect. "We are never perfect, we are never there," was how Mr. described being a leader and never being satisfied with their performance, or understanding that when you stop learning, you stop growing, and they aspire to be better than that. Each participant in the study recognized their need to be self-aware, take personal responsibility, and reflect on ways to improve and grow in

terms of how they infused the Appreciative Education framework into their administrative approach.

Below is an update to the table from Chapter 1 that provided a comparison for how the six phases are used in Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Advising. Table 3 compares the six phases and how they are defined within Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), Appreciative Advising (Bloom & Martin, 2002), and the current study.

**Table 3**

*Updated Comparison of Phase Definitions*

Phase	Appreciative Inquiry	Appreciative Advising	Appreciative Administration
Disarm		Make a positive first impression with a student, build rapport, and create a safe, welcoming space.	Be curious about individual stories. Proactively build relationships with employees and the institutional community.
Discover	Appreciating the best of ‘what is’ to find ‘what works’ and helps organizations rediscover and remember their successes, strengths and periods of excellence.	Asking positive open-ended questions that will help learn about students’ strengths, skills, and abilities.	
Dream	Imagining ‘what could be’ and using past achievements and successes to discover ‘what is best’ to project their wishes, hopes and aspirations for the future.	Inquire about students’ hopes and dreams for their future.	Harness your team’s values, talents, and strengths to achieve personal and organizational goals.
Design	Brings together the best of ‘what is’ together with ‘what might be’, to create what should be the ideal.	Co-create a plan for making their dreams a reality.	

Deliver	How design is delivered and how it's embedded into groups, communities and organizations.	Encourage and support a student as they deliver on the plan created during the design phase.	
Don't Settle		Advisers and students need to set their own internal bars of expectations high.	Commit to continuous learning and improvement.

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### **Appreciative Administration in Practice**

One of the strengths of Appreciative Education is the theory-to-practice nature of the framework. Although the theoretical roots of the Appreciative Education framework run deep, the popularity of the framework, particularly among higher education advisors, practitioners, and leaders, is the applicability of the framework to real-life settings. This section will highlight how Appreciative Administrators are using the Appreciative Education framework to establish trusting relationships, create and achieve personal and organizational goals, and live out “positive restlessness” in their daily administrative practice.

Table 4 below shows how Appreciative Administrators infuse Appreciative Education into their daily administrative practices.

**Table 4**

#### *Appreciative Administration in Practice*

Appreciative Education Component	Appreciative Administration Characteristic or Strategy
Mindset	Look for the best in others and the organization. Identify the generative and life-giving aspects of the organization and its individual members.
Disarm	Create a safe and welcoming environment. Build trust through consistently demonstrating integrity, competence, loyalty, and openness.

Discover	<p>Actively seek others' ideas.          Be insatiably curious about other peoples' ideas and stories.          Ask trusted colleagues for feedback about your strengths and achievements.</p>
Dream	<p>Observe your team in action, paying particular attention to strengths.          Collaborate with others to mitigate the impact of weaknesses.          Pay attention to projects and topics that excite employees.</p>
Design	<p>Facilitate the co-creation of shared visions and powerful future possibilities.          Invite the team to share individual dreams to generate a shared vision.          Develop an action plan where individual strengths are aligned to achieve the goals.</p>
Deliver	<p>Identify key relationships needed to accomplish essential processes.          Engage the group in developing a shared plan of action for change.          Work collaboratively and supportively with team members.          Engage in accountability, collaboration, and social support.</p>
Don't Settle	<p>Bring people together regularly to celebrate successes.          Meet regularly with individuals to provide appreciative feedback.          Continually strive to improve and innovate.          Focus on getting better through practice.</p>

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### **Defining Appreciative Administration**

In the first article published on Appreciative Administration, Bloom and McClellan (2016) asserted that the purpose of Appreciative Administration was to:

Create appreciative work environments where employees feel their contributions are valued and where they are empowered and encouraged to contribute their ideas for optimizing their organization's performance and fulfilling the institution's purpose amidst the challenges of the higher education environment.  
 (p. 198)

Bloom and McClellan (2016) loosely defined Appreciative Administration as a way for:

Administrators to actively and intentionally seek to create a work environment that celebrates the strengths and skills of each team member and the organization as a whole as a launching pad for dreaming how to improve and then acting on the



plans that are co-created as a unit. (p. 207)

I offer a new definition of Appreciative Administration, based on Bloom and McClellan's (2016) initial definition of Appreciative Administration, participants' definition of Appreciative Administration, and my own analysis of the data from this grounded theory study. Based on my research through this grounded theory study, I am putting forth an updated definition:

*Appreciative Administration is fundamentally situated as a human experience and involves the intentional, consistent, and aspirational practice of establishing trusting relationships in which team members' strengths and skills are identified and leveraged to co-create and achieve personal and organizational goals.*

This updated Appreciative Administration definition that emerged from the findings of this study enhances the initial Bloom and McClellan (2016) definition in a few ways. The updated definition brings to light the human element of being an administrator. Appreciative Administration is not solely focused on the organization. Participants understood the benefit of helping people grow, develop, and progress to unlock their potential both personally and professionally. Benji shared, "When we grow individually, we oftentimes will grow collectively as an organization."

During the interviews, all participants were asked if they consider themselves an Appreciative Administrator. Over half the participants paused and started their answer with "yes...but" because they recognized that this was a practice and they could always be doing something better. In essence, they aspired to be an Appreciative Administrator. Lorena stated, "It is a commitment to continuously learning and improving. A constant commitment to reflecting." The participants that had many years of using Appreciative

Education understood that one size does not fit all, that this is not a panacea that if you do it once it solves everything, but instead, it was something they consistently worked on every day.

The Appreciative Education framework assisted administrators in being curious about individual stories and spending time to get to know people as individuals. Participants had self-awareness about the role they play in establishing trusting relationships and how to anchor conversations in the personal before jumping to the next organizational fire that needed to be put out and how much more could be accomplished if relationships are developed first. Appreciative Administration is bringing people to the table and then co-creating a vision of success which helps keep employees energized and engaged.

### **Implication for Practice and Policy**

The findings of this grounded theory study may be helpful for higher education institutions and administrators looking for a framework to lead their institutions. This study may also inform administrators with information about how to provide professional development, recognize employees, create policy changes, make time, build relationships, and develop pockets of greatness. The section below will fully explore the implications for higher education institutions and higher education administrators and offer recommendations for each.

### **Implications for Higher Education Institutions**

Higher education institutions are influenced by many stakeholders, including governments for funding, citizens demanding accountability, parents who want the best education for their children, and students themselves (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012).

Based on my findings, Appreciative Education can serve as a theory-to-practice framework for higher education administrators dealing with these various stakeholders by reminding them to build relationships on trust, have an Appreciative Mindset that is centered on curiosity and gratitude, and reframe problems into opportunities. Higher education institutions have an opportunity to create a culture that values personal and professional development, recognizes all employees, and brings voices to the table with making policies.

### ***Professional Development***

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* has published numerous pieces this past year discussing the “Great Resignation” in which many higher education faculty and staff are leaving their higher education jobs to pursue positions in other sectors such as business and non-profits. Further, Ellis (2021) shared in *The Great Disillusionment* that employees often cite feeling underappreciated and undervalued or having inadequate support as reasons for leaving their positions. To be fair, many higher education leaders have not received training on how to manage their units or how to supervise: “Managers in higher education are rarely formally prepared to supervise” (Matthew et al., 2022, p. 13). Although organizations like the American Council on Education (ACE), American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), as well as other professional organizations offer some leadership training opportunities, these professional development offerings are often expensive and time-intensive which is a barrier to participation for many institutions. Yet, participants in this study consistently mentioned the importance of encouraging employees to engage in professional development as a way to demonstrate to employees they matter by investing in their continued skill and

knowledge development. For example, Jake shared, “this goes into the positive restlessness, encouraging your staff to keep their skill and knowledge base fresh.” Higher education institutions need to be intentional about providing high quality professional development opportunities to their employees as a means for retaining employees.

### ***Employee Recognition***

In their book *Everybody Matters*, Chapman and Sisodia (2015) suggested that the vast majority of employees in the United States “go home every day feeling that they work for an organization that doesn't listen to or care about them...but instead sees them merely as functions or objects, as a means to the success of the organization” (p. 67). They call for a different institutional ethos that values all employees where everyone feels cared for and that they matter.

Participants in this study stated that the Deliver phase of Appreciative Administration helped them to remember to recognize employees' efforts and accomplishments frequently, authentically, and equitably. Participants mentioned that employees often feel overwhelmed and that one way to help keep employees engaged is to consistently remind them that the work their team does matter. The participants in my study worked hard to show up for their team and for their students by celebrating the small victories along the way.

Participants in this study noted that employee recognition is most impactful when it is personalized. The Discover and Dream phases of Appreciative Education provide Appreciative Administrators with inspiration to ask questions that will help them learn how each employee prefers to be recognized. Cohen and Roeske-Zummer (2021) noted that recognition programs need to involve more than increasing financial compensation

levels of employees which may only have a short-term impact on employee satisfaction. The simple act of regularly acknowledging what each team member contributes to the success of the organization can increase productivity and longevity.

### ***Policy Creation***

Godwin (2021) stated, “In order to thrive in today’s disruptive world, leaders must adopt a reinvention mindset that ensures all stakeholders are involved in and committed to co-creating improvements for today and tomorrow.” An important element of the Appreciative Administration approach is the co-creation of outcomes and ensuring that all voices are heard. Therefore, it is important that as institutional and team policies are developed that policies that have been co-created with a broad range of constituents are more likely to be successfully implemented. Policies that are perceived to be created by senior-level without input from people impacted by said policies can have negative and/or unintended consequences. Ann emphasized the importance of including people in decision making when she said “it doesn't matter the process as long as we're putting people first, and that's what's going to help us support our folks in the best way so that they can support our students in the best way.” While Appreciative Administrators understand that you cannot always make everyone happy, providing space for all voices to be heard and explaining the why behind policies can assist in buy-in from the staff in carryout the policies. Co-designing outcomes and policies will help build trust.

### **Implications for Higher Education Administrators**

Appreciative Administrators practice being self-aware and reflect on ways to improve and grow in terms of how they infused the Appreciative Education framework into their administrative approach. Using the Appreciative Education framework is a way

for participants to name a behavior, correct mistakes, and share what they learned from situations. Based on the findings of my study, I recommend that administrators take time to build relationships with their supervisees and other constituents, practice self-reflection, and seek to create a pocket of greatness by finding communities to support their implementation of the Appreciative Education framework.

### ***Making Time***

According to the participants in this study, one of the keys to an organization being successful is to invest time up-front to build high-quality relationships with each supervisee. The excuse of “I don’t have time” is short-sighted because not making time to get to know employees’ stories, strengths, and dreams for the future will likely result in having to spend more time down the line dealing with problems that arise because trust has not been established. However, Richard Green acknowledged that investing time in building relationship up front, “takes a lot more effort, it takes a lot more introspection, it takes some fundamental changes to the way you operate.” Based on the findings of the study, I would advocate the higher education leaders make the time and effort to build relationships with their supervisees.

In addition to taking time to build trusting relationships, Appreciative Administrators noted the importance of making time to regularly self-reflect on their performance. The participants mentioned that they used the questions associated with phases, particularly the Don’t Settle phase, of the Appreciative Education framework to guide their own personal and professional reflections: Which stakeholders do I need to engage this week? Have I responded to all emails? How can I lead meetings that create/sustain generative energy, identify strategic opportunities/advantages, and elevate

moments of pride? How can I uphold my commitments and actively engage my creativity to deal with issues that arise? Beth stated, “I think that providing an opportunity for reflection very often enables the person to maybe shift their thinking or come up with a solution, but it's providing time for reflection.” When participants felt stuck, the habit of asking reflective, appreciative questions helped them get unstuck and work through ambiguity. Developing a practice of reflection and examining what went on with an experience can be professional growth.

### ***Relationship Building Practices***

This grounded theory study found that the foundation of Appreciative Administration is establishing trusting relationships. Employees want to feel valued, cared about, and that their voice is heard. Developing relationships is not a one-time conversation. It is a practice that involves spending time understanding their staff's motivations and ambitions. However, the good news is that by asking generative, open-ended questions of employees takes less time than many leaders anticipate. Drawing upon the Appreciative Advising literature (Bloom et al., 2008), advisors have been able to go through all six phases of Appreciative Advising with students in 30 minutes or less. In any case, time spent building relationships with others is time well spent and asking Disarm, Discover and Dream questions provide Appreciative Administrators with tools they need to get to know their employees' stories and dreams which often results in enhancing trust levels between them. Appreciative Administrators can also reinforce trust in relationships by acknowledging their own mistakes, asking for help, and regularly providing feedback on both what employees are doing well as well as potential areas for improvement.

### ***Create Pockets of Greatness***

Based on the findings of my study, it is important to create what Jim Collins (2001) designated as “a pocket of greatness” by focusing on the things that administrators have control over. One of the findings that emerged from the study was the importance that participants who attended a monthly Zoom meeting informally known as Deans and Directors placed on creating a space for people who use the Appreciative Education framework to guide their work gather together. In this monthly one-hour meeting participants seek advice on how to appreciatively handle situations that have arisen on their campus and to stay connected with other like-minded people that are implementing the Appreciative Education framework in their leadership positions. Participants stressed the importance of these meetings in terms of keeping them inspired to appreciatively handle the challenges they face on their campus. Nicole noted that the monthly meeting allowed her “to tap into the expertise of others to be a sounding board for growing and navigating uncertainty.”

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Since the research literature on the topics of Appreciative Education and Appreciative Administration is scant, there are many opportunities for conducting new and original research. While this grounded theory study is a good beginning to filling the research gap, I have several recommendations for future research on the topics of Appreciative Education and Appreciative Administration. This section will cover my suggestions for conducting future research on topics including the impact of the Appreciative Administration course on administrators, exploring how staff perceived being supervised by someone who practices Appreciative Administration, looking at how



administrators can use Appreciative Administration to manage and build relationships around campus, and exploring how institutions have infused the Appreciative Education framework into their culture.

### **Appreciative Administration Course**

In the fall of 2017, the Office of Appreciative Education at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) began offering a non-credit, six-week asynchronous online course on Appreciative Administration. This course allows community members to learn specific skills, techniques, and practical applications for becoming an effective administrator using the Appreciative Education framework. A qualitative research study needs to be conducted to understand the course participants' perceptions of how effective the class has been in teaching them how to implement the Appreciative Education framework in their jobs.

### **Effect on Staff**

This grounded theory study used self-reported data from participants to better understand how they have infused the Appreciative Education framework into their daily administrative practices. Findings from the study showed that Appreciative Administrators understand the fundamental importance of remembering that organizations are composed of human beings and therefore how important it is to consistently put people before process. To ascertain how the supervisees of people who self-identify as Appreciative Administrators to understand from the supervisees' perspective how they perceive their supervisors' adoption of the Appreciative Education framework has impacted their supervisors' effectiveness as a supervisor. In addition, another study could be conducted asking supervisees who have been supervised by

Appreciative Administrators and those who are not Appreciative Administrators to compare and contrast the perceived similarities and differences, if any, between the supervisors.

### **Managing Up and Out**

The interview protocol for this study asked participants to give examples about how they use the Appreciative Education framework with people they supervise. However, administrators do not just manage people below them on the organizational chart. They must also intentionally build trust, rapport, and collaboration with all stakeholders. I recommend a study to further investigate how the Appreciative Education framework can be used by administrators to manage relationships with their supervisors and other constituents they interact with across campus.

### **Expand Upon the Criteria to be Considered an Administrator**

This study used purposeful sampling and required participants supervise at least one full-time staff member and participate in at least one formal Appreciate Education training. Two participants were eliminated after filling out the background survey because they did not have any full-time staff reporting to them even though they had training experience with Appreciative Education. Often when participants were sharing ways they were putting Appreciative Education into their administrative practice they would also give examples of how they put it into practice during their interactions with students. By participants mentioning students as examples during the interviews showed that the Appreciative framework can have a positive cascading effect on their relationships with not only their direct reports. A future study could widen the definition of an administrator because supervision of full-time staff is not the only component of

being an administrator. These participants could be heading up committees, working on large scale projects that require forming relationships around campus, advising students, and working with others towards common goals. These new perspectives could allow for a deeper analysis into how Appreciative Education can be put into practice.

### **Repeat the Study During a Non-Crisis**

So many examples in the current study that participants used to describe how they used the Appreciative Education framework pertained to dealing with the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people had more time, and that time allowed for self-reflection. Recreating this study during a non-crisis or pandemic to see if administrators use the Appreciative Education framework differently could help to strengthen the current findings as well as provide additional examples of practical applications of the Appreciative Education framework.

### **Examine a University's Approach to Developing an Appreciative Culture**

During some interviews, participants mentioned that their institution was taking steps toward infusing the Appreciative Education framework across their institution. Participants mentioned that staff on all levels have a buy-in of the framework and were taking steps to have staff participate in Appreciative Education training providing a common language that is used in everyday discussions. I recommend that a case study be conducted at these institutions to ascertain the strategies used to embed the Appreciative Education framework across campus. This research could highlight how to create and transform institutional culture using the Appreciative Education framework.

### **Strengths of the Study**

There were several strengths associated with this study. While I drew upon Charmaz's (2014) memo writing concept and set aside my experiences, as addressed in the Role of the Researcher section of Chapter 3, my experience with Appreciative Education was a strength of this grounded theory study. Being immersed in Appreciative Education circles, including co-teaching the Appreciative Administration online course, meant that my level of knowledge about the Appreciative Education framework allowed me to build better rapport with study participants and better understand the Appreciative Education language participants used. While I created memos during data analysis, I was deeply invested in accurately telling the participants' stories in my analysis and dissertation writing. My deep interest in Appreciative Education will continue as I plan to publish this research for others to build upon and continue to build relationships with those interested in or currently infusing Appreciative Education into their daily administrative practices.

Outside of my deep investment in telling my participants' stories, another strength of the study was the rich, thick data that emerged during the interviews. Participants were candid in their responses and were eager to share their pasts, current situations, and future dreams. Given the qualitative nature of this research, I was able to probe and ask follow-up questions during the interviews, which would not have been possible with a quantitative approach, such as using documents or survey data.

Another strength of the study involved the fact that the findings from the preliminary interview data analysis were presented to a focus group, which included eight participants whom I had interviewed, for their feedback and to collect further data in

these areas. The focus group agreed with the preliminary analyses and themes and noted that the findings were congruent with their experiences as Appreciative Administrators.

A final strength of the study was the variety and depth of study participants. Out of the 21 participants, they represented 19 institutions ranging from community colleges to 4-year public and private institutions. Also, there was a good gender balance amongst the 21 participants, with nine identifying as male, and 12 as female. Lastly, there were a broad range of administrative roles the 21 participants held. Participants held administrative roles within student affairs or academic affairs and their titles ranged from Assistant Director to Vice President.

### **Personal Reflection**

As an alumna of Theta Phi Alpha, I believe in the motto for the organization that is adapted from Saint Catherine of Siena, “Nothing great is ever achieved without much enduring” (“For Parents,” n.d.). As I reflect on my doctoral journey, I am inspired and committed to being a lifelong learner. The doctoral journey was challenging, but I learned to lean on the “why” when I questioned my path. These past eight years taught me that it is okay not to be perfect and that when things get tough, it is important to name those struggles, take accountability, and practice resilience to move forward, even if they are baby steps. This degree would not be complete if it were not for the wonderful community that lifted me up and cheered me on – my family, friends that became like family, colleagues, mentors, and the amazing students who would check in on me as I would do for them. I hope to serve as a role model and cheerleader for those I know that will embark on this journey in the future.

When starting my research process, I never imagined that the world would face a global pandemic in 2020. The interviews for my research took place during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was amazed and inspired by my participants, who were eager to participate in this study because they genuinely felt that this research topic was both needed and relevant. Participants came onto the Zoom call with smiles, hope for the future, and a genuine interest in taking care of the staff around them. I left each interview energized and inspired by the stories of care and compassion and felt that higher education is lucky to have a growing community of Appreciative Administrators.

My research also impacted my work. Imposter syndrome is real, not only in the doctoral journey but also in my professional career. As I reflected on what was emerging in my research, I applied it in practice to my work. I started to understand that the Appreciative Education framework is a practice and that it is okay to be perfectly imperfect in my role as an administrator. I was inspired by the study's participants to establish trusting relationships with those around me, co-create goals and a vision for moving forward, and to celebrate accomplishments while also looking to continuously raise the bar for myself. The study's participants reminded me to remember the power I hold as an administrator, that what I will find what I am seek seeking, that I need to “really” listen, and that my actions speak just as loud as my words.

Lastly, and probably the most important, this doctoral journey has impacted me personally. The Appreciative Education community welcomed me with open arms. Being in a community with other individuals with a similar mindset and foundation once a month for the Appreciative Deans and Directors meetings always left me feeling that it was okay to be a work in progress and that I could conquer anything. Through these new

mentors and friends, I have had the opportunity to hone my craft and work on presentations, facilitate the online Appreciative Administration course, and work on publications that will hopefully provide other administrators with a framework and practical tools for doing their jobs better. When reading about the Appreciative approach, I always felt that this could affect someone professionally and personally, and I now know this to be true. The Appreciative Mindset and practices that showed up in my research are also things I have applied to other situations outside the workplace, which will stay with me forever. My research was life-changing, and I cannot wait to see where this Appreciative journey leads.

## APPENDICES



## Appendix A: IRB Approved Background Survey

### Appendix A

#### Background Information Survey

Q1: Please provide your first and last name, preferred email address, and preferred phone number.

First & Last Name:

Email Address:

Phone Number: ( ) \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_

Q2: Preferred pseudonym

Preference 1:

Preference 2:

No Preference (Place "X" on line):

Q3: Gender

Male

Female

Other:

Q4: What Appreciative Education trainings have you participated in (Check all that apply)?

I have taken the Appreciative Advising online course

I have participated in the Appreciative Advising institute

I served as faculty for the Appreciative Advising institute


I attended the Unleashing Greatness retreat

I have participated in the Appreciative Administration online course

Q5: How many professionals do you currently supervise?

Q6: List your current professional position and the respective institution.

Q7: List the year you started your current position.

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# Appendix B: IRB Approved Interview Guide

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol

Participant:  
Date of Interview:  
Time (Start/End):  
Location of Interview:

Good Morning/afternoon/evening! Thank you for taking the time to meet with me for this interview. My name is Meagan Elsberry, and I am a doctoral student at Florida Atlantic University.

The purpose of this interview for my study is to learn from you the specific ways you put into practice the Appreciative Education framework in your daily leadership approach along with the benefits and challenges of using this framework.

Information gathered during the interview will remain confidential. May I send you a copy of the transcription for review and any additional comments following the interview? I ask that you be open and candid with what you share.

Just a few things to get started:

- May I audio record this interview for accuracy?
- I will transcribe the interview as part of my data collection and will only include your pseudonym.
- Content shared during this interview will be coded as part of the data analysis.
- May I have your verbal consent to use this interview as part of my study?
- This should take 60- minutes. Thank you for your time.
- Send adult consent form prior to interview and ask for it back prior to the scheduled interview time


#### Questions:

##### Disarm

1. Why did you choose to pursue a career in higher education?
2. How did you become aware of Appreciative Education?
3. What is it that you value about yourself, the nature of your work, your department, and the institution?
4. How do you seek to create a culture where all voices are valued and respected?  
Probe: How do you recognize, access, and harness the strengths of your staff?
5. How do you put into practice the Disarm phase in leading your organization?

##### Discover

6. This study is specifically about Appreciative Administration. How do you define Appreciative Administration?
7. Tell me about a time when you felt most alive, engaged, and/or fulfilled at work.

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8. What elements of your environment hold the greatest positive capacity for contributing to change?
9. How do you deal with issues of uncertainty and ambiguity in your administrative practice?
10. Can you give me an example of a Discover question that you have found effective in leading others?
11. How do you live out the Discover phase in your work as an Appreciative Administrator?

**Dream**

12. What wishes or hopes do you have to strengthen the core of your department or that of the organization?
13. How do you get to know the Dreams of your staff for both their position and personally?
14. How else do you live out the Dream phase in your work as an Appreciative Administrator?

**Design**

15. How do you excite and/or motivate your staff about a new initiative or a new project?  
Can you please tell me a time where you successfully excited or motivated your staff about a new initiative or project?
16. When staff members share concerns or issues, how do you typically respond?
17. How do you help assist and support staff in making their dreams a reality?
18. How else do you live out the Design phase in your work as an Appreciative Administrator?

**Deliver**

19. How do you allow employees to be resilient?
20. What is a Deliver strategy you have used when it comes to projects you are working on?
21. How else do you live out the Deliver phase in your work as an Appreciative Administrator?

**Don't Settle**

22. How do you continue to encourage your staff to raise the bar on what they do?  
Probe: How do you challenge employees to reflect on their own learning process?
23. How do you continue to develop yourself professionally?
24. How else do you live out the Don't Settle phase in your work as an Appreciative Administrator?

**What are the benefits of using the Appreciative Education framework to lead your team?**

25. What alternatives to the Appreciative Education framework have you tried? How do your outcomes leading using the Appreciative Education framework compare to times you have used another or no framework?
26. How do you get buy-in on the Appreciative Education framework from those around you?




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What do you find to be challenging about using the Appreciative Education framework?

27. Do you ever struggle personally with taking an appreciative approach? If so, can you provide a specific example as to why?
28. Do you face barriers to your appreciative approach within the organization? If so, can you provide a specific example?
29. How do you work with those around you in the organization that may take a cynical approach to your use of the Appreciative Education framework?

Thank you again for sharing your experiences with me. I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me. I want to reiterate that this interview is confidential. I will be preparing the interview transcript within the next few weeks and will email you a copy for you to review for accuracy. If I do not hear from you within 72 hours, I will assume you are satisfied with the transcript. Should I have any follow up questions, would you be available for further communication? How would you prefer for me to contact you?

Have a great day!

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# Appendix C: IRB Approved Focus Group Guide

## Appendix C

### Focus Group Protocol

Participants:  
Date of Focus Group:  
Time (Start/End):  
Place:

#### Introduction:

Good morning/afternoon everyone! I'm Meagan Elsberry and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program here at FAU. I want to thank you for joining me for this one-hour focus group discussion today.

To refresh your memory, I am conducting a qualitative constructivist grounded theory to discover how higher education administrators put into practice the Appreciative Education framework in their leadership approach. Including those of you in this focus group, I have interviewed a total of X participants for my study and I would now like to share the results of my preliminary analyses with you to get your feedback. I welcome you to offer any thoughts that come to mind as we move through this discussion, even if they were not discussed during your interview.

Due to the nature of focus groups, I cannot offer you confidentiality among the people in this room, but I can assure you that I will be using pseudonyms for participants so your identity will remain confidential with me and in any presentation of this work. As with the interviews, I want to verify that you are comfortable with having this conversation recorded?

Thank you for your response. Is everyone ready to get started?

Preliminary Finding #1: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this finding reflective of your experiences as an administrator within higher education who puts Appreciative Education into practice?

[Discussion]

Probes:

How or why? Can you provide an example of how you put into practice?

Preliminary Finding #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this finding reflective of your experiences as an administrator within higher education who puts Appreciative Education into practice?

[Discussion]

Probes:

How or why? Can you provide an example of how you put into practice?

Preliminary Finding #3: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this finding reflective of your experiences as an administrator within higher education who puts Appreciative Education into practice?



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[Discussion]

Probes:

How or why? Can you provide an example of how you put into practice?

Preliminary Finding #4: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this finding reflective of your experiences as an administrator within higher education who puts Appreciative Education into practice?

[Discussion]

Probes:

How or why? Can you provide an example of how you put into practice?

Preliminary Finding #5: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this finding reflective of your experiences as an administrator within higher education who puts Appreciative Education into practice?

[Discussion]

Probes:

How or why? Can you provide an example of how you put into practice?

It is time for us to wrap up. Thank you all for volunteering your time and participating in this study; my research would not be possible without all of you. I hope you have enjoyed this discussion. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to reach out to me in the future. Have a wonderful rest of your day.



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# Appendix D: IRB Approved Recruitment Script

## Appendix D

### Interview Recruitment Protocol

**Working Title of Study:** Appreciative Administration: A Grounded Theory of How the Appreciative Education Theory-To-Practice Framework is Being Operationalized in Higher Education

#### Expert Nomination Email Script

Dear [Insert Name],

My name is Meagan Elsberry and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education, Educational Leadership program at Florida Atlantic University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting in partial fulfillment of the requirements of my doctoral program. The title of the study is *Appreciative Administration: A Grounded Theory of how the Appreciative Education Theory-to-Practice Framework is Being Operationalized in Higher Education*.

The purpose of this study is to discover how higher education administrators put into practice the Appreciative Education framework in their leadership approach within higher education. I am interested in learning the specific ways higher education administrators are implementing the Appreciative Education framework in daily leadership practices along with the benefits and challenges in using this framework.

This is a qualitative study using interviews as the primary analysis to explore this research topic. Participants will be asked to:

- Participate in a 60-minute semi-structured interview, which will be conducted via face-to-face or through Zoom. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed with your permission.
- Complete a short background survey.


Thank you for your time and consideration of this invitation. I hope you will consider participating in this study and have a part in contributing knowledge that will impact how higher education administrators can put into practice the Appreciative Education framework.

I would be pleased to have you participate in my study. Given this information, would you be willing to participate?

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Meagan Elsberry  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology  
Florida Atlantic University  
[MElsberry2014@fau.edu](mailto:MElsberry2014@fau.edu)  
954-540-9798 (cell)  
561-237-7233 (office)

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	Expires On:	Not Applicable



Follow-up Email Script to Potential Participants

From: Meagan Elsberry  
Sent: [date]  
To:  
Subject: Doctoral Study Participation

Dear [Insert Name],


Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study. As a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Florida Atlantic University, I am currently conducting my dissertation study in which I am seeking to discover how higher education administrators put into practice the Appreciative Education framework in their leadership approach within higher education.

I would ask that you complete the brief background survey and sign a consent form prior to the interview. Interviews will be scheduled to take place at a location and time that is convenient for you. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity and location of the participant. A 60-minute block of time should suffice to set up and conduct the interview.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via [MElsberry2014@fau.edu](mailto:MElsberry2014@fau.edu) or by phone. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Meagan Elsberry  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology  
Florida Atlantic University  
954-540-9798 (cell)  
561-237-7233 (office)

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# Appendix E: IRB Approval Focus Group Recruitment Script

## Appendix E

### Focus Group Recruitment Protocol

#### Recruitment Email Script

Dear [Insert Name],

I wanted to thank you again for participating in my study. Your input is invaluable and I appreciate you taking the time out of your day to contribute to my research. I am reaching back out today to see if you would be willing to participate in the one-hour focus group that I will also be conducting. I will be sharing the results of my preliminary analysis of the interviews and would like your feedback. The focus group will meet from (time) on (date) at (location).

Please let me know if you are willing to participate in the focus group as soon as you can.

Sincerely,

Meagan Elsberry  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology  
Florida Atlantic University  
954-540-9798 (cell)  
561-237-7233 (office)


#### Confirmation Email Script

Dear [Insert Name],

Thank you for volunteering for and confirming your participation in the focus group. The focus group discussion will begin at (time) on (date) at (location). I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Meagan Elsberry  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology  
Florida Atlantic University  
954-540-9798 (cell)  
561-237-7233 (office)

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## Appendix F: IRB Approval and Exemption



Institutional Review Board  
Division of Research  
777 Glades Rd.  
Boca Raton, FL 33431  
Tel: 561.297.1383  
[fau.edu/research/researchint](http://fau.edu/research/researchint)

Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Ph.D., Chair

DATE: June 3, 2020

TO: Jennifer Bloom, Ed.D.  
FROM: Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB

PROTOCOL #: 1576025-1  
PROTOCOL TITLE: [1576025-1] Appreciative Administration: A Grounded Theory Of How The Appreciative Education Theory-To-Practice Framework Is Being Operationalized In Higher Education.

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project  
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # A2

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS  
EFFECTIVE DATE: June 3, 2020

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM FEDERAL REGULATIONS under 45 CFR 46.104 (A2).

**Principal Investigator (PI) Responsibilities:** The PI assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects in this study as outlined in Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Manual Section 8-1, Exemptions.

**Continuing Review:** Exempt Studies do not need to be renewed.

**Modifications:** In general, investigators are not required to submit changes to the Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB once a research study is designated as exempt as long as those changes do not affect the exempt category or criteria for exempt determination (changing from exempt status to expedited or full review, changing exempt category) or that may substantially change the focus of the research study such as a change in hypothesis or study design. If the study is modified to add additional sites for the research, please note that you may not begin the research at those sites until you receive the appropriate approvals/permissions from the sites.

Please contact the HRPP office if you have any questions about whether a change must be submitted for IRB review and approval.

**Reportable Events:** If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems that may involve risks to subjects or others, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects and change the category of review, notify the IRB office promptly. Any complaints from participants that may change the level of review from exempt to expedited or full review must be reported to the IRB. Please report new information through the study's workspace and contact the IRB office with

any urgent events. Please visit the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) website to obtain more information, including reporting timelines.

**Personnel Changes:** After determination of the exempt status, the PI is responsible for maintaining records of personnel changes and appropriate training. The PI is not required to notify the IRB of personnel changes on exempt research.

**Closure:** Investigators are not required to notify the IRB when the research study can be closed. However, the PI can choose to notify the IRB when the study can be closed and is especially recommended when the PI leaves the university. Closure indicates that research activities with human subjects are no longer ongoing, have stopped, and are complete. Human research activities are complete when investigators are no longer obtaining information or biospecimens about a living person through interaction or intervention with the individual, obtaining identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens about a living person, and/or using, studying, analyzing, or generating identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens about a living person.

**Exemption Category.** The full regulatory text from 45 CFR 46.104(d) for the exempt research categories is included below.

**Exempt 1.** Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

**Exempt 2.** Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

- (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;
- (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or
- (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

**Exempt 3.** (i) Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection and at least one of the following criteria is met:

- (A) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;
- (B) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or
- (C) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

(ii) For the purpose of this provision, benign behavioral interventions are brief in duration, harmless, painless, not physically invasive, not likely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on the subjects,

and the investigator has no reason to think the subjects will find the interventions offensive or embarrassing. Provided all such criteria are met, examples of such benign behavioral interventions would include having the subjects play an online game, having them solve puzzles under various noise conditions, or having them decide how to allocate a nominal amount of received cash between themselves and someone else.

(iii) If the research involves deceiving the subjects regarding the nature or purposes of the research, this exemption is not applicable unless the subject authorizes the deception through a prospective agreement to participate in research in circumstances in which the subject is informed that he or she will be unaware of or misled regarding the nature or purposes of the research.

**Exempt 4.** Secondary research for which consent is not required: Secondary research uses of identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens, if at least one of the following criteria is met:

- (i) The identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens are publicly available;
- (ii) Information, which may include information about biospecimens, is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, the investigator does not contact the subjects, and the investigator will not re-identify subjects;
- (iii) The research involves only information collection and analysis involving the investigator's use of identifiable health information when that use is regulated under 45 CFR parts 160 and 164, subparts A and E, for the purposes of "health care operations" or "research" as those terms are defined at 45 CFR 164.501 or for "public health activities and purposes" as described under 45 CFR 164.512(b); or
- (iv) The research is conducted by, or on behalf of, a Federal department or agency using government-generated or government-collected information obtained for non-research activities, if the research generates identifiable private information that is or will be maintained on information technology that is subject to and in compliance with section 208(b) of the E-Government Act of 2002, 44 U.S.C. 3501 note, if all of the identifiable private information collected, used, or generated as part of the activity will be maintained in systems of records subject to the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a, and, if applicable, the information used in the research was collected subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, 44 U.S.C. 3501 et seq.

**Exempt 5.** Research and demonstration projects that are conducted or supported by a Federal department or agency, or otherwise subject to the approval of department or agency heads (or the approval of the heads of bureaus or other subordinate agencies that have been delegated authority to conduct the research and demonstration projects), and that are designed to study, evaluate, improve, or otherwise examine public benefit or service programs, including procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs, possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures, or possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs. Such projects include, but are not limited to, internal studies by Federal employees, and studies under contracts or consulting arrangements, cooperative agreements, or grants. Exempt projects also include waivers of otherwise mandatory requirements using authorities such as sections 1115 and 1115A of the Social Security Act, as amended. (i) Each Federal department or agency conducting or supporting the research and demonstration projects must establish, on a publicly accessible Federal Web site or in such other manner as the department or agency head may determine, a list of the research and demonstration projects that the Federal department or agency conducts or supports under this provision. The research or demonstration project must be published on this list prior to commencing the research involving human subjects.

**Exempt 6.** Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies: (i) If wholesome foods without additives are consumed, or (ii) If a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

\*Exempt categories (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5) cannot be applied to activities that are FDA regulated.

\*Each of the exemptions at this section may be applied to research subject to subpart B (Additional Protections for Pregnant Women, Human Fetuses and Neonates Involved in Research) if the conditions of the exemption are met.

\*The exemptions at this section do not apply to research subject to subpart C (Additional Protections for Research Involving Prisoners), except for research aimed at involving a broader subject population that only incidentally includes prisoners.

\*Exemptions (1), (4), (5), and (6) of this section may be applied to research subject to subpart D (Additional Protections for Children Involved as Subjects in Research) if the conditions of the exemption are met. Exempt (2)(i) and (ii) only may apply to research subject to subpart D involving educational tests or the observation of public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed. Exempt (2)(iii) may not be applied to research subject to subpart D.

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact Ximena Levy at:

Institutional Review Board  
Research Integrity/Division of Research  
Florida Atlantic University  
Boca Raton, FL 33431  
Phone: 561.297.1383  
[researchintegrity@fau.edu](mailto:researchintegrity@fau.edu)

\* Please include your protocol number and title in all correspondence with this office.

**This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations,  
and a copy is retained within our records.**

# Appendix G: IRB Approved Adult Consent Form

## ADULT CONSENT FORM

Version 1.0 – May 25, 2020

**1) Title of Research Study:**

Appreciative Administration: A Grounded Theory Of How The Appreciative Education Theory-To-Practice Framework Is Being Operationalized In Higher Education

**2) Investigator(s):**

Dr. Jennifer Bloom and Meagan Elsberry

**3) Purpose:**

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study is to discover how higher education administrators put into practice the Appreciative Education framework in their leadership approach.

**4) Procedures:**

- You will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview;
- You will be asked to complete a background information survey;
- Interviews will be conducted online via Zoom or in person;
- Interviews will need to be conducted in a quiet location and during a time that is most convenient for you;;
- The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

**5) Risks:**

There are minimal risks associated with this research study.

**6) Benefits:**

Participants will contribute to the growing literature on how higher education administrators can put into practice Appreciative Education, a theory-to-practice framework for leading institutions to not just survive but also thrive.


**7) Confidentiality/ Data Collection & Storage:**

Any information collected about you will be kept confidential and secure and only the people working with or overseeing the study will see your data, unless required by law. The data will be kept for 5 years in an electronic storage method and physical lock box. After 5 years, paper copies will be destroyed by shredding and electronic data will be deleted. Sometimes researchers need to share information that may identify you and your research records with people that work for the University, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Research Integrity staff, regulators or the study sponsor. These people are responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly. If this does happen, we will take precautions to protect the information you have provided. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name/identity unless you give us permission.

**8) Contact Information:**

- If you have questions about the study, you should call or email the investigator(s) Dr. Jennifer Bloom via [bloomj@fau.edu](mailto:bloomj@fau.edu) or Meagan Elsberry via [melsberry2014@fau.edu](mailto:melsberry2014@fau.edu).
- If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research, Research Integrity Office at (561) 297-1383 or send an email to [researchintegrity@fau.edu](mailto:researchintegrity@fau.edu).


**9) Consent Statement:**

	1576025-1	
	Approved On:	June 3, 2020
	Expires On:	Not Applicable

I have read or had read to me the information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Printed Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	1576025-1	
	Approved On:	June 3, 2020
	Expires On:	Not Applicable



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