

USING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY TO DESCRIBE AND CREATE TEACHER PEAK
EXPERIENCES: A CASE STUDY OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

A Dissertation by

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I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

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DEDICATION

To Russ for his support, Papa Jeff for his presence, Kimi for her daily encouragement, Clay for his belief in me, and Tammy for her assistance throughout my educational journey.
In loving memory of my mother, Frances Morris Jeffries, who always believed in me.

“If we want to answer the question how tall can the human species grow, then obviously it is well to pick out the ones who are already tallest and study them.”

-Abraham Maslow (1971, p. 7)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. Due to limited research on the study of peak experiences as it relates to teaching, this study sought to describe the peak experiences of teachers through the teachers' personal reflections back on their peak experiences, and it sought to understand the conditions that allowed these teachers to enter into a peak experience state.

The basic design of this study was a qualitative case study conducted through an appreciative inquiry theoretical perspective and a humanistic psychology perspective. An appreciative inquiry theoretical perspective is an action research inquiry process designed to help participants identify their achievements and strengths and allows people to think deeply about their human potential. Participants were guided through three Appreciative Inquiry stages to include discover, dream, and design. Descriptive field notes were taken and information was gathered from varying perspectives. Volunteers were asked to participate in various data collection methods to include semi-structured interviews, semi-structured paired-interviews, focus groups, participant created documents, and generative story telling to support cross-validation and triangulation. Data were analyzed using the comparative analysis matrix method (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data were also analyzed using the text analysis software CATPAC as a filter to facilitate a deeper level of content analysis. Data were compared, conceptualized, and categorized through content analysis, pattern matching, and an open coding process. After open coding, connections and categories were developed through an axial coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All analyzed data were used to aggregate common information and

identify new insights into perceptions of teachers regarding peak experiences in a teaching and learning context (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

The analyzed data revealed five salient findings: (1) The appreciative inquiry experience allowed participants to identify and create peak experiences and to discover the ecological conditions necessary for them to enter into a peak experience state, (2) the appreciative inquiry process allowed the participants to recognize the importance of connecting with each other and students, (3) the appreciative inquiry process allowed the participants to identify intrinsic needs, (4) the appreciative inquiry process allowed people to validate themselves and others as worthwhile people, and (5) the appreciative inquiry experience identified the importance of recalling and sharing peak experience stories.

All of the findings suggested that the appreciative inquiry process has the potential to alter patterns of teacher behavior, which in turn affects organizational culture. Using an AI theoretical research perspective in this research study empowered and energized teachers in life-changing, transformational ways to positively affect a teaching and learning context.

The findings from this study have the potential to contribute to the areas of study that focus on effective teaching. This research provided an expanded understanding of peak experiences through an AI design to facilitate teachers in describing personal experiences of peak experiences in a teaching and learning context.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Three decades ago, I began my teaching career with aspirations of becoming an extraordinarily effective and influential teacher capable of inspiring young children to learn. I sought to identify the best and brightest teachers and leaders who I sensed exhibited self-surpassing abilities to inspire students to learn. Through conversations, observations, coursework, personal teaching experiences, and opportunities to work in 15 different schools as a teacher, instructional coach, or administrator, I have witnessed, experienced, or heard about situations in which teachers recalled a moment in time that radically surpassed what is typical for most teachers. For example, some teachers related moments of extensive happiness or serenity when teaching. Other teachers recounted epic undertakings where they became so involved in instruction that they lost track of time and sensed they were masters of their situation. They operated with a narrow focus of attention where they were immersed in the present. They were physically and mentally relaxed, confident, and felt in control. They experienced moments that made life beautiful, good, and worthwhile. They encountered emotions of wonder and a loss of anxiety or inhibition. They appeared to be devoted to teaching as if it was perceived as a calling.

The act of teaching for these teachers during these extraordinary moments created a sense of work as play and play as work. I began to realize that there was a side to the teaching experience more complex than accounted for by traditional views of research regarding teaching. There appears to be skepticism that distances some researchers from examining these types of experiences within a classroom setting; yet, in other fields such as psychology, more than a half-century of research has examined these occurrences. Psychological research reported when individuals participated in various activities, they experienced intense engagement, a sense of

connectedness or special fit, fulfillment, and accomplishment that surpassed the norm (Berlyne & Madsen, 1973; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Waterman, 1990). This intense engagement or phenomenon was described by James (1902/2002): “All we know is that there are dead feelings, dead ideas, and cold beliefs, and there are hot and live ones; and when one grows hot and alive within us, everything has to re-crystallize about it” (p. 218). This phenomenon of hot and alive experiences fuels my desire to understand the peak experiences of teachers while teaching in a classroom setting.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary offers guidance on constructing a definition of a peak experience. *Peak* is defined as: “the very top: pinnacle: the highest level or greatest degree” (Gove, 1993, p. 1660), or “reaching the maximum of capacity, value, or activity” (Gove, 1993, p. 1661); *experience* is defined as: “direct observation of or participation in events” (Gove, 1993, p. 800). Peak experience is not to be confused with peak performance. Peak experience is an isolated, emotionally positive, intense experience; whereas, peak performance may occur without the company of peak experience (Privette & Bundrick, 1991). For the purpose of my study, peak experience will denote an event while teaching when a teacher feels he/she has reached his/her highest capacity.

The benefits of peak experiences provide credence for seeking ways to replicate conditions conducive for peak experiences. Some of these benefits include how a person feels or is seen: (a) A person feels more than at other times to be responsible, active, creative; (b) a person feels free of inhibitions, doubts, or fears; a person feels more spontaneous, expressive, and free flowing (Maslow, 1961); (c) a person is seen as more fully functioning—developing and utilizing all of his/her capabilities or potentialities. Peak experiences have been found to be therapeutic in nature; they change a person’s view of himself/herself in a healthy direction, as

well as a person's view of others and the world. Peak experiences also enhance a person's creativity and spontaneity and motivate the person to seek to repeat the experience since it is viewed as generative and worthwhile (Maslow, 1959a).

Background of the Study

In general, research on human experiences occurs in clinical or experimental settings where variables are controlled and the study's design limits the potential for manifested behaviors (Allport, 1961; LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). This theoretical model of human action is considered mechanistic and reductive in nature since it tends to neglect the possibility of human beings achieving greatness against all odds. For example, an appreciative inquiry (AI) theoretical research perspective and/or process is one alternative model that could be used with the intent to study human behavior by utilizing a qualitative methodology (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The AI theoretical research perspective emphasizes a search for what is good and seeks to identify experiences when people or an organization are at their/its best (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003). The AI process legitimizes research regarding what is successful through an unveiling of each other's peak experiences (Yballe & O'Connor, 2000). The four stages of the AI process are discovery, dream, design, and destiny. Appreciative inquiry questions are designed to facilitate an action research process throughout these four stages. During these four stages, people (a) are encouraged through a discovery phase to describe who was involved, the antecedents prior to the peak experience, and other contributing factors related to the event (Norum, Wells, Hoadley, & Geary, 2002); (b) are engaged to dream a shared image of a better organization; (c) are facilitated to design a clear purpose; and (d) are enlightened to realize the dream in the form of destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

In effect, AI seeks to discover the peak experiences of people and organizations as a means to evolve to higher states of performance. Based on the assumption that every organization functions well when it is most alive, effective, and masterful, AI offers a synergistic approach to discover the source of vitality of social systems when encountering peak experiences. The nature of this line of inquiry is to identify the positive core of people (their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences) and organizations through individuals/members relating accomplishments and assets through their life stories (Cooperrider et al., 2003). Given the positive line of inquiry inherent in AI, this theoretical research perspective was used in my research.

The asset-driven and strengths-based nature of AI was further enhanced through the theoretical perspective of humanistic psychology. This perspective evolved from the work of psychologists “Rollo May, Carl Rogers, Clark Moustakas, Henry Murray, Sydney Jourard – and, primarily...Abraham Maslow” (DeCarvalho, 1991, p. 7). Humanistic psychology centers on grasping the full essence of the meaning of a person’s full potential and is based on an underlying assumption that a person is in the process of becoming or a person is searching for a personal identity, and a person has a unique ability to direct and change the motives of his/her course in life (Bugental, 1967b). Humanistic psychology provides an eclectic view of human personality and assists researchers in grasping the complete organism of the person to include values, dispositions, motives, desires, objectives, intentions, and identity, which guides or directs the process of becoming a person (Evans, 1971). Humanistic psychology optimally serves as another lens for capturing the essence of a teacher’s encounter with peak experiences. These perspectives enabled me to describe the peak experience of teachers in classrooms (Glass, 1971; Maslow, 1968b).

Problem Statement

Despite the extensive research on peak experiences as it relates to the workplace environment (Allison & Duncan, 1992; Drucker, 1992; Katzenbach, 2000), personality (Allport, 1961; Jung, 1964; Maslow, 1968b; Rogers, 1961), altruists (Blake, 1978; Lee, Kang, Lee, & Park, 2005; Sorokin, 1950), and the arts, limited research exists on the study of peak experiences as it relates to teaching (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Hamilton & Robson, 2006; Krampe, 1962; Maslow, 1968a).

Much of the work on peak experiences centers on people who experience a greater sense of challenge, autonomy, control, satisfaction, and focus. By capturing and identifying the peak experiences of workers, athletes, artists, and altruists, researchers describe an altered state of functioning. I make the assumption in this study that peak experiences of teachers can also be captured and identified.

My study sought to describe the peak experiences of teachers through the teachers' personal reflections back on their peak experiences, and it sought to understand the conditions that allowed these teachers to enter into a peak experience state. In effect, my study sought to understand what it is like when teachers encounter a peak experience, as well as to understand the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state.

Significance of the Study

This study extended the current literature on effective teaching by describing peak experiences of classroom teachers and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into

a peak experience state. When researchers describe peak experiences, they focus generally on altruists or public performers such as dancers, actors, musicians or athletes (Bloom, 1985; Hays & Brown, 2004; Lee et al., 2005). Characteristics of people experiencing peak experiences include a coherent sense of self, a display of confidence in their abilities, an expressed sense of purpose and direction, an absence of fear, and a conceptualized sense of destiny (Cohen, 1991; Hays & Brown, 2004).

While the phenomenon of peak experiences appears exclusive to particular professions, Maslow's (1961) extensive studies on peak experiences reveals almost every person in and out of any profession most likely knowingly or unknowingly encounters peak experiences. He suggests although all people have peak experiences, not all people recognize these experiences. He classifies those who recognize these experiences as *peakers* and those who cannot recognize these experiences as *non peakers*. He finds that while everyone has peak experiences, those who most often recognize the experience of these phenomena are among the healthiest people since they frequently seek to increase their experience of this phenomenon (Maslow, 1962).

The characteristics inherent in peak experiences are referred to as *being values* or *b-values* (Maslow, 1970a). These values were derived from Maslow's asking participants to reflect on what peak experiences were like, when they were apt to come, what made them likely, and what were the conditions. The b-value characteristics include "truth, goodness, wholeness, dichotomy-transcendence, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, necessity, completion, justice, order, simplicity, richness, effortless, playfulness, and self-sufficiency" (Maslow, 1967, pp. 108-109). Maslow finds these characteristics most frequently inherent in people when they have peak experiences.

In investigations of peak experiences, Maslow discovered attributes, or characteristics of peak experiences to include moments of elevated inspiration and enhanced well-being. Triggers or influences causing regularity of peak experiences, are equated to when individuals are exceptionally developed or self-actualized (Maslow, 1968a). Self-actualization “. . . may be loosely defined as the full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc. Such people seem to be fulfilling themselves and to be doing the best that they are capable of doing.” (Maslow, 1970a, p. 150). Discoveries of self-actualization resulted when Maslow asked how people felt about themselves at the time of peak experiences, how the world looked to them, what their impulses were, and how they changed if they did change. A similar investigation of peak experiences among teachers may help legitimize the topic of peak experiences in education. Attributes and triggers of peak experiences can be explored by asking teachers how they felt, how the world looked, what their impulses were, as well as how they changed if they did change. A fuller knowledge of peak experiences related to teachers in a classroom setting is the purpose of this study.

There has been a flourishing interest in grasping a more comprehensive knowledge of people in general as it relates to self and identity in anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, and education (May, 1965; Tennant, 2005; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992), as well as an awareness of the influence of emotions and affective behavior in the classroom (Burnette, 1999; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Hunt, 1987); however, these studies do not specifically address how they relate to peak experiences of teachers in classrooms. The significance of this study will provide an expanded understanding of peak experiences through an AI design to facilitate teachers in describing personal experiences of peak experiences in a teaching and learning context.

Overview of Methodology

The basic design of my study was a qualitative case study conducted through an AI process and filtered through humanistic psychology. I presented my study to approximately 27 certified teachers at a faculty meeting. Teachers were invited to voluntarily participate in my research study. Eight participants were purposively selected to participate in this study. The use of eight participants in this study was based on the notion of the case as a bounded and integrated system (Merriam, 2001). Eight participants sharing a relationship of understanding about peak experiences in a teaching and learning context created the bounded system conducive to the acquisition of a rich, thick description of the complex phenomenon of peak experiences. Participants were involved in various data collection methods (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) semi-structured paired-interviews, (c) focus groups, (d) participant created documents, and (e) generative story telling to support cross-validation and triangulation. Participants were guided through the first three stages of AI: discover, dream, and design. For the purpose of this study, I do not involve the fourth stage of the AI process.

Descriptive field notes were taken and information was gathered from varying perspectives. A fuller explanation of methodology is provided in Chapter 3.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do classroom teachers describe their peak experiences in a teaching and learning context?
2. How do classroom teachers describe the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state?

Objectives and Outcomes

The research objectives for this study were as follows:

Objective 1. To describe peak experiences of teachers in a teaching and learning context.

Objective 2. To identify necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state.

Limitations

This study had the following limitations:

1. The study was limited by the participants' perceptions of peak experiences.
2. The study was limited by the specific time constraints—completion in one academic year.
3. The study was limited by the researcher's employment as a building level administrator in the proposed site for the study.

Delimitations

This study had the following delimitations:

1. This study was delimited to teachers at Robert M. Martin Elementary in the Andover United School District (USD) 385.

Perspectives

My conceptual framework was centered in three core beliefs that served as the perspective that I took to this study:

1. All people encounter peak experiences.
2. Healthy people bring experiences and assets that serve as a positive core to further experiences and exponentially increase assets.

3. Healthy people encounter peak experiences to a greater degree than non-healthy people.

Definition of Key Terms

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry is a theoretical research process and methodology that employs an affirmative co-evolutionary approach to explore and create the best in people and organizations through “discovery of what gives life to a system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable” (Cooperrider et al., 2003, p. 319).

Ecological Conditions

Ecological conditions will be referred to as conditions “having to do with environments of [people] or with the pattern of relations between [people] and their environments” (Gove, 1981, p. 150).

Peak Experience

Peak experience will be referred to as an ecstatic, free-flowing, momentary, emotional state of intense happiness during a teaching experience (Maslow, 1961) in which the person describes himself/herself as performing at an optimal level of functioning (Hays & Brown, 2004).

Organization of the Dissertation Proposal

Chapter 1 provided information related to the background of the study, the problem statement, theoretical perspectives, significance of the study, overview of methodology, research questions, objectives and outcomes, and definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 provides an alternative perspective, an explanation of conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and a review and synthesis of related empirical research. Chapter 3 provides a description of the context of the

study, research design, a delineation of the unit of analysis, the specific methods used to collect data, and the data analysis procedure. Chapter 4 provides a summary of the findings. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings, implications for future research, implications for praxis and recommendations, significance of the study, limitations, and a summary and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter begins with literature germane to appreciative inquiry and humanistic psychology related to peak experiences of teachers in a teaching and learning context. The purpose of this review was to provide an understanding of the previous research in this area. I will first discuss my conceptual framework. I will then discuss my theoretical frameworks. Next, I will identify competing perspectives and conclude with a review and synthesis of the relevant empirical research.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was comprised of my experience, epistemology, theoretical perspectives, and assumptions. First, my experiences, which inform my beliefs and values, were partially responsible for formulating my conceptual framework. My experiences, beliefs and values have continually generated moments in which I have been attracted to people who were interested in sharing or exploring personal distinct experiences considered both exceptionally challenging and rewarding—all of which I call *peak experiences*. My experience as a practicing educator, teacher, coach, and administrator, as well as my experience as a student, to include current graduate studies, informed my interests and research design. I believe people do their best and have much to offer by sharing their perspectives of peak experiences.

I value my role as a leader and educator to provide people with generative occasions in which they can reflect on their practice to create desired scenarios. I have the following beliefs about people: They behave according to (a) how things appear, (b) how they see themselves, (c) how they view situations they confront, and (d) how they form the purposes they hold at the moment in which they act. I also believe to gain a clear view of teachers' peak experiences in a

teaching and learning context requires a connection with those who can describe peak experiences. In my research, the claims, concerns, and issues of teachers served as the basis for determining what information was needed to fully capture the essence of peak experiences in a teaching and learning context.

Second, my conceptual framework was grounded in a constructionist epistemology since it reflected my view of how I construct meaning of the world through experiential engagement. A constructionist epistemology regards each viewpoint as unique, valid, and worthy of respect; therefore, I anticipated teachers involved in this study would have different perceptions of their peak experiences—all deserving attention (Crotty, 1998).

Third, the theoretical perspectives selected in my conceptual framework included appreciative inquiry (AI) and humanistic psychology. Appreciative inquiry was developed in the early 1980's at Case Western Reserve University as an action research process to facilitate corporations and institutions to achieve improved change (Elliott, 1999). Since its onset, AI has been used in universities, the military, and by an increasing number of researchers (Calabrese et al., 2006). Essential to AI is the premise that an individual or organization must understand what makes it strong if it is to evolve. Appreciative inquiry compliments humanistic psychology. The intent of humanistic psychology is to frame one's perspective of the human being in a positive psychologically meaningful context (Held, 2004). This perspective emphasizes that a person's knowledge needs to be more philosophical, creative, flexible, diverse, intuitive, and based on personal and subjective experiences. This contrasts with the prevailing perspective that looks at the person in terms of medical values based on anatomy, physiology, and neurology (Giorgi, 2005). The focus of humanistic psychology and AI is on the person's positive characteristics.

This perspective was conducive for research on positive experiences of teachers as it relates to peak experiences.

My conceptual framework had three assumptions: (a) All people encounter peak experiences, (b) healthy people bring experiences and assets that serve as a positive core to further experiences and exponentially increase assets, and (c) healthy people encounter peak experiences to a greater degree than non-healthy people. These assumptions were derived from the works of Maslow (1970b) and Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2003), who propose peak experiences are viewed as a representation of people's positive core where the researcher's intent is to seek the positive core that exists within individuals.

Next, I provide my theoretical framework used to inform my research study. My theoretical framework was comprised of an AI theoretical research perspective and humanistic psychology. In the following sections I provide the theoretical perspective of AI, followed by an examination of humanistic psychology.

Appreciative Inquiry

An AI theoretical perspective is an action research inquiry process designed to place participants in a fundamentally different and positive stance. It is designed to help people identify their achievements and allows people to think deeply about their human potential (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999).

Appreciative inquiry evolved from the arena of management and business to later include scenarios related to schools (Cooperrider et al., 2003). Since its onset, AI is based on the premise that mutual respect, valuing, and appreciation are essential for people to reach their potential (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990). While this perspective was initially used in the context of business, the premise of AI was soon applied in a broader context to include organizational

settings such as street children in the capital of an African country, villagers in the Western Sahara, teachers in three Dutch secondary schools, and employees in an accounting firm in Canada (Elliott, 1999). The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency—Office of Research Development (2006) recently used an AI approach in revitalizing the workforce of over 2,000 scientists, engineers, and administrative staff to explore innovative ways to attract and retain key talent. In two separate studies of at-risk students in school settings, AI was used to identify attitudes and traits of teachers in support of effective teaching (Calabrese, Goodvin, & Niles, 2005; Hall & Hammond, 1996).

While AI methodology has evolved to include various organizational scenarios, the intent of this empowering process for any setting is to generate a positive view of strengths that build on a shared vision through collaboration, inclusiveness, and caring interactions (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001). Studies of comprehensive school reform suggest that traditional methods fail in their problem-focused attempts to address concerns (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). In essence, AI offers a deconstruction of deficit thinking through a reframed positive perspective.

The primary impetus for generating a positive view is AI's line of inquiry that is juxtaposed to the tradition of problem-based research studies that highlight an organization's deficits (Valencia, 1997). Often the focus of research is to identify deficits, evaluate causes, and then design and implement solutions. At one time, for example, a review of literature revealed 45,000 published articles on depression and only 400 published articles on joy (Thatchenkery, 1999). An AI approach uses generative language and questions to unleash stakeholder capacity. Generative language is evident in that inquiry in AI is heliotropic in nature: "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change" (Dyer, 2004, p. 24). To change an

organization is to change the nature of the language and dialogue among people to support participation and positive interaction (Whitney, 1998).

The heliotropic nature of AI engages people in organizations to realize what gives life to them and their organization when they are most effective. Instead of maintaining a problem-solution oriented approach, AI searches for the best of what exists within people and organizations (Norum et al., 2002). In evaluating a program, evidence is gathered of what is valued about current structures. This awareness of peak experiences is then used to envision the preferred future (Kerka, 2003). Questions used in AI research are stated in the affirmative—using positive language to evoke data primarily in the form of stories. AI questions guide participants to ponder what is best in their organization.

Appreciative inquiry also focuses on the realization that improvement is perceived by people as more engaging, enjoyable, and productive when the focus is on what is already functioning well and not on what is imperfect (Browne, 1999). Appreciative inquiry asks people to recall a time when they function at their fullest capacity; it identifies how they feel and what helps them experience this moment. When this happens, a changed dynamic state is accessed. The process of accessing this state creates a new vision that compels participants to unconsciously and consciously move toward their vision. Through this approach, AI facilitates people and organizations to circumvent traditional obstacles.

Appreciative inquiry is also an action research process. An examination of recent literature on action research suggests a common goal is to provide researchers with skills and opportunity to improve practice through (a) systematically collecting data through observations and participation in interviews, (b) examining the results, (c) gathering the evidence, (d) engaging in reflective analysis, and (e) applying the analysis to improve practice, otherwise

known as *change* (Green & Brown, 2006). As an action research process, AI focuses on positive change by recognizing and valuing the importance of language, as well as the impact language has on the inquiry process, the data collection methods, and how the outcomes are reported—all of which are components of action research (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).

The notion of change in the AI process is from Lewin's (1951) work. Lewin proposed that change involves three stages: (a) unfreezing, (b) changing, and (c) refreezing of beliefs, values and behaviors. Unfreezing, change, and refreezing occur as participants realize their capacity to change. Lewin's interplay between theory and practice reveals the dynamics and effects of social psychology on human behavior relating to change.

The same concept of Lewin's change model is facilitated through AI in a four-stage process (4-D Cycle)—the researcher facilitates participants to discover, dream, design, and define their destiny. Discovery occurs through engaging people in the articulation of strengths through comprehensive interviews. The dream phase is facilitated through a collective analysis and formation of vision statements. Possible propositions of the ideal organization are articulated in the design phase, intended to affirm each person's capacity and positive core. The final phase, destiny, enables members to sustain momentum for ongoing positive change (Thatchenkery, 1999).

My study was framed by AI and asked this overarching question: What is the positive core of peak experiences held by teachers in a teaching setting? This question generated anticipation by teachers in my study to create a positive view about their peak experiences in a teaching and learning context. Through the use of the 4-D Cycle comprised of discovery, dream, design, and destiny, teachers in my study applied the AI stages of discovery, dream, and design.

The AI process included an AI theoretical research and humanistic psychology perspective to increase teachers' peak experiences in their teaching and learning context.

Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology is a theoretical perspective that speaks to positive attention to inner experience, internal processes, and self constructs of human strengths and virtues (Goldberg, 2000). This new way of studying people reveals clear differences between humanistic psychology and behaviorism. The difference between the humanistic psychologist and a behaviorist is that the humanistic psychologist (a) disavows descriptions of human functioning based on subhuman species, (b) places importance on meaning versus method in developing a research design, (c) places more emphasis on people's subjective experiences than people's actions, (d) values the interaction and contribution of science and application to each other, (e) explores and examines the exceptional as opposed to universal, and (f) explores that which may ameliorate people's experiences (Bugental, 1967a). As a result, humanistic psychologists believe (a) people are at their best and are in the process of becoming, (b) people have the ability to direct and change their guiding motives or life's course, (c) people's intentions are at the heart of consciousness, (d) people's orientation to the world determines the outcome; (e) people's intentions are comprised of meaning and movement toward something, and (f) people must be fully functioning to reach the highest level of becoming (DeCarvalho, 1991).

The concept of intentionality is central to humanistic psychology in that a person's perspective of particular situations transforms how he/she makes sense of his/her experiences (Feeney, 1996). In effect, a positive motivational state of mind contributes to the enthusiasm to pursue and attain positive outcomes (May, 1965). This positive motivational state of mind or

intentionality is known in humanistic psychology as a state of being and involves the totality of a person's orientation to the world (Helland & Winston, 2005).

Origin of Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology traces its origins to the turn of the 20th Century with the first American positive psychologist, William James. James was interested in the critical role played by the self in human functioning and the effect of self-beliefs in human conduct as it related to self-esteem (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). James' educational ideas regarding self-processes and the needs of the child were a prevailing influence in the educational community. He believed that the aesthetic sphere of the mind had been ignored in research. He felt it was important to address issues of self-esteem when directing research toward finding a more satisfactory basis for the conduct of life (James, 1948).

The works of James prefigured the five founders of humanistic psychology—Allport, Maslow, Rogers, May, and Bugental (DeCarvalho, 1991). They shared a common perspective as well as dissatisfaction with the contemporary direction of psychology. They challenged psychologists to move away from the limitations of behaviorism and believed that previous scientists tended to operate from an objective, detached, deficit-based view of people that focused on the negative, pathological, and disintegrating phase of human functioning (Hoffman, 2003; Sorokin, 1950). This deficit-based view of people was perceived as desacralizing human nature by denying full understanding of human potential through the exclusion of experiences of transcendence (Maslow, 1965).

Purpose of Humanistic Psychology

The shift from a deficit-based view to a positive perspective of people is the fundamental purpose of humanistic psychology. The values of humanistic psychology contend that people

have an inherent life purpose, which when lived to its fullest capacity, generates a sense of individual integrity, social harmony, and empathy (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988). This positive human perspective is interested in factors such as love, creativity, being, becoming, ego transcendence, transcendental experiences—all of which enable people to reach their fullest capacity (Bugental, 1964).

The notion of *full capacity* has been referred to as *fully functioning*, *in search for wholeness and self-discovery*, *seeking for transcendence*, or *self-actualization* (Cortright, 1997; Maslow, 1968b). In this study, I use the term *full capacity*. This optimistic vision of full capacity is based on the assumption that people are continually experiencing the unfolding of new capacities and talents. Through humanistic psychology, recognizing the full capacity of people is allowing for the positive assessment of human nature. The positive assessment of people recognizes full capacity through (a) upholding people as sacred, (b) recognizing that meaning is more important than method, (c) viewing people as subject centered and engaged in positively changing themselves and their worlds, (d) valuing the interplay of science and application, (e) seeking the exceptional and unexpected, and (f) searching for information that may ameliorate the experiences of people being assessed (Bugental, 1967b).

Humanistic psychology is also known as *breakthrough psychology* or *third force* in psychology. This perception is based on humanistic psychology being perceived as a convergence of previous scientific traditions of behaviorism and psychoanalysis, and a new thought of humanities. The study of man and woman can now concern itself with human capacities and potentialities of the whole person (Bugental, 1964).

Through the lens of humanistic psychology, researchers can view people from a more comprehensive, positive, and inclusive perspective with the intent to produce valid knowledge of

how people develop and learn (Giorgi, 2005). Researchers' perspectives can also be enhanced as they aspire to embody an ethical theory of practice centered on conceptions of respect, trust, caring, and optimism regarding human capacity (Richards, 2003).

Humanistic psychology has been used as a theoretical perspective in studies in education to explore (a) how transformational experiences of people affect cultural change in organizations (Walsh & Grob, 2006), (b) how political and historical issues need to be addressed in curriculum (Munn, 2006), (c) how instructional strategies should be selected for use in teaching (Richards, 2006), (d) how self-care techniques affect a student's educational experience (Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan, & Schure, 2006), and (e) how the concept of self-esteem relates to student performance (Beane, 1991; Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Purkey, 1970).

Humanistic psychology has also been used to study how the teacher can function as a practicing diagnostician. The teacher is viewed as a maker and tester of hypotheses; therefore, the teacher can define teaching as an act of inquiry where the teacher can become involved in a process called action research. This process empowers the teacher to continually move away from the routine application of teaching strategies and techniques to a professional diagnosis of interpersonal processes (Breslow et al., 1960).

Linking Humanistic Psychology and Appreciative Inquiry

Humanistic psychology can be linked to an AI theoretical perspective. Both perspectives emphasize a belief that the focus and/or intentionality of research determines the outcome (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Richards, 2003). The essential experience in intentionality involves the person moving from *I think* to *I can* to *I will* to *I am* (May, 1965). The AI *discovery* stage involves reflecting on action on what people *have done*. The *dream* stage involves recognizing what people believe they have the *capacity* to do. The *design stage* involves co-constructing the

dream. Humanistic psychology can also be linked with an AI theoretical perspective given that both perspectives initiate a positive perspective to explore questions about what makes life fulfilling and meaningful (Elliott, 1999; Rathunde, 2001). Most importantly to this study, humanistic psychology and AI helped to understand the concept of a fully functioning person by describing the peak capacity of human potential. This understanding might contribute to, reinforce, and maintain similar behavior during an extended period of time (Lee et al., 2005).

Competing Perspective

Organizational culture is a theoretical perspective that I considered to describe teachers' peak experiences and to identify the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. Organizational culture is often defined in terms of shared meanings, patterns of beliefs, values, climate, habits, rituals, symbols, and myths (O'Neill, Beauvais, & Scholl, 2001). Culture is perceived as enduring and capable of impacting performance, thought processes, and emotions (Barkdoll, 2004; Deal, 1982; Schein, 2004). In many cases, it is identified as a relational activity where people operate in a sense making activity that is social, retrospective, continuous, seeking of signs, and operating on likely occurrence (Weick, 1979).

I sought information related to organizational culture, teachers, and peak experience in several databases. I chose ERIC FirstSearch, InfoTrac, Education: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, Psychology: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, and Google Scholar. The few studies available that related to organizational culture, teachers, and peak experience pertained to (a) job satisfaction (Thompson, McNamara, & Hoyle, 1997), (b) educational leadership (Barbour, 2005; Tucker-Ladd, Merchant, & Thurston, 1992), (c) business management (Allix, 2000; Padmaker, 2002; Sharpe, Hermsen, & Billings, 2002; Vilnai-yavetz, Rafaeli, & Yaacov, 2005), (d) the teaching of administrative and organizational theory (Nicolaidis & Gaynor, 1992), (e) issues with trust

between students and teachers (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005), (f) behavior related to the change process (Brown, 1976; Normore, 2004), (g) culture and climate (Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002), and (h) psychometric testing of peak experiences (MacDonald & Friedman, 2002). These studies, viewed through an organizational culture perspective, examined various aspects in cultures by seeking underlying basic assumptions inherent in policies and procedures (Paparone, 2003). Through an organizational culture theoretical perspective, researchers seek to comprehend, explore, predict, and correct the dynamic intricacies of organizational culture as it relates to people in organizations (Subramaniam & Ashkanasy, 2001). The primary purpose of using an organizational culture perspective is to focus on the shared value system of an organization and its effect on an organization's efficiency and performance (Deal, 1982). I decided not to use organizational culture as a theoretical perspective because this perspective limits the scope of examining people's deep-felt perspectives of peak experiences.

In the next section, I present the results of the empirical research.

Search Criteria

The purpose of the literature review was to identify, summarize, and synthesize the related research associated with my study. The following questions guided my search strategy:

1. What research, using an AI theoretical research design and process, has been conducted with teachers related to peak experiences in a teaching context?
2. How are humanistic psychology (positive psychology) and peak experiences of teachers related?

Research considered for inclusion in my search result met the following criteria:

1. Empirical research that contained a qualitative or quantitative methodology, research questions, and clear research design.

2. Peer-reviewed.
3. Inclusive of teachers as the unit of analysis.
4. Inclusive of people as the unit analysis with identities other than teaching.

Table 2.1 reflects the results of my search. The number of documents available for each search is displayed under each respective database. Google Scholar was selected because of the broad collection of scholarly literature across disciplines and sources. Education: A SAGE Full-Text Collection and ERIC First Search were chosen because of the extensive collection of peer-reviewed documents related to education. They include easily accessible full text and links to other relevant databases. PsychINFO and Psychology: A SAGE Full-Text Collection were selected because of indexed databases in peer reviewed psychology and sociology articles. ABIInform was used to secure scholarly journal sources in the field of AI. To support an empirical research design, only published refereed journals were selected related to the following keywords (a) humanistic psychology, (b) positive psychology, (c) AI, (d) teacher, (e) flow, (f) experience, and (g) peak experience. Searches were narrowed to address (a) teacher, (b) classroom, and (c) instruction.

My search revealed a lack of empirical research regarding peak experiences relating to a teaching and learning context. Ample research was available relating peak experiences to AI that addressed people discovering the best of what is to include peak experiences (Yballe & O'Connor, 2000). Research was also available relating peak experiences to humanistic psychology addressing the understanding of the phenomenon of peak experiences (Maslow, 1971). The empirical research, however, was limited in indicating a relationship to peak experiences of teachers in a teaching and learning context. The following themes were evident in my review:

1. An AI perspective can facilitate members of an organization to increase human potential.
2. Humanistic psychology can guide researchers in defining peak experiences for people.
3. Attributes of peak experiences may vary or be similar to a teaching and learning context, depending upon the individual having a peak experience.

I now present my search findings in Table 2.1 followed by my synthesis of the empirical research.

Table 2.1

Internet Keyword Search Results

Key Words	Education A SAGE Full-text Collection	ERIC First Search	Google Scholar	Psych INFO	Psychology A SAGE Full-Text Collection	ABI Inform
Humanistic psychology	34	647	28,400	1,993	703	13
Positive psychology	4	3,202	798,000	731	88	29
Appreciative inquiry	12	28	11,800	82	3	55
Teacher	4,870	245,363	1,930,000	56,446	0	1,844
Flow	721	6,206	8,800,000	9,811	1,486	15,829
Experience	5,393	83,699	2,390,000	145,928	12,630	188,770
Peak experience	3	100	143,000	95	59	38
String Search						
Humanistic psychology teacher	17	147	12,400	41	189	1
Humanistic psychology classroom	15	90	8,370	31	60	1
Humanistic psychology Peak experience	3	6	462	13	112	1
Positive psychology teacher	3	559	120,000	11	26	1
Appreciative inquiry teacher	6	3	4,600	0	2	1
Appreciative inquiry Peak experience	0	1	99	1	0	2
Peak experience Teacher	3	29	27,400	1	20	0
Peak experience Instruction	2	13	13,700	0	8	0
Flow Teacher	500	959	106	106	321	135

Synthesis of Empirical Research

In my synthesis of research, I first discuss how empirical research indicated that peak experiences related to the concepts of flow and well-being. I next discuss the characteristics of peak experiences. I then synthesize the empirical research related to peak experiences. I conclude this section by presenting the research related to the necessary ecological conditions for teachers to enter into a peak experience state.

Peak Experiences, Flow, and Well-being

When exploring empirical research related to peak experiences, I included research related to peak experiences and to variations similar to how peak experiences were described. These variations of peak experiences were referred to as *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), *optimal experience* (Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000), *optimal psychological functioning* (Waterman, 1990), *ideal performance state* (Druckman & Bjork, 1991; Unestahl, 1986), and *the zone* (Murphy & White, 1995). For the purpose of this study, the term *peak experience* was used when referring to empirical research related to any variation aligned with how peak experiences were described.

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) is credited for the seminal work attributed to the notion of flow. A deeper understanding of the essential nature of flow identified (a) traits comprised in a flow state, (b) the attributes of the situation in which flow was experienced, and (c) the frequency that flow occurred for the individuals studied in both work and play (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Unstrained concentration, feelings of adequacy and liberation, absence of self-awareness and concept of time, and effortless response to difficult situations are characteristics of flow. Flow is found to result from peak experiences or peak moments (Tardy & Snyder, 2004). Peak experience and flow seem to share an underlying thread that describes feelings of exuberance

and elation; flow, however, is not a necessary precondition to all peak experiences since all peak experiences may not involve optimal performance (Privette & Bundrick, 1991).

When exploring the notion of flow, the terms *optimal experience* (Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000), *optimal psychological functioning* (Waterman, 1990), *ideal performance state* (Druckman & Bjork, 1991; Unestahl, 1986), and *the zone* (Murphy & White, 1995) have been used as descriptors. In these occurrences, a person emanates characteristics such as a sense of personal identity, self-actualization, an internal locus of control, intrinsic motivation, a sense of control, and a strong sense of purpose (Maslow, 1959a, 1959b, 1961, 1962).

Well-being is also associated with peak experience. Personal conditions for well-being include self-determination, perceived competence, and presence of self realization values (Waterman et al., 2003), as well as perceived support from others to include spouses, colleagues, and supervisors (Ruehlman & Wolchik, 1988). Intrinsic goals (self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling) affect a person's well-being more than extrinsic goals (wealth, materialism, physical appearances) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Well-being is associated with realistic and attainable goals, and with goals constructed in congruence with personal needs (Brunstein, 1993; Cantor & Sanderson, 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). While it might be thought well-being can be achieved when ecological conditions are positive in nature, it has even been achieved only in adverse conditions to include horrific tragedies such as prisoners of warfare where people reported a strongly directed purpose that is other-centered (Frankl, 1970; Logan, 1985). Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon (2001) found a tremendous sense of well-being or enjoyment in the form of peak experiences from people doing good work considered difficult that involved certain skills. Surprisingly, these experiences occurred more frequently at a work setting than in leisure time.

Characteristics of Peak Experiences

Characteristics of peak experiences are inherent in all people. They are momentary and, for many, remain latent (Harung, Heaton, Graff, & Alexander, 1996; Maslow, 1950). Peak experiences are valued as moments of magnified elation and intense inspiration distinctly set apart from common-day experiences (Maslow, 1968b). Traits or attributes related to peak experiences include (a) b-values found in self-actualizers (Maslow, 1967), (b) integration, intelligence, and perceptiveness (Maslow, 1961), (c) magnified elation, enjoyment, and wonder (Allison & Duncan, 1992; Maslow, 1968a; Warmoth, 1963), (d) spirituality, sacredness, inspiration, and transcendence (Maslow, 1970b; Privette & Bundrick, 1991; Ravizza, 1984), (e) absence of boredom and worry (Allison & Duncan, 1992), (f) full functioning, full control, totality, complete gratification, and enjoyment (Allison & Duncan, 1992; Maslow, 1961; Ravizza, 1984; Warmoth, 1963), (g) clarity, focus, sharpness, and immersion of self in activity (Maslow, 1961; Ravizza, 1984), and (h) confidence and sense of significance (Maslow, 1970b).

Peak Experiences and Empirical Research

The empirical studies of peak experiences began in the late 1980's based primarily on the work of Maslow in his identification of character traits and the states people recalled during their peak moments (Druckman & Bjork, 1991). The concept of peak experience is considered by some as not directly measurable; this does not mean there are no approaches that may be fruitful for gaining insights pertaining to issues related to peak experiences (Waterman, 1990). In fact, various methodologies have been used to study peak experiences to include quantitative methodologies (Elkins et al., 1988; Ilardi & May, 1968; Norcross, 1987; Orbach, Iluz, & Rosenheim, 1987), qualitative methodologies (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Faulkner & Davidson, 2006;

Gluck, Bluck, Baron, & McAdams, 2005; Waller, 2006), and mixed methods (Katz, 2002; Miller & Strongman, 2002; Tehrani, 1997) to understand the phenomenon of peak experiences.

Quantitative methodologies have involved the use of clinically derived psychometric tests to measure various characteristics or aspects related to people such as (a) security-insecurity (Maslow, 1950), (b) value and behavior judgments (Shostrom, 1977), (c) organizational behavior (Salanova, Bakker, & Llorens, 2006), and/or (d) spirituality and related constructs (MacDonald & Friedman, 2002). The Experience Sampling Method (ESM) was created to quantitatively assess temporal and contextual fluctuations in mood and performance (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). Studies employing the ESM, involve a randomly activated electronic pager worn by participants. When signaled, participants stop and journal or express thoughts and emotions.

Qualitative methodologies used in similar studies have involved techniques such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and reviews of autobiographies and journals (Caouette, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi, 1993; Jackson, Thomas, Marsh, & Smithurst, 2001; Maslow, 1945; Tardy & Snyder, 2004). Maslow (1970b) developed *rhapsodic communication*, a specific technique that was used in interviews. This technique assisted dialogue with people less able to describe peak experiences. Maslow used figures of speech, metaphors, and similes, that he found “to touch off an echoing experience, a parallel, isomorphic vibration . . .” (p. 84) generating the conditions conducive for people to recall peak experiences. In trying to elicit reports of peak experiences, the *rhapsodic communication* procedure facilitated participants in communicating and describing abstract experiences to include peak experiences.

Maslow’s use of qualitative methodologies to include interviews not only enlightened his understanding of peak experiences, but it also assisted him in developing the notion of self-

actualization. In one study using qualitative methods, Maslow (1950) explored the lives of personal acquaintances, friends, and public and historical figures to define self-actualization as a full demonstration of potentialities that connotes gratification of basic emotional needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect and self respect, and cognitive needs. While these elements imply a level of a flawless state of being, the notion of self-actualization is not perfection. Maslow indicated that self-actualized people also have flawed behaviors such as indecisiveness, lack of responsiveness in helping others, and indiscriminating acceptance (Maslow, 1959b). Despite flaws, self-actualized people are more fully functioning and live more enriched lives from the norm (Rogers, 1961). Self-actualized people have evolved personalities, are healthy people, and are thought to have profound amounts of peak experiences (Maslow, 1970a).

In later qualitative works, Maslow (1971) further explained his awareness of self-actualization after his extensive investigation involving interviews with two of his teachers whom he loved, adored, and admired. Maslow explored why these two people were different from the norm. In so doing, he began to see generalizable patterns, or ecological conditions, that revealed a kind of unique person as opposed to noncomparable people. He expanded his research to include other admired people in whom similar traits were recognized. The selection criteria used for these investigations included people who were “older . . . visibly successful, healthy, strong, creative, saintly, and sagacious” (Maslow, 1971, p. 41). From this study he described that self-actualization meant (a) experiencing life fully, (b) making choices supporting growth, (c) listening to the impulse voices, (d) being honest and taking responsibility, (e) being courageous rather than afraid, (f) using one’s intelligence, (g) having peak experiences, and (h) opening oneself up to himself/herself.

Research methodologies in studies on peak experiences, using mixed methods, involved the use of Likert scale questionnaires, interviews, and/or case studies (Katz, 2002; Miller & Strongman, 2002; Tehrani, 1997). Questionnaires have been used to facilitate a screening method for limiting the number of participants in the study, or to gauge perspectives or to compare differences between respondents. Interviews were often semi-structured with a purpose to obtain descriptions of the participants' perceptions related to the purpose of the study (Hoepfl, 1997; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002).

In general, studies on peak experiences that used qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods methodologies focused on (a) eliciting reports of peak experiences to advance human behaviors (Maslow, 1970a, 1970b), (b) determining if a connection exists between peak experiences and other factors (Waterman, 1990), or (c) examining the relationship between peak experiences of teachers and student cognitive engagement in class (Zhu, 2001). The focus of research on peak experiences varied as well as the context of studies. Primary attention, however, was devoted to the arena of sports as it relates to peak experiences.

The concept of peak experiences in sports was popularized in the works of Garfield (1986); Gilson, Pratt, Roberts, & Weymes, (2000); Hanin (2000); Kirschenbaum, Owens, & O'Connor (1998); Hardy, Jones, & Gould (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996); and Jackson, Thomas, Marsh, & Smithurst (2001). These in-depth explorations of peak experiences related to work, sports, or general life events involved a familiarization of factors that influence behavior to include personality traits, motivational tendencies, values, and beliefs of peak performers. Through various data collection methods to include (a) interviews, (b) focus groups, (c) observations, (d) archival material, and (e) surveys researchers identified factors such as peak experiences that sustain individuals and organizations to perform at peak levels.

Studies on peak experiences generated results beneficial to researchers interested in the notion of a fuller sense of functioning. In these studies, researchers discovered (a) personal and social resources and work related peak experiences have interchangeable positive effects (Salanova et al., 2006), (b) although everyone has had peak experiences, there are wide differences between frequency and intensity of peak experiences (Maslow, 1970b; Waterman et al., 2003), (c) some people are not able to recognize peak experiences (Maslow, 1961), (d) some working adults claim never to have peak experiences, while others have peak experiences at work, up to three times as often as in free time (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992), and (e) participants in one study were found to prefer leisure over work despite the gratification gained through peak experiences while at work (Allison & Duncan, 1992).

Ecological and Personal Conditions for Peak Experiences

Researchers have identified various ecological and personal conditions for peak experiences (Maslow, 1970b; Reiss & Havercamp, 2005). More emphasis was placed on personal conditions as opposed to ecological conditions that affect the plausibility of peak experiences. Conditions having a direct relationship to peak experiences include (a) an achievement of basic needs gratification, particularly as it relates to self-actualization (Maslow, 1970a), (b) the presence and construction of goals (Little, 1989), (c) a sense of challenge and control (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), (d) a quest for wholeness (Feeney, 1996), and (e) a sense of well-being (Omodei & Wearing, 1990).

People's achievement of basic needs is one personal condition that stimulates peak experiences (Maslow, 1950). Universally, people desire to satisfy a hierarchy of needs ranked from lowest to highest: (a) physiological, (b) safety, (c) belongingness, (d) esteem, and (e) self-actualization (Maslow, 1970a). People desire to reach an evolved sense of self, full individuality,

and identity, which is also referred to as self-actualization (Maslow, 1962). Approaching and arriving at a fuller sense of self or self-actualization is gratifying and creates the conditions necessary for peak experiences. Increased significance is given by organizational initiatives to impact self-actualization or higher developmental stages of individuals, due to the effect this impact may have on organizational settings. Studies have shown creating change in organizations cannot be fully administered without fundamental metamorphosis within individual stakeholders (Torbert, 1991).

Another personal condition for peak experiences is related to the construction and attainment of goals (Little, 1989). When people overcome challenges considered relatively high and requiring discovery, exploration, and/or problem solving, a peak experience is more apt to occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Jackson et al., 2001). Little (1989) extends this notion of the relationship of goals and peak experiences in his findings that people who feel positive about reaching their goals report high well-being, which is another trait inherent in people who have frequent peak experiences. When challenges are in the form of goals, and are intrinsic in nature, a higher level of peak experiences has been reported (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

A person's sense of challenge and control is an additional personal condition thought to often preclude peak experiences (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). A link between peak experiences and challenge and control on the job has been found in various studies (Allison & Duncan, 1992; Caouette, 1995; Heckhausen, 1999; Jackson et al., 2001). When ecological conditions allow people to control their decisions and to concentrate on a challenging task at hand, peak experiences are more likely encountered. Feelings of control are often associated with traits inherent in peak experiences such as (a) a narrow focus of attention, (b) an absence of fear, (c) a sense of confidence, and (d) a feeling of physical and mental relaxation (Cohen, 1991).

People's quest for wholeness is another personal condition for peak experiences. People scoring highest on measures of self-actualization, personal identity, moral reasoning, and internal locus of control have greater frequency and more intense feelings related to peak experiences (Waterman, 1990). People in search of wholeness are found to exhibit similar traits as self-actualizers (Cortright, 1997). Transcendence, or higher states of consciousness, is thought to contribute to peak experiences. Since experiences beyond the ordinary are thought to have their origins in the concept of transcendence, Harung (1996) designed a survey based on transcendental consciousness. Participants were selected from creative fields such as education, the arts, and business. The study revealed that a systematic cultivation of a higher state of consciousness can enable an individual to achieve and sustain peak experiences.

Outcomes of Peak Experiences

Peak experiences have been found to generate numerous outcomes. People who exhibit characteristics of peak experiences have reported a sense of union with others, ideas, and entities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The experience leaves people feeling empowered and more in tune with self as a result of a perceived enhanced quality of life (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). Peak experiences restructure knowledge of self and the environment, in turn generating enhanced feelings of well-being, which then facilitate the transformation of people to evolve to a higher developmental stage (Maslow, 1968b).

Summary of Literature Review

My review of empirical research pertaining to peak experiences indicated that conceptions of peak experiences may vary across research studies; yet, the underlying attributes probably do not. Empirical research on peak experiences related to teachers or teaching was limited. Ample research was available related to AI and humanistic psychology; however,

limited research existed that indicated a relationship to peak experiences of teachers in a teaching and learning context.

My search also revealed a lack of empirical research regarding teacher peak experiences relating to AI. The few studies available identified how the AI process facilitated people in summarizing their peak experiences and explaining the causes for such occurrences (Bell & Taylor, 2004; Bushe & Coetzer, 1995; Neilsen, Winter, & Saatcioglu, 2005). While these few studies revealed substantive direction on searching for meaning in everyday work life, the limited number of studies clearly indicated a need for empirical research in the area of peak experiences relating to teaching and learning contexts and an AI theoretical perspective.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 provided the conceptual framework, theoretical framework, competing perspective, and a synthesis of the related empirical literature. The conceptual framework was centered in three core beliefs: (a) All people encounter peak experiences, (b) healthy people bring experiences and assets that serve as a positive core to further experiences and exponentially increase assets, and (c) healthy people encounter peak experiences to a greater degree than non-healthy people. These three core beliefs aligned with the theoretical framework comprised of AI theoretical research perspective and humanistic psychology guided this descriptive study. AI and humanistic psychology were the lenses through which peak experiences were studied of teachers in a teaching and learning context. Chapter 3 describes the methodology implemented in this AI driven research design.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 highlights the research methodology and procedures that I used in the study. This chapter includes the research design and methodology, purpose of the study, research questions, context, unit of analysis, role of the researcher, methods, data analysis, and research quality. I organize this chapter by first describing the research design and methodology; I will then address the purpose of the study and questions that guided my research. A description of the context of this research will then be provided. The unit of analysis will be addressed and will involve the initial invitation given to possible participants, an explanation of my participation as a researcher and facilitator, and my role in general as a researcher. I will then explain my data collection methods and analysis techniques. I will follow up with how I supported the quality of my research. I will conclude with a summary.

Research Design and Methodology

I employed a qualitative case study research design filtered through an AI theoretical research perspective and humanistic psychology. I used a constructionist epistemology that supported an emergent design that offered the ability to maintain an adaptive, open, and responsive stance as situations changed and emerged throughout the research process (Patton, 2002). My case study involved elementary school teachers who were identified as peakers to describe peak experiences. I purposively selected eight teachers from a group of elementary teachers who were identified as peakers. This group of peakers participated in the first three stages of the AI process: (a) discovery, (b) dream, and (c) design. The process was similar to an intense AI summit which is designed to accommodate 30-30,000 participants; however due to the small group of people who were guided to focus on a specific topic, the process was called an AI Learning Process (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003). The AI process has been used

by nonprofit and business organizations with an emphasis on a wide range of applications to include strategic planning, organizational design, culture change, collaboration, civic development, conflict resolution, and leadership structures (Phillips, 2004).

The intent of an AI methodology is to support the main premise of AI which is to conduct research with a focus on what is working and valuable to collaboratively generate increased enthusiasm and energy (U. S. Environmental Protection Agency - Office of Research and Development, 2006). AI is also used in educational settings to discover, value, and amplify what works with student-teacher relationships, instruction, and school district-wide contexts (Henry, 2003). In my research study, the participants were involved in an initial interview to allow me to collect base-line data. They then participated in an AI Learning Process that took place over three days. I conducted individual post AI Learning Process interviews to gather data related to the participants' involvement in the AI Learning Process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do classroom teachers describe their peak experiences in a teaching and learning context?
2. How do classroom teachers describe the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state?

Context

The research site for my study was Robert M. Martin Elementary in Andover United School District (USD) 385, located in the Wichita metropolitan area. The city of Andover covers an area of 47 square miles and overlaps the eastern border of Sedgwick County and western border of Butler County (CivicPlus Content Management System, 2006). The city of Andover, Kansas, is a growing community of approximately 8,222 residents (Chamber of Commerce Andover Kansas, 2006) with a 5.7% annual growth rate over the past 10 years (Andover Public Schools USD 385, 2006c).

During the 2005-2006 school year, 4,050 students were enrolled at Andover USD 385 (Kansas State Department of Education, 2006c). The ethnicity for USD 385 students is 95% White, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% African American (United States Census Bureau, 2006). There are 11% economically disadvantaged students (Kansas State Department of Education, 2006b).

Andover USD 385 is comprised of 424 faculty and staff (Kansas State Department of Education, 2006c). There are 280 certified employees to include pre-kindergarten through 12th grade teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, administration, counselors, librarians, and nurses. Additionally, in Andover USD 385, 145 non-certified employees provide support to include transportation, food service, custodial and maintenance, instructional aide, and clerical services. Robert M. Martin Elementary is comprised of 46 faculty and staff to include kindergarten through 5th grade teachers, reading specialist, special education teacher, administration, counselor, librarian, nurse and classified staff to include paraeducators, aides and clerical assistants.

A commitment to education is a priority in this community as evidenced by the passing of three bond issues to enhance and sustain small schools with fewer transitions. In the year 1994, a \$17 million bond issue was approved for a new middle school and for elementary school renovations. In 1998, another bond issue was approved for \$52 million which allowed USD 385 to grow from two primary schools (grades kindergarten through third), one intermediate school (grades fourth through fifth), one middle school (grades sixth through eighth), and one high school (grades ninth through 12th) to the current structure of four elementary schools (grades kindergarten through fifth; average population of 423), two middle schools (grades six through eighth; average population of 456), and two high schools (grades ninth through 12; average population of 600) (P. Terry, personal communication, July 29, 2006). The last bond of \$40 million dollars in September of 2005 continued the efforts of the previous bond with the intent to build three additional kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools and provide numerous other enhancements throughout the district (Andover Public Schools USD 385, 2006a).

A brief history of student performance in Andover USD 385 reflects this district has exceeded the norm in relation to various federal and state expectations. The federal No Child Left Behind Act was designed to mandate states to close the achievement gap to ensure all students achieve academic proficiency (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a component of NCLB, is a method for determining if schools, districts, and states have made adequate progress in improving student achievement. Criteria for meeting AYP rely upon participation and performance on state assessments, attendance rates, and high school graduation rates. All schools in Andover USD 385 have met AYP expectations and student performance on all state assessments at every tested grade level is above the state average. During the past four years, Andover schools have earned 76 Standard of Excellence state

recognition awards for their assessment results (Kansas State Department of Education, 2006b). Standard of Excellence awards are basically determined on the percentage of students who score below basic level, as well as the percentage of students who score at the exemplary level (Kansas State Department of Education, 2006a). In 2003, the number of students taking the advanced placement exams doubled from 53 to 106. Seniors consistently score well above the state and national average on American College Test (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) exams and 90% of graduates go onto college or other higher education.

High quality teacher performance is a primary goal of Andover USD 385. The NCLB Act incorporates accountability standards for teachers and includes the mandate that by the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers must be highly qualified (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Teachers in Kansas are considered fully licensed or highly qualified when they hold a valid Kansas teaching certificate/license with the appropriate subject and grade level endorsement for the assignment held (Kansas State Board of Education, 2002). The 2004-2005 district report card for Andover USD 385 reveals ninety-eight percent of the teachers in the district are fully licensed (Kansas State Department of Education, 2006b). Six Andover teachers have received Kansas Master Teacher awards, and five teachers have been named Kansas Teacher of the Year semi-finalists. Two teachers have been named Kansas Horizon Award winners for outstanding first-year teaching, and one teacher was named a finalist for the Presidential Award for excellence in math and science (Andover Public Schools USD 385, 2006b).

Robert M. Martin Elementary is one of four kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools in Andover USD 385. During the 2005-2006 school year, 404 students were enrolled at Robert M. Martin Elementary. The ethnicity for students was 92% White, 2% Hispanic, 3%

African American, and 5% other. There were 2% economically disadvantaged students (Kansas State Department of Education, 2006b).

Given the richness of the setting and environment of Andover USD 385, I believe this site was conducive for discovering teachers who frequently have peak experiences in a teaching and learning context.

Unit of Analysis

A significant aspect in the research design is to identify the primary focus or unit of analysis for data collection (Patton, 2002). In this study, my unit of analysis was eight teachers at Robert M. Martin Elementary in Andover USD 385 who were identified as peakers. Initially, I presented my study to all licensed teachers at Robert M. Martin Elementary at a faculty meeting. I explained my study, described peak experiences, and described characteristics of peak experiences. All of these teachers were given an opportunity to describe, in writing, a recent personal peak experience while teaching. The information provided to teachers to explain peak experiences in a teaching and learning context was developed from a compilation of scholarly research pertaining to perspectives of peak experiences (see Appendix A). I invited volunteers to (a) sign consent form (see Appendix O) and (b) participate in writing a description of a recently recalled personal peak experience while teaching (see Appendix B).

The teachers who comprised my unit of analysis were purposively selected using the following criteria:

1. They reported having had a peak experience.
2. They scored in the upper quartile on a rubric designed to assess how well they described a peak experience (see Appendix C).

An important step to establish validity in any instrument is the notion of face validity. Face validity addresses the extent an instrument resembles what it claims to represent, e.g., the ability to describe a peak experience (Wigal & Wigal, 2006). Face validity was established by submitting the rubric to experts in peak experience research and revising items as advised (D. Whitney, personal communication, December 8, 2006; J. Stavros, personal communication, January 2, 2007). The rubric used to assess how well one describes a peak experience evaluated each respondent's ability to describe (a) a peak experience while teaching, (b) what was going on during the peak experience, (c) who was involved in the peak experience, (d) what he/she did during the peak experience, (e) how he/she felt during the peak experience, (f) what was valued most about his/her peak experience, (g) what happened after his/her peak experience, (h) what happened before his/her peak experience, and (i) other contributing factors that led to his/her peak experience.

Peak experience characteristics in the rubric were gleaned from a systematic review of various scholarly studies related to (a) peak experiences (Warmoth, 1963), (b) peak performance (Cohen, 1991; Ericsson & Charness, 1994; Harung et al., 1996; Hays & Brown, 2004; Katzenbach, 2000), (c) expert performance (Elo, 1986), (d) talent (Bloom, 1985), (e) well-being (Brunstein, 1993; Deci & Ryan, 1985), (f) flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997; Jackson et al., 2001), (g) genius (Galton, 1869/1962), (h) optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Newell & Simon, 1972), (i) individual zones of optimal functioning (Hanin, 2000), and (j) ideal performance (Unestahl, 1986).

I used the following qualitative methods in facilitating the three AI stages: (a) semi-structured interviews (see Appendices D), semi-structured paired interviews (see Appendix E),

(b) focus groups (see Appendices F, G, I, J, and K), (c) participant created documents, (d) a generative story telling activity (see Appendix H), and (e) journals.

After I purposively selected eight volunteers to participate in this study, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with each teacher. The process and purpose of the research was explained, after which an invitation was extended to participate in the study.

Role of the Researcher

I addressed various ethical considerations to ensure the protection of each participant's privacy and confidentiality. An unbiased approach was needed throughout inquiry to ensure personal interests were not furthered while compromising the integrity of the research (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluations, 1994). My goal was to minimize the biases I brought to this study. My role as researcher and former principal at Robert M. Martin Elementary had the potential to be problematic. I used several techniques to prevent bias from occurring. I (a) carefully constructed questions; (b) involved two colleagues who had no familiar or professional ties to Robert M. Martin Elementary (Martin) staff, to review the written stories with me; (c) ensured none knew the identify of the author of any written story during the review; (d) thoroughly analyzed sentences, phrases and single words of the data collected; and (e) through personal reflexivity identified and assessed evidence of personal bias (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

As the researcher, I served as a facilitator in group discussions. As the facilitator, I articulated carefully crafted questions to help participants tell stories of their peak experiences (Cooperrider et al., 2003). My primary role was to introduce the AI process and facilitate AI activities in the discover, dream, and design stages as I sought to bring out the best of participants (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Methods

In this section I explain the data gathering methods that I used in my research study. I first describe semi-structured interviews and semi-structured paired interviews. I then explain the focus group. Participant generated documents will then be explained. The use of journals will be explained. I will close this section with information about the use of generative story telling as a method of data collection.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the eight teacher participants selected to participate in the study. The purpose of semi-structured interviews was to obtain rich descriptions of the participants' peak experiences in a teaching and learning context (Kvale, 1996). The questions and protocols were piloted with non-participating teachers who reported peak experiences to ensure questions and protocols were related to teacher peak experiences in a teaching and learning context. For example, one question was, "Can you recall a time at school when you enjoyed a task related to teaching that was exceptionally rewarding? Describe this experience." In addition, participants were encouraged to provide additional comments, stories, or information.

Semi-Structured Paired Interviews

Semi-structured paired interviews are different from semi-structured interviews in that the paired interviews involve two participants interviewing one another. Questions and protocols are still a part of this process; however, the conversations are between two participants rather than directly between a participant and me. The purpose of paired interviews is to initiate a deep study and analysis of specific causes and successes while (a) creating a sense of inclusion; (b) providing participants a feeling of being attended to, heard, and respected; (c) facilitating

opportunities for partners to help each other's ideas, values, and concerns be considered in the larger group; (d) developing a deep sense of cooperation through knowing respecting interests and differences of each other (Ludema et al., 2003).

Focus Groups

Focus groups create a non-threatening social context where group members are encouraged to consider their own views in the context of the others' perspectives (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The protocols for focus groups were also field tested and aligned with an AI theoretical perspective. Members were afforded protection of privacy and informed consent (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Focus groups were conducted with the eight teacher participants selected to participate in the study. The purpose of each focus group was to guide participants to engage in activities designed to experience each of the three AI phases: (a) discover, (b) dream, and (c) design. One question, for example, that was used in a focus group during the discovery phase: "What do you consider to be the core factor that gives life to your peak experiences?" In the dream phase, participants were asked in another focus group to describe what would be happening 5-25 years into the future that would support peak experiences in a teaching and learning context. During the design phase, in a focus group, participants were asked to reflect and dialogue on what circumstances would make the best, ideal, and desired peak experiences possible.

Participant Documents

The AI Learning Process included several data-gathering activities in which the eight participants were guided during focus groups to create summary sheets and graphic recordings (Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006; Cooperrider et al., 2003). Participants also took notes while

conducting paired interviews. These notes, along with the summary sheets and graphic recording sheets were collected, transcribed, and analyzed.

Generative Story telling

During the discovery stage of the AI Learning Process, participating teachers were guided in a generative story telling activity. Online technology was used to facilitate participants in generating a story about a fictitious individual who recently had a peak experience while teaching. Participants were guided to access the Wichita State University College of Education site via the Internet (Wichita State University College of Education, 2006). Each participant had an opportunity to add to the previous participants' contributions. Each participant built on the story until everyone contributed to co-creating a full story about this fictitious person. This open editing approach has been used in other settings to include evaluating youth development and risk prevention programs as an attempt to get at experiences an individual may be reluctant to claim (Nelson, 1998). Researchers have found generative story telling to be powerful in making sense of difficult to understand events (Harter, Japp, & Beck, 2005). Other researchers have found storytelling important in identifying what is most valued and helpful in constructing expectations and attitudes toward an important event (Pasupathi, Weeks, & Rice, 2006). Meanings drawn from story telling have been found to help make sense of perceived events and to impact how one chooses to behave in the future (White, 2006).

Journals

Journals are often used as inquiry tools to help researchers gain understanding of their own lives or participants' lives and as a platform to construct meaning (Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, & DeWine, 2005). The use of a researcher has also been advised for assessing (a) the reason and logic that entered into every aspect of the investigation, and (b) the emotions

and perceptions of the investigator (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Both participants and I used journals throughout the AI Learning Process. Time was devoted at the beginning and end of each of the three days the AI Learning Process was in session for members to record their (a) feelings, (b) anticipated occurrences, and (c) what they valued most of the AI Learning Process. I used a journal throughout the investigation to record my emotions, thoughts, perceptions, and reactions of the process and to describe my observations of occurrences.

Data Analysis

All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All participant documents created in each AI Learning Process phase were transcribed electronically. Data were analyzed using the comparative analysis matrix method (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data were analyzed using the text analysis software CATPAC as a filter to facilitate a deeper level of content analysis. Specifically, I applied content analysis and pattern matching using an open coding process to compare, conceptualize, and categorize data. After open coding, connections and categories were developed through an axial coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All analyzed data were used to aggregate common information and identify new insights into perceptions of teachers regarding peak experiences in a teaching and learning context (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Research Quality

The quality of this research study was enhanced through ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data to include semi-structured individual interviews, semi-structured paired interviews, focus groups, participant documents, generative story telling, and journals. As a researcher, I make no statements about transferability for findings in this study. I

leave it up to the reader to make any conclusion related to transferability. Dependability was strengthened through the protocols in the data collection procedures to minimize errors and bias (Yin, 2003). Confirmability of data was obtained by interacting with participants in the study who reviewed the findings and provided verification of the findings and using member checking to confirm the meaning of what was said at the end of each interview and focus group; participants were given an opportunity when needed to review findings and to offer clarification on perspectives.

Summary

Chapter 3 explained the methods that were employed in this research. The intent of this qualitative case study design was to reflect the views of the teachers from Robert M. Martin Elementary USD 385 who participated in this study. Methods were used to address the purpose of this study, which was to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. Data collection methods included semi-structured individual interviews, semi-structured paired individual interviews, focus groups, participant documents, generative story telling, and journals. Data was analyzed using text analysis software and content analysis. A constant comparative analysis was used to identify patterns, code data, and categorize findings. I present my findings in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 provides the findings from data collected during this study. I organize this chapter by first restating the purpose of the study and theoretical perspectives that I used to guide my study. I present the methodology, research questions, data analysis, and the summary of findings. I proceed to present a rich and deep description of each of the three days of the AI Learning Process. I then discuss each of my findings in order of my summary of findings. I conclude with a chapter summary.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspectives selected for this study were AI and humanistic psychology. Appreciative inquiry is a research process and methodology that refers to both a bounded or collective system and a search for knowledge to discover the potential of people while affirming what exists (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Appreciative inquiry complements humanistic psychology. The intent of humanistic psychology is to study positive aspects of people's experience. This perspective focuses on an intellectual focus of the positive traits and subjective experiences of people as opposed to giving pathological attention to repairing the worst things in life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The focus of humanistic psychology and AI is on the person's positive characteristics. These two perspectives are conducive for research on positive experiences of teachers as it relates to peak experiences.

Methodology

The basic design of my study was a qualitative case study conducted through a three-day AI process. The AI process was known as an AI Learning Process. Eight participants (all elementary school teachers in the same school) were purposively selected to participate in this study.

Research Questions

This study answered the following two research questions:

1. How do classroom teachers describe their peak experiences in a teaching and learning context?
2. How do classroom teachers describe the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state?

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the text analysis software CATPAC as a filter to facilitate a deeper level of content analysis. Content analysis was applied and pattern matching was employed, using an open coding process to compare, conceptualize, and categorize data. After open coding, connections and categories were developed through an axial coding method. The quality of the research was enhanced through ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Summary of Findings

Five salient findings were derived from my data analysis. Each finding will be reported using examples of the comments from the participants to illustrate the finding.

Finding 1: The appreciative inquiry experience allowed participants to identify and create peak experiences and discover the ecological conditions necessary for them to enter into a peak experience state.

Finding 2: The appreciative inquiry process allowed participants to recognize the importance of connecting with each other and students.

Finding 3: The appreciative inquiry process allowed participants to identify intrinsic needs.

Finding 4: The appreciative inquiry process allowed participants to validate themselves and others as worthwhile people.

Finding 5: The appreciative inquiry experience identified the importance of recalling and sharing peak experience stories.

Report of Findings

The sections that follow will address the findings from my study. The first section will provide a rich description of each of the three days of the AI Learning Process. The following sections will each present the results of one finding. Participants' comments will be integrated into the narrative to provide a rich description of the AI Learning Process and each finding.

Table 4.1 provides a brief profile of each of the study's eight participants

Table 4.1

Participants (all Pseudonyms)

Name	Position
Claire	Special Education Resource Teacher; 29 years teaching experience; masters in reading; recipient of various awards
Nancy	First Grade Teacher; 19 years teaching experience; completing masters in curriculum and instruction end of year
Jane	Second Grade Teacher; seven years teaching experience; completing masters in curriculum and instruction end of year
Ann	Third Grade Teacher; two years of teaching experience; owned own business for fifteen years prior to teaching
Peter	Fourth Grade Teacher; 12 years of teacher experience; 15 years of coaching experience; worked in business for 4 years prior to teaching
Karen	Kindergarten Teacher; seven years of teaching experience; completing masters in curriculum and instruction end of year
Linda	Fifth Grade Teacher; eight years of teaching experience; completing masters in curriculum and instruction end of year
Rita	Computer Lab Teacher; seven years of teaching experience; completing masters in curriculum and instruction end of year

AI Learning Process – Day 1

Getting Started

The gathering of qualitative data from other people is often taken from stories people tell (Stake, 1995). While there is no rigid formula for the AI Learning Process, the data collected come primarily in the form of stories. Therefore, the purpose of the three day AI Learning Process was to engage a group of eight teachers from one school in storytelling. The teachers volunteered to come together for three consecutive days to explore the notion of peak experiences of teachers in a teaching and learning context and the ecological conditions necessary for teachers to enter into a peak experience state.

One challenge that I faced was to peak the interest of enough people to commit time for participation in a three day AI Learning Process. During a faculty meeting, all certified staff members (approximately 27 teachers) were invited to participate. A carefully constructed description of peak experiences was shared. Teachers were promised that the AI experience would be a valuable use of time; however, for many teachers, the timing was not perceived as convenient. Among personal and professional challenges, many teachers were preparing for state assessments scheduled to begin during the week of the planned AI Learning Process. Teachers down-played the importance of devoting time to participate in a three day AI Learning Process. After the invitation to write about a peak teaching experience, 14 teachers decided not to participate.

Eight teachers chose to participate. They described, in writing, their peak teaching experiences. Their stories of teaching peak experiences were independently reviewed by two colleagues who had no familiar or professional ties to Robert M. Martin Elementary (Martin)

staff and by me. During the review of each reported peak experience, no one knew the identity of the author.

All of the stories addressed the basic questions about a peak experience: what happened, who was involved, what occurred prior to and after the experience, and how the person felt. Aspects of the stories of peak experiences varied as they related to the setting, characters, and details; the stories also varied in length and depth of detail. The review team concluded that each teacher (a) recalled and reported a specific peak experience in a teaching and learning context; (b) scored in the upper quartile on the rubric designed to assess how well they described a peak experience, (c) exhibited a different level of comfort about describing a peak experience; and (e) committed valuable time to have an in depth discussion about this notion of teacher peak experiences. The review team determined that all eight participants had valuable input for a discussion about peak experiences in a teaching and learning context.

In the Beginning - Anticipation of Participation

Rita invited everyone to meet in her home for the first day of the AI Learning Process. Her basement was spacious and replete with comfortable lounging sofas and floor pillows. Plenty of floor space was available for participants to spread out when working on individual or paired group activities. There was a small kitchenette in one corner of the large, open room where coffee was prepared and sodas and water were chilling in a refrigerator. Snacks were spread across the counter. They included a pan of freshly baked brownies brought by Nancy.

Participants arrived between 7:30 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. I presented an overview of the three day process. Each participant was given a folder with writing material for journaling, a pen, an agenda, a copy of the PowerPoint presentation on the AI Learning Process, and protocols for the focus group and paired interview discussions. This material gave the participants the resources

needed for the three days, as well as the expectations for the AI Learning Process. Participants were then guided to express feelings and anticipated thoughts of the process through writing in a journal.

Rita confidently shared, “I believe I have many peak experiences to share with the group.” Karen said she too felt “very positive” and even added, “I think today will get us excited to go to class tomorrow looking for more peak experiences.” Jane was also, “. . . so glad to be in the group. I think this will be fun and beneficial to my teaching career.” Ann shared she was “nervous about sharing” however, she was “looking forward to spending time with these people” and was “hoping to hear some valuable insights from other teachers.” Nancy expressed,

All weekend I’ve been anticipating what we’ll be talking about. I’ve been excited to learn more about other peak experiences. I’ve also been excited because of who is in this group . . . being able to bond with other colleagues is rewarding!!!

While many shared excitement about the AI Learning Process, some shared feelings of anxiety. Linda reflected, “Sharing is difficult for me. I am a reserved person. However, I look forward to working with this group of people.”

Peter also had mixed feelings. He said, “I’m feeling a bit of nervousness about what I can gain from the experience; yet, I’m anxious to hear others’ stories and to see what common threads are evident.”

Claire, said, “I’m dying to hear about other experiences from this group. I love the people in this room but feel like I don’t know much about what has moved them as teachers. I’m excited but nervous too.”

Highlights and Peak Experiences

For the first AI Learning Process activity, participants were paired according to years of experience at Martin. Everyone was to brainstorm and later share high-point events in the history of Martin. Each pair constructed a timeline on poster. Participants recalled and listed events related to various experiences. Awards, first-time experiences, celebration events with teachers and students, challenges, funding from the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), and activities supportive of the School Improvement Plan process were important highlights. They also recalled special personal moments when a teacher had a baby, got married, or was hired.

Participants were asked to share the kind of connection they felt could be made between the highlight experience and the ability to recall personal peak experiences while teaching. Participants tried to discover why they were unable to recall any highlight during certain periods of time. Jane said, “I wondered why I couldn’t remember, but then we’ve all talked and several of us can’t remember that time.”

Two participants recognized the importance of recalling positive experiences. Karen said, “I think it’s neat to reminisce about the different things that we’ve tried and what worked and what didn’t work . . . Claire and I shared we need to do that more.”

The focus on highlights generated some comments about what might be missing from the school as a faculty. Nancy shared, “I feel like we are lacking a bond as a full group. I’m talking about faculty.”

Jane added, “Our school culture needs more of that.” All of the participants recognized the importance of valuing themselves and others as worthwhile people.” Jane continued, “That’s another thing. We want to be acknowledged when something good happens . . . to acknowledge a lot of good things are happening.”

Claire added, “We forget to celebrate our practice that actually allowed us to get there.”

Participants believed this activity helped them remember events when attempting to recall personal teaching peak experiences. Rita said, “I think that we really tapped into our peak experiences [when identifying school highlights] because not many people recognize their own peak experiences.”

This discovery activity enabled participants to recognize some events that were peak experiences even if they were not realized as such at the time. Peter recounted, “We don’t recognize it as a highlight.” Taking time to reflect and identify the highlights was a positive experience. Linda shared, “Just to take a moment to think about [highlights]. I felt pretty good.”

Paired Interviews

After the group was led through the highlights activity, an overview of the AI Learning Process was shared. Participants were guided to cluster in groups of two, where they interviewed one another about personal peak experiences in a teaching and learning context. Specific directions were given pertaining to how each participant should coach each other to gain rich descriptions about personal teacher peak experiences—details about what happened, who was involved, what occurred prior to and after the experience, and how the person felt.

Mapping the Positive Core

Once peak experiences were thoroughly explored, participants were guided to connect strengths, resources, and capacities with everyone in the group. Participants first identified two of the best stories. Everyone then brainstormed a list of themes that were present in the stories. Themes were described as the high points of each peak experience. Forces thought to influence the peak experience were discussed and identified. Participants then discussed what it was like to have a peak experience in a teaching and learning context.

Creating a Generative Story

During the final portion of Day 1 of the AI Learning Process, participants were guided to create a generative conversation (in writing) around a fictitious person who had a peak experience in a teaching and learning context. The intent of the activity was to extend participants' experiences in describing peak experiences. On-line technology was used to facilitate this experience. Participants were guided to access the Wichita State University College of Education site via the Internet (Wichita State University College of Education, 2006). Each participant was instructed to add to the previous participants' contributions with the intent of developing a story. This activity continued until all participants contributed to co-creating a detailed story about this fictitious person.

AI Learning Process – Day 2

Building a Bridge

The second day of the AI Learning Process was devoted to the dream stage. Karen invited everyone to her home. She had a comfortable and cozy family room in her basement with a sofa and chairs. A few participants chose to sit on the floor. Refreshments were spread on a coffee table in the center of the room. All but one participant brought a laptop computer to use for journaling or brainstorming. Once everyone was settled, the participant documents for Day 1 were displayed and reviewed to help them dream and visualize themselves creating peak experiences.

Participants were asked to share what they valued most about the experiences from Day 1. Karen expressed she most enjoyed, "listening to other people's peak experiences." Jane shared, "Peter and I had several things that were alike." Peter added, "We're similar. You know, anytime you can make those personal connections with others [is important]." While differences

were evident in peak experience stories, participants saw similarities. Claire noted, “I think, you can see some of the similarities very easily in very different peak experiences.”

Participants continued to speculate central themes conducive to peak experiences. Emphasis was placed on the need for people to make connections with others. Claire expressed the community needs to be a place, “Where people are connected with individuals with a sense of care . . . where they feel comfortable and safe.” Nancy agreed, “That's right, because we talked about the environment and that it needs to be one of care.” Peter posed another angle. “I think being outside of the comfort zone may be more of a reason [for peak experiences].”

Since they all began their day in their classrooms and then joined as a group late morning, participants were asked to share connections they made from Day 1 to their time in their classroom. Rita said, “I was really more intent with looking for peak experiences. I was more in tune.” Rita then shared about an earlier conversation she had with her paraprofessional. The paraprofessional said Rita’s substitute teacher really enjoyed her classroom because the students were so well behaved. Rita said that this compliment meant more to her as a result of Day 1. She shared, “If I had not been looking [for peak experiences], I probably wouldn't have thought anything about it. But with my recent experiences, I took the time to share this compliment with my students.” Jane added:

Well, along the same lines, when the bell rang, and all my students came in, there were some who said they missed me yesterday. So I told them, “I missed you, and will be leaving shortly but I’ll be back for the morning tomorrow.” That made me feel good that they expressed they needed me. Before Day 1, it probably wouldn’t have mattered as much. I paid more attention to that moment—that feeling. It meant more to me for some reason.

These stories suddenly caused others to realize how they noticed things were changing. Ann and Peter shared another story regarding a morning when they were de-escalating a troubled child who had begun to cry about a situation involving younger siblings. Ann and Peter shared how impressed they were with how it was all resolved in a matter of minutes. After they shared their story, Peter said, “I was just thinking. I went in there today, more optimistic, and you know, now that Rita shared her story, it made me realize . . . you know what?” EVERYONE shouted out, “THAT’S A PEAK!” Peter exclaimed, “YES!”

Peter shared every positive contributing factor, the calm behavior of the colleague, the humor of Ann that helped redirect the older student, and the swift thinking of each teacher involved in the situation. He also recalled the reasons why the outcome was so remarkable and such an accomplishment because unfortunately the younger siblings had a reputation for (on several occasions) being quick to panic to the point of hysteria resulting in incessant, shrieking, uncontrollable screams—the last episode lasting 1½ hours—loud enough to be heard throughout the entire school. Others added comments of disbelief and excitement.

Ann shared:

It’s funny, because now it is taking me back to the night we had a sleepover at the school and the next morning when a parent came to pick up the older child she said, “This is the first time he has ever spent the night away from home. He always has to come home.” I didn’t even think about that until now, when we are having these conversations.

This sparked another story from Nancy. She shared how she spent an hour this morning covering another teacher’s classroom. This was not a planned event. She was given short notice and even though she had something else planned, she decided to help out. When she arrived to the other teacher’s classroom, she found out one of the students in this classroom was the same

little girl that she spoke of earlier to another participant in the AI Learning Process. “That same little girl!” Nancy continued to share what she enjoyed from this one hour: (a) she learned a new creative method about how to group students for instruction, (b) she enjoyed the opportunity to hear older children read, and (c) she valued time to listen to students discuss a higher level book. This prompted Claire to share her morning experience, “Even though I was busy and particularly task focused, I noticed that there was a sense of calm. It was a calm busy, not a frantic busy.”

Claire shared another story. She talked about helping a teacher with a struggling student. Claire said that she has felt frustrated at times because the teacher is not warm or inviting when Claire comes into the teacher’s classroom. Many times, this teacher avoids eye contact with her. She said, “You feel like you come in and do your job and then you leave.” Claire also struggled with helping the student. Today, however, was different. Claire said, “I think that it came from that inner calm.” She stated that the student was performing exceptionally well and the teacher engaged in a friendly conversation as well. While Claire shared this story, she was clapping and the other participants clapped and laughed. Claire added, “I just felt like ‘Oh!’ I just bounced down the hall. You don’t realize how good that feels!”

Participants revealed how this experience was helping them in their personal life. Karen told how her son became ill last night. She said his illness brought back to mind an earlier experience when her son was in the hospital. Karen said with tears in her eyes:

. . . and then I started thinking about how Ann and I were discussing all the things he’s learning; how he’s grown so much; he’s saying words and he’s even using sign language and he’s making animal sounds. Even though I was concerned that I might not be able to be here today, it felt good to focus on the positive.

It was evident in the discussion, participants discovered how to identify and create peak experiences. The discussion constructed an effective bridge from the discovery activities from Day 1 to the dream activities planned for Day 2, to enable participants to craft meaningful dream statements.

Crafting Dream Statements

The next activity was the dream phase. This activity entailed the construction of a dream statement. Each participant was guided to create an inspiring statement of a dream that pointed the way to peak experiences. Participants were asked to visualize a dream from the themes, forces, and conversations from the discovery phase. Statements were to contain vivid and positive language written in present tense. After writing their dream statement, participants were to creatively construct a depiction of the crafted dream statement. Each participant was given poster paper, construction paper, scissors, glue, and colored markers to use in their representation. At the completion of their projects, participants were to present their creations to the group.

Everyone except Claire used laptop computers to write their dream statements. Claire felt she was more comfortable writing with paper and pencil. Participants spread out and worked in pairs. Ann and Linda chose to develop their written and visual dream statement together. Claire asked Peter if she could use him as a sounding board for some of her ideas. They sat closely with others and brainstormed with one another throughout the work session. Participants coached one another to clarify or replace certain words. They continually reminded one another to write in the present tense—writing in the present tense was a struggle for the participants. The dreaming stage was a new adventure. Once participants were satisfied with their projects and ready to

present them, they went back to their original places and prepared to listen to each other's presentation.

Presenting Dream Statements

Peter was the first to share. His visual was taken from his experience as a coach where he developed game plans. Peter would list what was known as "Go-to Plays." They were the plays where a person or team did well. For his dream statement, Peter drew a mock game plan grid that listed his "Go-to Plays" as "my flexibility, being spontaneous, I'm opportunistic, I'm courageous, and I set high expectations." He shared what he thought would take him over the top, "[I want] to build relationships, make connections, be empathetic, and value people." Peter's dream statement was:

I am continuing to be flexible, spontaneous, opportunistic, and courageous in my classroom while setting high expectations. I am fostering better relationships, while making connections with my students, by being empathetic and valuing each individual.

Claire then shared her presentation. Claire drew a picture of a large book with an excited child jumping out of the book with a smile on his face. Claire's dream statement was:

I see myself as a reading coach. I am training my students to read effectively. I am listening carefully to their reading and I am getting honest advice on how they can achieve more success. I am helping my students to recognize their own successes and to feel proud of their efforts in achievement. I am modeling how I read and think as I read.

While constructing their dream statements, others began thinking about how they wanted to carry out their dreams. Ann and Linda, for example, shared their plans to begin weekly class meetings. Ann said, "Students will be allowed to come together in a circle for community building activities." Linda added, "We see peak experiences happening when students get

opportunities to know their classmates on a more intimate personal level. They will make connections with one another.”

Each participant’s dream statement involved some component pertaining to relationships. Karen realized that some peak experiences are only realized after the fact; therefore, taking time to reflect was an important part of her dream statement: “As of today, I am slowing down. I am valuing the moments that I have with my students. I am taking time to teach my students how to recognize their peak experiences.” Karen’s visual included symbols of a stop sign to represent slowing down, a speech cloud with question marks to represent reflecting, a spray of ignited fireworks to represent celebrating, and a speech bubble with the words “Guess what . . .” to represent sharing. Karen continued her dream statement:

When my students recognize their accomplishments and celebrate them, it turns into a peak experience for me too. I am teaching and modeling this practice. I am sharing my peak experiences more often with my peers. I feel more comfortable with sharing my experiences and feel confident in them. The more I share, the more others share too.

Jane’s dream statement was similar to Karen’s. Jane dreamed, “I make more time to acknowledge peak experiences . . .” Jane said this thought came from her awareness in the AI Learning Process that “Reflecting back on peak experiences has helped me to realize that I do have a lot of peak experiences. I just didn’t realize it!”

Rita created colorful word clouds. She inscribed the words special, family, respect, think, and empathy onto the clouds. Her dream was “building a better community in my room with my students.” She felt if these word clouds were posted in her classroom, they would serve as a reminder to students to think and speak positive thoughts to one another, just as you would want your family to speak lovingly positive words.

Everyone appeared energized and appreciative for having this time to focus on peak experiences in teaching. The past two days helped participants discover how to identify and create more peak experiences.

AI Learning Process – Day 3

Embarking on New Beginnings

The third day of the AI Learning Process was devoted to the design stage. Claire invited everyone to her home. Claire's home was located on the edge of a rural residence right next to a landing strip for small aircraft.

Immediately upon arrival, Claire warmly toured her inquisitive guests throughout her home. During the tour, all participants shared what they appreciated about Claire's home and they engaged in lively conversation while moving about each room. After the tour, the participants helped themselves to beverages and snacks spread on the kitchen counter nearest the dining area and then found a place to sit in the living room. Participants had their choice of sitting on either of two couches, umbrella type canvass lawn chairs, or pillows on the floor.

The session began with participants entering their thoughts and expectations in their journals. Many of the entries addressed appreciation toward participants. Rita shared:

I received a nice compliment from Nancy regarding an idea I had. She e-mailed me and included the two other grade level members. I was thrilled to receive the compliment and grateful to have such a wonderful teammate and friend. Overall, this has been an enlightening experience and I'm anxious to see what the rest of the afternoon brings!!

Nancy wrote, "I enjoy my new peaker friends! To get to know them has been a wonderful experience. I have a great respect for each and every one of them. Seeing them in the hallway brings a smile to my face."

During reflection time, some participants focused on how the AI Learning Process motivated them to change the way they look at things. Peter saw a difference in his interactions with students and staff. He shared:

I was surprised at how much more positive my feelings were when I walked into the school building today. During class time I was able to share different aspects of the past couple of days with my community helper and how it could relate to him as he prepares for his future at college. I was pleased to hear all of the others' positive reflections of the day as well. I think the ability of this group to share is wonderful.

Linda had similar feelings. She exclaimed, "Today I came into my classroom pumped to begin class with a positive attitude." She found her students did not begin the day with the same positive attitude. Linda said their "energy was very low." Linda responded by saying, "I told the students since they were down on energy today, I was going to come around and share some of my energy with them as they worked with partners." She then walked around and "gave a positive feedback comment to each pair of students." As a result she saw a change in the interest level of her students. They became energetic and engaged in the instructional process.

Nancy recognized how the AI Learning Process changed her approach to teaching. She wrote that she "really loved how Karen and Jane brought this experience to their classrooms. I plan on doing that tomorrow. I'm so excited!!" Jane believed her thought change was evident in how she learned to embrace the notion of flexibility. Jane shared how she was teaching her students about predicting outcomes. Then the students asked what she had been doing the past two days with the AI Learning Process. Jane shared the generative storytelling activity. Her students came alive with eagerness to try this approach.

This was not in my plans, but part of my dream is to be flexible. This was a teachable moment and I am glad that I took the time to enjoy the experience. I want to have more of these peak experiences and I will!!!

This positive mindset was carried over in participants' personal lives. Claire believed the past two days affected her thought processes as a pilot and how she mentally prepared herself for a flight last night. She said, "I realized that thinking about obstacles can help, but I've now realized not to give the obstacles power by dwelling on them." She later wrote, "I was surprised at how much more positive my feelings were today when I walked into the building."

A strong desire to avoid deficit thinking and adopt an asset-positive perspective was a common theme as Karen shared, "I really want to continue thinking in the positive manner and help others to do the same, including students and other staff members. Ann also valued the approach and affect of the AI Learning Process. She promised, "I will remember to use appreciative inquiry in all my interactions with my students, my children, my husband, friends, and other family members."

After participants completed their journals, an effort was made to begin the next activity; however, participants immediately began sharing their appreciation of one another. Affirmations were mixed with teasing and laughter. The energy level of the group was exuberant as each participant excitedly shared his or her compliment. Teasing evolved to pulses of rallied laughter to the point when Jane eagerly stated:

When we were driving back yesterday, Claire and I made the comment about looking forward to what we are getting out of this. You know, I'm just really enjoying the group that we're with! We're going to be friends forever!

Linda added:

I want to share with this group of people, this experience has just made me stop and realize it's important to have moments to just be able to laugh . . . it's nice just to stop and reflect on what we do as teachers, and that it's not just the teaching—it's the whole teacher.

Playful teasing and hearty laughter continued intermittently as participants shared what they appreciated about the time together. Claire added:

I've just enjoyed being able to laugh with you guys. There are many differences in this group, but this sort of thing really helps us see how in our hearts that we are all very much the same and connected. It's just really wonderful for me.

Peter said:

It's been nice to see people in a different light, and to share some things. I'm really surprised about the openness of the whole group. People are saying things in this environment that surprises me. I've been appreciative of that.

Ann was complementary of the three day process. She felt breaking the schedule up to include periods of time in the classroom facilitated her ability to learn how to identify peak experiences.

She said:

I have enjoyed entering the classroom in the morning during our second and third days of this process to work with students. I think that if we had just gone for three full days without going into the classroom, we wouldn't have had that opportunity to think about it, reflect on it and then come back . . .to find like what happened to Peter and me after we shared our morning experiences. We were able to say, 'Oh wait a minute! That was a peak experience with those boys in the hallway.'

Participants recognized the energy generation of identifying peak experiences as a group. The time to express appreciation, value events, and to laugh and enjoy one another's presence, created a caring, exciting, and positive environment conducive for designing how to implement the dreams interwoven with discoveries of teacher peak experiences.

Identifying High Potential Design

The next activity for Day 3 began after each participant was asked to restate his or her dream statement. Each reading was followed with a high five, clapping, or words of cheer. Claire shouted, "There's a lot of power in writing it down!" Others responded, "ABSOLUTELY!" Ann added:

I like the visuals each person created to explain their dream. Karen's visual helped me to remember when I was driving back from my meeting yesterday. I remembered about the stop sign—to stop and reflect and then the fireworks visual reminded me to celebrate.

The participants took turns excitedly and confidently reading their positive statements filled with vivid and powerful language. This energizing experience preceded the overview of the next activity where participants were guided to create a map of high-potential design possibilities. The purpose of the customized map was to identify the elements that will help each participant gain and grow in his or her quest for more peak experiences. Each participant was given a large sheet of poster paper and colored markers to draw a bull's-eye target diagram consisting of three circles onto the poster paper.

All participants wrote "peak experiences" in the smaller inner circle of the target. In the second circle, they wrote key relationships or tangible, physical, ecological conditions thought to influence their peak experiences. In the outer circle, participants wrote elements that they thought influenced the tangible and physical conditions of peak experiences. Participants were

given examples of maps from various resources such as guidelines and examples of “organization design elements” (Ludema et al., 2003, pp. 179-180, 274-275), a “social-technological architecture design” (Cooperrider et al., 2003, p. 170), and “information about how to select relevant and strategic design elements” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, pp. 208-210). Participants read through the information and discussed their understanding as well as sought clarification on how to apply this concept to the study’s topic on teacher peak experiences. In reference to the handouts, Claire stated, “When you think of the examples that they gave, they were things that affect the dream, but the dream affects them too.” Jane added:

But here it says the conditions that affect the outside or the inside of the organization, so it could be a life outside the school that could affect the teaching—so it's what could get in the way or what could help your dream.

Karen asked, “Should we add parents?” Ann compared the concept to a room and windows. She said, “When I walk into Claire’s room, there are windows. The windows would be an element or condition and where they are placed would be the influence.” This started a litany of suggested internal and external elements or conditions to include (a) furniture, (b) teacher/self, (c) students, (d) bulletin boards, (e) schedules, (f) standards, (g) parents, (h) volunteers, (i) instructional materials and resources, and (j) the classroom. There were other influences as well that participants shared to include (a) how I foster opportunities, (b) how much time I spend by myself, (c) how I schedule my day, (d) how I interact with parents, (e) how I teach the standards, and (f) how I model appropriate behavior.

After participants completed their high potential designs, everyone listened carefully as they took turns sharing their design. During the sharing process, they were encouraged to add to their design. Rita began the presentations. Some of the influences she noted addressed, “how I

foster opportunities, how I take time for myself, how often I laugh, how I schedule my lessons.” Ann noted, “teammates, expectations, and student grouping” were other conditions for peak experiences. She identified the following influences of these peak experiences to be “how I take time to reflect, share my experiences, and keep myself positive.” Nancy recognized “district office personnel . . . and the principal” as being external conditions to peak experiences. Of her long list of influences she added, “how often I show enthusiasm or interest, how I learn from my principal, how I trust staff members, and the kind of expectations I have.” In her list, Linda added the following unique conditions: “energy, music . . . conversations, journals . . .”, and she believed some of the influences for peak experiences involved “how I engage students, the words I have posted in the room, how I make time for students to interact, and how I soothe the atmosphere.”

The effectiveness of a leader was also noted by Linda: “how I facilitate other colleagues and facilitate problem solving as a teacher leader.” Peter also acknowledged interpersonal skills as being an important influence. He shared, “how I work with one another, value and respect others, and foster opportunities to show respect.” Karen identified “student work, and attitudes” as two unique conditions for peak experiences and she emphasized, “how well I model positive thinking, and how I involve others,” to be influences for peak experiences. Jane recognized, “how I allow teachable moments, how confident I am, and how I learn and grow as a teacher” can influence peak experiences.

Several participants added more to their design as Claire shared the following influences to peak experiences: “how often I ask questions and the questions I choose to ask, how often I build relationships, what I choose to eat, how often I accept others, how often I fly, and how I create opportunities to show respect.” Everyone contributed to the process of creating high-

possibilities designs. Once the activity was finished, each design was filled with conditions, elements, and influences of peak experiences in a teaching and learning context.

Creating Provocative Propositions

The last structured activity was devoted to writing a provocative proposition. They brainstormed the ingredients that they would like to see in the ideal version of a classroom where peak experiences frequently occurred. A provocative proposition was explained as (a) an uplifting, affirmative statement in bold and present terms; (b) a statement that bridged the best of what is with their own ideas about what might be; and (c) a challenge to the status quo in that it offered new possibilities for positive change.

Participants brainstormed what they believed they wanted and needed to create more peak experiences. Nancy said, “We want a culture that is open and supportive of relationships.” Rita added, “Where there is trust and a sense of value and respect for others.” Participants took turns and offered the following ecological conditions of a school culture conducive for peak experiences:

Ecological conditions of a school culture conducive for peak experiences are friendly, inclusive, contagious, full of curiosity, positive, and an environment that is free of blinders. We also want to hear stories. We want no fear or criticism. We want to hear laughter. We want to bring this out. We want to create a caring culture.

After rearranging words, and undergoing a group editing process, the AI Learning Process group concluded the session with the following provocative proposition:

We are continuing to be flexible, spontaneous, opportunistic, and courageous in our school while setting high expectations, fostering better relationships, and making

connections with our school community (staff, students, parents, and community members) by being empathetic and valuing each individual.

Participants then brainstormed some ways that they intend to extend their work in the AI Learning Process. They plan to (a) use the AI Learning Process in leadership and in-service meetings, (b) hold monthly AI Learning meetings to provide encouragement, (c) communicate peak experiences via e-mail on a daily basis, (d) design an AI crest for each participant to have as a visual reminder of their provocative proposition, (e) name the AI Learning Process group the “Martin Peakers”, and (f) work with the school-wide assemblies committee to develop a powerful transition/end of year experience for teachers, students, and parents.

After the final activity, participants shared an appreciation for every participant in the group. Nancy surprised the group with a small laminated card with the following inscription: MARTIN—courageous, giving, trusting, accepting, loving, kind, considerate, respected, valued, priceless friends – PEAKERS. Tears, hugs, and laughter were shared.

After setting up a schedule for times participants would make one final contribution to the study through individual interviews, they were asked to add one more entry into their journals. Rita wrote, “What a great afternoon we had. Our discussion was so powerful and meaningful. I was able to distinguish what conditions and influences that I need to incorporate into my classroom to experience more peak experiences.”

Karen also felt “so lucky to be part of this group of PEAKERS! I have learned so much about myself this year and made some positive changes within myself.” Ann shared, “I can see where this knowledge could be useful in all aspects of life.” Nancy wrote, “Thank you so much for allowing me to be a part of something so BIG!” Claire confidently shared, “I feel certain that this group can transform the culture of our school and create a caring, crazy at times, family.”

There was evidence that the participants became comfortable with the phenomenon of teacher peak experiences and confident in their ability to create more peak experiences. Jane wrote, “Wow! I feel great about the AI process in the last three days and knowing I am a true peaker. I feel better about myself and the direction I am going.” A positive view of life was evident in the participants’ statements. Linda shared, “Life is good. We just need to stop and take time to enjoy it along with others.” The AI Learning process facilitated opportunities for participants to generate more peak experiences. Peter wrote in his journal:

I had a peak experience when the group used a lot of my personal dream statement to help write the position statement for our group and for the future. I appreciated this process and experience. It in itself was a peak experience. It will make me a better teacher and a better person. It already has.

I now discuss the five findings that emerged from my data analysis.

Finding 1: The Appreciative Inquiry Experience Allowed Participants to Identify and Create Peak Experiences, and Discover the Ecological Conditions Necessary for a Peak Experience

Data collected from participants revealed that the AI experience allowed participants to identify peak experiences and to discover the ecological conditions necessary for them to enter into a peak experience state. Activities that initiated a fuller understanding of a peak experience included the discovery activities where participants first brainstormed highlights of school events to include awards, transitions, special assemblies, new hires, people leaving, and state assessment challenges. This generated an awareness of situations that create a heightened sense of emotion, notoriety, or life changing adjustment. Participants easily transferred their understanding of school highlights to personal highlights that then led to the recollection of peak experiences.

After identifying school highlights, participants had little difficulty talking about a peak experience on their first day. Rita spoke about two situations. One involved a time when a student overcame his struggle with reading, and the other a parent who recently contacted her to affirm her worth as a teacher. Ann recalled a teaching moment after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. She observed her students showing a heightened sense of engagement and concern in others' well-being. Nancy shared a time when parents were overly generous and considerate when expressing their value of her as a teacher. Linda spoke of the moment when she as a teacher suddenly realized something sensitive about the personal life of a child.

Claire's story was about a child who, for the first time, bravely and unprompted read fluently and confidently aloud which generated a round of applause by classmates. Peter spoke of the time a group of students finally "got it."

Karen recalled the day a student who had been through so much emotional turmoil, and demonstrated low self esteem, confidently ran up to her to show how prepared she was for a test. Jane recalled her ability to overcome obstacles when she was faced with a new reading series, her master's coursework, and her first year of looping her previous class to a new grade level. Each participant was open when sharing his or her peak experience.

Participants discussed why these stories were remembered. They believed that events that occurred in unique or memorable situations were remembered as peak experiences. "Yeah," said Peter, "You've done something different from what you're used to doing." "Yes," said Audrey, "It was unique and that makes it stay with you." "That's the neat thing about it," continued Nancy, "It's like a first-time kind of a feel."

Through the AI Learning Process, participants were guided in activities to identify every aspect of a peak experience. This activity helped each participant fully understand a peak

experience. After sharing specific peak experiences, participants described the environment and the emotions preceding these peak experiences. They reflected and described the themes and forces of their peak experiences. When working on this activity, the mood escalated to passionate exuberance as participants shouted out and sometimes talked over one another about what they thought generated a peak experience.

Participants brainstormed important themes that were present in their peak experience stories to include the forces thought to influence the peak experience. They spoke of general themes that described the peak experience and the key attribute of the experience. Karen said, "I think maybe it's going outside of the box. I guess it's flexibility." Peter added, "I think out of your norm is probably a better thing to say." Claire said:

It's like taking risks . . . It's like being adventurous. Maybe it's adventurous instead of taking risks, but it is as if you have to be willing to try something, when you don't know for sure. It's more than flexibility.

Participants identified positive relationships that preceded many peak experiences. Nancy said, "It's all about how you respond and act towards people and their responses toward you . . . you have to value that person to have a peak experience, because if you don't care then you just forget it." "And the other thing too Nancy," added Claire, "is they valued you as a person and not just in your role." "That I value the child," continued Nancy, "but they valued me as a person."

The participants identified forces they thought to influence peak experiences: (a) various positive emotions such as feeling inquisitive, loved, affirmed, trusted, respected, confident, hopeful, passionate, determined, desirous or yearning, and expectant; (b) various negative emotions such as feeling frustrated, afraid, angry, threatened, uncertain, insecure, unloved, apprehensive, and nervous; (c) the teacher's level of comfort with ambiguity; (d) the teacher's

level of flexibility, spontaneity, and openness; (e) the degree students were allowed to drive the instruction and discussion; (f) the level of relevancy of instructional activities to students; (g) the environment of the classroom when students felt accepted, valued, cared for, safe, and comfortable; (h) the degree of perceived difficulty of a desired outcome; (i) events in which a unique connection was made with another human being; (j) a situation when hope exceeded expectations; and (k) how one responded to a situation.

A common precursor to participants' experience of a peak experience was a down time or lull in progress; more specifically a struggle with a particular outcome. Conflict was not necessarily associated with these circumstances, but a clear struggle or obstacle was presented, and the determination to overcome obstacles carried the participant through to the peak moment.

Participants also identified peak experiences as (a) a moment when everyone or everything came together, (b) a "culture of care" in a classroom, (c) a time when someone was highly valued, (d) a life-changing experience, (e) an achievement of something considered by some as unobtainable, (f) a time when one went outside the norm or took a risk, (g) an event considered unusual or different, (h) a moment experienced for the first time, (i) a sense of magnified clarity, (j) a person's reverence for life, or (k) a high degree of student engagement.

The identification of every facet of peak experiences excited the participants. As they became clearer about what a peak experience was and the ecological conditions necessary for peak experiences, they expressed confidence in their ability to create more peak experiences—especially if they took time to dream and design situations conducive for peak experiences.

Participants also realized that taking time to reflect on their day could create peak experiences. This insight was realized during reflection activities at the beginning of the second and third days of the AI Learning Process where participants were guided to share what

happened in their classroom prior to the meetings. Peter and Ann shared a story involving three students in the hallway after the bell rang. They took turns sharing the details. With each detail, they became more excited as they reached the climax of their story. Suddenly, Peter exclaimed, “Oh wait a minute! That was a peak experience with those boys in the hallway!” He added, “When you step back from the event and recall the details surrounding the event, you can see that it definitely is a peak experience!” It became evident to participants that as details of some situations were recalled, they grew in excitement and understanding of a particular situation and identified a personal peak experience.

Participants identified how the AI Learning Process facilitated their ability to identify and create peak experiences. On the two days that participants began their days by teaching in their classroom, they felt the prior day’s AI activities prepared them well to immediately apply newfound knowledge in practice. They looked forward to sharing the effect the AI Learning Process was having on their understanding of how to identify and create peak experiences in a teaching and learning context after practicing in their classrooms. On the second day of the AI Learning Process, Karen began her day in her classroom creating a peak experience as a result of being guided in the AI Learning Process in constructing a dream for creating peak experiences. She felt the discovery activities from Day 1 helped her understand every aspect of past peak experiences.

Displaying participants’ documents was found to be helpful for participants to recognize attributes and conditions for peak experiences. Participants appreciated these documents being displayed to assist with dreaming, visualizing, and creating peak experiences. Participants enthusiastically chose a creative way to present a dream using vivid and positive language. They used symbols or metaphors in their dream construction.

Participants expressed confidence and interest in developing their dream. Karen shared that as a result of this experience, she entered her classroom with a different mindset. This peak experience and other peak experiences were shared throughout the three day AI Learning Process. They reinforced the belief that participants were capable of creating peak experiences.

In addition to discovering how to identify peak experiences, the AI Learning Process guided participants to learn how to create peak experiences. During the third day of the AI Learning Process, Karen began the meeting by enthusiastically sharing a peak experience she had earlier in the day. She attributed this experience to intentionally creating conditions she believed were necessary for peak experiences. She believed because she had a clearer understanding of attributes found to influence peak experiences and because she had just completed a crafted dream from the prior day, she was better prepared to create the conditions conducive for a peak experience. Karen shared:

I entered my classroom this morning with a very positive attitude toward the day. Unfortunately, I heard a lot of negative comments and attitudes from my students. I took that moment to gather around on the carpet and discuss what I have been doing during this AI Learning Process and what it is all about. Finding the positive! We discussed different ways of turning what we might normally find negative to a positive. My students did a great job of coming up with ideas. Then I told them that the test was for them to show me in their actions throughout the day that they understood what this meant. I asked them to reflect and write about how they could be more positive. We talked about the glass being half full or half empty. And then I asked if they felt comfortable in sharing what they wrote and several did feel comfortable. They came up with some really great things. One of my little boys said, “When I mark off three of them,

I need to remember that I got eight right – not that I got three wrong.” I then said, “That’s just exactly what I’m looking for! That you remembered to value what another person did!”

Karen continued to share how this made her feel. She was elated to know that the AI Learning Process and extensive discussions about teacher peak experiences had a transformational effect on her life. Additional stories were shared giving evidence to participants that they were capable of creating peak experiences.

Some participants may have been less certain of how to identify peak experiences; however, over time commonalities were woven together and all participants developed a sharper sense of identifying and creating a peak experience. This experience of discovering how to identify peak experiences and the ecological conditions necessary to enter into a peak experience state provided participants with synergistic tools to bolster their confidence level in generating conditions conducive to peak experiences. Participants felt ready to move forward while expecting, identifying, and creating more peak experiences in their lives. These connections and influences were perceived as “life changing” and “transformational.”

The participants were already identified as people comfortable with sharing and discussing the notion of peak experiences in a teaching and learning context through an AI Learning Process. Now, however, they recognized their qualities and abilities to generate more peak experiences, propelling them into the next level of self-awareness and effortlessness in their desire to reach their fullest potential.

Finding 1 Summary

Data collected from participants revealed that the AI Learning Process experience allowed participants to discover how to clearly identify and create peak experiences and discover

the ecological conditions necessary for them to enter into a peak experience state. Discussions related to telling personal peak experience stories allowed participants to work backwards in time to recall antecedents and conditions of peak experiences. Furthermore, as participants shared experiences and revelations, they identified similarities and concluded there are multiple influences and opportunities for teacher peak experiences. While some may have begun the AI Learning Process feeling less certain of identifying peak experiences, over time they developed a clearer sense of identifying and creating peak experiences.

Finding 2: The Appreciative Inquiry Process Allowed the Participants to Recognize the Importance of Connecting with Each Other and Students

When a peak experience occurred for a participant in a teaching and learning context, it often involved a relationship with a student, colleague, or parent. When asked which of the themes seemed most important for peak experiences, everyone spoke to the issues of relationships and flexibility. This epiphany was discovered as participants recounted how individuals were valued and seen as people instead of role figures. In some situations the participant was connecting with a student on a personal level. Other times participants found the peak experience was a result of their abilities to change the way they looked at a child. While this was perceived as a result of an internal awareness, it still involved something with how the person connected with another. When participants changed how they viewed a student, or in some cases a colleague or parent, it transformed their feelings from negative to positive, resulting in a peak experience.

Linda recalled a time she connected with a student in a different way. When she changed how she viewed this student, it transformed her feelings of frustration and agitation to feelings of understanding, compassion, and caring. Linda sensed her peak experience the moment the

transformation occurred. Peter shared stories of a connection made with another student or a group of students. They involved his ability to be attuned and responsive to students' needs. He helped students achieve something thought unobtainable, resulting in a peak experience because he made a connection with the students.

Participants spoke of the importance of carefully creating and nurturing relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. They believed making connections was a powerful force because it connects teachers and others on social, emotional, and psychological levels. They discussed being able to enjoy their interaction with another, value a person's talents, help another person achieve something unique, or create a mutual need experience. They felt their needs were also satisfied, thus resulting in peak experiences.

Details of the connected nature of peak experiences varied. When thinking about what may have been occurring prior to a peak experience, participants remembered the experience involving underachieving students, uneasy feelings about a person's self worth or capability to function successfully, or an emotional turmoil about a particular setting. When, however, participants changed the way they responded to the situation to involve making a positive connection with another, a peak experience occurred. Claire remembered how she engaged her students in motivating, relevant activities that resulted in students feeling that work was play. Jane recalled when she connected with her students and motivated them to understand a difficult concept.

Through discussions and story telling of personal peak experiences, participants discovered peak experiences could be possibly created through developing interesting and energizing activities with students. By approaching teaching with fun and exciting activities, a domino effect could be unleashed—letting students feel that they belonged. Participants felt that

when a student's emotional need to belong was fulfilled, a change in attitude and behavior resulted and generated a peak experience for the participant.

Participants also spoke of their personal needs to belong and feel connected. They felt that these needs were met during the three day AI Learning Process. Affirmations were continually exchanged among participants. Many times comments were made regarding how much it meant to be able to connect with one another. When asked what most enlivened each participant about the AI Learning Process, Rita said:

It's the interaction that I had with my peers, the eight who were chosen for this group. It was the openness of being able to speak our minds . . . the relationships that evolved and what we learned from each other.

Karen also said:

The first thing is just the people . . . It was probably something I needed to do a long time ago. So I think that whole group togetherness, the cohesiveness that we felt, was something that I really, really got out of it. It was amazing!

Claire added, "I think that there were several things, but the one thing that meant a lot to me was the connectedness with our group." Ann shared, "It was nice that we could all connect in a comfortable setting." Nancy was more specific about the kind of connection with another that mattered most. She said, "It's the open, honest conversation, where you can say what you want without feeling judged or being afraid that you might offend someone." Linda reiterated this need by stating, "It helped taking time to talk together; helped me kind of refresh what and why I'm teaching." Paired interviews were found to be helpful in generating the connections participants identified as important. Peter shared:

The intimacy of the conversation that you have with somebody in paired interviews . . . and the [AI Learning Process], we were able to gradually open up, and break down some of those barriers . . . but seeing and being with different folks made a difference too. Visiting with Jane, visiting with Claire, that was beneficial because you're kind of set in your own little routine. That was one of the things that I really liked.

One of the most striking consistencies in the peak experience stories shared by participants was the identification of connecting with others. Participants readily agreed that connections with others were clear influences on peak experiences in a teaching and learning context. The culmination of the interactions between the participants was synergistic in that it energized them to move forward as a collective group, while expecting, identifying, and creating more peak experiences in their lives. This provided the confidence they needed to face challenges within their profession and relationships.

Finding 2 Summary

The AI Learning Process allowed the participants to identify and describe the importance of connecting with each other and students. The vision of interactively connecting with students, parents, and colleagues and connecting AI Learning Process participants with each other was a central theme to their peak experiences.

Participants spoke of the important issues of relationships and flexibility for peak experiences. They believed people need to connect and be able to respond to others' needs by adjusting personal behaviors and attitudes that in turn pave the way for peak experiences.

Finding 3: The Appreciative Inquiry Process Allowed the Participants to Identify Intrinsic Needs

Participants wondered if peak experiences might be a result of a need being satisfied. This insight was the result of participants describing conditions prior to peak experiences. Needs

of both the participant and the person or people involved in the peak experience were referred to in each peak experience story.

Participants identified the need to feel a sense of belongingness was evident in several situations prior to a peak experience. Participants recognized several positive emotions resulted when the need to belong was satisfied. For example, when participants felt connected with a student, or genuinely accepted the student, they looked forward to helping the student, which they believed helped them feel satisfied in their profession. They also recalled a sense of well-being with others when this feeling of belongingness was satisfied. They identified their need for joyful interaction was related to their students' need for a teacher who demonstrated love for teaching and genuine acceptance of students. They also recognized that creating a classroom atmosphere of acceptance, enthusiasm, and excitement in which students felt connected was an important part to achieving peak experiences.

Participants also identified that a peak experience occurred when their need to feel safe was satisfied. For example, Ann shared a peak experience where one of her students, Mark, was unnecessarily injured by another student named Sam. Mark's parents were rarely present at any school event. He was often ostracized by his peers, partly because he lived in a low socio-economic area and partly because he had a surly, unapproachable attitude. Ann recalled feeling Mark's safety and well-being were threatened by Sam and so she responded by defending Mark and confronting Sam. She spoke to Sam's father in Mark's presence. Ann shared, "My student watched as I became an advocate for him, the way I am usually an advocate for my children." Ann said that she felt a strong, binding, connection with Mark. "I could tell he felt pleased to have someone stand up for him." Ann shared the peak experience was a result of her protecting Mark, which she believed fulfilled Mark's safety and belonging needs.

One of Peter's stories reflected a similar peak experience insight resulting from the satisfaction of an esteem need. Peter talked about a 5th-grade student, Shannon, who had been diagnosed with autism and Asperger's Syndrome. Peter spoke of concerns with his personal self-esteem. He did not feel competent in working effectively as a teacher with Shannon.

Due to Shannon's exceptionality, a paraprofessional aide, Penny, was assigned to provide assistance especially during social situations; however, there were times when Penny was unsuccessful in getting Shannon to cooperate. There were days Penny had to remove Shannon from the classroom because she would exhibit heightened sensitivity, agitation, defiance, and disruptive behavior. One day that Penny was not available, Peter scheduled a cooperative learning activity involving partner work. He implemented a creative, yet simple approach that worked well. Shannon was part of the cooperative learning activity. It was the first time Peter successfully helped Shannon interact comfortably and cooperatively in a social setting. It was a milestone for Peter. For the first time he felt more competent and capable than ever before—especially in his ability to meet the needs of a unique child without the assistance of an aide.

Esteem needs were often identified as a precursor to a peak experience. Rita shared a situation where her esteem flourished, causing a peak experience. She told the story of a parent notifying her about a 5th-grade graduation ceremony. At the ceremony, a child read a story about his favorite teacher. The story was about Rita when the student was in kindergarten. With tears in her eyes, Rita shared how she had a rough school year right before she received this call. She felt the message from this parent “proved that at the end this year, receiving that phone call made me feel more confident in myself—thinking I'm still where I need to be.”

Karen felt her self-esteem needs were satisfied in two of her peak experience stories where she became confident in her ability to teach. In one of her stories, she remembered how “It

makes me feel good that I've helped a child get there. I've helped a child achieve who the child is now. It's great!" She felt this same sense of satisfaction the day her students exhibited excitement about taking a test.

When I look back on that experience, I still smile. I knew at that time that I had done my job well as an educator. I know that my students felt good about what they did, and that alone makes the whole experience a positive one.

The need to feel competent and to gain approval and recognition was a common theme among participants. Nancy had a struggling student, Angela, who loved to play school at home. Over the past two years, Nancy gave Angela several items such as books, paper, and office supplies to add to Angela's make-believe classroom. Nancy shared the warm response she always received from Angela whenever their paths crossed in the hall. Anytime Nancy sees the parents, they warmly embrace and exchange well-wishes. The connection has strengthened over time to the point that the parents recently gave Nancy a generous gift in support of her "above and beyond" care for Angela. Nancy spoke of Angela's mother,

I valued her just as much as she valued me. I didn't look to her like a mom, but more like a person . . . being able to make a bond with a parent and a student continually makes it worthwhile.

Some of the stories reflected peak experiences that were a result of a need for participants to experience compassion for others. Whenever participants focused on problems outside themselves, with a mission-oriented mind-set, peak experiences were often a result. Jane remembered a time when her students were unusually engaged and excited about learning a very difficult concept. She struggled with the concept but desperately wanted her students to understand, succeed, and feel good about this newfound knowledge. She shared her long and

tedious process to find a way to ensure that her students could master a particularly higher-level concept. The day she graded the students' products, it was greatly satisfying to find every student scored exceptionally well. Jane said:

[I am] elated that they finally got what I was trying to teach them . . . when I see in their eyes—they got it! Even when they don't, it just makes me want to be more determined to find a way to help them learn. I like that!

Claire shared personal needs that were satisfied and resulted in peak experiences. Claire's story took place when she was a teacher several years ago in another country. Her description of her peak experience was detailed. She identified the need to be autonomous and trusted in how she chose to teach the curriculum. She shared her need to accept self and others to the degree that she expressed comfort in her strengths and weaknesses and was not critical of others. She recalled reasons for her excitement during her peak experience. She was given a new curriculum supportive of a constructivist model and Vygotsky's interactive learning process.

Claire found the whole curriculum concept conducive to her philosophical persuasion that she considered was supportive of spontaneity and continued growth. She was allowed to freely explore resources and approaches. Claire found the challenge invigorating and was continually energized to find her students always immersed and engaged in the learning process. She experienced awe, pleasure, and wonder on a daily basis. She felt exceptionally aware of her environment and was not afraid of the unknown. Claire reflected that her self-actualizing needs were satisfied in this teaching experience.

Throughout the AI Learning Process, participants identified personal intrinsic needs. Participants felt the three-day AI Learning Process was full of moments in which personal intrinsic needs were satisfied; they believed these personal intrinsic needs attributed to more

peak experiences. Participants shared that their need for love and belongingness was met through their connection and reciprocal acceptance of all participants. They also identified esteem needs related to recognition that resulted in a peak experience to include feelings of prestige, acceptance, adequacy, competence, and confidence. Participants felt that participation in the AI Learning Process satisfied this need through kind, complimentary, and encouraging statements. Words spoken throughout the three-day process managed to bring tears, concerns, smiles, or laughs. Laughter was a common expression among participants that increased throughout the AI Learning Process.

Participants shared that all of the positive emotions they felt during the AI Learning Process satisfied a driving need to fulfill their potential as teachers and individuals. They believed the AI Learning Process experience was transformational. They believed that they were able to alter their negative emotions. As a result, they now felt calm, energized, and capable. Participants also felt the AI Learning Process invigorated them to embrace and celebrate their roles as teachers.

Finding 3 Summary

The appreciative inquiry process allowed participants to identify intrinsic needs. The AI Learning Process also allowed participants to satisfy many of these needs. Participants attributed the satisfaction of these needs to their sense of well-being and peak experiences.

Participants recognized that their intrinsic needs were satisfied in past peak experiences, as well as, during the AI Learning Process. They felt positive emotions and were energized when they spoke of transferring their positive feelings to their classrooms and personal lives.

Finding 4: The Appreciative Inquiry Process Allowed Participants to Validate Themselves and Others as Worthwhile People

Throughout the AI Learning Process, participants began to recognize the value in themselves and others as worthwhile people. This specific finding often occurred when connecting with another; however, it occurred in other situations as well. Valuing self and others was closely interrelated to peak experiences. How participants interacted with each other and how they had formed relationships sometimes determined a peak experience. They talked about a sense of value based on authenticity and caring. They recognized their desire to feel they were part of a greater whole. They shared ways they saw themselves treating others and ways others treated them. They suggested that to create peak experiences, it is important to focus on valuing people and relationships. When they helped others and showed care, concern, and support, they believed they were less apt to falter and more apt to have peak experiences.

Participants shared that valuing others generated more peak experiences. During the three days, they took time to reflect on their past experiences that involved students. Taking time to think about a student's actions and taking time to embrace or appreciate the experience was found to possibly generate peak experiences. The act of valuing past experiences was found to sometimes generate a peak experience.

Participants also saw the importance of valuing students and others by reflecting on their lives and personal struggles while simultaneously noticing the abilities the students had to offer. When peak experiences occurred, participants recalled valuing the opportunity, resulting in feeling energized, refreshed, or transformed. Additionally, participants began to value their colleagues, to include those outside of the AI Learning Process. When participants perceived a colleague, student, or parent was ambivalent, disinterested, or judgmental, they recalled feeling

defensive and prone to negatively react. The participants discussed this type of reaction and believed that it would not help the situation and that it was not conducive for a peak experience.

Participants were asked to share an elevator story about the AI Learning Process. This activity helped underscore the need to value others Ann stated:

Well, to put more people on that elevator . . . As much as I enjoy this AI group, I don't want to become an exclusive group . . . a lot of people aren't here because I think they didn't feel comfortable with the situation. They shouldn't be excluded. So my elevator experience would be: let's all get on the elevator and let's all try to take it somewhere . . . try to view them in a positive manner.

Participants recognized the importance of valuing others outside of the AI Learning Process and saw it as a contributing factor for the peak experiences felt during this three-day process. Participants felt inspired and comfortable to be vulnerable about revealing their personal weaknesses and struggles. They believed they were competent individuals who had significant and valuable perspectives of the meaning of peak experiences. They cared intensely about the AI group. They revealed their differences and felt accepted. All of these experiences were believed to be the results of valuing self and others that resulted in peak experiences throughout the process.

Participants admitted there are some students, colleagues, and parents who are easier to support than others. They, however, also believed that when people overcome a perceived challenge, this creates a sense of accomplishment—resulting in peak experiences. Participants valued everyone who participated in the AI Learning Process. They valued their accomplishments and their ability to prevail and overcome the perceived inconvenience of the

timing, or the unimportance of the topic of the AI Learning Process about peak experiences. The participants believed they acted courageously in participating in this study. Linda said:

I feel that our staff really needs an energy boost and those who are lacking that genuine energy need to open up and accept it instead of judging us for taking the courage to step forward and help in this peak experience [research].

Karen shared how her value of others affected her decision to participate in this study. She shared:

Well, we knew that with our action research [through the master's coursework] we have our classroom. We have students easily accessible to us in our classroom all day long to help us conduct our research; where you, as an administrator doing this study, need us to be able to conduct your research. We felt like we should be there for you.

Claire also shared why she participated in the study:

For me, this is a professional issue. As teachers, we share a common environment and we share a level of curiosity about our life experiences. Helping colleagues is another part of being professional. We are not in isolation. We do not do our best work in isolation by shutting our door. I was excited that I was going to get a chance to interact with you in a way that I've not had an opportunity for the longest time. And I missed it.

The participants believed that a collaborative culture that values everyone and has close relationships is powerful and an important condition for peak experiences. They felt that teachers need to value others by respecting, building, and drawing on relationships. Those who step outside of self and do so for others can generate peak experience conditions.

Participants acknowledged a surge of respect or appreciation for others who demonstrate acts of courage. They valued each participant for exhibiting a level of courage to participate in a

study on peak experiences. This act of courage was identified when they discussed characteristics thought to be inherent of people, particularly those in the AI Learning Process group, who were comfortable recalling or speaking about peak experiences.

Participants said they thought the topic of peak experiences may be perceived as something not everyone is comfortable exploring. Because of that, the eight participants said it took courage on their part to participate in the research process. They valued this trait and believed it was a contributing factor of people who are comfortable exploring concepts not commonly embraced. Participants also valued each other's openness and positive attitude to contribute to the field of education and to value another colleague.

Participants shared peak experiences sometimes resulted from having courage and energy to advocate for students and others. To advocate for a colleague in need of help, a student who is belligerent or unmotivated, a parent who is unappreciative—takes courage; yet, participants found when courage is displayed, it was contagious and others were able to draw from that courage which in turn created an energizing peak experience.

As time passed during the AI Learning Process, the level of appreciation for one another increased. Participants felt the elements of the AI Learning Process created an environment conducive for transferring new knowledge about peak experiences into participants' personal lives, professional career. The AI Learning Process convinced participants to apply aspects of the process to their teaching and personal lives in support of creating more peak experiences.

Finding 4 Summary

The AI process allowed people to validate themselves and others as worthwhile people. Participants viewed themselves and others as important members of the school organization.

They recognized to become at ease with self is to totally accept oneself. They also recognized that to accept others was important as well.

Participants were grateful for being understood and valued during the AI Learning Process and outside the AI Learning Process. They believed the level of genuine respect and value expressed toward another affects the comfort level of a person to be open and determines the likelihood of peak experiences. Participants believed all of these aspects were needed to enhance the ecological conditions for peak experiences.

Finding 5: The Appreciative Inquiry Experience Identified the Importance of Recalling and Sharing Peak Experience Stories

Through the AI Learning Process participants identified the importance of recalling and sharing peak experience stories. It appears peak experiences produced greater feelings of self-confidence and a deeper sense of meaning and purpose for each participant. The way participants felt during and at the end of the AI Learning Process underscored the importance of reflection where participants identified, recalled, and shared peak experience stories.

Claire's statement reflected what participants said in different ways during the three-day experience, "I was pleased to hear all of the others' positive reflections of the day as well. I think that the ability of this group to share is wonderful." They shared feelings about this time of the school year being rife with anxiety, stress, and ambiguity. They felt that taking time to frame their perspective through the use of asset language was a welcomed relief from other situations where they were exposed to people who were arrogant, inflexible, and unsupportive of collaboration. Participants embraced one another for being empathetic, responsible, flexible, tolerant of stressful situations, and optimistic. High levels of flexibility, and an ability to be open

and responsive to others' needs, were considered prime traits of people who have peak experiences.

Participants said that taking time to recall peak experiences helped them realize and reaffirm their calling as teachers. When asked what was valued most in the peak experience, Ann's response was, "It affirms what you've done and why you work so hard." Participants felt hearing others' stories would strengthen their capacity as teachers. Ann hoped "to hear some valuable insights from other teachers." Karen believed a discussion around something positive such as peak experiences would "pull a group together." Ann saw value in recalling peak experiences to know "how we get to where we are now." Nancy believed, "Talking about peak experiences may help other staff members realize their value and worth as a teacher." Peter added, "Anytime you can make those personal connections with others [it is worthwhile]."

Participants believed recognizing peak experiences generated a sense of well-being and excitement. After recalling a recent peak experience, Claire exclaimed, "Oh! I just bounced down the hall . . . You don't realize how good that feels!" Participants shared their peak experiences for three days; this generated enthusiasm among participants. Peter reflected:

I think that the overall feeling of the group itself . . . was a benefit across the board for everybody. There wasn't anybody who came out of the process without making a difference to someone. It was life changing.

Finding 5 Summary

The AI experience identified the importance of recalling and sharing peak experience stories. All participants in the AI Learning Process found that through sharing peak experience stories, relationships were invigorated and energized.

Participants believed that sharing peak experiences creates an environment contagious and open for more peak experiences. They felt that more dialogue and access to more details about peak experiences generates more peak experiences.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provided the findings from data collected during this study. The five salient findings were: (1) The AI experience allowed participants to identify and create peak experiences, and discover the ecological conditions necessary for them to enter into a peak experience state; (2) The AI process allowed participants to recognize the importance of connecting with each other and students; (3) The AI process allowed participants to identify intrinsic needs; (4) The AI process allowed people to validate themselves and others as worthwhile people; (5) The AI experience identified the importance of recalling and sharing peak experience stories with others. Chapter five will provide implications for further research, implications for practice and recommendations, relationships of results to theory, limitations, and a summary and conclusion.

CHAPTER 5

My study was designed to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. I organize this chapter by first restating the purpose of the study, then providing a summary of the literature review and methodology. I then restate the research questions, and then follow with a summary of the findings. I then proceed to discuss each of my findings. After I discuss my findings, I present the implications for future research, the implications for praxis and recommendations, the relationship of the findings to relevant theory, the limitations that emerged in my study, and a summary and conclusions.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state.

Summary of Literature Review

Information directly related to empirical research regarding peak experiences in a teaching and learning context was limited. Ample research relates peak experiences to AI, as well as humanistic psychology; however, the empirical research did not indicate a relationship to peak experiences of teachers in a teaching and learning context. The available research on peak experiences provided information about the characteristics, precursors, and benefits of peak experiences as it relates to people in the work place, the arts, and athletics. Empirical research was also available to gain an understanding of the various physiological, emotional, or psychological effects of peak experiences on the human being.

In the field of psychology, the evidence of ample research as it relates to the phenomenon of peak experiences or variations of peak experiences legitimizes the notion of this heightened

emotional state of being called peak experiences. Variations of peak experiences have been explored to include the notion of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), *optimal experience* (Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000), *optimal psychological functioning* (Waterman, 1990), *ideal performance state* (Druckman & Bjork, 1991; Unestahl, 1986), *well-being* (Waterman et al., 2003), *fuller state of functioning* (Salanova et al., 2006), and *the zone* (Murphy & White, 1995). In research on peak experiences or variations previously mentioned, a person emanates characteristics such as a sense of personal identity, self-actualization, an internal locus of control, intrinsic motivation, a sense of control, and a strong sense of purpose (Maslow, 1959a, 1959b, 1961, 1962).

The empirical research on peak experiences was expansive in nature, despite the absence of how peak experiences relate to teachers. The available empirical research extensively addressed variations of peak experiences similar to how peak experiences are described, and characteristics or aspects of peak experiences. Methodologies used in the available empirical research to study peak experiences included (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, and (c) mixed methods which focused on (a) advanced human behaviors, (b) the connection of peak experiences to other factors, or (c) the relationship of peak experiences to student engagement. Researchers identified ecological and personal conditions for peak experiences to include but not limited to situations related to (a) need-satisfaction, (b) goal setting, (c) challenge and control, (d) quest for wholeness, and (e) well-being. Outcomes of peak experiences were identified in empirical research and involved (a) a sense of union with others, (b) empowerment of self, and (c) a heightened sense of self.

Research using an AI theoretical research design and/or humanistic psychology related peak experiences to people. The empirical research using an AI perspective as it relates to peak experiences provided examples of how the AI process has been used to facilitate organizations to

change procedures, policies, or processes connected to the positive core by having individuals recall personal peak experiences. The empirical research using humanistic psychology as it relates to peak experiences revealed various components of the causes of peak experiences and the effects peak experiences have on individuals. While empirical research related to peak experiences using AI or humanistic psychology exists, minimal research using these perspectives exists as it relates to peak experiences and teachers. It is evident a link exists between humanistic psychology and an AI theoretical perspective because both perspectives initiate a positive perspective to explore questions about what makes life fulfilling and meaningful. Most importantly to this study, humanistic psychology and AI were thought to help understand the concept of a fully functioning individual by describing the peak capacity of human potential and contribute to, reinforce, and maintain similar behavior during an extended period of time.

Methodology

The basic design of my study was a qualitative case study conducted through a three-day AI Learning Process to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. The AI Learning Process is similar to the process used in an AI Summit. The unit of analysis was eight participants purposively selected to participate in this study. The participants were all teachers from Martin Elementary.

Research Questions

This study answered the following two research questions:

1. How do classroom teachers describe their peak experiences in a teaching and learning context?

2. How do classroom teachers describe the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state?

Summary of Findings

Five salient findings were derived from my data analysis. They are listed below.

Finding 1: The appreciative inquiry experience allowed participants to identify and create peak experiences and discover the ecological conditions necessary for them to enter into a peak experience state.

Finding 2: The appreciative inquiry process allowed participants to recognize the importance of connecting with each other and students.

Finding 3: The appreciative inquiry process allowed participants to identify intrinsic needs.

Finding 4: The appreciative inquiry process allowed participants to validate themselves and others as worthwhile people.

Finding 5: The appreciative inquiry experience identified the importance of recalling and sharing peak experience stories.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, I will discuss my findings in the context of the five principles of AI: (a) the constructionist principle, (b) the principle of simultaneity, (c) the poetic principle, (d) the anticipatory principle, and (e) the positive principle. The participants were affected immediately by the power of the AI Learning Process. Change occurred from the first activity through the conclusion of the AI Learning Process. I will discuss how and why change occurred dramatically and concurrently with participants in the process through each of the five principles that inspired AI practice.

The Constructionist Principle

The constructionist principle is one of the five scholarly lines of inquiry considered central to AI's theory base of change. This principle is based on the premise that reality is created or constructed and determined by people through their interaction with and within a social system. Reality is constructed through symbolic and mental processes. The act of learning, the act of acquiring knowledge, and the destiny of that organization are interwoven. Furthermore, the individual is replaced with the relationship as a locus of knowledge (Chapagain, 2004).

In this study, the AI Learning Process allowed participants to co-create or construct meaning about (a) how to identify and describe peak experiences, (b) what ecological conditions are necessary to create peak experiences, to include the satisfaction of intrinsic needs, and (c) the importance of connecting with each other and students.

Constructing Meaning about How to Identify and Describe Peak Experiences

The iterative nature of the AI Learning Process facilitated a constructivist occurrence in that every activity provided participants a different perspective, facilitating participants in identifying aspects and ecological conditions of peak experiences. This AI Learning Process provided participants varied and frequent activities designed to maintain a focus on an affirmative topic of peak experiences, while tapping into the positive core of the participants as individuals and as a group. Participants were exposed to group and individual hands-on creation and reflective experiences that led to expansive and collective thinking about teacher peak experiences. The opportunity to reflect and engage in dialogue allowed participants to connect their past stories of peak experiences to their beliefs in their abilities to create peak experiences in the present and future.

Constructing Meaning about Ecological Conditions

While constructing meaning about the ecological conditions necessary for peak experiences, participants discovered intrinsic needs were at times precursors to peak experiences. This awareness is also aligned with how Maslow (1970a) believed people have the intrinsic need to satisfy five levels of basic needs (a) physiological, (b) safety, (c) belongingness and love, (d) esteem, and (e) self-actualization. Maslow attributed satisfaction of basic needs to peak experiences. Research has found the satisfaction of intrinsic goals to include self-acceptance, belongingness, and self-actualization result in a higher level of well-being than with extrinsic goals to include materialism, wealth, and physical attractiveness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). I believe the revelation of ecological conditions involving the satisfaction of basic needs was a result of the AI Learning Process in facilitating collective and enlightening dialogue throughout the three-day process.

Constructing Meaning about the Importance of Connecting with Others

The AI Learning Process was conducive for constructing meaning of peak experiences because it enabled participants to gain a sense of personal connection with others. This became an essential and valued experience for participants' understanding of peak experiences. The participants understood and affirmed each other's perspectives and because of this, participants gained a clearer understanding of peak experiences. They came to appreciate the diversity among themselves and a higher level of trust and collaboration emerged. As participants engaged in interaction and dialogue, they disclosed previously hidden possibilities about peak experiences. It became evident to the participants that when people are brought together to collectively construct and create positive instructional scenarios, life-changing, transformational, and

intensely significant experiences may occur that positively affect the self-image and well-being of the teacher.

Validation of self and others were outcomes of peak experiences and the AI Learning Process. Peak experiences, whether from personal stories recalled by participants or peak experiences that occurred during the AI Learning Process, often involved validation of self or others. Through validating self and others, participants restored and reinforced the sense of self-worth, meaning of teaching, and personal identity and competence through a variety of AI activities that included interactions with people at school and with other participants during the AI Learning Process.

Through the AI Learning Process, participants operated as a collective group or bounded system, reinforcing the constructionist principle. Knowledge of a social phenomenon resides in the collectivity of a group (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). William James captured the concept of social self which placed emphasis and importance on the person and environment interacting (James, 1902/2002). Whatever problem or topic people are working on face-to-face in a group, the personality is modified and socialized, resulting in some form of change (Thelen, 1954). It is through groups that people learn, construct meaning, practice, grow, and change their roles in the larger organization (Srivastva, Obert, & Neilsen, 1977).

The Principle of Simultaneity

The principle of simultaneity recognizes that inquiry and change occur simultaneously. As one asks questions, what is said, becomes implicit. The questions set the stage for the constructed meaning (Cooperrider, 1990). As participants, for example, explored the notion of ecological conditions, they experienced their personal basic needs being satisfied through the AI Learning Process. They believed this experience created more peak experiences. Some of their

physiological needs were met through meetings being held in participants' comfortable homes and through the provisions of snacks, beverages, materials, and laptops. Safety needs were met, through the caring and accepting support between the participants, which generated trust and well-being. Belongingness and love needs were satisfied as participants gained attentiveness, affection, acceptance, and interest from one another throughout the AI Learning Process. Esteem needs were satisfied prior to peak experiences as a result of feelings of affirmation or self-confidence. Self-actualization needs were satisfied through interactive and interpersonal opportunities in which participants experienced what has been referred to as being values (a) truth, (b) goodness, (c) beauty, (d) wholeness, (e) aliveness, (f) uniqueness, (g) perfection, (h) completion, (i) justice/rightness, (j) simplicity, (k) richness, (l) effortlessness, (m) playfulness, and (n) self-sufficiency (Maslow, 1970b). At the same time participants discovered and spoke to ecological conditions of past peak experiences, similar ecological conditions occurred during the AI Learning Process resulting in peak experiences.

The principle of simultaneity was evident as participants shared their stories of peak experiences and engaged in inquiry about peak experiences, change occurred. The act of inquiry and change are synergistic; one cannot happen without the other. As was the case with the participants, because they were deeply inquiring about peak experiences, a positive change occurred simultaneously. Inquiry and change were inseparable as a result of participants immersing themselves in conversations and storytelling about peak experiences. The image of what peak experiences looked and felt like was sharpened and activated, causing participants to experience a metamorphosis in that not only did they encounter more peak experiences, they sensed a change in their perceptions of self and others.

The Poetic Principle

The essence of the poetic principle is that any topic is open for discussion and study (Sanchez, Moscov, Nyland, & Smith, 2003). Life is constantly being co-authored and each unique point in time, the place, and the new experience generate a different perspective worthy of consideration. The iterative nature of the AI Learning Process was conducive to this principle in that each new day and each new activity generated another facet regarding teacher peak experiences.

For the merits of the poetic principle to take hold, participants needed to be open to discuss the topic of peak experiences. Fortunately, these eight participants were open to share and explore the notion of peak experiences and believed each person had something to offer the discussion. They valued the perspective of each person and they grew more excited each day as the story of peak experiences evolved.

Reluctance to being open to the topic of peak experiences would have likely prevented this research from being conducted; resulting in what a writer of a poetic piece of literature would call a writer's block. The AI Learning Process facilitated the participants to co-author a description of peak experiences; however, the participants had to first be open and responsive and remain as such throughout the evolving discussion. Maslow (1965) suggested reluctance to report peak experiences may be equated to what he called desacralization. Desacralization is a person's denial of the sacred dimension of everyday experiences. He concluded desacralization resulted from low self-esteem and avoidance or suppression of intense emotion, which may lead to elation or pain. Maslow's conclusions are aligned with another study on peak experiences in which various factors were found that led a person to share or not share peak experiences (Davis, Lockwood, & Wright, 1991). Factors included (a) the experience was very special, intimate, and

personal; (b) the person felt others would not share the same value or appreciation for the experience; (c) the person did not feel he or she could adequately describe the peak experience; (d) the person did not understand how to recognize a peak experience; (e) the person felt the power of the experience would be lessened if shared; or (f) the person was afraid he or she would be thought to be unbalanced.

For the purposes of this study, the poetic principle took shape because the participants were not reluctant to discuss teacher peak experiences. They were open and trusting of the process to allow their understanding of teacher peak experiences to grow and evolve into a rich, thick description, similar to a good piece of poetry or literature.

Aligned with the poetic principle, the participants wrote a new chapter for their lives through the AI Leadership Process. Because they freely spoke about their world of teaching with a focus on peak experiences, they created a new life script that involved excitement and potential. Peak experiences began to multiply, and their positive frame of mind strengthened. The participants grew in their awareness of how the direction of their gaze clearly impacts the outcome of their role as teachers. They adopted a new way of thinking—to reflect and recall highlights, successes, and peak experiences while teaching and to speak about these experiences with others. This new of thinking generates more positive experiences.

The Anticipatory Principle

The premise of the anticipatory principle is that image inspires action (Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Newman, 2001). Thought precedes action — what is visualized has a direct impact on the action taken. The AI Learning Process facilitated participants to dream and design a clearly visualized image of teacher peak experiences. As a result, participants were able to create more peak experiences because “a vivid imagination compels the whole body to obey it,”

(Aristotle, in Sheikh, 1984, p. 5). Just as plants grow in the direction of sunlight, I observed that these participants grew and created peak experiences as a result of choosing to focus on teacher peak experiences.

The anticipatory principal was evident as participants identified peak experiences. Participants recalled that peak experiences were sometimes a result of feeling expectant due to a clearly defined goal or outcome. This discovery was reinforced as participants had peak experiences during the AI Learning Process after they more clearly described what peak experiences looked like. After participants crafted their dream statement and created their map of high potential design, participants reported more peak experiences and feelings of well-being. It became evident as participants anticipated teacher peak experiences and visually reflected on what this meant, they developed the ability to create additional peak experiences. Their thoughts preceded new action as a result of their anticipation.

The Positive Principle

The positive principle recognizes that building and sustaining momentum for change requires discussion that pivots around large amounts of positive effect and collective bonding. There are several examples where the AI Learning Process supported this principle. First, the AI process requires all discussion to pivot around an affirmative topic, and in this study, the affirmative topic was to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. This affirmative topic was posted and reviewed throughout the AI Learning Process with the intent to accomplish the purpose of the research study.

Second, every activity was guided through the use of previously constructed protocols designed with positive questions to conduct an inquiry about teacher peak experiences. Through

The AI Learning Process all protocols, activities, and the agenda were rooted in positive imagery. The components of the AI process were intended to provide each participant opportunities to describe and practice creating peak experiences.

Third, the participants maintained a positive focus as they explored the common processes, pathways, actions, and patterns that attract or even cause peak experiences. This positive perspective not only influenced the generative upward spiral for more positive discoveries, it influenced perspectives initially viewed as negative. Participants, for example, realized in a school setting, emotions frequently run high and often represent differences of opinion. They believed that teachers and parents often express doubts or reservations and sometimes opposition to new directions. Initially, they saw these forces as influences that prevent peak experiences; however, as the AI process progressed, participants recognized these obstacles as opportunities to attach a positive perspective. They found as they reframed their thinking and shifted negative energy to positive energy, this pivotal action generated a sense of accomplishment and enormous sense of well-being that resulted in a peak experience.

Fourth, participants discovered having a positive view of self and others may possibly cultivate more peak experiences. This recognition of valuing self and others is grounded in various empirical research studies in psychology. Every person is given a purpose to recognize the value of themselves and others (Ishiyama, 1993). This is based on the individual's desire to actualize his or her potential. A correlation exists between competency and a belief in oneself to use skills effectively, and it has been found that teachers who have a high sense of efficacy about their abilities are effective at motivating struggling students (Bandura, 1986). In alignment with the positive principle, Carl Rogers (1961), another influential humanistic psychologist, valued the notion of self and believed there is a need for positive regard for self and others. He believed

that everyone has a tendency to reach his or her fullest potential or to become self-actualized by accepting and valuing self and others. Participants received and gave support from one another throughout the AI Learning Process. It became evident that personal resources to include self-efficacy beliefs and peak experiences had a positive influence on participants. The AI Learning Process facilitated participants to maintain a positive perspective as they explored the notion of teacher peak experiences.

Through the AI Learning Process participants (a) maintained a focus on an affirmative topic, (b) answered positive questions throughout the inquiry process, (c) maintained a positive perspective, and (d) discovered a positive view of self and others. As is true of the positive principle, a positive focus of teacher peak experiences allowed participants to (a) enlarge their focus on the potential good in teaching; (b) increase feelings of solidarity with each other; and (c) increase their confidence in the ability to describe, recall, and create peak experiences.

Implications for Future Research

This study presents multiple opportunities for future research. One research opportunity would be action-research that focuses on the application of peak experiences and its impact on teacher performance using an AI theoretical research perspective. The use of an AI theoretical research perspective coupled with the purpose of discovering the impact that describing and creating more peak experiences have on teaching offers a socially beneficial perspective to the field of teaching. If peak experiences do, as the present data suggests, encourage teachers to be more effective, then it is important that further research explore this possibility. Although interest has been reflected in research as to the impact peak experiences have on performance, practically all of this interest has been derived from volunteered accounts outside of teaching or from clinical studies (Wuthnow, 1978). Applying AI to peak experiences and its impact on

teacher performance over time could have direct implications to the research on effective teaching.

Longitudinal research would be conducive to understanding the impact of peak experiences on teacher performance. A year-long study using all four stages of the AI process would provide researchers an opportunity to see the impact of recognizing and creating peak experiences has on teaching and learning.

Researchers may explore the possibility of nonpeakers having similar experiences through an AI theoretical research process as found by peakers in this study. Since Maslow's (1962) studies revealed everyone has peak experiences, and there are those who cannot recognize these experiences, it would be interesting to explore if the AI process facilitates non-peakers to recognize their peak experiences and develop the capability to create additional peak experiences.

Researchers may seek to understand if students can be taught how to recognize and create peak experiences. Again, the use of an AI theoretical research perspective coupled with the purpose of discovering the impact that describing and creating more peak experiences has on learning offers a socially beneficial perspective to the field of education.

Using organizational culture theory, researchers could examine the ecological conditions conducive to peak experiences in a teaching and learning context. Exploring the intricacies of an organization's culture in a school where peak experiences are reported could inform educators of effective practices that address cultural aspects of a school that affect decision making structures, policies, allocation of resources, space and time, feedback and communication mechanisms (Senge et al., 2000).

Another area of research could involve administrators. Describing peak experiences of educational administrators might offer important insights related to effective leadership. Such a study may describe the impact of peak experiences on the organizational culture from the perspective of those in decision-making positions.

Implications for Praxis and Recommendations

I offer the following implications for praxis. Understanding the value peak experiences have on teachers in a teaching and learning context will help educators recognize another important facet to the field of teaching. I recommend that teachers and administrators explore and create positive emotions to include peak experiences in the educational work place. Positive emotions broaden people's thought processes and behavior, encouraging them to discover unique ways to think and behave (Fredrickson, 2003). When teachers and administrators are guided to describe and create positive emotions as they relate to peak experiences, it is likely performance and feelings of well-being can be enhanced, as was the case in my study. Similar results were found in a study of 138 college students during two assessment periods. For the college students, it was reported positive emotions initiated enhanced feelings of well-being and broadened attention and cognition (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Thus, methods and means for cultivating peak experiences and other positive emotions should be sought since to generate an upward spiral toward optimal functioning (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003).

I recommend that teachers and administrators devise strategies for increasing the frequency and comfort to discuss peak experiences. I believe teachers and administrators can practice discussing peak experiences in safe and supportive cultures. They can also examine the ways others have described peak experiences, thus, allowing the expression, description, and identification of the most valuable experiences of their professions. Strategies supportive of

recalling and openly sharing peak experience stories, would also generate more enthusiasm and more frequent peak experiences.

I recommend teachers and administrators become well versed in the practice of the AI process. The AI process deserves further examination by educators concerned with teams and team development. A teacher's world is permeable, emergent, and open to the influence of how the teacher thinks about his or her world. Through AI, the situations a teacher or administrator faces can be reconstructed, strengthened, and often profoundly created through the teacher's images, intentions, plans, beliefs, and values. This study reflected the empowering results inherent in the use of the AI process with regard to a teaching and learning context. When the affirmative topic of the AI process is centered on peak experiences, as occurred in this study, PK-12 teachers and administrators have the potential to become rejuvenated. The AI theoretical perspective seeks to empower people through facilitating the telling of stories guided by open ended positive questions designed to discover the source of vitality of a person or organization when functioning at a peak level. Through the four stages of AI, while describing and creating peak experiences, teachers and administrators can experience mutual valuing and affirmation — creating collaborative learning and social transformation (Tenkasi, 2000).

I offer five reasons why the AI process focused on peak experiences should be a common practice for teachers and administrators. First, focusing on peak experiences through the AI process has the potential to empower teachers to share positive experiences, and to engage in conversations about hope and renewal. An assumption of AI is that images of the future are created through social interactions within a group. This experience influences the direction in which the group moves; therefore, through group identification and creation of peak experiences, group action is guided in a positive direction.

Second, regardless of the topic under study, the AI process can facilitate teachers in recognizing the importance of connecting with each other and students. The AI principle is inherent in ideal human relationships. When someone believes in another and sees strengths in another, he or she has the powerful ability to affect a person's self esteem. AI has made inroads into education to include the use of AI to discover and amplify the traits of people engaged in effective relationships found to enhance the school culture (Henry, 2003). Guiding teachers and administrators to participate in an AI process can strengthen relationships that in turn strengthen the culture of the school.

Third, the AI process, with a focus on the affirmative topic of peak experiences, can facilitate teachers and administrators in identifying and satisfying intrinsic needs. A link exists between intrinsic need satisfaction and peak experiences (Maslow, 1970a). Providing teachers and administrators with experiences to identify and satisfy intrinsic needs through an AI process may be advantageous for them to create peak experiences, thus, generating optimal functioning. In my study, the AI process facilitated participants in identifying various intrinsic needs of self and others. Through the AI Learning Process, participants identified personal esteem needs and found these needs were met through affirmation of one another and through a sense of confidence that was gained in their evolving ability to identify and create peak experiences. These experiences satisfied intrinsic needs and resulted in participants having more peak experiences, which participants credited to their optimistic countenance. The AI process, with a focus on peak experiences, may have the same results for other teachers and administrators.

Fourth, the AI process can facilitate teachers and administrators in validating themselves as worthwhile people. Instead of searching for weaknesses to correct or problems to solve, AI begins with a search for the best in people. By using an AI evaluative approach that focuses on

what is working, teachers and administrators can gain information about the strengths of self and others in the profession of teaching. This may create positive momentum of more valuing of self and others. Through guiding teachers and administrators to craft positive, deep story questions in support of discovery, dreaming, designing, and destiny, they can learn to reflect, evaluate, affirm, support, appreciate, and value the positive core in people and organizations.

Fifth, the AI experience can enlighten teachers and administrators to the importance of recalling and sharing peak experience stories. Human communication is the guiding factor that creates, strengthens, and transforms reality. Image theory holds that on what we choose to focus influences our decisions and practice – image inspires action (Fitzgerald et al., 2001). The recalling and sharing of peak experiences are primary ways to better an organization's process or an individual's personhood. The expression of peak experiences excites people because positive language has the capacity to generate positive -emotions. Dialogue is a powerful means for transforming the status quo. When language is asset in nature, it holds profound implications for change (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Relationship of Findings to Relevant Theory

The conceptual framework for this study was centered on my beliefs, experience, assumptions, epistemology, and theoretical perspectives. My beliefs, assumptions, and experience as a teacher, instructional coach, administrator, and graduate student helped me frame the conceptual framework of this study. My study was grounded in constructionist epistemology that was reflected in the emergent design and in the data collection process in which all participants' viewpoints were included. The use of a constructionist epistemology that supports an emergent design offered the ability to maintain an adaptive, open, and responsive stance as situations changed and emerged throughout the research process.

The theoretical perspectives selected in my conceptual framework included appreciative inquiry and humanistic psychology. Findings in this study reflected patterns inherent in my theoretical perspectives. The research design, methodology, review of literature, data collection protocols, and the AI Learning Process, support the notion to focus research toward purposefully identifying, describing, and creating peak experiences. AI and humanistic psychology offer a positive orientation to thinking and making sense of our world and my research offered a new purpose and positive orientation for educational praxis and research.

This research positively affected eight participants while engaged in an AI Learning Process. Consistent with Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) perspectives, this research was supportive of a generative theory in action which has the ability to alter patterns of behavior. Participants not only identified and described peak experiences, they created peak experiences that they reported positively altered and affected their behavior as teachers.

Evidence of the influence of intentionality was present throughout this research study which is aligned with both an AI theoretical perspective (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999) and humanistic psychology (May, 1965). The protocols developed and used in this study intended to positively orient participants to engage in thought processes and dialogue to successfully capture a rich description of teacher peak experiences. Thus, intentionality turned participants' minds toward an object – to describe and create peak experiences. Intentionality was an underlying structure for this study and as is true of both the AI theoretical perspective and humanistic psychology, the measures taken to intentionally structure the conditions conducive for participants to describe and create peak experiences influenced the success of accomplishing the intended purpose of this study; participants successfully described peak experiences and the

ecological conditions necessary for them to enter into a peak experience state and successfully discovered how to create peak experiences.

A relationship to humanistic psychology was evident between how the participants behaved during the AI Learning Process and the core principles of humanistic psychology. According to the core principles of humanistic psychology, people are viewed as (a) being at their best, (b) becoming more complete, (c) having the ability to direct and change their guiding motives, (d) behaving intentionally, (e) experiencing outcomes as a result of their orientation, (f) constructing intentions and moving toward what is constructed, and (g) capable of becoming fully functioning to reach their highest level of capacity (DeCarvalho, 1991). These principles were evident in how the participants in the AI Learning Process exhibited the ability to intentionally direct and change their experiences as teachers to create more peak experiences. As a result of orientation toward constructing peak experiences throughout the AI Learning Process, participants successfully created peak experiences.

Organizational culture emerged as an explanatory theory. Organizational culture is a theoretical perspective to describe teacher peak experiences and to identify the necessary ecological conditions for the participants to enter into a peak experience state.

The situations the participants faced while teaching were reconstructed, strengthened, and often created through their images, intentions, plans, beliefs, and values. The participants believed that a culture that is caring, supportive, and affirming generates the conditions conducive for creating peak experiences. Schein (2004) devoted extensive research to the notion of organizational culture, its design, and effect on performance. He found the design of culture that is learning oriented, flexible, and adaptive is needed for any type of reform or organizational

learning. Organizations conducive for change bare similar characteristics as those described by participants in this study.

The participants in this study spoke to a desire to change the culture of their school to become one that is more caring and supportive of differences. They believed the culture impacts behavior and creates the ecological conditions supportive of peak experiences. Conditions identified by participants as conducive for peak experiences include a culture where positive relationships are nurtured and valued. This is aligned with research on organizational culture indicating the impact of culture on behavior (Barkdoll, 2004).

Significance of the Study

Currently, extensive research on peak experiences exists as it relates to the workplace environment (Allison & Duncan, 1992; Drucker, 1992; Katzenbach, 2000), personality (Allport, 1961; Jung, 1964; Maslow, 1968b; Rogers, 1961), altruists (Blake, 1978; Lee et al., 2005; Sorokin, 1950), and the arts, limited research exists on the study of peak experiences as it relates to teaching (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Hamilton & Robson, 2006; Krampe, 1962; Maslow, 1968a). This study extended the current literature on peak experiences by describing peak experiences of classroom teachers. Through the lens of an AI theoretical perspective and humanistic psychology, the intent of this study was to describe peak experiences of teachers in the classroom and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. This study surpassed expectations in that not only did the participants purposively selected succeed in describing peak experiences and identifying the necessary ecological conditions of peak experiences, the participants created peak experiences throughout the AI Learning Process and in their classrooms during the period of time data were being collected.

In this study, peak experiences appeared to be associated with introspective, self-aware personalities with a penchant to learn, grow, and perform effectively. The participants, as Maslow (1970a) suggested, exhibited some important values inherent in effective teachers to include socially concerned and caring personalities. The participants reported behavior supportive of Maslow's (1970b) being-values. This study found that a combination of (a) teachers who are open and caring individuals, (b) an AI process, and (c) a focus on the affirmative topic of peak experiences is a powerful agent in generating enthusiastic, optimistic, determined, caring teachers that leads to environments conducive for teaching and learning.

This study is significant because it validates the notion of teacher peak experiences. Participants realized the identification, description, and creation of peak experiences had a positive affect on their role as teachers. The AI process, focused on the topic of peak experiences, energized participants to embrace their profession and to persevere when faced with challenging tasks often presented in the field of teaching. Given the impact this study had on the participants, it may affect how we look at teaching and learning.

This study sheds light on the concept of teacher peak experiences, since this concept has the capacity to be used as a tool for understanding more about how teachers reach their full capacity as educators. Peak experiences of teachers may be essential to effective teaching, given the benefits derived from these experiences as found by the participants in this study. This study legitimizes the possibility of incorporating the notion of peak experiences into teacher development programs and into investigations of teacher effectiveness.

This study suggests that a correlation may exist between teachers' descriptions of peak experiences and what Prabhu (1990) calls teacher's "sense of plausibility" that is defined as "a concept of how learning takes place and how teaching uses or supports it" (p. 172). Prabhu

recommends attention be given to developing teachers' individual senses of plausibility by having them identify and define these senses. Similarly, Johnson (1992) recommends that teacher education should involve opportunities for teachers to develop a sense of awareness of their behavior and actions as teachers. Teachers should make sense of who they are by exploring their choice of practice and by reflecting on and communicating about their practice. Incorporating an AI process to facilitate reflection and dialogue of teachers' peak experiences is deserving of study and practice because person and practice cannot be separated (Goodson, 1992). By examining how teachers' use of peak experiences to enhance their ability to effectively teach in their classrooms, the notion of effective teaching takes on a new humanistic meaning.

This study is significant because it supports the plausibility that peak experiences may provide valuable opportunities for teachers to become more aware of how different tasks affect them and their students. This study reflects that through an AI process, teachers can be helped to develop a sensitivity to peak experiences, found to generate and strengthen a positive perspective about teaching.

This study empowers the role of the teacher in its generative nature to view the teacher as a capable, opportunistic creator of high potential opportunities for self, students, parents, and colleagues. This study revealed how the AI process has the potential to facilitate teachers who are open and adaptable to maintain a positive focus as they explore the common processes, pathways, actions, and patterns that attract or even cause peak experiences. Through a positive perspective, the AI process influenced the generative upward spiral for more positive discoveries of teachers in a teaching and learning context.

This study was powerful to the extent that participants could envision the world of the teacher in a way to challenge perceptions of what is possible and what can be realized. Teacher peak experiences ignited their imaginations, hopes, and passions. Through discovering, dreaming, and designing peak experiences the participants envisioned compelling and effective bonding that they hoped could be taken to their school setting.

Limitations

Some study-specific limitations occurred during the conduct of this research study. The most apparent limitation was the perceived time limitations of a three-day in-service devoted to peak experiences by potential participants. Prior to the invitation to participate in this study, the potential participants expressed personal and professional challenges to include state assessments that were to begin during the week of the planned AI Learning Process. Teachers down-played the importance of devoting time to participating in a three-day AI Learning Process that focused on peak experiences. After the invitation to write about a peak teaching experience, eight volunteers expressed an interest to participate.

Another unforeseen limitation was the number of substitutes allowed to release teachers to participate in this study. Permission was granted to only involve six participants for three full days. The intent of the AI Learning Process was to involve participants in three full days of AI activities designed to collect data in support of describing peak experiences and the ecological conditions. Upon reviewing the initial contributions of the eight potential participants, it became evident it would be beneficial to include all eight participants in the study. Including all eight participants required a change in the schedule to ensure the allocation of substitutes needed did not exceed the quota granted. While this was initially perceived as a limitation, participants valued the adjusted structure of the AI Learning Process in that it built in time for participants to

apply new knowledge in practice which resulted in a clearer understanding of how to describe and create teacher peak experiences.

Summary and Conclusions

Through an AI design, this study extended the current literature on peak experiences to include teachers in a teaching and learning context. Since current research primarily addresses the phenomenon of peak experiences in fields outside of education, this study extended research on the phenomenon of peak experiences to include the profession of teaching.

Drawing on the current scholarly literature on peak experiences, my research investigated the description of peak experiences in a teaching and learning context and the ecological conditions for peak experiences. My primary research questions were (a) how do classroom teachers describe their peak experiences in a teaching and learning context and (b) how do classroom teachers describe the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state? The findings in this research study focused on the identification, description, and creation of peak experiences in a teaching and learning context. My study identified that teacher peak experiences are a valid, legitimate, empowering phenomenon that has the ability to strengthen research and praxis on effective teaching in education.

My research validates peak experiences of teachers and recognizes why effective teaching goes beyond cognitive ability or technique (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Palmer, 1998). The AI process validated what was best in the participants, their pedagogy, and in classroom learning outcomes. It is possible for other teachers to create peak experiences that will improve their teaching and positively affect student learning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Participant Invitation

Hello! Thank you for giving me an opportunity to share the purpose of my study and to offer you an opportunity to volunteer as a participant. The purpose of my study is to describe the peak experiences teachers may experience while teaching and the conditions teachers believe are necessary to encourage a peak experience during the teaching act. Research of people other than teachers has shown during peak experiences many people feel extensive happiness and serenity – they report becoming so involved in the situation that they lose track of time and sense they are masters of the situation. They operate with a narrow focus of attention where they are immersed in the present. They are physically relaxed, confident, and feel in control. The experience makes life seem beautiful, good, and worthwhile. They encounter emotions of wonder and a loss of anxiety or inhibition. They feel devoted to the task as if it is perceived as a calling. Work is play. They are fully functioning at their highest capacity.

Today, I would like to invite you to participate in my study of teacher peak experiences and the conditions necessary for teachers to enter into a peak experience state. You will be guided to write about your own past personal peak experience while teaching. A rubric has been designed to help me review the information you share and to select eight participants to continue participating in my research study.

Two colleagues, unrelated to Martin Elementary, and I will review each person's response independently using the rubric. Your identity will not be disclosed because (a) you will compose your description using Microsoft Word, (b) you will be assigned a random number for identification, (c) a non-participating assistant will maintain a record of your name and assigned

number to be disclosed after all ratings are completed, and (d) the non-participating assistant will collect your descriptions.

This rubric I will use will help my colleagues and me to evaluate each person's ability to describe (a) a peak experience while teaching, (b) what was going on during the peak experience, (c) who was involved in the peak experience, (d) what he/she did during the peak experience, (e) how he/she felt during the peak experience, (f) what was valued most about his/her peak experience, (g) what happened after his/her peak experience, (h) what happened before his/her peak experience, and (i) other contributing factors that led to his/her peak experience.

Selected participants will be provided release time to participate in a three day Appreciative Inquiry Learning Process next week in which each person will be guided through three AI stages: (a) discover, (b) dream, and (c) design. Participants will also be asked to participate in an initial semi-structured interview prior to the AI Learning Process. There will be several data gathering methods used during the AI Learning Process: (a) interviews, (b) focus groups, (c) participant generated documents associated with the three stages, (d) generative story telling online activity, and (e) journals.

I have explained my study and examples of peak experiences. At this time, those who would be interested and available to participate in this study is invited to remain for further directions about the writing activity. Anyone else may leave without fear of recrimination or penalty.

Appendix B

Protocol for Writing about a Personal Peak Experience

As a teacher can you recall one of your personal peak experiences in a teaching and learning context? To put it another way, can you recall any teaching moment in which you seemed to experience a different kind of reality; a time when you felt extensive happiness and serenity; a time when you became so involved in a situation that you lost track of time and sensed you were a master of the situation; a time when you might have operated with a narrow focus of attention where you were immersed in the present; a time when you were physically relaxed, confident, or felt in control? The experience might have made life seem beautiful, good, and worthwhile. You might have had emotions of wonder and a loss of anxiety or inhibition. You might have felt devoted to the task as if it was perceived as a calling. Work was play. You were fully functioning at your highest capacity.

I am especially interested in how you describe your peak teaching experience. With this in mind, please describe in rich detail a classroom teaching experience that met the characteristics I described as a peak experience. All information you share will be confidential and your privacy will be protected. In my dissertation, I will not attribute anything you share to you or that could be attributed to you.

Now I would like to invite those of you who are willing to complete a written description of a peak teaching experience. If you are willing to participate in this activity, please sign the consent form provided to you.

At the top, right hand side of your Microsoft Word document, indicate the number you have been randomly assigned. Write a description of a personal peak experience you have had while teaching. Try to address the following questions in your description:

Appendix C

Criteria and Rubric for Purposively Selecting Participants

While the phenomenon of peak experiences appears exclusive to particular professions, Maslow’s (1961) extensive studies on peak experiences revealed that almost every person in and out of any profession has most likely knowingly or unknowingly encountered peak experiences. He suggested that although all people have peak experiences, not all people recognize them. He classified those who recognize them as *peakers* and those who do not recognize them as *nonpeakers*. He found that while everyone has had peak experiences, those who most often recognize the experience of these phenomena are among the healthiest people since they frequently sought to increase their experience of this phenomenon (Maslow, 1962). In pursuit of understanding the phenomenon of peak experiences, Maslow interviewed individuals who were able to report having had peak experiences and reported peak experiences in similar ways. They described their peak experiences as (a) times of awe, (b) intense happiness or even rapture, or bliss, (c) times when they felt all doubts, fears, inhibitions, tensions, and weaknesses were left behind, (d) times when they felt one with the world – really belonging to it, (e) times when they saw a moment of truth – complete clarity of a situation, and (f) the end of straining and of striving (Maslow, 1962).

For the purpose of my study, I purposively selected eight volunteers who could describe a peak experience and could score in the upper quartile on the following rubric that was used to evaluate each participant’s written description of his/her peak experience.

Category	Possible Descriptors	4	3	2	1	Score
1. Description of what happened before his/her peak experience.	May vary	The story contains a clear description of what happened before his/her peak experience.	The story contains a fairly clear description of what happened before his/her peak experience.	The story is vague about what happened before his/her peak experience.	There is little evidence of what happened before his/her peak experience.	

Category	Possible Descriptors	4	3	2	1	Score
2. Description of a peak experience while teaching.	The very top – pinnacle (Gove, 1993) The highest level (Gove, 1993) The greatest degree (Gove, 1993) An isolated event (Privette & Bundrick 1991) An emotionally positive event (Privette & Bundrick, 1991) An intense experience (Privette & Bundrick, 1991) Fully functioning – utilizing all potential (Maslow, 1961)	The story contains many details and/or descriptions that contribute to an understanding of a peak experience.	The story contains a few details and/or descriptions that contribute to an understanding of a peak experience.	The story contains a few details and/or descriptions, but they distract from an understanding of a peak experience.	There is little evidence of understanding a peak experience.	
3. Description of what was going on during the peak experience.	May vary	The story contains many details and/or descriptions about what occurred during a peak experience.	The story contains a few details and/or descriptions about what occurred during a peak experience.	The story contains a few details and/or descriptions, but they distract from an understanding of what occurred during a peak experience.	There is little evidence of understanding of what occurred during a peak experience.	
4. Description of who was involved in the peak experience.	May vary	The story contains a clear description about who was involved in the peak experience.	The story contains a fairly clear description about who was involved in the peak experience.	The story is vague about who was involved during the peak experience.	There is little evidence who all was involved in the peak experience.	
5. Description of what he/she did during the peak experience.	May vary	The story contains a clear description about what he/she did in the peak experience.	The story contains a fairly clear description about what he/she did in the peak experience.	The story is vague about what he/she did in the peak experience.	There is little evidence of what he/she did in the peak experience.	
6. Description of how he/she felt during the peak experience.	Senses integration, intelligence, and perceptiveness (Maslow, 1961) Feels magnified elation, enjoyment, and wonder (Allison & Duncan, 1992; Maslow, 1968a; Warmoth, 1963) Senses spirituality, sacredness, inspiration, and transcendence (Maslow, 1970b; Privette & Bundrick, 1991; Ravizza, 1984) Experiences absence of boredom and worry (Allison & Duncan, 1992) Experiences full functioning, full control, totality, complete gratification, and enjoyment (Allison & Duncan, 1992; Maslow, 1961; Ravizza, 1984; Warmoth, 1963) Experiences clarity, focus, sharpness, and immersion of self in activity (Maslow, 1961; Ravizza, 1984) Feels confidence and sense of significance (Maslow, 1970b) Feels more than at other times to be responsible, active, creative, spontaneous, expressive, and flowing; free of inhibitions, doubts, or fears (Maslow 1961) Feels more than at other times to be active (Maslow 1961) Feels good about self and others (Maslow 1959) Feels satisfied; wants more of the same (Maslow 1959) Feels elevated inspiration and enhanced well-being (Maslow, 1968a) Experiences a greater sense of challenge, autonomy, control, satisfaction, and focus (Allison & Duncan, 1992; Blake, 1978; Drucker, 1992; Katz, 2002; Lee et al., 2005; Sorokin, 1950) Emanates characteristics such as a sense of personal identity, self-actualization, an internal locus of control, intrinsic motivation, a sense of control, and a strong sense of purpose (Maslow, 1959a, 1959b, 1961, 1962)	The story contains a clear description about how he/she felt during the peak experience.	The story contains a fairly clear description about how he/she felt during the peak experience.	The story is vague about how he/she felt during the peak experience.	There is little evidence of how he/she felt during the peak experience.	

Category	Possible Descriptors	4	3	2	1	Score
7. Description of what happened after his/her peak experience.	<p>A person feels more than at other times, to be: (a) responsible, active, creative; (b) free of inhibitions, doubts, or fears; (c) more spontaneous, expressive, and free flowing; and (d) fully functioning – developing and utilizing all of his or her capabilities or potentialities (Maslow, 1961).</p> <p>A person's view of self changes in a healthy direction, as well as a person's view of others and the world. A person's creativity and spontaneity is enhanced, and the person is motivated to seek to repeat the experience since it is viewed as generative and worthwhile (Maslow, 1959a).</p> <p>A person feels a sense of union with other, ideas, and entities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The experience leaves a person feeling empowered and more in tune with self as a result of a perceived enhanced quality of life (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). Peak experiences restructure a person's knowledge of self and the environment, in turn generating enhanced feelings of well-being, which then facilitates the transformation of a person to evolve to a higher developmental stage (Maslow, 1968b).</p> <p>A person feels fear and anxiety in the presence of peak experiences and yet they go forward and has a great experience (D. Whitney, personal communication, December 8, 2006).</p>	The story contains a clear description of what happened after his/her peak experience.	The story contains a fairly clear description of what happened after his/her peak experience.	The story is vague about what happened after his/her peak experience.	There is little evidence of what happened after his/her peak experience.	

Category	Possible Descriptors	4	3	2	1	Score
8. Description of other contributing factors that led to his/her peak experience.	<p>While everyone has had peak experiences, those who most often recognized the experience of these phenomena are among the healthiest people since they frequently seek to increase their experience of this phenomenon (Maslow, 1962).</p> <p>A person who has frequent peak experiences has been found to have <i>being values</i> or <i>b-values</i> (Maslow, 1970a). The <i>b-value</i> characteristics include "truth, goodness, wholeness, dichotomy-transcendence, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, necessity, completion, justice, order, simplicity, richness, effortlessness, playfulness, and self-sufficiency" (Maslow, 1967, pp. 108-109).</p> <p>Triggers or influences causing regularity of peak experiences, was equated to when individuals were exceptionally developed or self-actualized (Maslow, 1968a).</p> <p>These assumptions are derived from the works of Maslow (1970b) and Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros (2003), who proposed peak experiences can be viewed as a representation of a person's positive core where the researcher's intent is to seek the positive core that exists within individuals.</p> <p>Well-being is also associated with peak experience. Personal conditions for well-being include self-determination, perceived competence, and presence of self realization values (Waterman et al., 2003), as well as perceived support from others to include spouses, colleagues, and supervisors (Ruehlman & Wolchik, 1988). Intrinsic goals (self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling) affect a person's well-being more than extrinsic goals (wealth, materialism, physical appearances) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Well-being is associated with realistic and attainable goals that are congruent with needs (Brunstein, 1993; Cantor & Sanderson, 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995).</p> <p>A strongly directed purpose that is other-centered enables a person to have peak experiences (Frankl, 1970; Logan, 1985). Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon (2001) found a tremendous sense of well-being or enjoyment in the form of peak experiences from people doing good work considered difficult that involved certain skills.</p> <p>Conditions having a direct relationship to peak experiences involve: (a) an achievement of basic need gratifications, particularly as it relates to self-actualization (Maslow, 1970a), (b) the presence and construction of goals (Little, 1989), (c) a sense of challenge and control (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), (d) a quest for wholeness (Feeney, 1996), and (e) a sense of well-being (Omodei & Wearing, 1990).</p> <p>A person's achievement of basic needs is one personal condition that stimulates peak experiences (Maslow, 1950). Universally, people desire to satisfy a hierarchy of needs ranked from lowest to highest: (a) physiological, (b) safety, (c) belongingness, (d) esteem, and (e) self-actualization (Maslow, 1970a).</p>	The story contains a clear description of other contributing factors that led to his/her peak experience.	The story contains a fairly clear description of other contributing factors that led to his/her peak experience.	The story is vague about other contributing factors that led to his/her peak experience.	There is little evidence of other contributing factors that led to his/her peak experience.	
9. Description of what was valued most about his/her peak experience.	May vary	The story contains a clear description of what he/she valued most about his/her peak experience.	The story contains a fairly clear description of what he/she valued most about his/her peak experience.	The story is vague about what he/she valued most about his/her peak experience.	There is little evidence of what he/she valued most about his/her peak experience.	

Appendix D

Protocol for Semi-structured Individual Interviews

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

Date of Interview	
Location of Interview	Robert M. Martin Elementary
Name and Title/Role of Participant	
Name of Interviewer	Crystal Hummel

A. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- **Allow interviewee to pick seating**
- **Small talk**
- **Introduce self**
- **Express thanks**
- **State purpose**

You have been invited as one of eight teachers to voluntarily participate in this study. I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University and I am conducting research that specifically focuses on describing the peak experiences of teachers through the teachers' personal reflections on their peak experiences and the conditions surrounding the peak experience. My research will be conducted today and during an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Learning Process that will occur during the month of February 2007 at Robert M. Martin Elementary in Andover, Kansas.

- **Discussion format**
 - **45 minutes**
 - **Informal questions – feel free to ask questions**
 - **Interested in positive and negative comments**
 - **Assure safety (anonymity-confidentiality)**
- **Any questions?**
- **With your permission, I will record this interview for research purposes. If there are no questions about the process or the purpose of this interview we will begin. (PAUSE FOR A BRIEF SECOND).**
- **Turn on tape recorder – state “By permission of name I am taping this interview at Robert M. Martin Elementary on date.”**

B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Describe a specific peak experience when teaching. What happened? What did you feel?

- Q1. Describe what the students were doing.**

- Q2. What did you value most in this experience?**

- Q3. Describe the classroom environment that stimulated this experience.**

- Q4. What other things stimulate you as a teacher?**

- Q5. Is there anything else you would like to share about peak experiences while teaching?**

C. CLOSING

- Thanks**
- Safety (confidential)**
- Questions?**

Appendix E

Protocol for Semi-structured Paired Interviews – Discovery Stage - Understanding the Topic &

Mobilizing a Systemic Inquiry into the Positive Core

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

Date of Paired Interviews	
Location of Paired Interviews	Robert M. Martin Elementary
Names and Title/Role of Participants	
Name of Facilitator	Crystal Hummel

A. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- **State Purpose**

Typically in an AI Learning Process, the group first develops the topic(s) with an emphasis on strengths. This is done through a *paired interview* exercise. In a nutshell, the topics should be bold; something that stretches the organization beyond the status quo; something that you really want to see happen, something that has the potential to energize people, mobilize forces, and be strategic.

For the purposes of this study, the topic has already been identified: to describe the peak experiences of teachers while teaching and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. To further reinforce this topic and to set the stage for this, you each will take about 15 minutes to complete the following exercise by recording your responses on a piece of paper.

Describe a peak experience or *high point*. What things did you value most about yourself, and the nature of [the experience]? What do you consider to be the core factor that gives *life* to [this peak experience]? What three wishes would you make to heighten vitality and health [of peak experiences]? (Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006, Preparing for Topic Selection Section, ¶ 2)

Once each person has completed the exercise, the AI [Learning] Process divides itself into pairs. Each person takes a turn at interviewing and being interviewed. The questions just answered are used with the interviewer probing deeper into the answers, getting excited, being surprised, curiously inquiring. Listen intently. Pause before asking questions. Each pair will then rejoin the group of [eight participants]. The interviewers report to the group what was learned from the interview. A list is created on newsprint/poster boards (Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006, Preparing for Topic Selection Section, ¶ 3).

- **Ground Rules**
 - **Everyone participates**
 - **All ideas are valid**
 - **Everything is written/recorded**
 - **Listen, ask, and be curious**
 - **Observe time frames**
 - **Seek higher ground and action**
 - **Create “relationship-enhancing” conversations**

Everything you say in these paired interviews will be kept strictly confidential. No comments that include names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research.

With your permission, I will record these paired interviews for research purposes. If there are no questions about the process or the purpose of paired interviews we will begin. (PAUSE FOR A BRIEF SECOND).

Turn on tape recorder near each pair – state “By permission of names I am taping this paired interview at Robert M. Martin Elementary on date.”

B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Q1. Describe a peak experience or “high point.”**
- Q2. What things did you value most about yourself?**
- Q3. What things did you value most about the nature of a peak experience?**
- Q4. What do you consider to be the conditions surrounding this peak experience?**
- Q5. What three wishes would you make to heighten vitality and health of peak experiences?**
- Q6. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me?**

Additional Follow-up Questions May Include:

- 1. Would you elaborate on that?**
- 2. Can you say more about that?**
- 3. I'm beginning to get the picture. Please tell me more.**
- 4. What happened specifically?**
- 5. What were you doing?**
- 6. What were others doing?**
- 7. How did this fit together to produce something exceptional?**
- 8. When did that happen?**
- 9. Who all was involved?**
- 10. What role did you play?**
- 11. What role did others play?**
- 12. Where were you during that time?**
- 13. How did that come about?**
- 14. What would it feel like to have such moments on a deeper or more frequent basis?**

(Taylor, 2002, p. 7)

C. CLOSING

“You are to prepare a Summary Sheet on newsprint/poster about the interview you conducted. Please be prepared to share this with the group. Components of your summary sheet should include:

Summary of the Interview:

Name of interviewee:

Name of interviewed person:

What was the most quotable/best quote that came out of this interview?

What was the most compelling story that came out for you during the interview?

What was learned from the interview? List 1-3 themes that stood out for you during the interview.”

(Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006, Interview Summary Section, ¶ 2)

- Thanks**
- Safety (confidential)**
- Questions?**

Appendix F

Protocol for Focus Group – Discovery Stage - Capturing Our Best Stories – Discovering & Disclosing Our Positive Capacity

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

Date of Focus Group	
Location of Focus Group	Robert M. Martin Elementary
Name and Title/Role of Participants	
Name of Facilitator	Crystal Hummel

A. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- **State Purpose**

“The discovery phase involves a data collection and narrative exploration. It begins the process of revealing the positive, the successful, and the prideful experiences of the individual and collective. Through carefully developed interview questions based in the affirmative topic selection, the focus is to explore and enliven the stories that are shared through interviewing the defined group within the [school]. Generally, the more reflective of the entire [group], the more effective the outcome” (Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006, Discovery-What gives life (the best of What is)-Appreciating Section, ¶ 1).

The next activity is designed to capture the best stories, data, and visions of the AI Learning Process. “The intent is to energize both the interviewers and interviewees as they share their experiences and history with the [group], as well as [the ecological conditions they believe can enhance more peak experiences] for the future. Noteworthy is that this is a mutual learning process for the interviewer and interviewee. Within this learning process, the frame of reference of the [group] begins to shift from problem solving and/or deficit thinking to possibility evolving and successfully working” (Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006, Discovery-What gives life (the best of What is)-Appreciating Section, ¶ 3).

“The interview protocol begins the process of changing the frame of reference of the individual and the collective. As Cooperrider and Whitney note, we need to remember throughout this process that:

- What we ask determines what we find.
- What we find determines how we talk.
- How we talk determines how we imagine together.
- How we imagine together determines what we achieve” (Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006, Interview Protocol Section, ¶ 1).

- **Ground Rules**
 - **Everyone participates**
 - **All ideas are valid**
 - **Everything is written/recorded**
 - **Listen, ask, and be curious**
 - **Observe time frames**
 - **Seek higher ground and action**
 - **Create “relationship-enhancing” conversations**

Everything you say in this focus group will be kept strictly confidential. No comments that include names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research.

With your permission, I will record this focus group for research purposes. If there are no questions about the process or the purpose of this focus group, we will begin. (PAUSE FOR A BRIEF SECOND).

Turn on tape recorder near each pair – state “By permission of names I am taping this focus group at Robert M. Martin Elementary on date.”

B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q1. Would each of you please take turns sharing your summary of the paired interviews? Please take notes and be prepared in the next activity to select the story that best illustrates a peak experience. It should be a story that makes you and others want to have a peak experience.

Q2. What were the conditions surrounding the peak experience?

Q3. What three wishes do you have for creating more peak experiences?

C. CLOSING

- **Thanks**
- **Safety (confidential)**
- **Questions?**

Appendix G

Protocol for Focus Group – Discovery Stage – Mapping the Positive Core

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

Date of Focus Group	
Location of Focus Group	Robert M. Martin Elementary
Name and Title/Role of Participants	
Name of Facilitator	Crystal Hummel

A. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- **State Purpose**

Once peak experiences have been thoroughly explored, it is time to connect strengths, resources, and capacities with everyone in the group. This will be accomplished through creating a visual map of the positive core. “Visual displays are important for three reasons. First,...they create a spirit of inspiration in the room...Second, visual displays focus and draw meaning from the whole-group discussions...Finally visual displays are excellent ways to remember and communicate what happened at the [AI Learning Process]” (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 134).
- **Ground Rules**
 - **Everyone participates**
 - **All ideas are valid**
 - **Everything is written/recorded**
 - **Listen, ask, and be curious**
 - **Observe time frames**
 - **Seek higher ground and action**
 - **Create “relationship-enhancing” conversations**

Everything you say in this focus group will be kept strictly confidential. No comments that include names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research.

With your permission, I will record this focus group for research purposes. If there are no questions about the process or the purpose of this focus group, we will begin. (PAUSE FOR A BRIEF SECOND).

Turn on tape recorder near each pair – state “By permission of names I am taping this focus group at Robert M. Martin Elementary on date.”

B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Q1. Would each of you please select “one or two of the best stories told by group members?”**
- Q2. Would each of you help to create a brainstormed list of the themes that were present in the stories – about the high points, life-giving forces, ideas that ‘grabbed’ you – thoughts about what life is like when [having a peak experience in a teaching and learning context?**
- Q3. Would each of you please ask and/or answer any clarifying questions about the themes listed?**
- Q4. From this list of themes, would each of you please select three to five themes you feel are important for peak experiences?**
- Q5. What do you notice about the themes selected? Which themes are most important?**

(adapted from Ludema et al., 2003, pp. 136-137)

C. CLOSING

- **Thanks**
- **Safety (confidential)**
- **Questions?**

Appendix H

Protocol for Generative Story Telling – Discovery Stage

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

A. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- **State Purpose**
Members will be asked to participate in a generative conversation in writing around a fictitious person with a peak experience in a teaching and learning context.
- **Ground Rules**
 - **Everyone participates**
 - **All ideas are valid**
 - **Everything is written**
 - **Observe time frames (Please participate in this activity prior to the next meeting.)**

Everything you write in this generative story will be kept strictly confidential. No comments that include names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research.

B. DIRECTIONS

The EL Wiki URL is as follows:

<http://coetechcenter.wichita.edu/wiki/differencemakers/index.php/Main/MartinElementarySchoolPeakers>

Once you arrive at the Wiki, click on the “edit” link and type in your contributions as if you were working in Word. Once you finished with your comments, scroll down the page and click on the “save” link. You should be all set. If you experience problems, let me know.

Peak Experience Generative Question found on Wiki:

You are to contribute to the writing of one story about Brenda, a fictitious teacher as she recalls a peak experience while teaching. You may contribute as many times as you'd like. Contributions to the story need to address one or more of the following statements or questions: Describe her peak experience. Who was involved? What happened? What did she do? How did she feel? What was she doing at the time of the peak experience? What made it happen? What did she value most about the experience?

Brenda's story is to start here. Each person adds to the last entry to develop one story in its entirety. **Make sure you click "Save" at the bottom of this Wiki before exiting.**

Appendix I

Protocol for Focus Group – Dream Stage – Crafting Dream Statement – Presenting Your Dream

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

Date of Focus Group	
Location of Focus Group	Robert M. Martin Elementary
Name and Title/Role of Participants	
Name of Facilitator	Crystal Hummel

A. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- **State Purpose**
“To create an inspiring statement of your dream that points the way to peak experiences” (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 272); “to bring your dream to life by enacting it before the group” (Ludema et al., 2003, p.273).
- **Ground Rules**
 - **Everyone participates**
 - **All ideas are valid**
 - **Everything is written/recorded**
 - **Listen, ask, and be curious**
 - **Observe time frames**
 - **Seek higher ground and action**
 - **Create “relationship-enhancing” conversations**

Everything you say in this focus group will be kept strictly confidential. No comments that include names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research.

With your permission, I will record this focus group for research purposes. If there are no questions about the process or the purpose of this focus group, we will begin. (PAUSE FOR A BRIEF SECOND).

Turn on tape recorder near each pair – state “By permission of names I am taping this focus group at Robert M. Martin Elementary on date.”

B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Q1. Visualize the dream that you really want from the themes and conversations identified in the discovery phase. Ask yourself, what is happening during a peak experience?**

Q2. How does this peak experience happen?

Q3. What are the things that made this peak experience happen?

Q4 What makes this dream exciting to you?

Q5 Capture the dream in a narrative statement. Use vivid language. Be positive and uplifting.

Break for lunch

Q6 Choose a creative way to present your dream to all the participants. It can be the format of a news report, song, poem, skit, interview, or a picture. After everyone is prepared, each of you will present your dream to the group.

(adapted fromLudema et al., 2003, p. 163)

C. CLOSING

- **Thanks**
- **Safety (confidential)**
- **Questions?**

Appendix J

Protocol for Focus Group – Design Stage – Creating a Map of High Potential Design

Possibilities

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

Date of Focus Group	
Location of Focus Group	Robert M. Martin Elementary
Name and Title/Role of Participants	
Name of Facilitator	Crystal Hummel

A. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- **State Purpose**
“To create a customized map showing all the organizational elements that will help us gain and grow our [peak experiences]” (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 274).
- **Ground Rules**
 - **Everyone participates**
 - **All ideas are valid**
 - **Everything is written/recorded**
 - **Listen, ask, and be curious**
 - **Observe time frames**
 - **Seek higher ground and action**
 - **Create “relationship-enhancing” conversations**

Everything you say in this focus group will be kept strictly confidential. No comments that include names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research.

With your permission, I will record this focus group for research purposes. If there are no questions about the process or the purpose of this focus group, we will begin. (PAUSE FOR A BRIEF SECOND).

Turn on tape recorder near each pair – state “By permission of names I am taping this focus group at Robert M. Martin Elementary on date.”

B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Q1. “On a flipchart, draw a blank ‘design possibilities map,’ using as much of the flipchart as possible. Write in the inner circle of the map [your dream of a peak experience in a teaching and learning context]...”**
- Q2. Brainstorm all of the key (conditions) both within and outside the organization that will impact or be impacted by the accomplishment of your dream. Write these in the second circle of the design possibilities map.**
- Q3. Brainstorm all the formal organization design elements that will influence the accomplishment of [having peak experiences in a teaching and learning context]. Write these in the outer circle of the design possibilities map.”**

(Ludema et al., 2003, p. 274)

C. CLOSING

- **Thanks**
- **Safety (confidential)**
- **Questions?**

Appendix K

Protocol for Focus Group – Design Stage - Creating Provocative Propositions

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

Date of Focus Group	
Location of Focus Group	Robert M. Martin Elementary
Name and Title/Role of Participants	
Name of Facilitator	Crystal Hummel

A. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- **State Purpose**

“To design and align our organizational culture, practices, structures, processes, policies, technologies, and so on to fulfill our dream and advance our [peak experiences]” (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 276).

- **Guidelines for Writing Great Provocative Propositions**

“Provocative propositions are uplifting statements about we want our organization to be designed to fulfill our dreams and grow our strategic competitive advantage. A provocative proposition is a statement that bridges the best of ‘what is’ with your own ideas about ‘what might be.’ It is provocative because it stretches the status quo, challenges common routines, and offers new possibilities for positive change. Your task as a team is to create a provocative proposition about the ideal future of [peak experiences in a teaching and learning context]...What would your [classroom] look like if it were functioning in every way, to maximize the strengths and capitalize on the opportunities discussed during the last two days?

To write a provocative proposition, ask yourselves these questions:

- Is it provocative? Does it stretch, challenge, or interrupt the status quo?
- Is it grounded? Are there examples that illustrate the ideal as real possibility?
- Is it desired? If it could be fully actualized, would the organization want it? Do you want it as a preferred future?
- Is it stated in affirmative and bold terms?” (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 277).

- **“Examples of Provocative Propositions**

Work-life balance. Our organization is committed to maintaining standards and policies that reflect the work and family life balance of our employees. Alternative work opportunities attract top-quality people from inside and outside our industry and motivate them in ways that honor employees’ individual differences, needs, and aspirations.

Cooperation. We are committed to high level of cooperation to accomplish our collective goals. We do a variety of things to promote cooperation. First, we function as a consensus-seeking group in which decisions are made through face-to-face dialogue. Second, we encourage experimentation. We maintain an environment in which failure is

not punished as much as success is applauded. Third, we structure our organization with a minimum of status differences, hierarchy, and formal boundaries between functions and groups. Fourth, we offer members the opportunity to acquire the interpersonal and group skills that they need to work cooperatively. Fifth, we encourage each member of the organization to cross-train to enhance understanding and interdependence” (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 278).

- **Ground Rules**
 - **Everyone participates**
 - **All ideas are valid**
 - **Everything is written/recorded**
 - **Listen, ask, and be curious**
 - **Observe time frames**
 - **Seek higher ground and action**
 - **Create “relationship-enhancing” conversations**

Everything you say in this focus group will be kept strictly confidential. No comments that include names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research.

With your permission, I will record this focus group for research purposes. If there are no questions about the process or the purpose of this focus group, we will begin. (PAUSE FOR A BRIEF SECOND).

Turn on tape recorder near each pair – state “By permission of names I am taping this focus group at Robert M. Martin Elementary on date.”

B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Q1. What would your classroom look like if it were designed in every way to maximize and preserve having peak experiences in a teaching and learning context?**
- Q2. While in the group of eight, the focus of developing provocative propositions is threefold: “Find examples of the best, the ideal, and the desired” of peak experiences.**
- Q3. “Reflect and dialogue on what circumstances made the best, the ideal, and the desired [peak experiences] possible.**

Q4. Record these circumstances in detail.

Q5. Take the stories and envision what might be.

Q6. Write an affirmative statement that describes the idealized future of teaching to include peak experiences as if it has already happened (Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006, Design-What should be-the ideal-Co-construction Section, ¶ 2).

C. CLOSING

- **Thanks**
- **Safety (confidential)**
- **Questions?**

Appendix L

Appreciative Inquiry Learning Process Agenda

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

Day 1: Topic & Discovery Stage

Activity	Purpose
1. Pre-start activity (Ludema et al., 2003)	Setting the tone; warming up for the AI Learning Process Participants will list high-point events in the history of Robert M. Martin Elementary on a pre-constructed wall timeline.
2. Setting the task focus (Ludema et al., 2003)	Providing a brief introduction to the context and purpose of the meeting; introducing AI, 4-D cycle; receiving an overview of the AI Learning Process
3. Paired interviews (see Appendix E) (Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Taylor, 2002)	Understanding the topic; mobilizing a systemic inquiry into the positive core

Day 1: Discovery Stage

Lunch

4. Focus Group (see Appendix F)
(Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006) Capturing our best stories; discovering and disclosing our positive capacity

The discovery phase involves a data collection and narrative exploration. It begins the process of revealing the positive, the successful, and the prideful experiences of the individual and collective.
5. Focus Group (see Appendix G)
(Ludema et al., 2003) Mapping the positive core; providing overview of day; highlighting best story of peak experience; identifying core factors of peak experiences; previewing upcoming events
6. Introduce Generative Story Telling
(see Appendix H) Creating a generative story by having each group member add to a narrative about a fictitious individual

Generative storytelling is a means of getting at experiences an individual is reluctant to claim or at material that might not be accessible to conscious thought.

Day 2: Dream Stage

Activity	Purpose
1. Review the purpose of and guidelines for the Dream Stage (Cooperrider et al., 2003; Ludema et al., 2003)	Providing focus for the day
2. Focus Group (see Appendix I) (Ludema et al., 2003)	Crafting dream statements; creating an inspiring statement of your dream that points the way to peak experiences
Lunch	
3. Focus Group (see Appendix I continued) (Ludema et al., 2003)	Presenting your dream; bringing your dream to life by enacting it before the group

Day 3: Design Stage

Activity	Purpose
1. Review the purpose of and guidelines for the Design Stage (Ludema et al., 2003)	Reflecting on dreams from previous day; identifying high-potential design possibilities; selecting high-impact design elements; crafting provocative propositions
2. Focus Group (see Appendix J) (Ludema et al., 2003)	Creating a map of high-potential design possibilities; creating a customized map showing all the organizational elements that will help us gain and grow our peak experiences
3. Focus Group (see Appendix K) (Cleveland Consulting Group, 2006; Ludema et al., 2003)	Creating provocative propositions; designing and aligning our organizational culture, practices, structures, processes, policies, technologies, and so on to fulfill our dream and advance our peak experiences

Appendix M

Protocol for Semi-structured Individual Interviews

ROBERT M. MARTIN ELEMENTARY; USD 385 DOCTORAL STUDY

Date of Interview	
Location of Interview	Robert M. Martin Elementary
Name and Title/Role of Participant	
Name of Interviewer	Crystal Hummel

A. INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- **State purpose**
I will conduct a post AI Learning Process interview to gather data related to your involvement in the AI Learning Process.
- **Discussion format**
 - **45 minutes**
 - **Informal questions – feel free to ask questions**
 - **Interested in positive and negative comments**
 - **Assure safety (anonymity-confidentiality)**
- **Any questions?**
- **With your permission, I will record this interview for research purposes. If there are no questions about the process or the purpose of this interview we will begin. (PAUSE FOR A BRIEF SECOND).**
- **Turn on tape recorder – state “By permission of name I am taping this interview at Robert M. Martin Elementary on date.”**

C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Q1. “What about the [AI Learning Process] most enlivened you?**
- Q2. What’s your elevator story about [the AI Learning Process] that you would like to share?**
- Q3. What can you envision to take [the AI Learning Process] to a higher level for yourself, someone else or your [school]?” (Cooperrider et al., 2003, p. 314).**

C. CLOSING

- **Thanks**
- **Safety (confidential)**
- **Questions?**

Appendix N

Andover USD 385 Superintendent Letter of Consent



Office of the Superintendent

*Mark A. Evans, Superintendent
1432 N. Andover Road
Andover, Kansas 67002
Office: 316/733-5017
Fax: 316/733-3604
E-mail: evansm@usd385.org*

December 15, 2006

Dear Ms. Hummel,

I grant you permission to conduct a study as a part of your requirements in the Wichita State University Educational Leadership Doctoral Program. I understand your proposed study is entitled "A Case Study of Teacher Peak Experiences". I acknowledge your study involves the collection of data from faculty members at Robert M. Martin Elementary and will be conducted during February 2007 and March 2007.

I look forward to the results of this study. If there are further questions or if I can be of service, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark A. Evans', is written over a horizontal line.

Mark A. Evans
Superintendent of Schools

"Building on the Foundation of Excellence"

Appendix O

Robert M. Martin Elementary Introduction Letter of Consent

February 2007

Dear Robert M. Martin Elementary Teacher:

PURPOSE: I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University who is conducting research that specifically focuses on describing the peak experiences of teachers through the teachers' personal reflections back on their peak experiences and understanding the conditions that allowed these teachers to enter into a peak experience state. This study proposes to understand what it is like when teachers encounter a peak experience, as well as to understand the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. Research will be conducted prior to and during an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Learning Process which will occur during the month of February 2007 at Robert M. Martin Elementary in Andover, Kansas.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION & EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES: You have been invited to voluntarily share your perspective of a peak experience and to express an interest in participating in this study. After information is shared about this study, and a description of peak experiences is provided with details and examples, you will be asked to voluntarily share, in writing, a similar experience. Based on the written feedback, I will then invite up to eight teachers to: (a) be interviewed prior to a three day meeting called an AI Learning Process; and (b) participate in the three day AI Learning Process to include focus groups, the creation of participant documents, a generative story telling activity, and journals.

No minors or members of vulnerable populations are participating in this study. There are no known risks or discomforts, physical, psychological, or social, connected to this study.

BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY: The results of this study have the potential to contribute to current literature on effective teaching by describing peak experiences of classroom teachers and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. The significance of this study will provide an expanded understanding of peak experiences in a teaching and learning context.

REFUSAL/WITHDRAWAL/CONFIDENTIALITY: Participation in this study is voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate. Your participation in this initial activity, in no way obligates you to continue in this study. Should you decide not to participate in this initial activity, or in the study, your decision will not affect your future relations with Robert M. Martin Elementary, Andover USD 385, or WSU. Your privacy will be protected and confidentiality of information guaranteed. By signing one copy of this form, you are granting your permission to participate in this study. Findings from this research may be presented at national conferences or result in publication in scholarly journals. If this is the case, you are guaranteed anonymity. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or fear of reprisal.

If you have questions regarding this study, please contact me at home at 316-541-2758 or at school at 316-733-5264. Should you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285. A copy of this form is provided for your records. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Crystal D. Hummel

I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix P

Wichita State University Institutional Review Board Application

Wichita State University Institutional Review Board
for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB)

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Please use a typewriter to complete this form.

Name of Principal Investigator(s): **Raymond Calabrese, Professor for Educational Leadership, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0142**

(For a student project, Principal Investigator **must** be a WSU faculty member; student is listed as Co-Investigator.)

Departmental/Program Affiliation: **Educational Leadership** Campus Box: **142** Phone: **978-5329**

Name(s) of Co-Investigator(s): **Crystal D. Hummel**

Co-Investigator(s) is/are: Faculty Member Graduate Students Undergraduate Student

Type of Project: Class Project Capstone Project Thesis or Dissertation
 Funded Research Unfunded Research

If student project, address of student: **718 NW Diamond Rd.; Towanda, KS 67144**

Title of Project/Proposal: **A Case Study of Teacher Peak Experiences**

Expected Completion Date: **April 30, 2007** Funding Agency (if applicable): **Not applicable**

Please attach additional sheets, if necessary, with numbers of responses corresponding to those listed below.

1. Describe the research in non-technical language:

This dissertation proposes to describe the peak experiences of teachers through the teachers' personal reflections back on their peak experiences and it will seek to understand the conditions that allowed these teachers to enter into a peak experience state. This study proposes to understand what it is like when teachers encounter a peak experience, as well as to understand the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state. Research will be conducted prior to and during an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Learning Process which will occur during the month of February 2007 at Robert M. Martin Elementary in Andover, Kansas. A qualitative case study research design conducted through an appreciative inquiry process and filtered through humanistic psychology will be utilized.

The research will answer two questions:

1. How do teachers describe their peak experiences in a teaching and learning context
2. How do classroom teachers describe the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state?

2. Describe the benefits of the research to the human subjects, if any, and of the benefits to human or scientific knowledge:

Findings from this study have the potential to contribute to current literature on effective teaching by describing peak experiences of classroom teachers and the necessary ecological conditions for them to enter into a peak experience state.

There has been a flourishing interest in grasping a fuller knowledge of people in general as it relates to self and identity in anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, and education, as well as an awareness of the influence of emotions and affective behavior in the classroom; however, these studies did not specifically address how they are related to peak experiences of teachers in classrooms. The significance of this study will provide an expanded understanding of peak experiences in a teaching and learning context.

3. Describe the subjects, how the subjects are to be selected, how many are to be used, and indicate explicitly whether any are minors (under age 18 per Kansas law) or otherwise members of "vulnerable" populations, including, but not limited to, pregnant women, prisoners, psychiatric patients, etc.

Participants will include eight adult teachers from Robert M. Martin Elementary who will be purposively selected to voluntarily participate in this study. Participants will be those who can: (a) report a peak experience, and (b) can describe the peak experience in detail.

- A. It is not intended that any "vulnerable" populations be included in this study.
- B. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the eight purposively selected volunteers in preparation for the AI Learning Process to be convened later in the month.
- C. During the AI Learning Process, paired semi-structured interviews will be conducted at one time with the eight purposively selected volunteers.
- D. During the AI Learning Process, an undetermined number (at this time) of focus groups will be conducted with the eight purposively selected volunteers.
- E. During the AI Learning Process, a generative story telling online activity will be conducted with the eight purposively selected volunteers.
- F. During the AI Learning Process, participant documents created by the eight purposively selected volunteers will be collected and analyzed.
- G. After the AI Learning Process a post interview will be conducted individually with each participant to gather data related to the participants' involvement in the AI Learning Process.

4. Describe each procedure step-by-step, including the frequency, duration, and location of each procedure.

All data collection visits to Robert M. Martin Elementary will be arranged through the superintendent in advance. Semi-structured individual interviews, semi-structured paired interviews, and the focus group interviews will last approximately 45 minutes. The generative story telling online activity will be presented and explained to all participants and will last approximately 30 minutes for each participant. Participant documents created by the eight purposively selected volunteers may include but not limited to brainstorm lists, graphical recordings, and conceptual drawings. The confidentiality of all participants will be protected. All consent forms for participants in the study will be provided and collected prior to any interview, focus group or generative story telling activity.

5. Describe any risks or discomforts (physical, psychological, or social) and how they will be minimized.

There are no known risks or discomforts anticipated for any of the participants.

6. Describe how the subjects' personal privacy is to be protected and confidentiality of information guaranteed (e.g. disposition of questionnaires, interview notes, recorded audio or videotapes, etc.).

All participation in the study is voluntary. All data will be treated confidentially. No respondents will be personally identified. Because of data analysis coding, only the researchers will be able to identify any respondent.

7. Describe the informed consent process and attach a copy of all consent and/or assent documents. These documents **must** be retained for three years beyond completion of the study. Any waiver of written informed consent must be justified.

A consent form will be signed by all participants to document their voluntary participation; this will be completed prior to any involvement in the study. Data produced by these participants will be available only to members of the research team.

8. Attach all supporting material, including, but not limited to, questionnaire or survey forms and letters of approval from cooperating institutions.

The Principal Investigator agrees to abide by the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects and to retain consent forms for a minimum of three (3) years beyond the completion of the study. If the data collection or testing of subjects is to be performed by student assistants, the Principal Investigator will assume full responsibility for supervising the students to ensure that human subjects are adequately protected.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Signature of Co-investigator (for student project)

Date