Appreciative Inquiry for Inclusive Schools: Preliminary Results from a Scoping Review on VLE[1]

Inclusion is widely recognized as one of the founding principles for the quality of educational institutions and it is strictly related to the ICF perspective. Actually, the conceptualization of educational needs is associated to the enhancement of everyone's strengths and potential, and to the influence the (physical and social) environment may have. For these reasons schools should pay attention on these factors and on what is positive to lead to transformative and generative processes that may promote inclusion. In this sense, a useful framework may be that of the Appreciative Inquiry as it is strength-based process through which people act in partnership to determine and co-create how to move an organization forward. Based on this premises, this contribution aims at exploring existing literature on the adoption of this strength-based approach in the inclusive educational field and presenting preliminary results of a Scoping review. The PRISMA-ScR checklist will be used to report the review and five databases and global search engines. As a final point, this preliminary investigation will pay special attention to the adoption of the Appreciative Inquiry to encourage full participation and learning process of students who use Virtual Learning Environment at school. Results show that only few studies adopt the AI in this specific educational field, but an interesting investigation propose the adaptation of the Appreciative Learning. Hence, more studies should be done to make clear how this process may support inclusive process.

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry; Inclusion; Virtual Learning Environments; Scoping review.

Introduction

To date, the principle of inclusive education, which firstly gained worldwide attention with the Declaration of Salamanca in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994), spreads the light to the importance of giving all students the possibility to learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Consistent with it, the Italian educational policy anticipated these initiatives, because it provided for a unitary education system aimed at overcoming the dual track system (special schools and ordinary schools) to enhance the differences since 1970 (Aiello, 2015). Working in a single-track system require inclusive teachers and educational community to change their perspective on people with disabilities and other special educational needs, to adapt the context to their potentials and considering that their needs may arise because of various factors related to the individual, but also to the environment (social and physical). Therefore, it may be inferred that there is a strictly connection between this

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[1] The article is the result of a collaboration between the authors. However, Flavia Capodanno wrote paragraphs "1. Introduction", "3. Results and discussion", "4. Conclusion"; Emanuela Zappalà wrote paragraph "2. Methodology"; Paola Aiello is the scientific coordinator of the research.

1 perspective and the way the International Classification of Functioning, Disability
2 and Health (WHO, 2001). It is fundamental in inclusive educational context as
3 explains disabilities by using bio-psychosocial model. More specifically,
4 according to this paradigm, student with disabilities should not be labelled with
5 their disease or disorder; whereas teachers and other professionals should consider
6 how their full participation and learning process may be hindered (or not) by the
7 context.
8   This hermeneutic approach bases its originality on a close link between
9 personal factors and environmental one, in a holistic and systemic perspective,
10 with the full enhancement of diversity, understood as values and resources. These
11 considerations lead politics (UNESCO, 2005; UN, 2006) and researchers (Booth
12 & Ainscow 2014, Aiello & Pace, 2020; Stainback and Stainback, 1990) to stress it
13 and to point out that inclusion is a right of everyone, as everybody is entitled to a
14 quality education, to actively participate to all the activities proposed within
15 everyday life environments. To date, it has also become a crucial theme and
16 objective of the Agenda 2030, specifically the 4th which invites to "Ensure
17 inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning
18 opportunities for all" (UN, 2015).
19   Moreover, as stated by Booth & Ainscow (2014, p. 18):
20
21 "The challenge posed by inclusion […] implies not simply «making room» for
22 differences - in the name of an abstract principle of tolerance of diversity - but rather
23 affirming them, put them at the center of educational action as the generative nucleus
24 of life processes".
25
26   Actually, these principles emphasize the need to guarantee everyone the right
27 to equity and accessibility to effective and quality training, regardless of
28 disadvantaged situation. But it also means that who want to act inclusion should
29 develop everyone potential, not just focusing on their disabilities or difficulties and
30 let them be physically part of the environment but letting them be main character
31 of its learning process, too.
32   In this sense, schools serve a pivotal role. It clearly emerges the need for
33 teachers to plan and realize both well-structured and accessible learning
34 environments (both in classrooms and within virtual environments) that suites
35 peculiars and preferences of their students. Increasingly important is the idea that it
36 is necessary to pursue forms of inclusive planning aimed at eliminating barriers to
37 students' development and participation, as emphasized by the Universal Design
38 for Learning (CAST, 2011; Hall, Meyer & Rose, 2012). According to this
39 approach, attention should be paid to the potential of new technologies too,
40 because of their multimedia characteristics that may be useful to support every
41 different learning style, but also for their accessibility, thanks to the extreme
42 flexibility and plurality of languages (European Agency for the Development of
43 Education for Disabled Pupils, 2013). In fact, the use of technologies within
44 Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) would facilitate both social participation and
45 learning process (Calvani & Vivanet, 2014; Hamburg & Bucksch, 2015) if the
46 teachers choose them by considering students' preferences, interests and opinion
47 about it. In this regard, there is a rich national and international scientific literature

1   on VLE (such as: augmented or virtual reality, serious game, edugame) that
2   highlights the potential of these in offering educational opportunities, for instance
3   to satisfy a variety of special educational needs, to develop several skills, to
4   promote educational and social inclusion (Eow et al, 2011; Astuti et al., 2021).
5   Nonetheless is important to clarify that it may be possible only if the teachers are
6   aware that a practice is effective, not only when it is adopted and implemented by
7   properly trained teachers, but also when there is an active involvement of the
8   students (Eow et al, 2011).

9   Based on these premises, the Appreciative Inquiry (AI; Cooperrider, Whitney
10 & Stavros, 2008) may be considered a potentially useful approach, because it is
11 based on the analysis of the strengths, of what is positive within an organization to
12 design a project aimed at changing, transforming and improving its practices. Even
13 if it origins in the organizational and managerial field (Cooperrider-Strivastva,
14 1987) it is even used within the educational field (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).
15 This hermeneutic approach begins with the analysis of the strengths of an
16 organization and then builds a project aimed at change and transformative and
17 improvement processes. According to it, the issue should be "what is working" or
18 "when the organization was at its finest", rather than starting with "what is wrong"
19 (Cooperrider-Strivastva, 1987).

20   The adoption of the AI is guided through two different phases. The first is the
21 theoretical one and it is characterized by four principles: Constructionist;
22 Simultaneity; Poetic; Anticipatory; Positiv of a social and collaborative co-
23 construction of learning. The second is the operational phase. Either the first or
24 the second underline the nature of the investigation for transformative purposes
25 and are based on a circular process, known as "4D cycle" as it originates from the
26 name of the individual corresponding phases, later integrated with one more
27 preliminary phase (Cockell, McArthur Blair J, 2012) that take rise to the 5D-
28 Cycle:
29
30 *Figure 1*. The 5D-Cycle (Cockell, McArthur Blair, 2012, p. 54)

31
32   The AI approach actively involves participants to the investigation as they are
33 asked questions in a positive and rational way searching for improvements.
34 Because of that, it is often used to change something in people and their behavior
35 by defining the problems to be solved. Moreover, according to Cooperrider and
36 Whitney (2005) appreciative research practices focus on the past and present

1 capacities of the subjects to create possible future (Cooperrider et al., 2008).
2 Hence, it seems to be an interesting and useful method to employ, especially in
3 relation to the construction of inclusion. According to it, it seems important to
4 investigate if there are studies which have already explored the potential of AI to
5 select and design VLE while adopting educational technologies to promote the
6 teaching process-learning and inclusion of all students.
7
8
9 **Methodology**
10
11 **Objectives**
12
13 This review aimed to examine international research that made use of the AI
14 to promote the teacher-learning process within VLE. At the same time, as reported
15 in the theoretical framework, it aimed to investigate the opportunities arising from
16 the adoption of this approach to improve the involvement of students who use
17 digital artefacts, with the prospect of recognizing opportunities for promoting
18 collaborative and inclusive processes.
19
20 **Study Design**
21
22 Given the exploratory nature of the objectives, the preliminary investigation
23 was conducted by adopting the methodology of the Scoping Review (Arksey &
24 O'Malley, 2005; Ghirotto, 2020; Heyvaert, Hannes, & Onghena, 2016). It
25 consisted of a literature review aimed at detecting the state of the art in terms of
26 breadth and depth of a phenomenon or a theme within a specific disciplinary field
27 (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Ghirotto, 2020; Heyvaert, Hannes, & Onghena, 2016).
28 Actually, this review process is used to assess the degree of evidence that is
29 available, classify it and identify any gaps to detect the state of the art in terms of
30 extensiveness of a phenomenon or a theme within a specific disciplinary field.
31 The review was carried out following the PRISMA-ScR protocol (Tricco et
32 al., 2018) with the purpose of mapping key concepts, types of evidence and gaps
33 in the AI area, systematically researching, selecting and synthesizing what exists
34 as suggested by Colquhoun et al. (2014). The review was conducted following
35 five phases: searching, screening, data extraction and charting, analysis and
36 synthesis.
37
38 **Search Strategy and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**
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40 The systematic search was carried out using five international databases and
41 search engines which are the most representative for the topic: ACM Digital
42 Library, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Worldcat. Moreover, the search was
43 limited to studies published in English from 2000 and January 2022.
44 The key search terms were established iteratively as the reviewers became
45 more acquainted with the topic. This search included the combination of:
46 "Appreciative learning", "virtual learning environment", "videogames", "student

1   agency", "educational technology", "edugame", "serious game", "virtual
2   environment", "computer game", "technology-enhanced learning", "inclusion",
3   "student engagement". The terms were combined using boolean operators "AND"
4   and "OR".
5   Moreover, to be included, studies should meet at least one of the following
6   criteria:
7
8   - adoption of Appreciative Inquire to promote inclusion within *Virtual*
9   *Learning Environment;*
10 - adoption of Appreciative Inquire related to the use of edugame to foster
11   skills development;
12 - research design: empirical research conducted in gropus, single case, use
13   of qualitative and/or quantitative methods.
14
15   At last, gray literature (proceedings, thesis, doctoral dissertations, …), books,
16 or studies published in other languages than Italian and English were not included
17 for this preliminary research.
18
19 **Selection Process, Data Charting and Extraction**
20
21   A Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
22 (PRISMA; Liberati et al. 2009) flowchart (Fig. 1) was created to clearly indicate
23 how the included studies were chosen.
24   The search led to 121 contributions, screened by the researchers employing
25 the inclusion criteria. It supported to assess the eligibility of the selected and
26 identified studies. Later, the articles were screened according to title and abstract
27 data (Prahladh, & van Wyk, 2020) and it led to select 12 relevant studies[2].
28   After that, full-text screening of all eligible articles, as Badger et al. (2000)
29 pointed out, it was important to go further by reading the full text of the selected
30 papers as abstract and title might not be representative. Then, a manual search was
31 used to find studies that might not have been found in the primary searches
32 (Hopewell et al. 2007). This required going over the reference lists from the
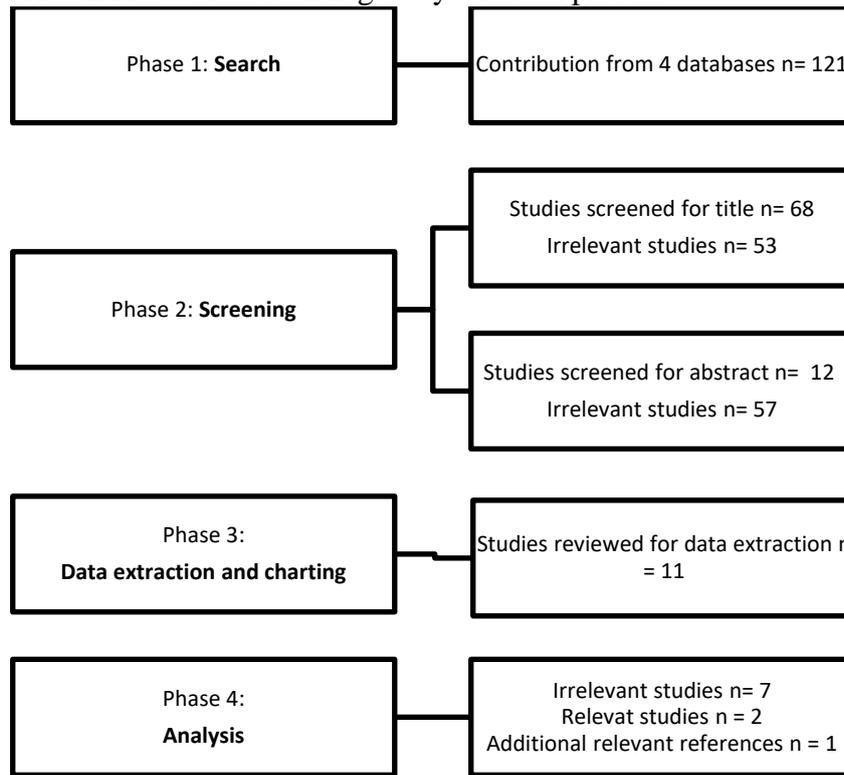33 screened studies.
34
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[2]Look at Fig. 1 to read the flowchart that outline how the included studies were selected.

1   *Figure 1.* PRISMA flow chart outlining study selection process

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3
4   It led to the next phase: the data extraction of studies included (n. 11). This
5 process was supported using a charting strategy based on the completion of a table
6 (Tab.1) where the researchers noted, for the relevant studies (n. 3):
7
8   • bibliographic information (author/s, year of publication)
9   • aims/purpose,
10   • study population and sample size (if applicable),
11   • methodology/methods,
12   • technology or VLE used (if applicable)
13   • key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s.
14
15   This charting procedure was useful to synthetize and interpret qualitative
16 data cataloging and ordering the information in an analytical way according to
17 key-themes (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Bibliographic information	Aims/ purposes	Study population and sample size	Methodology/methods	Technology or VLE used	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s.
Haryanto, H., Harisa, A. B., & Gamayanto, I. (2021).	Appreciative Learning is used to design immersive experiences of games. Actually, these usually consist of sensory, imaginary and challenge-based immersion.	Not applicable	Overview of the Game Reward Model and Appreciative Learning (AL) for Reward System to develop an edugame prototype on Entrepreneurship Education with Role Playing Game (RPG) Genre.	Educational game	The researchers developed immersive experiences that may be characterized as sensory, creative, or challenge based. Adopting the AL they prepared a questionnaire that was given both to teachers and students who played the game to evaluate their experiences.
Eow, Y. L., Wan Zah, W. A., Rosnaini, M., & Roselan, B. (2011).	The study investigates the combination of the Appreciative Learning approach and Computer Game Development in enhancing students' creativity, in terms of the products created.	36 students randomly chosen from two schools in Kuala Lumpur (the capital of Malaysia).	This study employs three phases and both an action research technique (Greenwood & Levin, 2007) and a control group experimental design. The first phase explores the impact of the Appreciative Learning approach and Computer Game Development on the creativity of student output. The second and the third phase extend the examination of the influence of AI methods on the creation of computer games.	Computer-based learning tools	In this action research study, the importance of computer game development and AL was underlined as an efficient combination for encouraging students to think and act creatively. Thanks to the combination of AL and computer game production, students in the treatment group were able to develop much better game frameworks, game content, and game polishing than students in the control group. This may be explained by the fact that therapy group participants had more developed creative perception and creative processes. According to statistical analysis, evaluators students found that the treatment group's computer games in Phase I offered more novelty, arousal, and centrality qualities than the control group did. Except for the arousal dimension during Phase III in this study, results showed statistically significant increases in mean scores on all dimensions as evaluated by student evaluators from phase to phase. When given the chance, students proved their ability to come up with appealing and original ideas. In conclusion, it was found that the AL approach and game development had the potential to give students opportunities to express themselves creatively via the games they create.
Eow, Y. L., & Baki, R. (2010).	The contribution aims to look at a combination of technology, pedagogy, and	36 Malesian students (13-14 years old).	The rationale for employing control group experimental design derived from an effort to assess the efficacy of an AL technique employed in a computer game creation	Computer-based learning tools	Students in the AL approach group (treatment) exhibited a significantly higher Creativity Perception Index as compared to the control

| | creativity through computer games development and Appreciative Learning approach. | Sample strategy used: randomised subjects. | activity with the objective of developing students' creative perspectives. The overall Creative Perception Index (CPI) score, WKOP (What kind of person are you?), and SAM (Something About Myself) score were computed using a modified Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical test for normality. | | group. The facilitator's learning environment, which placed an emphasis on supportive, helpful and unrestricted directed autonomy for students to grow with more self-fulfillment, may be responsible for the treatment group's significantly higher score. Further studies might evaluate a wider range by setting the proportion of male and female participants to be even before the trial begins. Second, the study was rather condensed (4 weeks or 16 hours of interaction). The arrangement should be longitudinal. |

Table 1. Description of the included article.

Results and Discussion

The analysis showed that the most cited author was Barrett (1995) who explained that an appreciative approach may foster a number of specific skills, all linked to the dimension of the positive, generativity and collaboration between members of an organization, while using action-research methodology. Moreover, Drew et al. (2014) emphasized the coherence of AI to the principles of positive psychology, (Seligman, 1996) of leadership and complex systems theory, too. According to the objectives of this contribution three main themes were identified:

Conceptualization and Appreciative inquiry framework; Appreciative inquiry, technologies and VLE; Appreciative inquiry inclusion and education.

Conceptualization and Appreciative Inquiry Framework

Eow, Zah, Rosnaini, & Roselan, (2010) analyzed the potential of AI in the educational field. More specifically, they explained how its phases may be adopted to promote the learning process. In fact, the relevance of this study depended on the opportunity to *recalibrate* the learning approach, enhancing students' potential and motivations, putting them at the center of their training process by adopting the AI as a new pedagogical alternative.

According to Eow et al. (2010) it may be possible to implement the 4D cycle to promote greater flexibility to face the technological advancement. Moreover, they decided to add three more theoretical principles, taking account to further research on this topic (Preskill and Catsambas, 2006), which are the:

- *Wholeness Principle,*
- *Enactment Principle,*
- *Free Choice Principle.*

The last one was considered by the authors as the most useful and suitable within Asian educational context, where there are specific conventional methods to teach and learn that sometimes give raise to disciplinary problems.

Appreciative learning approach proposed by the authors as a new pedagogical option for educational setting is based on AI. Actually, there are several applications of this approach in the educational field (Morsillo & Fisher, 2007; McAdam & Mirza, 2009; Yballe & O'Connor, 2000; Filleul & Rowland, 2006). Empirical evidence therefore demonstrates how appreciative inquiry is applied to the school world involves both an increase in knowledge and a changing behaviors and attitudes. Indeed, the appreciative inquiry can provide an alternative paradigm for creating teaching experiences generative and positive. In this way the didactic action is constantly redefined by the teacher and yes responds to the needs of the individual by making him a participant and involved. The students feel part of a project designed by them and for them.

Appreciative Inquiry, Technologies and VLE

Interesting results were about the adoption of the AI in combination with videogames with the aim of promoting: learning process and participation. Above all, Haryanto's research group (Haryanto, Ardiawan & Gamayanto, 2021; Haryanto, Rosyidah and Kardianawati, 2019) used the AI framework to implement role-playing videogames with educational purposes. Their research projects aimed to foster learning, while using serious games and adopting the AL. This peculiar framework was actually used to design immersive experiences using all the four phases of the 4D model to let the players practice sensory, imaginary, and challenge-based experiences that supported them on focusing on positive elements, such as achievements and opportunities. The authors found out that the appreciative approach showed its effectiveness in modeling and categorizing reward behavior.

Likewise, Eow, Wan Zah, Rosnaini and Roselan (2010, 2011) investigated how to improve students' creativity by implementing the appreciative learning approach. Its 4D cycle was employed as a pedagogical strategy to improve the students' perception of their creativity. The sample was composed of 69 Malaysian students, between 13 and 14 years of age, which was divided into two groups. With the treatment group the Appreciation-Based Learning (AI) approach was used, whereas a self-learning approach was applied with the control group. Results showed that the students of the treatment group achieved a mean score of 71.82, which was significantly higher at a significance level of 0.05 than the mean score of 50.49 exhibited by the control group. According to the authors, the stages of the appreciative learning approach may have encouraged students in self-awareness and freedom of self-expression.

Later, the scholars (Eow et al., 2011) conducted another study with the aim to investigate the combination of the appreciative learning approach and the development of computer games to foster creativity skills development. The sample consisted of 36 pupils from two Malaysian schools, with some similar characteristics in terms of age, gender, computer proficiency, years of experience playing computer games, time spent a week playing virtual games and creative perception. Compared to the previous study, the steps of the 4Ds were modified with the intention of leaving students freer to express the awareness of their own actions in an autonomous and personal way. Alternative tools to support group discussion of 10 minute, such as the logbook, were used to preserve privacy and accommodate students with greater intrapersonal reflection skills. During the phase three of the 4D cycle, it was preferred to replace the discussion time to encourage collaboration through small group work. In general, the effectiveness of the AL was proved when the students were asked to highlight the positive aspects.

Appreciative Inquiry Inclusion and Education

At last, two studies conducted by Ronald Calabrese (2006,2008) wese considered relevant to the purpose of this investigation. The first one was cited into Eow et al. (2010) contribution because the researchers employed the AI to

investigate how much social inclusion may be encouraged while adopting the *Circle of Friends Program* (COFP) for students with disabilities. The COFP(2006) is an initiative aimed to improve social inclusion through a mentoring program that involve young people with disabilities and peers. The study involved six schools, four school districts in the Midwestern state, ten school sponsors, eight mentors and friends as well as parents of children served by COFP. The results of this study showed an improvement of social inclusion of students with disabilities. Furthermore, parents felt more integrated and less isolated, and it supported change process. Finally, the last study of Ronald Calabrese (2006) envisaged the application of the AI in relation to the relationship between school and university in American contexts. This research aimed to explore the ecology of collaboration between schools and universities through an appreciative inquiry-theoretical perspective, to demonstrate how it increases social capital in school and university partnerships. Results highlighted that the application of appreciation inquiry as a theoretical perspective improved public school-university relationships and promoted sustainable partnerships as it reduced focuses on issues and ab attention to on human potentials.

Conclusion

The review showed that the methodological approach of AI is usually applied within business organizations. Only its educational-didactic declination, the Appreciative learning, is usually employed in studies that explores the potentials of Virtual Learning Environments, especially to foster creativity skills and students' participation.

Remarkable is the trend of adopting AI towards learning improvement. It stimulates to broaden the investigation of scientific literature, especially with the aim of investigating the presence or absence of studies about inclusion within other educational contexts by using other combinations of key terms during the search phase. It is also interesting to highlight that the investigations are limited to the United States, Australia, Indonesia and Malaysia. Hence, the European context did not appear in the analyzed studies. Therefore, further investigations are needed to broaden the horizon of analysis to deepen the dimensions of application of this approach.

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