

CONVERSATIONS WORTH HAVING

Case Studies with Michigan Library Leaders

MLA 2026— Novi, Michigan

Michelle Bradley, Biz Gallo, Glenn Fischer, Jennifer Balcom, &
Andrea Vernola

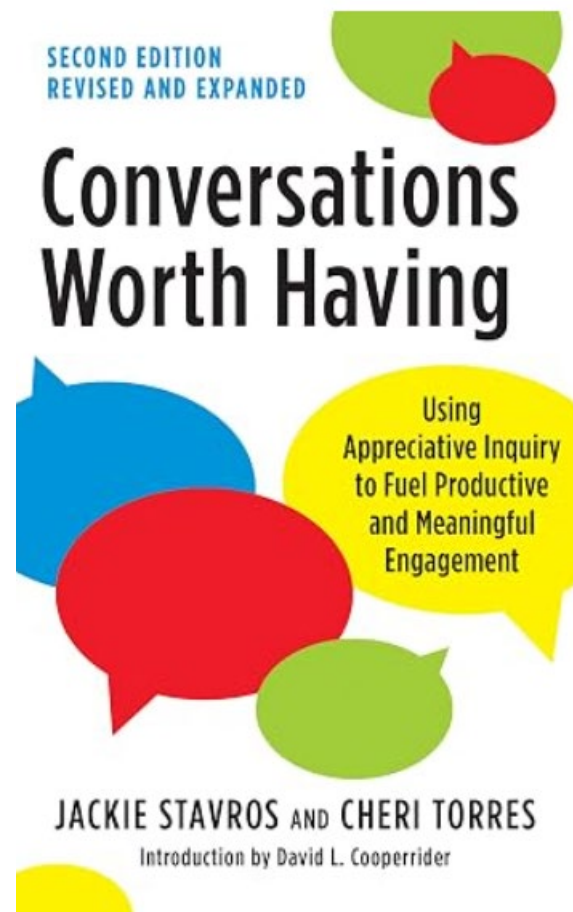
Overview

- CWH Project at LM
- Productive and Meaningful Conversations
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Two Simple Practices
- Case Studies
- Q&A

Michelle Bradley
Library Development Manager
Library of Michigan

CWH for Michigan Library Leaders

- 110+ participants in 2024-2026
- 23 certified trainers through CWH Institute
- Ongoing and collaborative
- Individual and team projects to bring CWH practices to Michigan libraries
- Additional training opportunities coming soon



CWH - Grounded in Research

Conversations Worth Having:

Using Appreciative Inquiry to Fuel Meaningful and Productive Conversations

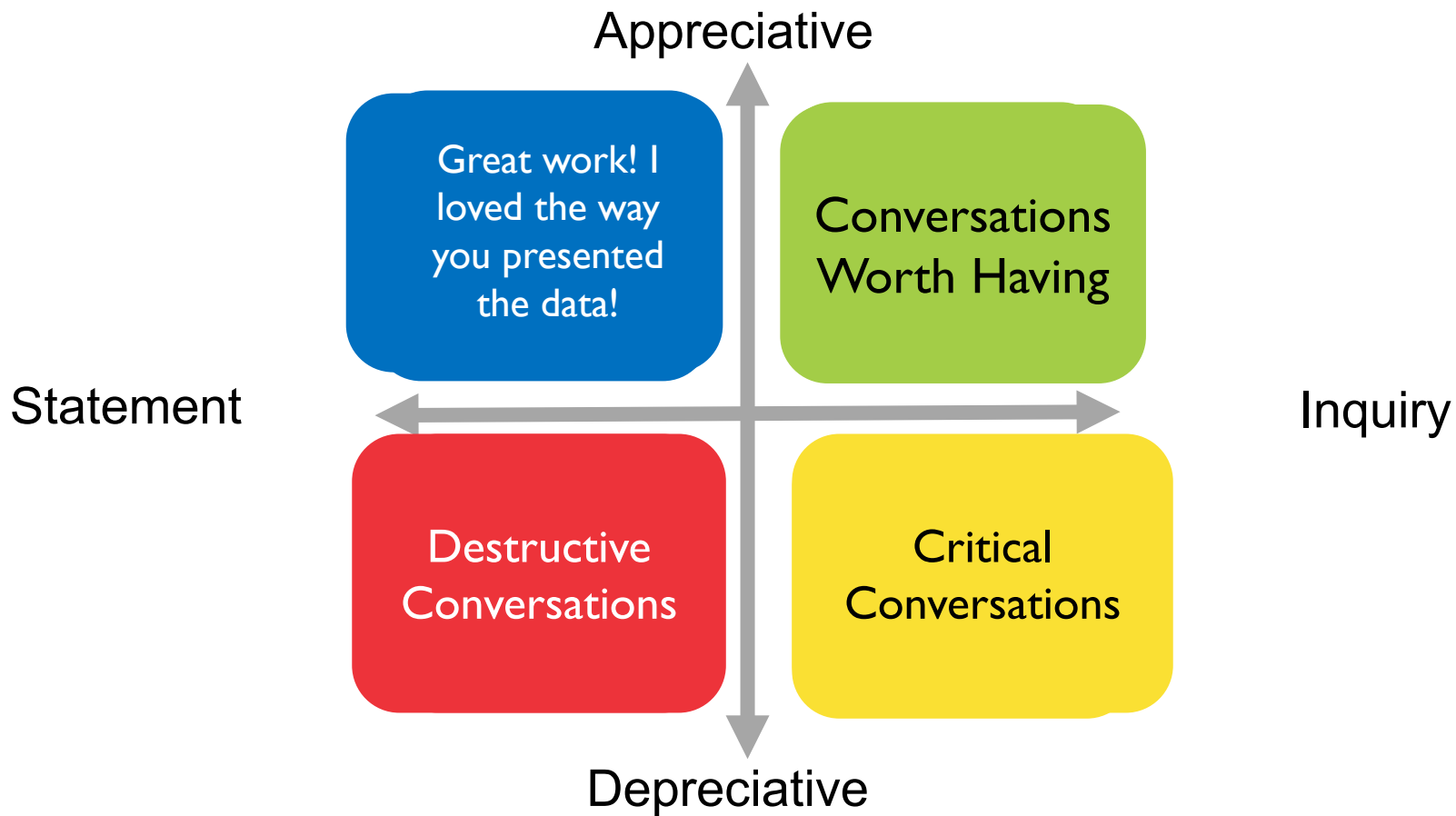
Appreciative - Add value, value people and the best of what is.

Inquiry - Get curious, wonder, and search for what generates life and emergence.

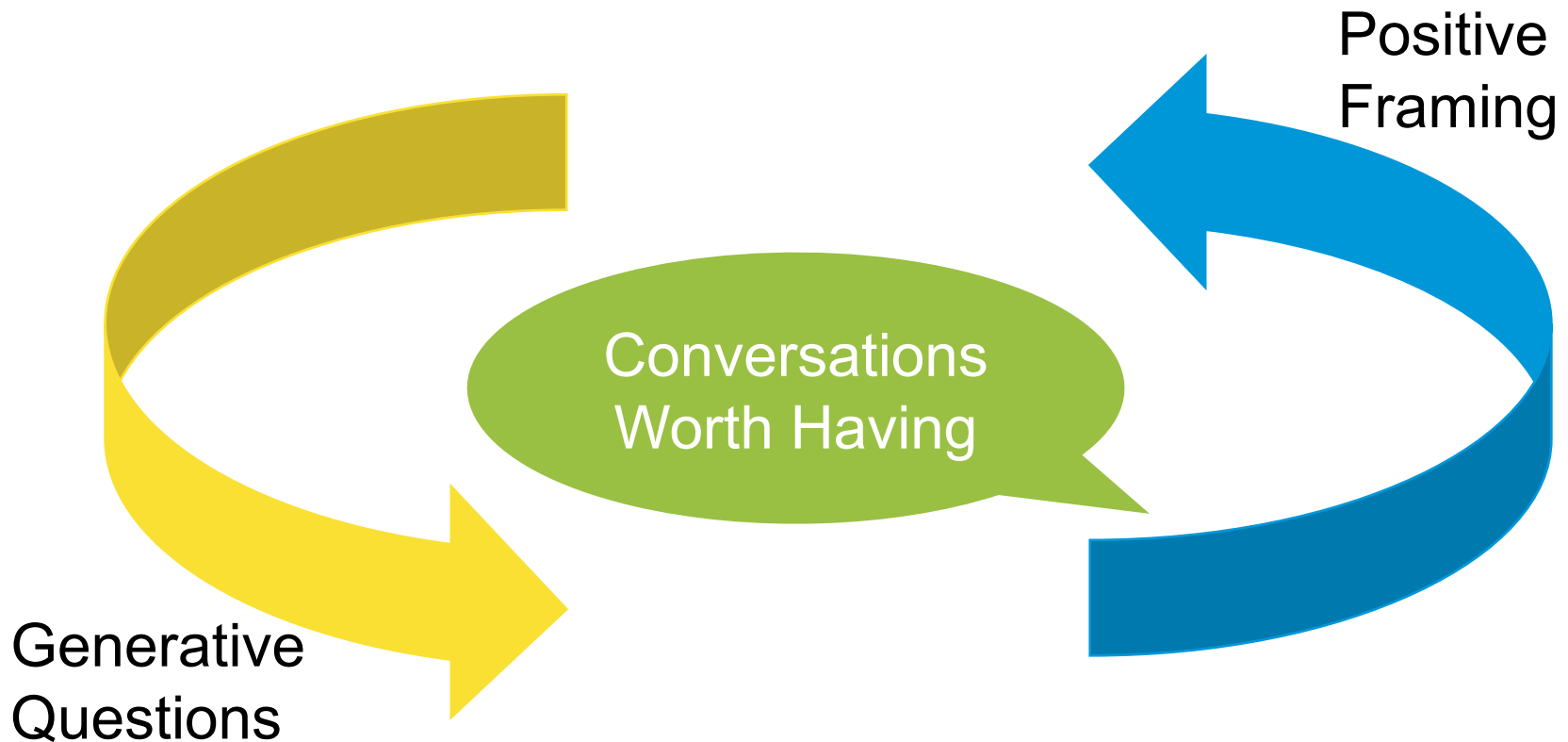
A vibrant underwater scene featuring a variety of colorful fish, including a large yellow and black striped fish, a blue and white striped fish, and a blue and white striped fish, swimming around a dark, textured rock formation. The background is a deep blue, suggesting an underwater environment. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

What percentage
of your waking life
is spent in
conversation?





Two Simple Practices



Re-envisioning the Michigan Library Directors Meeting

Biz Gallo
Statewide Digitization Initiatives
Coordinator
Library of Michigan

- Rethinking an established, successful meeting.
- Getting curious about what directors wanted
- 2-hour virtual meeting incorporating CWH
- Separate survey to engage additional stakeholders
- Using generative questions

Generative Questions



Making the
invisible visible



Creating shared
understanding



Generating new
knowledge



Inspiring
possibilities



What Did We Ask?

Questions intended to inspire the participants to pause and reflect

- An "AHA" moment with a past meeting
- What did they value about the meeting?
- What could be achieved as a result?
- What would an ideal version of the meeting look like to them?

We incorporated group activities that used discussion and visual representation to encourage participants to consider differently.



What Did We Discover?

Meetings are
valued

More peer
interaction &
connection

Additional and
varied
presenters

In-Person
opportunity

From Grumpy to Gratitude

Glenn Fischer
Director
DeWitt District Library



- Practice and Training Matter
 - Opportunities can occur unexpectedly and anywhere
- Planning Our Mural
- Confrontation
- Introductions
- Reflection

Next steps

- Personal Invitations
 - We scheduled a lunch to talk
 - Conversations Worth Having Can Heal
 - Empathy is key
- Checking in and Being Present of a Conversation
- Active Listening, Framing, and Generative Questions
 - ...then more listening
- Make Space – You Have the Power to Pause
- Create an advocate

Conversations That Move Work Forward

Jennifer Balcom
Cooperative Director
Mid-Michigan Library League

- Started with a question: Why does work get stuck?
- Looked at how work and conversation can get out of sync
- Connected Conversations Worth Having with the Working Genius stages of work (WIDGET)
- Built a practical diagnostic for meetings, projects, and decisions

A process problem can look like a people problem

Sometimes what looks like...

PEOPLE STORY

- resistance
- negativity
- lack of initiative
- overthinking
- poor follow-through

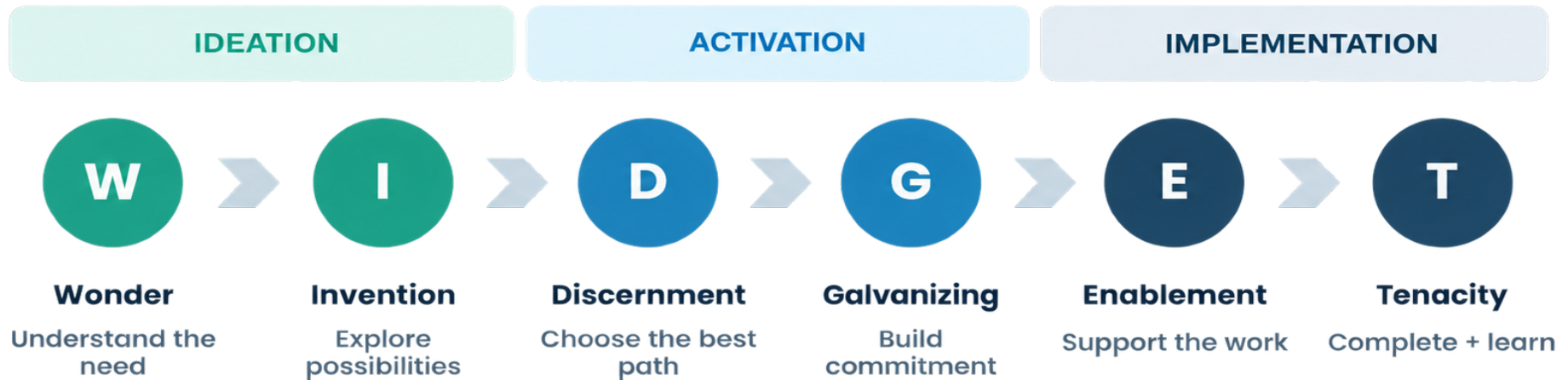


PROCESS STORY

- a missing conversation
- an unanswered question
- a rushed transition
- unclear ownership

WIDGET: How work moves from idea to completion

The question changes because the stage of work changes.



A four-question diagnostic

Use this when a meeting, project, or decision starts to feel stuck

Where are we in the work process?

Name the stage.

What tells us we are stuck here?

Look for evidence.

What conversation does the work need now?

Curiosity? Possibility? Wisdom?
Commitment? Support? Completion?

What question will help us move forward.

Ask the next useful question.

SOAR'ing with QSAC

- Revising QSAC Together
- Aligning Folks for a Strategic Conversation
- SOAR instead of SWOT
- Positive Reframing and Generative Questions

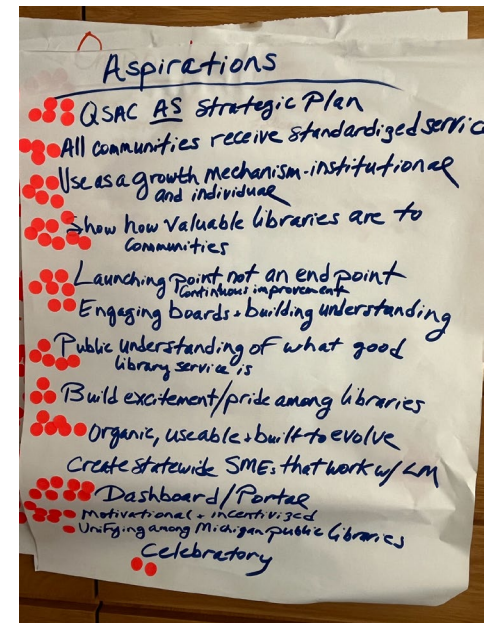
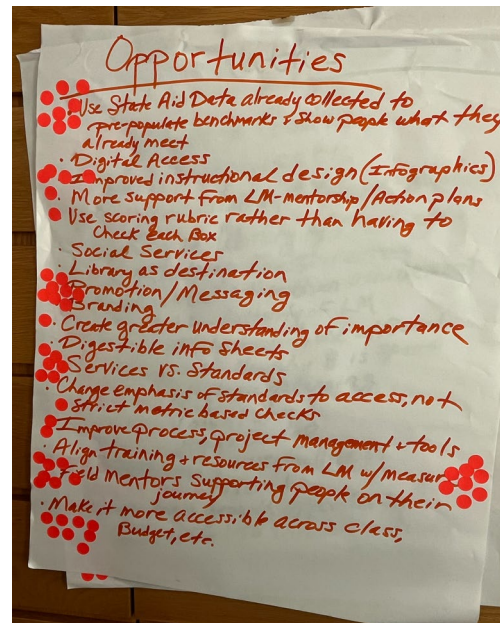
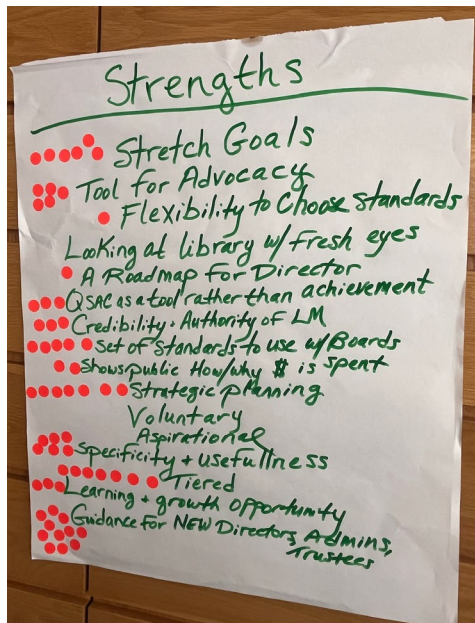
Andrea Vernola
Continuing Education Coordinator
Library of Michigan

Revising LM's QSAC Measures

- Many years of collective experiences and perspectives
- Bringing Michigan folks together
- From brainstorming to consensus



Building Consensus with S O A R



- Positive framing as lens
- Generative questions to focus discussion

Questions?
Please reach out
anytime.



Michelle Bradley
Library of Michigan
BradleyMI3@michigan.gov



Biz Gallo
Library of Michigan
GalloB@michigan.gov



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DeWitt District Library
gfischer@dewittlibrary.org



Jennifer Balcom
Mid-Michigan Library League
jbalcom@mml.org



Andrea Vernola
Library of Michigan
VernolaA@michigan.gov