

# Appreciative Inquiry Facilitation Training Certification Report

Larissa Thurlow

Improving Speaking Assessments for Students at the College of the North Atlantic – Qatar

January, 2012

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## 1. *Name and Contact Information:*

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## 2. *Brief description of the organization, group, or community you worked with.*

Opened in September 2002 through an agreement between the State of Qatar and College of the North Atlantic (in Canada), CNA-Q is Qatar's premier comprehensive technical college. With approximately 750 staff and 4500 full and part-time students, CNA-Q is one of Qatar's largest post-secondary institutions.

CNA-Q combines a Canadian curriculum and industry expertise in 4 program areas, including Business Studies, Engineering Technology, Health Sciences and Information Technology.

The Language Studies department that we worked with offers a wide range of preparatory and program support courses, as well as continuing education and contract training courses to meet the needs of the community, business and industry.

## 3. *List the names and/or category of stakeholders you included in the Core Group, the cross-section of people that helped you identify the topic and modify the Interview Guide.*

### Topic and Interview Guide Modification:

Rolene Pryor, Manager of Quality Assurance

Eleanor Kenny, Chair, Language Studies

P. Charles Brown, Associate Dean, Language Studies and Academics

Jason Rolls, Dean, Language Studies and Academics

### Exceptional Speaking Assessments at CNA-Q focus group consisted of the following LSA Faculty:

- Bartlett, Loretta
- McCann, Arlene
- Eibner, Linda
- Mauer, Ian
- Phillips, Moira
- Holtby, Amy
- Moczuk, Lorraine
- Watts, Marc
- Cherniak, Elizabeth

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- Chisholm, Christopher
- Woodrow, Norah
- Earl, Linda
- Oakley, Joan
- O'Neill, Maureen
- Jack, Krista
- Fraser, Linda
- Ashkuri, Nadine
- Pumphrey, Heather
- Thurlow, Larissa
- Blakesley, Catherine
- Burton, Shairon
- Jamal, Fozia
- Cabrnach, Tomas
- Kenworthy, Roger
- Doucette, David
- Maby, Mark
- Wolansky, Randall
- Symes, Skipp
- Ferzam, Saad
- MacDonald, Aime
- Rogers, Susan

#### 4. *What was the positive topic that the Core Group identified for inquiry? What method did you use to help them identify the topic?*

We used AI within the Language Studies department at CNA-Q to formulate a more effective way of assessing speaking skills. As such, the positive topic focussed stakeholders' "peak experience" of a time they were involved in an exceptional speaking assessment.

*Attach or include the modified Interview Guide they used, i.e., the Generic Interview Guide slightly modified for the positive topic of the inquiry.*

See **Appendix A** for interview guides.

#### 5. *What method of interviews did people use to inquire into exceptionally positive moments, face to face paired interviews, or some other way?*

Face-to-face paired interviews lasting 40-60 minutes each

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**6. Attach or include a list of the Life-Giving Forces (what they MOST wanted to create MORE of) that the group identified in the stories they shared.**

See **Appendix B** for a list of the Life-Giving Forces as identified by participants.

**7. Attach or include the Provocative Proposition(s) the group or organization created from the LGFs.**

The following are the provocative propositions, a.k.a. “preferred statements of the future”, that were created from our session.

The speaking assessments at CNA-Q are really authentic. They allow students to fully demonstrate their abilities.

Speaking assessments are positive experiences for both students and teachers.

I'm able to express myself (naturally & creatively) and I can't wait to show what I know.

It's like having a conversation with my teacher.

We've done it before, I know what to expect. I'm ready.

The speaking assessments at CAN-Q give real world communicative opportunities, allowing students to actively use target language in a way that instills confidence in their abilities to go into their programs at the college and succeed.

CNA-Q is a leader in the field of speaking assessment. Students are engaged with authentic tasks in an environment that allows them to reach their full potential. They're a step above the rest.

CNA-Q speaking tests really showed me how much I learned in the course and how far I've come.

Authentic speaking assessments at CNA-Q encourage learning and prepare students for future success.

**8. Attach or include the organization, group or community's Strategic Intentions and the individual Commitments, Offers, and Requests that were created to realize the Provocative Proposition(s).**

**9. Impact or Results: What organizational, group or community attitude, process or structure changes have people already made as they move toward realizing the Provocative**

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## *Proposition(s)? What progress have people made toward their Strategic Intentions or Initiatives or Pilot Projects? What stories of success can you share?*

The Language Studies department has seen many changes to assessment over the years through a number of different initiatives that have met with limited success. The decision was made to use an Appreciative Inquiry approach to help inform the leadership team in creating an action plan for changing speaking assessments.

Ultimately, the result of this process was a discussion starter that was developed collaboratively. It is our hope and intention that all participants can “see themselves” in the summary report, and thus take ownership of implementing the action plan going forward.

Feedback suggests that people felt valued and included. They were pleased to be asked to be involved in the process and had valuable contributions. As a facilitator, I feel that our department, and the college as a whole, is moving towards a more solution-focused philosophy of working together. AI provides an excellent opportunity to reframe discussions about “problems” to conversations about “how things would look if they were working well”.

## *10. What will you do to ensure that people continue to move toward realizing the Provocative Proposition(s)? How will you help them gather stories of success? How will you help them celebrate? How will you, as the AI Facilitator, support their ongoing success?*

A summary report of the session was submitted to the leadership team, which has committed to implementing suggestions as soon as possible. I have asked the leadership team to share the plan that results from our findings and to invite ALL faculty members (including those unable to attend the session) to view and provide feedback on the draft plan.

As a result of the session, a recommendation to establish an ongoing assessment committee has been put forth to the leadership team. The intention is to continue to use Appreciative Inquiry throughout the process.

## *11. What did you wish for in the inquiry? What did you learn from the inquiry about yourself and your facilitation? What was your “personal best” experience related to facilitating the Inquiry?*

### *What did you wish for in the inquiry?*

I wished that people would “buy in” to the experience, trust the process, and continue to use the appreciative inquiry concept in other contexts (whether personal or professional). I wished that participants would easily discuss what they would like **more** of in our department rather than what they would like **less** of and focus on solutions; that instead of complaints falling on deaf ears, participant generated solutions would emerge and be implemented in a timely manner. I hoped that we

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would get the “data”, or recommendations we needed from the inquiry on which to adapt our speaking assessments to better serve faculty, and more importantly, our students’ needs. I hoped that participants would feel included, valued and their voices heard.

## *What did you learn from the inquiry about yourself and your facilitation?*

Working with my colleague Rolene exposed me to a different way of approaching facilitation and I’ve started to adopt some of her techniques. Despite having different styles, we worked well together and complemented each others’ skills well.

From the inquiry, I was able to again experience the power of appreciative inquiry firsthand. The sessions themselves moved along smoothly and it wasn’t a struggle to get participants to reframe ideas from a more positive perspective. My experience with AI has resulted in AI taking a firm place in my life; it’s another tool I’ve added to my toolbox. Since I received the AIFT training, there have been many moments where I’ve found myself reframing to the positive, both personally and professionally. Most recently I’m bringing it to my coaching conversations.

## *What was your "personal best" experience related to facilitating the Inquiry?*

There was something very satisfying about seeing people from my department who are usually very negative and cynical opening up to the process and becoming actively involved– maybe even enjoying it!

It gave an opportunity for people to be seen, heard and understood, which I think boosted morale. I strongly believe that using AI methods to shape decisions will greatly improve how we work together to achieve our mission and vision.

## ***12. Have you received permission from the "client" or "clients" to tell us their story? In other words, does Company of Experts.net have permission to share this story with others? If not, who would COE.net need to contact to receive permission?***

Company of Experts is welcome to share anything that is included in this document.

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## APPENDIX A: MODIFIED INTERVIEW GUIDES

## APPENDIX B: Life-Giving Forces