

AI Facilitator Certification

1. Please include your name, title, email address, phone number and agency that you work for.

Facilitator:

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2. Please include the AIFT Dates and location that you received your training

Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator Training
Las Vegas Center

February 12-14, 2014

3. Brief description of the organization, group, or community you worked with.

I carried out an Appreciative Inquiry with the Upper School faculty of the American School Foundation in Mexico City during the In-Service Days (Aug. 8 to 10, 2014) before the 2014-15 school year began. The faculty is made up of 73 members: 67 are teachers, 6 are counselors. 10 of the faculty members were new to the ASF this year. 65 % of the Faculty is from the United States, Canada, or the UK. 35 % of the faculty is from Mexico. 93 % of the faculty is proficient in English. The teachers who were not fully fluent in English were placed in a small group with strong bilingual community members who could help them process the whole group sessions and make their own contributions (provocative propositions, for example) in Spanish.

4. 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.

The Core Group that I assembled included the Heads of the Academic Departments within the school, and the presence of the two Deans, or Assistant Principals in the school. As such, the group of ten participants looked like this:

- Dean of Students
- Academic Dean
- Head of English Department
- Head of Language Department
- Head of Humanities in English Department
- Head of Humanities in Spanish Department
- Head of Mathematics Department
- Head of Science Department
- Head of Fine Arts & Technology Department
- Head of Counseling Department

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

The topic that the Core Group identified was: “How can we facilitate and celebrate student success in order to become the best that we can be?”

The method that I used to get the group to identify the topic began with a brainstorming “homework assignment.” As the Head of School, I meet periodically with the Heads of Dep’t. At the end of the 2013-14 school year (June 2014) I asked them the following question, “If you could choose any 3 topics for the professional development sessions for the in-service days of 2014-15, what would they be? The 10 participants shared their thoughts in a Google Document. When we met in July of 2014, 2 weeks before the inquiry, we used a consensus building strategy about which areas were most important to the group.

There were two main areas that the Core Group identified:

The first was concerning the topic academic rigor – that is, how to challenge students, and prepare them for acceptance into challenging academic programs at our school and selective universities in the future. That is, how to raise the bar academically, and live up to our school’s mission.

The second was about how to take care of kids emotionally, socially, and personally. The Deans and Heads of Department wondered about how to generate a greater sense of community in school, and develop strong relationships of trust among faculty members, and - most particularly – between students and faculty members.

The topic that I helped the group to devise, tries to pull upon both strands of their concerns, rigor and fellowship, achievement and celebration.

6. Attach or include the modified Interview Guide they used, i.e., the Generic Interview Guide slightly modified for the positive topic of the inquiry.
7. What method of interviews did people use to inquire into exceptionally positive moments, face-to-face paired interviews, or some other way?

The faculty used face-to-face paired interviews. The interviews were mostly conducted in English. The few non-English speakers were paired together or with a bilingual faculty member.

8. 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.

The Life Giving Forces identified by the Upper School Faculty are the following:

4 Upper School Themes / Life Giving Forces

- We build community by being caring individuals who model values such as trust, empathy, and open-mindedness.
- We identify students’ strengths to help them achieve “success”.
- We focus on simplicity.
- We retain a human element.

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

Upper School Provocative Propositions

1. Each piece of our community is integral to the whole. We as individuals take responsibility to model values in order to strengthen our ASF community (I without a “we” make no sense to me!)
2. Teachers use more experiential learning and small group participation activities to facilitate students’ abilities to identify personal strengths and potential for academic growth.
3. Simplicity allows everyone to focus. It helps students find success in what they are passionate about. The more complicated things become the more muddled the results. (K.I.S.S. - Keep It Simple, Sweetie)
4. *La escuela es un lugar donde se promueve el conocimiento interdisciplinario a traves de actividades humanistas, cientificas, y tecnologicas. / School is a place where interdisciplinary knowledge is promoted through humanistic activities as well as scientific and technological exchange.*
5. Effective teaching exemplifies clarity and simplicity of design. We guide students to success by eliminating unnecessary complexity.
6. All teachers must recognize that all students have strengths and abilities.
7. Our role exists to facilitate student learning. This shall always be our priority.
8. Community is created by working together toward common goals, fostering a sense of social responsibility reaching beyond the self.
10. Attach or include the Strategic Intentions the group or organization developed to realize the Provocative Proposition(s) they created.

Strategic Intentions developed to realize the Provocative Propositions

- Incorporate discussion of values into class time and Advocacy*. Collaboratively formulate rules based on agreed upon community values. Make connections to curriculum whenever appropriate.
- Be an involved and active member of the community by attending school events, clubs, and presence in school spaces.
- Model positive and community values among staff and faculty.
- Use pre and post-assessments to measure growth.
- Include community service activities.
- Quality over quantity
- Short, succinct policies schoolwide
- Don’t reinvent the wheel. (“If it ain’t broke don’t fix it.”)
- Post only one concise learning objective for each lesson.
- Eliminate one element from each lesson.
- Talk to all students and get to know their strengths.
- Teachers will incorporate each student’s strengths when planning.
- We will come prepared daily to engage students and optimize their learning.
- We will express reminders (to self and others) when we notice that student learning is not being prioritized)
- Schoolwide partnership with a sister school providing opportunities for mutual student and faculty growth.

- To make Advocacy the avenue for creating community through social engagement.

*Advocacy is a social-emotional program at the school. It takes place for the first 20 minutes of each day, therefore adds up to 100 minutes a week. The objective of the Advocacy Program is for each student to have an adult in whom to confide. The program looks to support students academically, socially, and emotionally. Additionally, it looks to increase the sense of community within the school, country of Mexico, and across the world.

11. Impact or Results: What organizational, group or community **attitude, process or structure** changes have people made as they move toward realizing the Provocative Proposition(s)? What progress have people made toward their Strategic Intentions or Initiatives or Pilot Projects? What stories of success can you share?

Attitude

The attitude towards professional discussion, and professional development has undergone a metamorphosis this school. The tone that was set by engaging in discussion and listening (vs. administrators “talking at” faculty members) has been key.

After 6 years of taking baby steps, the Upper School faculty seems to have embraced its role as “Advocates” of students (not just teachers). Although Admin. had made the expectations very clear to teachers (I ask a question in every single job interview), teachers until now had not seemed to understand the *raison d’être* of the program. Now, after the Inquiry, there is an understanding. Instead of grumbling that it is the “counselor’s job” to check in on kids’ grades (for example) teacher do so on a weekly basis with their students. They “high five” those kids who are making progress and dish out tough love to those who are slipping.

Another result of the inquiry was the establishment of an attitude where faculty members do not take themselves so seriously. The inquiry allowed people to stop being “experts” in everything. As part of the process, the Faculty decided to make a “Welcome Back” video for the kids. The video is a tangible symbol of the change in attitude, as it is very, very silly, and fun. (And, the kids loved it!)

Process

The way that teachers on the faculty communicate with one another, or with members of the Admin. Team is a bit more direct. If there are concerns within the community, faculty members have begun to talk more openly, instead of gossiping for months. If there is a breakdown in communication, the faculty members are holding each other to standards of accountability for clear communication.

Structure

We have worked towards getting students to reach beyond themselves (Provocative Proposition #8) by reaching far into the community. There are two pilot community service groups that students have formed this year. The first is a Special Olympics connection. Our private school (with outstanding facilities) has partnered with a special needs public school within the school vicinity. Our students are coaching the special needs kids on our campus, and our school will host the Special Olympics in April. Additionally, our students have organized a drive for donations in kind to help fix up the school.

Another pilot program, a group called “Leyendo por Mexico” (Reading for Mexico) has developed from a Senior Advocacy Group. Motivated by their teacher to think beyond the bubble of our school, 6 students have created a book collection program. They are organizing book drives within the school community, and have reached out for corporate sponsorship for books to be given to local

public schools. Our students recently organized an event with well-known Mexican novelist, with the presence of the Mexico City Secretary of Education, to raise awareness for their cause.

We have decided to structure school initiatives on a monthly basis for each provocative proposition. That is to say, during the month of September, the faculty focused on the following:

“Each piece of our community is integral to the whole. We as individuals take responsibility to model values in order to strengthen our ASF community (I without a “we” make no sense to me!)”

In the Weekly Upper School website, the Deans and myself provided faculty members with opportunities to be involved in community events. At faculty meetings, we asked teachers to give “shout outs” to each other for ways that their colleagues had strengthened the community.

Stories of Success

As a result of the Provocative Propositions that clearly established the relationship element between faculty members and students, one goal established by all Upper School Faculty members is called the “Who’s your Kid?” initiative. The goal is very simple. Each member of the faculty has chosen one student to “look out for” over the course of the school year. They are helping kids academically, socially or emotionally. I have met with about one third of the teachers in the faculty (29 teachers) and have heard many stories of success about “their kids.” Here are a few:

- One story involves a Biology teacher, Mr. A, who watches “his kid” at football practice twice a week. When they meet in the classroom, the teacher makes analogies between biology concepts and football passes. The student has been beyond flattered, and is finally getting biology. His grades have risen dramatically.
- Another story involves Mr. E, a Chemistry teacher. He heard that “his kid” was performing poorly in a US History class, so he has begun to pop into the History class to see where “his kid” is sitting, how he is behaving and what his attitude is like. Since this happens during his free period he can go every day and do a quick “check in.”
- An English teacher, Mrs R, is a master teacher. She set a challenge for herself to work closely with the most indifferent student in her senior English class. She said she has “forced herself” to think of “her kid” as her nephew. While he might annoy her with his poor work habits at times, she has come to understand that he is her family, and she needs to modify her approach in order to get him to learn.

12. 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?

I am in a privileged position to follow up with the process begun with the AI. I am the Head of the School (Upper School) I have made plans to ensure that we carry through with the positions in the following ways:

Devoting time each month to each of the Provocative Propositions.

At each faculty meeting, we will share our stories of success with the propositions.

At the end of the year, we will share – overall – the stories of “our kids.” We plan on presenting academic and social data on each student.

I would like to plan another Inquiry for the beginning of the 2015-16 school year. I will re-establish the core team again and choose the topic of inquiry.

13. 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?

I really wanted to see groups of teachers, counselors and librarians engage in meaningful conversations in the days leading up to the beginning of a new school year. I wanted the focus to be on the “why do we do this” piece instead of the 999 point check list of items to do before school begins. I had an additional goal of wanting members of a large faculty to communicate with different people, outside of their own departments or social circles.

I think that my “personal best” in the process of facilitating this inquiry was my ability to keep my own mouth shut. Usually, during an in-service time, I am talking a lot in front of a group of people. I lay down the law, talk about goals, initiatives, expectations, etc.. This time, I laid out the process of inquiry, gave a few examples, answered some questions, then walked around and listened. This is simple, but not easy! This is a characteristic that I have tried to maintain for the rest of the school year.

14. Have you received permission from the “client” or “clients” to tell us their story? In other words, does Company of Experts, Inc. have permission to share this story with others? If not, who would Company of Experts, Inc. need to contact to receive permission? If you could please answer each question as if telling us a story. Attach any materials that you may use such as power points, agendas, etc. It helps for us to “experience” your facilitation. Also, if you take pictures and we may use those, please include them.

Yes, I do have permission. I will attach the documents.