

## Strategic Planning and Targeting Success

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**C**oming Together—Targeting Success was the title of Colegio Maya's (American International School of Guatemala) Strategic Planning Summit. It captured well the objectives for the innovative and dynamic event to generate dialogue in bringing the learning community closer together to set future targets for school improvement. Utilizing an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, which aligned to the school's culture, allowed the school's stakeholders to engage in a meaningful and energized experience to begin creating the shared vision for school improvement. The truly magical mix included students, teachers, administrators, parents, Board Members, as well as former members of the school community.

As the school's previous five year school improvement plan came to an end, the School Board of Directors Strategic Planning Committee began the process to develop a new school improvement plan. In having heard about the use of AI in school, the

committee inquired further about its possible application for strategic planning. Information about this strengths-based approach was shared with the committee members as they were led through a mini-exercise in conducting an appreciative inquiry. For them, the challenge was to leave behind the traditional SWOT [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats] problem-solving (what's wrong, let's fix it!) mindset and to have confidence in the ability of the stakeholders to come



together for generative dialogue in seeking the best in their school and to build upon the identified positive core with genuine interest and energy. They came to understand that using AI is a way to 'give life' to an organization and the tasks at hand as people share their knowledge and look to create their future together. With this understanding the Strategic Planning Summit was held in Spring 2009.

The format of the day and a half Summit followed the recommended 4-D Appreciative Inquiry process, especially focusing the group's energy on the Discover and Dream phases.

**Discover**—Participants took part in a sequence of activities in order to identify the school's positive core: (1) One on one interviews and the sharing of stories directed at how the participants

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## New Horizons for Yangon International School

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are a part of the Colegio Maya learning community and what hopes they have for the future; (2) Report-outs to groups of what makes Colegio Maya special; (3) Creation of representative posters; and (4) Producing a synthesis of the school's positive core;

**Dream**—Working with the 'discovered' positive core, the participants in groups then began the Dream phase by using their multiple intelligences to share the images, sounds, and emotions that the positive core represented to them. With the freedom to create a skit, montage, song, dance or rap, they prepared a presentation to share with the rest of the summit participants. In taking this presented core a step further, groups were then asked to dream of a bold and possible future for Colegio Maya. In this exercise, groups were asked to create a future newspaper headline as an aspiration statement of which they would hope to accomplish. To accompany the headline, the groups also wrote an expected storyline in telling the story of how the aspiration was accomplished. The focus of the aspirations became the 'destination targets'.

**Design**—Participants were afforded the opportunity to choose the destination target that most interested them, joining a group to develop a proposed action plan for each. As part of the strategic planning, it was decided that this

resulting piece would only be a recommendation, leaving the formal design work as a subsequent step to be completed after the Summit.

**Destiny**—It was explained to the Summit participants that in Fall 2009, a Continuous School Improvement Task Force (CSITF) would be convened to continue with the strategic planning process. The CSITF would use the targets to develop the next three year school improvement plan. Participants were invited to share how they thought they would like to continue to be a part of the school improvement work. In celebration of the work and play accomplished, cups of sparkling juice accompanied by gourmet chocolates were hoisted in unison. According to all accounts – the Summit was a success.

As of March 2010, the CSITF and its target sub-committees recently completed developing a four year school improvement plan. As is the case with most good performing school communities, once the community came together to start planning for a future three year school improvement plan, they realized that there were things that could be done during the current year for each target and decided to act upon them. The interest and energy from the initial Strategic Planning Summit was carried forward in beginning work toward the identified shared future. 🌐

