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SED 686

Dr. Rivas

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Response #1

1. Pick 3 students that you have in class (or know really well if you are not in a classroom) and look for what you see as their strengths and describe them.

The three students I have chosen to describe are from my Model United Nations program that I have also had as classroom students. The first student is Jeremy. His strengths would likely include Intellection, Learner, and Harmony. This student is one of the brightest students I have ever taught. Their understanding of complex geopolitics is rivaled only by their ability to solve complicated organic chemistry problems. They also have high moral character and are intrinsically motivated to do the right thing. As their advisor I also notice that this student is a gifted leader and has a talent for finding consensus. Especially in a Model United Nations group, this is very important. I think that this student also has the unique combination of academic brilliance with high social intelligence.

A second student to describe is Mya. This student's strengths would likely be Incluser, Learner, and Achiever. This student does a lot of different things well but most importantly they do well in working with others. Their capacity for empathy is quite high and they do a great job of working with younger classmen, specifically 9th graders and helping them feel included in our high school community. This student's greatest strength is their ability to ask questions without being afraid and adapting to feedback. As a Model UN student, Mya seems to always be searching for the Truth (big "t").

A third student I want to describe is Danika. A little different strengths than the other two I think Danika's strengths might be Learner, Positive, and Achiever. I have known this student nearly three years now and she does a great job of asking questions and really setting her mind to new things. She tried Model UN because she likes history, water polo because she likes to swim, and joined Link Crew to help younger students on campus. This sense of adventure is impressive but more impressive is her energy. She isn't always happy but she's always positive. Even when she is burned out, and does happen given how much she is signed up for, she works to find some kind of positivity in every scenario.

2. Look for the weaknesses in the same 3 students and describe.

Jeremy's weaknesses, while seemingly minimal, are sometimes Jeremy struggles to connect with others. This is not for lack of trying but more so because Jeremy's intelligence is intimidating to people his own age. Having known Jeremy for four years now, I see it in his

peers. They know how much he is capable of and there does not seem to be much common ground in what he can connect with others his own age. I think this will change once he is in college next year, but it was quite the mental exercise trying to come up with weaknesses for this student. They are a unicorn, or perhaps something rarer!

Mya's weaknesses relate to consistency and lack confidence in her abilities. For consistency with Mya I see this with her understanding in my AP Government class. Sometimes she really understands the material and other times it seems like she doesn't care. This is not a capability issue but an execution issue: Mya could do more to make sure that she puts the same amount of effort into her academics as she does in other things, but this weakness is hard to pinpoint. For her confidence, Mya is very secure in who she is as a person but lacks the same confidence in her abilities. She does well with positive encouragement and I know Model UN has been beneficial for her to see herself as an intelligent person.

Danika's weaknesses are saying no to commitments and confidence in her abilities. I think part of why Danika feels burned out as often as she does because she is involved in so many different things and does not prioritize self-care and signs up for too many things instead of saying no and disappointing the person she would be saying no to. Her confidence is pretty similar to Mya's weaknesses, but again the benefit of a program like Model UN is it gives students opportunities to engage with others and see incremental growth over time.

3. Compare and contrast those students' strengths and weaknesses to your own.

I notice that a lot of these strengths and weaknesses are similar to my own. I wonder if there is something to be said that I chose students who have similar strengths and weaknesses. For example, the Learner strength is something that I identify in my students as something that is reflected in my own personality. The fostering of a love of learning is perhaps the easiest to instill in students who are interested in the same subject as I teach but I think the learning transcends the subject. Each of the students I chose, especially Danika and Jeremy, are very gifted at mathematics and problem solving, whereas Mya is best skilled in writing, shows a different interest but a similar desire to learn more and improve.

For weaknesses I most identify with Danika's difficulty in saying no and getting themselves involved in too many programs. This is probably one of my greatest weaknesses. I do not like disappointing people and would rather say yes than to disappoint them, regardless of how trivial their disappointment might actually be. This can lead to overload and burnout, which is something I continue to strive to improve. Writing about Danika's weaknesses was an interesting experience because as I was writing it I noticed how similar it was to how I am.

4. If you were your own teacher, how would you design lessons/activities to play to your strengths and thus may motivate you to learn?

If I were designing lessons that best play to my strengths and thus motivate me to learn are those that require reading and a small group discussion of the reading. Or a lecture and discuss the lecture in small groups. Or adding in lots of think-pair-share opportunities.

Throughout my learning experience, these are the lessons I feel like I learn the most. Any chance I can have to read something or to listen and “soak up” information from a lecture helps keep me motivated, but the discussion piece is something that needs to go with the lecture or reading. In all honesty I do not like to participate in discussions but I love to be able to listen. In school, if I had a choice I would always sit in the back, not because I wanted to mess around but because I could see everyone in the room and listen and to observe everything going on around me.

5. What do you see as the purpose/application of this exercise?

The purpose of this activity is to help us learn more about ourselves and then in turn take that information and utilize it to be more effective educators. I have read a decent amount of information about multiple intelligences and a lot of the research points to encouraging the use of as many of the types of intelligences as possible to differentiate the learning because this is what can help students better learn. I also think that as someone who loves to learn visually, that this activity helps remind me that we cannot just teach the best way we learn, and it may be beneficially for me to learn more about the least effective ways I learn because there is a good chance that I am not including those ways of learning in my classroom. I also think this could be an excellent activity (strength's assessment) to help build classroom community.