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## You Are a Genius in This Room

Vivian Demers-Jagoda

*You cannot motivate anyone; they must do it for themselves.*

The statement, “You are a genius in this room” hung as a banner across the doorway of my classroom for the last fourteen years. Adults walking past my door would comment on what a positive affirmation that was. That was true, but not the reason I hung it. Other teachers would comment on the banner, thinking it was part of Character Education. That was true, but not the reason I hung it. The students arriving to my room thought I hung it to let them know I believed in all of them. I do, but that is not why I hung it. I hung it for one reason: MOTIVATION!

Human beings are motivated to do what they are good at! Nobody is motivated to do what he or she has been unsuccessful at. Yet, in school, many of our students are constantly being asked to complete tasks that they are no longer motivated to attempt (due to previous unsuccessful attempts), and far less work until completion. No one can motivate another; we can only motivate ourselves. Sustaining motivation comes from within, built upon successes.

Based on that premise, students need to find the genius in themselves, and build success and successes. To get my class of 500+ seventh graders every year to be open to this concept, we read and discussed the unique book, *Animal School*, by George Reavis. In this story, the animals of the woods decide that they should form a school to prepare for the “new world.” The curriculum was chosen and standardized for all animals, not considering their personal talents or skills.

(Does that sound familiar?) So, of course, the duck does well in swimming, but fails tree climbing miserably. The rabbit does well in running, but almost drowns in swimming class.

The message to my students is that we all have talents and “smarts” that allow some subjects to come more naturally (are easier) for us. Other topics, concepts, or subjects need to be practiced more to achieve understanding.

For example, this teacher loved and did well in all courses that were hands-on, including biology, chemistry, and physics. The science labs made the book learning come alive for me. Foreign language was a very different story. The dialogue and conversations in class sounded like the adults talking during a Charlie Brown TV special (“Wha-wha-wha”). Considerably more time was spent studying for foreign language than any other subject, because a natural talent or smart was still developing for me. Every year when I tell this true story, my students are amazed. They assume that teachers were good in every subject in school, and found every subject equally interesting and satisfying; that’s why they became teachers. (WOW, what a misconception.)

The reason hands-on learning made sense to me was because I am bodily/kinesthetic smart. I continue explaining that my verbal/linguistic smarts are still developing, even today, with practice (as in writing this article). At this point, we discuss and identify their strengths using a Multiple Intelligences inventory (*see pages 32 & 33*). What is remarkable at this point

is that students realize there many ways of being smart. Yes, smarts are ranked in order of strength, but they are capable of achieving an average level on all smarts, through practice and experience.

Discussion swells comparing the success certain students find in certain subjects based on their top smarts. Now it makes complete sense to everyone, that logical/mathematical smart kids do well and enjoy math class. Other students struggle in English Language Arts and are often enrolled in writing or reading labs, which is reflected in the lower ranking of their verbal/linguistic smarts. So the additional lab class is not punishment (which is often the view of students) but is just the extra practice that is needed to develop that smart. That is a very different way for students to view themselves and their possible successes. Each strength is developing and needs experience to increase.

Now comes the real motivation kicker. Can we use the top strengths we already have developed to be more successful in struggling classes? YES!

Back to the story of this teacher. Foreign language was my struggle. I had to attack my studying through my strength (bodily/kinesthetic). So I created hundreds, maybe thousands, of flash cards of vocabulary. I studied them with movement, usually in a rocking chair or walking around my bedroom. After the initial study session, I would tape record the pronunciation (I used an old reel-to-reel tape recorder). I would play the recordings over and over again, not when I was sitting still, but in the shower, riding my exercise bike, or cleaning my room. It worked! I received a 90% on my Regents exam!

So how are you (i.e., my students) going to study the subjects that are giving you some difficulty? Study through your strengths (*see page 34*). Now you have a plan, and can study your most difficult subjects through your

natural talent or smarts. Motivation skyrockets, because you enjoy learning through your strengths and success will be found. Since success breeds success, self-motivation is created! Students have found the genius in themselves, not just in my classroom, but in their own classroom — in themselves.

As the years continued, the students' strengths also changed my teaching approach. In 2007-2008, 83% of all my 500+ seventh graders were bodily/kinesthetic and visual/spatial, first and/or second in the survey results. Therefore, lessons included Cornell split-page note taking, windowpaning graphic organizers, and creating 24 different study aides (puzzle book, subway pass, concertina books, book in a box) to support studying through their smarts.

I invite you and your students to discover the genius in yourselves. In our (animal) school, we need to stay motivated and feel at least an average level of success. Using our strengths may be just that determining factor.

## References

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## STRENGTH AND INTEREST SURVEY

Give yourself a score from 1-10 for each of the statements. A 10 means the statement describes you perfectly. A 1 indicates the statement is not like you at all. Use any number from 1-10.

- \_\_\_1. I enjoy playing with words (writing, telling jokes, riddles).
- \_\_\_2. Working with clay or dough is fun for me.
- \_\_\_3. I love to solve mathematical puzzles or problems.
- \_\_\_4. I enjoy dancing (even if not very good at it).
- \_\_\_5. I often sit alone and think about things.
- \_\_\_6. Being a member of a team is important to me.
- \_\_\_7. I find myself humming or tapping on things often.
- \_\_\_8. I wonder about the world and like to look up answers to my questions or find answers by experimenting.
- \_\_\_9. I feel I am a good leader in groups.
- \_\_\_10. Others enjoy hearing me tell a story or joke.
- \_\_\_11. I am a good athlete or enjoy playing sports.
- \_\_\_12. I know myself well and can identify my feelings easily.
- \_\_\_13. I find myself doodling or drawing often.
- \_\_\_14. I sing often (even if not very good at it)
- \_\_\_15. I can put myself in another's place and understand how they feel.
- \_\_\_16. I love to talk.
- \_\_\_17. I look at things (like clouds) and see pictures in them.
- \_\_\_18. I am good at making decisions and planning things.
- \_\_\_19. I evaluate myself and try to change things I don't like.
- \_\_\_20. I listen to music every day for personal pleasure.
- \_\_\_21. Drama or acting is one of my strengths.
- \_\_\_22. I am told I have a good sense of humor.
- \_\_\_23. Friends are important to me.
- \_\_\_24. I play a musical instrument fairly well for my age.
- \_\_\_25. I like to gather facts and organize them.
- \_\_\_26. I can draw or illustrate well.
- \_\_\_27. I know myself well (how I learn best, my weaknesses).
- \_\_\_28. I learn new dances, sports or movement easily.
- \_\_\_29. I am good at finding my way using a map.
- \_\_\_30. I feel confident speaking in front of a group.
- \_\_\_31. I can figure out if I've received the correct change at the store without using a calculator.
- \_\_\_32. I exercise regularly through physical activity.
- \_\_\_33. I am able to hum a tune that I just heard.
- \_\_\_34. I usually give encouragement and positive support to others.
- \_\_\_35. I like to explore my values and think about what I feel is right or wrong.

Adapted from *Seven Pathways of Learning*, by David Lazear

## ANALYSIS of STRENGTH AND INTEREST

Transfer each score from the survey for each question number listed for each intelligence. Total the five numbers for each intelligence.

### VERBAL / LINGUISTIC or Word Smart

1                    10                    16                    22                    30

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

### LOGICAL / MATHEMATICAL or Number Smart

3                    8                    18                    25                    31

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

### VISUAL / SPATIAL or Picture Smart

2                    13                    17                    26                    29

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

### MUSICAL / RHYTHMIC or Music Smart

7                    14                    20                    24                    33

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

### INTERPERSONAL or People Smart

6                    9                    15                    23                    34

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

### INTRAPERSONAL or Self Smart

5                    12                    19                    27                    35

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

### BODILY / KINESTHETIC or Body Smart

4                    11                    21                    28                    32

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

The greatest sum is your #1 smarts. Mark it here. #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Any sums within a range of 5 points from the top smarts are your #2. Mark them here. You may have more than one or perhaps you have no scores within 5 points of your #1.

#2a \_\_\_\_\_ #2b \_\_\_\_\_ or NONE \_\_\_\_\_

## STUDYING THROUGH YOUR STRENGTHS

### **Verbal/Linguistic or Word Smart**

- Put what you are reading into your own words.
- Describe it all out loud, paraphrase aloud.
- Form questions you want answers for.
- Find the answers and repeat them aloud.
- Summarize it out loud (tell your parents about it at dinner).
- Read it aloud dramatically using a foreign accent or whisper it.
- Read it aloud and tape record; play it back later.

### **Mathematical/Logical or Number Smart**

- Make a flow chart or diagram, list, and number.
- List key point in numbered sequence; rank points in order.
- Create a time line or diagram to express your learning in step-by-step sequence.

### **Visual/Spatial or Picture Smart**

- Create a strong visual image of what you are trying to learn in your mind's eye.
- Make a poster for your wall of what you learned.
- Create a learning map, take a photo, sketch, diagram.
- Use a highlighter pen indicating only new and important information.
- Read through a blue or green colored transparency or report cover.

### **Musical/Rhythmic or Music Smart**

- Choose and play appropriate background music as you think about the topic. Music stimulates the emotional center of our brains and our emotions are strongly linked to our long-term memory. So playing soft background music, especially classical music, has proved to be very effective for many people.

- Try to choose music that represents what you are learning.
- Write a rhyme, rap, or song for the facts you are learning (it works for advertising).

### **Interpersonal or People Smart**

- Teach what you are learning to someone else.
- Compare notes with someone from the same class. You can see the ways they approach the task and learn about other learning styles.
- Review with a study buddy in person or on the phone.

### **Intrapersonal or Self Smart**

- Take time to quietly reflect on the subject — how does it fit in what you know already?
- When you are learning anything, find a way to compare it to what's familiar.
- Compare your grades to your own previous grades, not someone else's grades.
- The more real or concrete something is, the better you understand it. Make comparisons to everyday items to make the learning real.

### **Bodily/Kinesthetic or Body Smart**

- Make up index cards of the main ideas and sort them out in logical order.
- Carry "flash cards" with you and look at them at random times.
- Post cards on a bulletin board or around your bathroom mirror or interior door of your locker and look at them regularly.
- Make summaries of reading on post-it notes and rearrange them directly on your notebook cover and review as you are moving.
- Walk around or rock in a chair while you are reading or listening to cassette tapes of lessons.
- Use a clipboard for your note taking and note making.