

STRENGTHS FINDERS

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StrengthsFinders , a program developed by the Gallup Organization (2007), identifies a person's natural strengths. Strengths theory utilizes the philosophy of using talents as the basis for consistent achievement of excellence (strength). Specifically, the strengths philosophy is the assertion that individuals are able to gain far more when they expend effort to build on their greatest talents than when they spend a comparable amount of effort to remediate their weaknesses (Clifton & Harter, 2003; CSF Technical Report, 2007). This activity focuses on having ninth grade students, faculty, and staff complete an on-line survey, which takes approximately a forty minute session to complete. The purpose of completing this measure is to identify what a person's strengths or natural talents are. This aids in identity development and personal awareness of one's strengths; it provides a starting place for discussions and exploration about one's personal development and growth and in creating and setting goals. Additionally, it helps to identify appropriate interventions for continued growth and encouraging behavioral changes (CSF Technical Report, 2007; Bands, M. & Woolfson, L., 2008).

The Importance of Strength Finders for Students

The StrengthFinders measure is an important step in helping students develop identity, which is "one of the sociocultural tasks of adolescence" (Violand0Sanchez & Hainer-Violand, 2006). A person's identity is strongly tied to his/her self esteem and self-esteem is recognized as one of the five basic needs of all humans. It is listed along with physiological needs, safety needs, belonging and love needs, and self-actualization needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Prince & Howard, 2002). Low self-esteem is frequently a by-product of poverty, low socioeconomic status, living in undesirable neighborhoods, immigration status, linguistic differences, family separations, school cultural differences from one's own a culture, and a sense that one does not belong (Jones, C. & Palmer, J., 2004; Bioland0Sanchez & Hainer0Violand, 2006). "All people have the need to have a high evaluation of themselves: the more competent a person perceives himself to be at any activity, the greater the intrinsic motivation will be for that activity" (Prince & Howard, 2002). Students with low self-esteem are less likely to look beyond today, let alone to set goals for themselves.

If a student is able to see that they do have strengths, and that they're desirable strengths, it follows that it will improve their own evaluations of themselves, increase their self-esteem, and therefore increase intrinsic motivation to use those strengths in their activities, including schooling. Just knowing that they possess strengths can lead to increased self-confidence which can ultimately lead to higher academic achievement.

The purpose for finding out what talents one possesses is based on the concept of positive psychology as described by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). Positive psychology focuses on what is 'right' with a person, his/her 'strengths' and expands upon those features rather than focusing on what is 'wrong' with a person, his/her weaknesses, and trying to fix or change them. The Clifton StrengthFinders program is but one way for an individual to identify areas of talents in which they are strong.

The Importance of Strength Finders for Faculty

Discovering one's personal strengths is also important for faculty and staff. By having one's strengths identified and becoming personally aware of them, participants can use these strengths to work more effectively with others as well as create lesson plans that use these strengths. It may follow that the work would become less stressful and perhaps more enjoyable as one would be using talents and strengths one already possesses. As well, the energetic and positive feelings it creates would be passed along to the students as well as other faculty and staff (The Gallop Organization, 2006; Delpit, 2006).

The Process

Students completed the on-line measure in one class session. Post measure sessions to review and discuss data took place over two, one hour class sessions, approximately two weeks apart. Individual data as it relates to the whole group continues to be brought forward in discussion. Teachers completed the on-line measure on their own. Post measure sessions to review and discuss data took place at individual house (small learning communities) teacher retreats with approximately two hours devoted to the discussion. Individual data as it relates to the whole group continues to be brought forward in discussions.

Anyone who completed the on-line measure, reviewed his/her own results, and was part of the post-measure session with colleagues benefited from this activity. While basically beneficiaries included those who completed the measure and reviewed results, the greater community at large benefited in several ways: each person became more self-aware in that they possess positive desirable strengths, and each person had a more positive outlook based on understanding their strengths.

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