

LEARNING JOURNEY

Announcements:

⇒ The holidays provide an opportunity to reflect on life's gifts and our gratitude for them. We count the families, colleagues, and teachers with whom we work among our blessings. This year, we continue our tradition of expressing appreciation for all of you through a donation to an important organization that benefits young people. We have chosen **All Kinds of Minds**, a nonprofit institute that helps students who struggle with learning improve their success with programs that integrate educational, scientific, and clinical expertise. For infor-



mation, check out: www.allkindsofminds.org.

⇒ Upcoming talks: Ali will speak to the SELPA/SEPTA parent group on January 24 in Los Altos. The presentation is entitled: "You Are What You Do: How Parents Can Model What They Want Their Kids to Learn". The talk will convene at the Covington Multipurpose Room (205 Covington Road, Los Altos), at 7:00pm. Please join us!

Ali will also speak for the

Parent Keshet group at Gideon Hausner in Palo Alto on March 7 at 9:00am. The topic is: "What's Right with Your Child? Orienting Ourselves to Kids' Strengths". To read more about this perspective, see "Featured Article" below.

⇒ Ali has spoken for parent groups, school staff inservices, corporate audiences, and the National Tutoring Association. If you'd like to invite Ali to present for your group, please contact her directly: ali@meyerslearningcenter.com.

Featured Article: Nurturing Our Children's Strengths By Ali Zidel Meyers, MSW

Whatever we put our attention to will grow stronger in our lives. ~ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

Where does your lens look?

When you look at your child, what do you see? Do you see the innocent sweetness s/he exuded as a little one? Do you see a grumbling, grumpy adolescent? Does your attention go to your child's latest success or most recent mistakes? What we tend to in our kids becomes the reality that we see, cultivate, and nurture.

Of course the way we see our children stems from countless factors: the kind of day we're having, the kind of day they're having, hormones (theirs and ours), life stage, stressors operating on and around us. One day we may look at life in a kind of happy vacuum, and the next day we can feel depleted and demoralized.

The way we choose to see our children affects more than our own state of mind; it can affect their self-concepts. And their self-concepts influence the myriad "classrooms" of their lives: the playground, the sports team, the tests they take, and the goals they make (or negate) for themselves. These class-



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Recent Testimonials

"We're delighted with your work with our daughter - she has improved markedly. You are patient and upbeat, an excellent motivator and educator. You are also punctual and flexible about scheduling. All around excellent."

- Father, 5th grade girl

"You are amazingly adaptive to whatever needs each child brings. You are able to bring out each child's best ... I can't say enough about how wonderful you are."

- Mother, 6th grade boy

"You work with my daughter not only on academic topics, but you've built a solid foundation of confidence and organizational skills."

- Mother, 7th grade girl

Nurturing Strengths (continued)

rooms help establish their sense of what is personally possible. Most of us can attest to the critical influence an important adult had on our own sense of possibility, growing up.

Seeing Strengths

A cornerstone of MLC's approach is a framework borrowed from the fields of social work and psychology: the strengths-based perspective. In the past, psychological treatment protocols for families, adults, and children focused on pathology and deficits. But the strengths-based approach emphasizes assets, competencies, and abilities. There has been a substantive body of research conducted on strengths-building over the last 40 years through organizations like Gallup. Their work emerged from a movement to examine positive psychological/human potential. Gallup's research on human performance targeted over 2 million people (globally) and set out to answer the question: could it be that the greatest gains in human development are based on investment in what people do best naturally? Their hypothesis was confirmed when they found that individuals gain more, building on their talents, than when they make comparable efforts to improve their areas of weakness (see <http://gmj.gallup.com/>, the Gallup Organization's website and online journal, for more information).

Ask any school-aged child what his weaknesses are, and he is likely to have ready mental access to a list of personally internalized deficits. But ask about strengths, and you may face an empty stare coupled with a loud silence. In my experience, children and adults are reluctant to invoke their strengths when asked about them. Whether it's lack of confidence, messages they've heard from their surroundings, or ignorance of what they do well, kids' inability to identify and articulate their strengths

is lamentable.

When children know their personal assets, it not only helps them develop and grow, it empowers them to leverage their strengths in learning new information, solving problems, and thinking in creative and innovative ways. I encourage all stu-

Could it be that the greatest gains in human development are based on investment in what people do best naturally?

dents to leverage their strengths in these self-promoting ways. Like using a muscle, the more a strength is exercised, the stronger and more integrated it becomes.

A strengths-based approach does not mean celebrating mediocrity, random praise for ordinary expectations met, or overlooking areas needing improvement. Child development experts will tell you that selective encouragement aimed at specific acts and effort will benefit your child far greater than vague reminders of his or her "greatness" as a person. This leads us to the importance of paying attention to the unique and outstanding gifts our kids possess individually, not showering praise superfluously.

As for weaknesses, it may be necessary to correct behavior that produces counter-productive outcomes. But how effective is our steadfast emphasis on them? Perhaps our lens has been myopic—focused too narrowly on deficits and remediation. I'm suggesting that we hone the focus: toward developing

strengths and building on talents--while acknowledging, understanding, and managing weaknesses.

Kinds of Smart

What kinds of strength does your child possess? Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University, proposed a theory of multiple intelligences (MI) over 20 years ago that has steadily gained support and attention ever since. MI grew out of Gardner's observation that schools focus primarily on linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence. He posited that the conventional notion of intelligence, based mainly on I.Q. testing, was far too limited. Instead, Gardner identified eight distinct intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential in kids and adults.

MI: The Eight Intelligences

1. Linguistic intelligence ("word smart")
2. Logical-mathematical intelligence ("number/reasoning smart")
3. Spatial intelligence ("picture/space smart")
4. Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence ("body smart")
5. Musical intelligence ("music smart")
6. Interpersonal intelligence ("people smart")
7. Intrapersonal intelligence ("self smart")
8. Naturalist intelligence ("nature smart")

Our educational system rewards

Nurturing Strengths (continued)

those who are highly articulate or logical, but is slower to highlight the accomplishments of students gifted in other intelligences: the artists, musicians, naturalists, designers, dancers, innovators, for example, who enrich our world. Unfortunately, children exhibiting these gifts may get little reinforcement for them. Many of these kids end up lumped together with problematic learning or behavioral labels or simply dubbed “underachievers”, when their ways of thinking/learning go unaddressed in heavily linguistic or logical-based classrooms.

So, what can I do?

“Fine and good,” you say, “But what can I do about it?” One answer is to pay attention to your child’s unique strengths. If your focus has been mostly on deficits and “fixing”, stop to notice and appreciate what is going well in your child’s learning, behavior, and development. Instead of considering standardized test results as an omniscient predictor of success, stop to consider what your child knows that the tests do not measure; view children with a larger lens. Shifting toward a more strengths-based perspective can be easy.

Assets in Action

Try this:

- Make a list of your child’s best qualities—strengths, talents, emerging capacities.
- Keep this list in your pocket or a place that’s easily accessible this week. Look for “proof” (or examples) of these assets in action, and write them down. Try to jot down at least one example for each

trait. Some traits will have more than one instance.

Noticing what we do well as parents and as people can empower us through challenges. It can also help expand and develop our strengths to new heights.

- Tell your child! Notice aloud to your child instances of his or her strengths in action. For example:
 - I noticed you sitting down and starting your homework right after snack.
 - I noticed you tackled a difficult math problem and didn’t give up when you were feeling stuck.
 - I noticed you singing while you were getting dressed—what a voice you have!
 - I noticed the way you negotiated a delicate situation with your friends. That took a lot of finesse.
- Expand and share: share the list with other important people who have regular contact with your child. Encourage that person to add to it. Continue expanding the list. In fact, you may want to convert it to a journal that can be built upon week after week and eventually given to your child.

You may find that you witness more of these strengths, or that they occur more frequently when you pay attention to and acknowledge them. Your mind may shift to noticing and nurturing your child’s abilities and emerging capacities (a.k.a. potential). This is a worthy and beneficial pursuit for the entire family. In fact, I encourage you to

make your own strengths-based list for yourself and your partner. Noticing what we do well as parents and as people can empower us through challenges. It can also help expand and develop our strengths to new heights.

Parting Thoughts

Imagine learning a new language at your current age. How easy do you think it would be? What if you had a teacher who scowled at your every mistake or tried to teach you in a way that didn’t make sense, barking at your incorrect answers? Now picture a teacher who notices what you do well, provides tools to gently correct your errors, and teaches you in a way that complements your unique ways of thinking and learning. I know which teacher I’d prefer. Our children constantly learn new “languages” or scripts about who and what they can be in the world. We can choose what kind of teachers we want to be, as parents, in that process. Leveraging and nurturing strengths expands possibilities for us and our children.

Welcome, Purvi!

We are thrilled to welcome Purvi Bhagat, MS Ed., in her new role as Assistant Director for Meyers Learning Center (since September). Purvi holds a Bachelors Degree in Theater Arts from Drew University and a Masters Degree in Education from Mercy College in New York. Many of you know Purvi as a talented educator, but you may also come to know her now in the capacities of this new position. Purvi communicates with families, supports tutors, manages new families that come to MLC, and assists Ali and Adam in their roles. She also continues to positively impact students’ lives through her tutoring. We’re delighted to have such a caring, skilled, and knowledgeable person as our Assistant Director.

Tutor Spotlight: Sabrina Strand

Sabrina holds a Bachelors Degree in journalism from Northwestern University and a Masters Degree in teaching secondary ELA (reading and writing) from Pace University. Sabrina is a 2004 corps member of the acclaimed Teach for America program, which places outstanding college graduates in under-performing schools around the country. She taught at a public school in Brooklyn, as well as a renowned charter school in Harlem following the program's completion. Sabrina loves children and believes each child has the potential to do something great with his or her life. She has a reputation for demanding excellence in student work while maintaining a sense of humor and honesty. Sabrina strongly believes that all children will succeed with a mixture of support, praise, and high expectations. In her spare time, Sabrina enjoys swimming, reading, singing, playing the piano, and cuddling with her two cats.



Sabrina's Fun Facts:

Q: *What is your favorite ice cream?*

A: Mint chocolate chip!

Q: *Name a book you've read and loved.*

A: Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, by Jonathan Safran Foer. My favorite part about this book is the 8-year old protagonist, Oskar. He is brutally honest and hilariously quirky, as every New Yorker should be. This one really tugged at my heart strings. I read it all in one day!

Q: *Name a place you've visited that had a significant impact on you.*

A: Doolin, Ireland to see the Cliffs of Moher. I studied abroad in Ireland, and Doolin was one of the rural towns we visited on our travels. I had never - and still have never - seen a place quite as beautiful (though Cinque Terre, Italy came close!). There were fields dotted with yellow wildflowers, more cows than people, and so many stars in the sky it looked like a light show!

Q: *If you could meet any person living or not, who would it be?*

A: I've always wanted to meet Mary Magdalene to get her side of the story. Must trace back to my journalism roots!

Student Spotlight: Casey

Q: How would a friend or teacher who knows you well describe you?

A: I think someone would describe me as fun, funny and energetic.

Q: What qualities should a successful student possess?

A: Patience, kindness, a long attention span, and willingness to learn

Q: What accomplishment of yours has given you great satisfaction or pride?

A: Making the basketball team at my school because I love the feeling of making the team of a new sport!

Casey's Fun Facts:

Q: What is your favorite ice cream?

A: My favorite ice cream is chocolate chip cookie dough.

Q: Name a book you've read that you loved.

A: The Franny K. Stein Series

Q: Name a place you've visited that had a significant impact on you.

A: New Zealand: it is where my parents are from so it is like my hometown. I can visit my family there.

Q: If you could meet any person living or not, who would it be?

A: I would like to meet my great-grandfather who died from an illness when I was a little girl.

About Meyers Learning Center

Our Mission

Meyers Learning Center teaches students practical tools to empower and manage themselves while instilling self-confidence and a love of learning.

Our Service

Offering one-to-one academic tutoring, coaching, and workshops to youth of diverse ages and learning abilities, we teach the whole student. That means we seek to know each child as a person; we see him or her in the context of a school, a family, a stage of life, and other factors that can shape learning and academic success. Taking the time to understand students' obstacles to achievement, we also believe it's crucial to identify and capitalize on each person's natural strengths and capacities. We focus on bolstering self-esteem and confidence since these factors critically impact academic success. With a holistic, tailored approach based on strengths, abilities, and clearly defined goals, students can achieve their tremendous potential.

Please contact us for more information.

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