

OMEGA PILLAR INSIGHT

Rainbow Mountain has two pillars that help to guide the teachers and students on the path of learning. Students are exposed to these pillars every year, and by the time they graduate they are quite familiar with what they are and what they mean to them. In Omega, we give the students the knowledge needed to better understand these pillars and to better understand how this understanding enhances their learning in every moment of everyday. This memo is to help you to understand these pillars so that you can engage in meaningful conversations with your child as their understanding grows.

The two pillars are the Domains and the Essential Learning Skills. In Omega we identify the connection to these pillars as follows; the Domains connect directly to you, as a person and who you are and how you learn, and the Essential Learning Skills are how we choose to complete tasks at hand. Below, this is better explained. The most important lesson for each student is that they understand that in each of these they do not have strengths and weaknesses, but rather preferred and not preferred methods. It is the ability to recognize our preferred method and the ability to use this method when in situations that require us to use a method that we are not as comfortable with (again, this will be explained below.)

We hope this helps to deepen your understanding of these terms, and look forward to exploring them and their connection with your child at your listening conference.

The Seven Domains of the Whole Child

There are seven Domains: Spiritual, Mental, Social, Natural, Emotional, Creative, and Physical. Within each of these domains we have strengths and weaknesses, as we do as humans. Some of us are very much in control of our physical self, but not as much in control of our emotions, not willing to share our true feeling for fear of displeasing others. It is nice to connect these domains to the literary concept of Characterization, which is how each domain is described below.

We find these seven areas to be very important when looking at a child and their readiness for the future. It will be the focus of our check-ins and is a large portion of your child's formal assessment. Additionally, one centering a week will be focused on one of the domains, students will analyze their own development at the end of each trimester, and students will explore the domains of characters we read and study about.

At Rainbow children are exposed to information using all of the Seven Domains. In the early grades students learn through centers, often given the opportunity to learn information about a unit in their chosen domain. As they move forward in grades, students are often exposed to a variety of lessons that often incorporate many of the domains but the student does not have the choice rather the teacher chooses.

In Omega, we try to ensure each unit has at least one lesson that utilizes each of the Seven Domains so that students recognize which Domains seems to be the easiest for learning. This, of course, differs from child to child. Some learn best when given a chance to do hands-on activities, some learn best when working in a group, and others do best when listening to a lecture. Regardless of which is 'best' for individual children, it is when a child recognizes this and knows how to utilize this strength to enhance learning when information comes to them in a less desirable format. For example, a student who struggles to learn from lecture and prefers visual learning might use Cornell Notes and colored pens to take notes on the lecture to ensure understanding of a topic. It is good to understand how you learn so that you can be prepared to excel in all classes no matter the teachers teaching style.

Now let us take a better look at the Domains. How can they be defined? What are some of their implications? What are some of their observable behaviors?

Spiritual:

This can be expressed by characterization in literature by what the character BELIEVES in. The title of this domain often causes confusion, for the term 'spiritual' is commonly connected to religion. Religion can be part of the spiritual domain, but it is not all that this domain encompasses. It also includes the answers to the question, "Why are we here?" It is a way of being.

One who likes to learn through reflection, looking inward, examining one's own thoughts and feelings: People who have strengths in the Spiritual domain have the sensitivity and capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence, such as the meaning of life, why do we die, and how did we get here.

Mental:

In characterization this is expressed by how the character THINKS. This, again, does not only include how well you do in math and English, but also connects to our natural gifts and strengths. This strength might be musical, artistic or even social, for it is the time when you are able to do quick thinking. This domain can be broken into two: Verbal/ Linguistic and Logical/ Mathematical

Verbal/ Linguistic: One who likes to learn through actions- whether working in groups or doing something physically: People who are verbal/linguistic like to read and write. They like telling jokes and playing word games. They are pretty good spellers and like listening to stories.

Logical/ Mathematical: One who examines something carefully in order to understand it: People who are logical/mathematical smart like working with numbers. They enjoy math class and like playing strategy games. Putting things in order and finding patterns also interest them.

Social:

The best way to connect this to literature is by how they INTERACT with other and what other characters say about the character being analyzed and how they act around them. The best way to describe this to an Omegan is by analyzing the type of friend they are. It is how do you react to differences with others, are you influenced by your peers, and how empathetic you can be to others.

One who likes to learn through actions- whether working in groups of doing something physically: People who have strengths in the Social domain love to be with others. They have two or more close friends. They like joining clubs and other organizations. They like playing games with others.

Physical:

This domain is expressed by characterization in literature by what the character DOES. This does not necessarily only mean play sports, but it also is referring to self-awareness, confidence, and health. This includes getting enough sleep, eating healthy foods, and making choices that help to nurture a healthy life.

One who likes to learn through actions- whether working in groups of doing something physically: People who have strengths in the Physical domain tend to do very well in sports. They love to move. Taking things apart and putting them back together is fun for them. They like to make crafts, work with clay and finger paint.

Natural:

In literature, a character would express their strengths in this domain through their INTERACTIONS with the natural world. They would express an awareness of their world around them, manifested in a delight in discovery and observation. The character would be sensitive to their environment and demonstrate respect, awe and wonder of it and seem to feel interconnectedness with the plants, animals and natural world around them. They seem most at home in the outdoors. They gaze at stars, climb trees, look at flowers, love walks, notice birds flying, get lost in the woods. They seek natural objects to play and create with.

One who examines something carefully in order to understand it: People who have strengths in the Natural domain enjoy doing nature projects. They love plants and animals and the great outdoors. They have pets and like to bring bugs, flowers, leaves and other natural things to school to share with the class.

Emotional:

A character in a novel would expose this domain by the way they REACT to events and the feelings they EXPRESS in actions and words. The emotional domain includes sadness and happiness, but it is more about how you express these feelings and your ability to recognize how you are feeling. This domain tends to shift, bend and grow tremendously in the Middle School years.

One who likes to learn through reflection, looking inward, examining one's own thoughts and feelings: People who have strengths in the Emotional Domain like working alone. They are usually very independent. They do very well when left alone to play or study.

Creative:

The creative domain would express a character's personality by what the character DOES, from art they may create, personal performance, or through the lyrics of words and communication. This domain can be split into two: Visual/ Spatial and Musical.

Visual/ Spatial: One who likes to learn through reflection, looking inward, examining one's own thoughts and feelings. People who are visual/ spatial enjoy art activities. They are good at drawing. They like doing puzzles, mazes and building things in 3D. They are good at reading maps and charts and like watching movies.

Musical: One who examines something carefully in order to understand it: People who are music smart enjoy listening to music. They play instruments. They like to sing songs and have good singing voices. They like to hum and tap to rhythms.

After reading the details of each domain, it is quite evident that this truly is a 3D photo of a person, and is truly an important pillar to focus on. Understanding the person one is can greatly influence their learning from day to day. Try to take time in your days to talk about these domains with your child and ask them how they believe they are developing in each.

When you receive our bi-weekly parent letter, it will include a great question for each class. It is a great idea to also ask which lesson they enjoyed the most and why. Help guide your child as they discover their strengths (superpowers) and how they can use them in the future.

Eight Essential Learning Skills

The Eight Essential Learning Skills are that with which you can check in with your child and see which skills they are using, not only to complete homework assignments but also to complete daily tasks. With a little luck, you might be able to apply these skills to your everyday life as well!

The Eight Essential Learning Skills are:

1. Effective Learners Think Creatively & Critically
2. Effective Learners Communicate
3. Effective Learners Cooperate With Others
4. Effective Learners Function Independently
5. Effective Learners Use Appropriate Resources To Seek, Access and Apply Knowledge
6. Effective Learners Take Risks To Succeed
7. Effective Learners Exhibit Self-confidence
8. Effective Learners Create Options And Make Choices

How does this work? When your child completes assignments in class, and they choose this work to be placed into their portfolio, then they will assess as to which E.L.S. was used to complete the task. The skill chosen can sometimes be obvious, i.e. their interview assignment might be noted as completed by using Effective Learners Communicate. However, there may be times there is no 'right' answer! In such a case the student then gains the opportunity to deeply reflect on the assignment and discover validations to their choices based on their own personal experience.

Now let us take a better look at the ELS. How can they be defined? What are some of their implications? What are some of their observable behaviors?

Effective learners think creatively and critically.

An effective learner forms and uses new combinations of ideas. Such a learner analyzes and questions information and concepts. This type of learner views relevant new information and situations as opportunities to learn and grow. They incorporate new information into their own understanding and alter their thinking when appropriate. They evaluate the quality of a particular thinking strategy and respect the rights of others to employ different thinking strategies. Among other behaviors, this student questions, negotiates, explores, designs, analyzes, restructures, imagines, combines ideas, and evaluates.

Effective learners communicate

An effective learner knows how to make one understand through a variety of modes. Such a student values self-expression and knows how to share ideas, thoughts, feelings and values. They also listen and reflect on what is being communicated and make their own needs known in order to learn effectively. Among other behaviors, this student shares, listens, volunteers, gives feedback, offers understanding and effectively make them understood.

Effective learners cooperate with others

An effective learner knows how to work together with another or others for a common purpose. Such a student functions with self-confidence in interpersonal situations. They communicate needs and respond constructively to the needs of others. This student can recognize a situation where compromise is needed and use the required skills, and they can perceive when to lead and when to follow. Among other behaviors, this student takes turns, listens well, encourages and supports others, makes eye contact, knows their opinions, perceives best timing and offers solutions.

Effective learners use appropriate resources to seek, access and apply knowledge

An effective learner knows how to recognize and use appropriate resources to support their learning experience. Such resources may be people, facilities, media and technology. These students are literate; they can access information from a variety of technologies, know how to develop strategies for applying knowledge and can work independently as well as collaboratively. Among other behaviors this student solves problems; reads, writes, and communicates ideas; succeeds within a variety of structures and settings; and has strong research skills.

Effective learners function independently

An effective learner is independent through the ability to function with self-reliance and self-determination. This student assumes responsibility for their learning. They are able to infer and understand the persuasion and bias of others. They are disciplined and direct themselves and take initiative in group and individual situations. Among other behaviors this student sets and achieves goals, completes tasks, evaluates, researches, negotiates, adapts, accepts challenges, and accepts responsibility.

Effective learners take risks to succeed

An effective learner has the willingness to gain a new level of understanding by taking chances. They benefit from their mistakes as well as their success, weigh the odds and know the pros and cons. They can recognize potentially harmful risks. These students are also willing to face the unknown. Among other behaviors, this student accepts and learns from failure. They persevere in learning, set goals, offer alternatives, accept both criticism and encouragement, and assume or share leadership.

Effective learners exhibit self-confidence

An effective learner is sure of one's own abilities. Such a student determines their special skills and talents. They develop and share their unique abilities and interests as well as their self-worth. Among other behaviors, this student chooses, defines, and acts on personal goals. They explore personal talents and interests. Additionally, they demonstrate learned skills, seek challenges, use divergent thinking, accept evaluation, request assistance when needed and recognize potentials.

Effective learners create options and make choices

An effective learner creates options by bringing into being or producing what is needed. They make choices and can select among several alternatives, picking that which is needed and appropriate to support the learning at hand. This student can adapt to change, recognize available avenues and devise methods for gaining knowledge. They also evaluate options and choose those most likely to achieve results. Among other behaviors, this student suggests solutions, designs methods, asks questions, budgets time, sets priorities, sets goals, evaluates, builds models, formulates hypothesis, and experiments.

Take a minute to touch base with your child, ask about their school activities and assignments throughout the school year, and see which ELS they choose to identify with when their task at hand is completed. Go one step further, and note when you see your child use these skills to plan a week-end gathering, get their game system to work, solve a problem with a friend, or anytime you see an ELS being used in everyday life. Think about the ELS you use in your life! Mention these to your child.

We hope you find this information useful, and will support your student internalize these skills on their road to becoming life long learners.

Namaste,

Susan, Jason and Mark