Center for Leadership & Educational Equity

Profile of a Student Activity
Alternative Students

Developed by Camilla Greene.

Process

1. Read and think about all of the Student Profiles. Pick a profile that interests you based on past or current students you've taught, mentored, or experienced in some way. If this hasn't been your experience, please pick a student profile that simply intrigues you.

2. List or journal what it is about this profile that interests you. (5 minutes)

3. Mingle and find others who share the profile you selected. (5minutes)

4. In your profile group, please share what interests you about this student. (7 minutes)

5. After sharing, please discuss and chart the following questions: (15 minutes)
   Essential Questions
   - Now imagine you're a member of a school design team and your team has to design a school with this student in mind. What would it look like? How would you engage this student in continuously culturally relevant, challenging, rigorous and standards based learning?
   - What kinds of supports need to be in place in a small high school learning environment for your student profile group to be willing to take academic risks to learn?

6. Each group reports out.

7. Debrief the process.
   - What was it like for you to engage in the Student profile activity?
   - How might you use this student profile activity?
   - What might you change about this student profile activity?

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Student 1
Kevin is the middle child of 3 who lives in a small urban city in New Jersey. He's being raised by his mother who works very hard to make sure her children stay out of trouble and live in a clean safe environment. Kevin's a 10th grader who's a "good student" — by his current school's standards — but he has low-expectations of going to the community college or getting a job for the "State" after graduation. Since he doesn't give his mother or teachers any problems he's able to skate by doing just enough to get by.

Student 2
Shawn, is a very smart young man who has read a lot about slavery and conspiracy theories. He wonders why he should work hard, given the unpredictability of his teachers' responses to his work. He believes that no matter what he or other members of his group accomplish, his achievements won't change how he's viewed by the larger society. In his opinion, he still won't be able to get a cab. He will still get followed in department stores, and he'll still get stopped when he drives through certain neighborhoods after dark, whether he gets a GED, or a PhD.

Student 3
Shante loves learning. She can't get enough of it. She actually looks up the books that her teachers mention in passing and independently figures out alternative math theorems — just for fun. Her only beef with school is the busy work she has to do and the classes she has to take with kids who just don't care about learning so she's disengages and has become cynical about school overall and thinks that everybody's a loser.

Student 4
Sehniqua is a very bright and attractive student. She enjoys school and engaging adults in conversation. However, she has difficulty making friends, especially with females. To her, females are always "hating" on her because she's smart and pretty. Although she stays focused most of the time, there are times she gets into a deep funk and shuts down. During a parent/teacher conference, her dad became verbally abusive to her and her mother and he spoke openly about how he prostituted her mother. Sehniqua just listened without emotion and ended the meeting by saying she would just work harder to stay focused.

Student 5
"Who am I anyway?", is what Nicole thinks. It sometimes takes teachers a full semester to remember her name, and she often feels invisible. The stories they make her read and discuss in class never sound like anybody from her family or neighborhood. College is for rich kids and brains, so that leaves her out. She watches the "favorite" students with a mixture of envy and disdain. She knows more about certain subjects than they do, but most teachers don't know that because she's "shy and quiet".

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Student 6
Tasha, an 11th grader, is a young lady whose mother was incarcerated when she was just 13. Tasha and her siblings, ages: 10, 8 and 3 went to live in a 3-bedroom apartment with her aunt who had four children of her own. Tasha became the primary caretaker of her siblings but still managed to keep her grades up. Although she wants to go to college, she feels responsible for her siblings and doesn't want to leave them with her aunt who is overwhelmed. She's thinking about getting a job right after graduation to help provide for them.

Student 7
Marcus, is an 18 year old who dropped out during his senior year of high school and now wants to go back to school to get his diploma. He lives at home with his 17-year-old brother, who has also dropped out and his mother who is in recovery, and working very hard to stay clean. Their relationship is volatile at times, because he still harbors resentment for her from when she was using. He's smart and hard-working and sees college as his way out of poverty. Most of his homies have already dropped out and are either working odd jobs or hustling. Marcus is trying to stay focused in this environment and sees schools as a safe space.

Student 8
In LaShonda's mind, there is no way she can succeed in school. She has been a "remedial" student for as long as she can remember. She reads slowly, and seldom gets a passing grade on in-class essays. She does have strengths, but no one seems to notice or value them. She wonder if life after high school will feel like more of the same.

Student 9
Vincent is a finely tuned teacher-pleasing machine. Vincent lives with both his parents who both graduated from the same high school. They both work in the local factory and have since they graduated from high school 20 years ago. Vincent knows exactly what he needs to do to maximize his grade and he does it (no matter what) and then some. He is organized, disciplined and focused — with his homework, getting good grades, and on with extra curricular activities, which will look good on his transcript when he applies to college. His teachers know he will always volunteer for anything they ask — and he often does.

Student 10
Shane is "life smart", but not school smart. He would do almost anything to not look stupid in school. He's the class clown, or the loud political protester, or the persistent talker — on the edge of being a "behavior problem." As a result, he was labeled EBD (Emotional Behavioral Disorder). He doesn't mind being sent to the office instead of having to give an oral presentation — and he knows just how to get sent there. Everyone at the office knows him well and greets him with affection, because they know him as "really, a nice kid." The things Shane's really good at seem to have little place in school.

"People are always creating small schools for the kids they hope will come not for the students they know will come."
— LaRhonda Stewart, T.A.L.C. Milwaukee

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