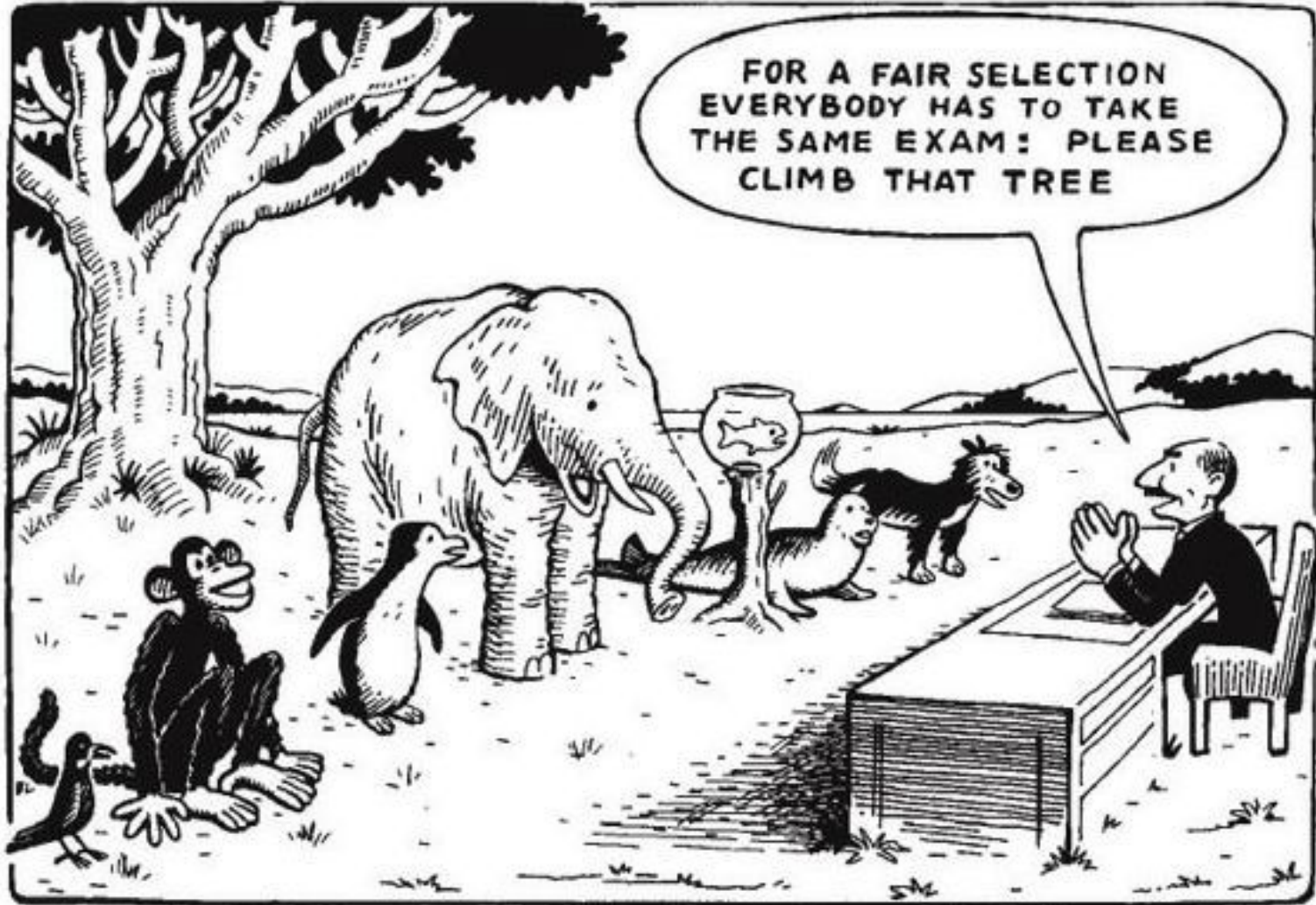# A strengths-based approach to information literacy

Sebastian Krutkowski

Academic Achievement Librarian

The context: widening participation

The strengths-based approach

"Strengths-based education involves a process of assessing, teaching, and designing experiential learning activities to help students identify their greatest talents, and to then develop and apply strengths based on those talents in the process of learning, intellectual development, and academic achievement to levels of personal excellence."

(Anderson, 2004: 1)

The strengths-based approach

- Strong roots in positive psychology

- Departure from remediation

- 3 key stages of strengths development:

Institution: identify students' strengths → engage students in activities to develop these further → empower students to mobilise and apply their strengths in everyday situations

(Soria & Stubblefield, 2015)

Students: identify, recognise and psychologically "own" their talents → recognise the value derived from performing activities congruent with their talents

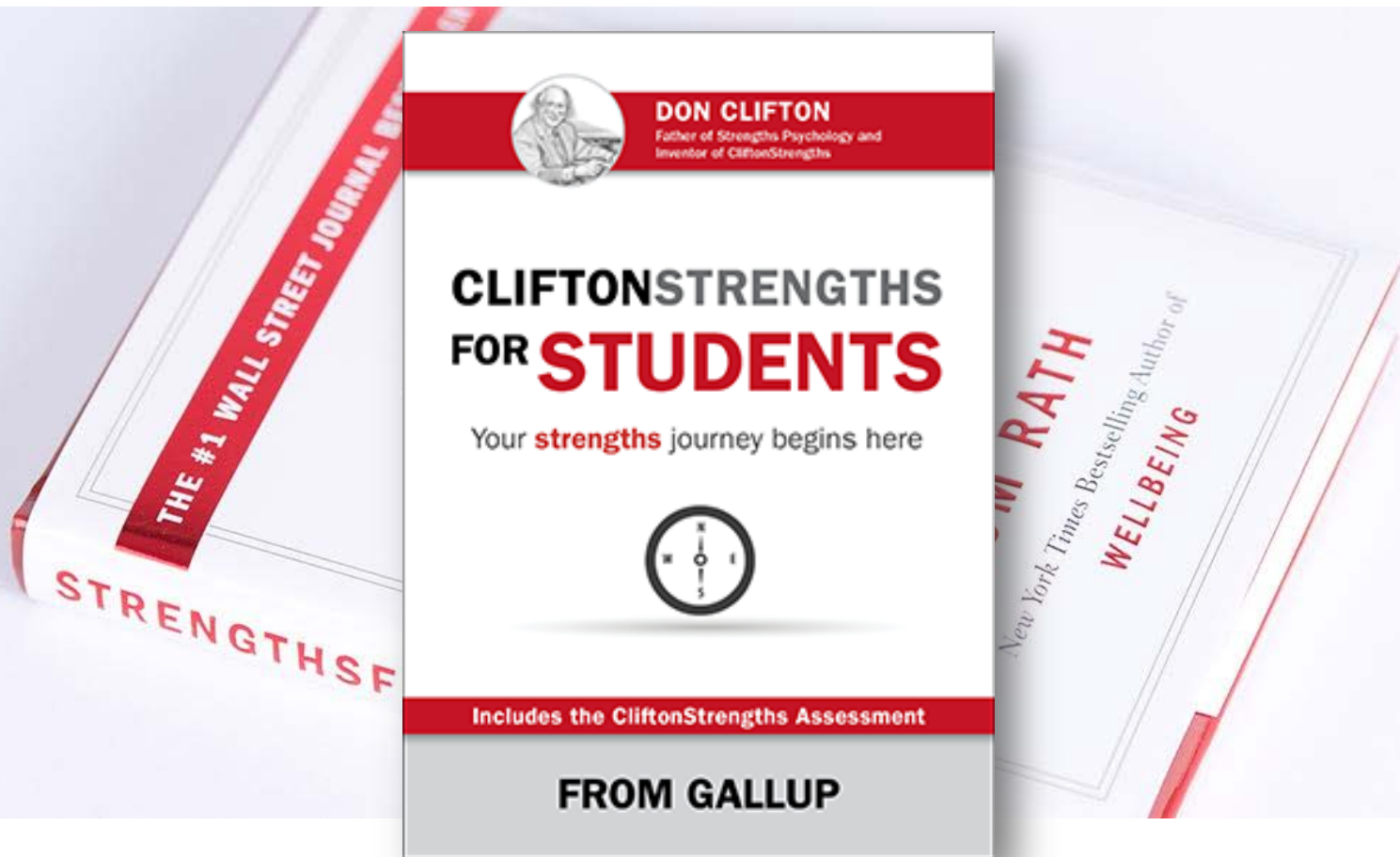# Case Study: The strengths-based approach at GSM London

- Emphasis on social mobility and inclusion

- Diverse student body

- Developing choices

- Remedial effectiveness, grades, graduation → not the sole determinants of student success (Rashid *et al*, 2017)

Strengths testing

The chances of having the exact same Top 5 Talent Themes in the exact order as someone else is **1 in 33.39 million**

The process

1. Measurement of strengths

2. Individualisation – personalised educational approach (e.g. library resources – personalised learning pathway)

3. Networking with others – "strengths interactions" – *strengths grow in the context of relationships, teams and organisations*

4. Deliberate application of strengths in classroom and beyond

5. Intentional development of strengths

Assessment design

Assessment drives learning (Race, 2014)

Allow students to interact with their preferred medium (Robinson & Aronica, 2015)

Feedback mechanisms

Gamification – action, interactivity, emotions, navigating risks, safe-to-fail environment, instant feedback

Information literacy is effective in a curriculum that stimulates engagement in learning activities that require ongoing interaction with the information environment (Bruce, 2004).
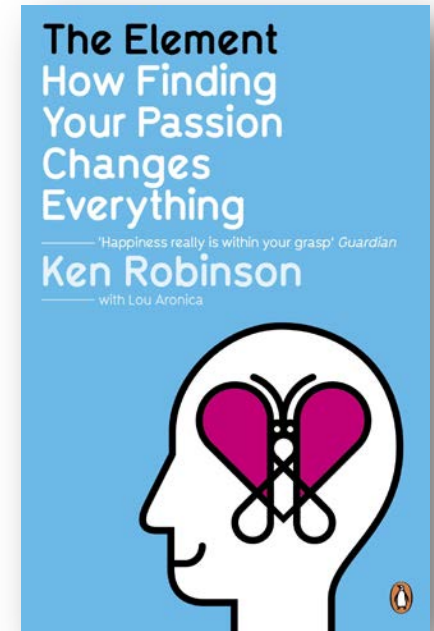
Library activities using strengths

- **Strengths deck** – students write their name and signature themes on a card that will serve them the most in workshop

- **Talk about strengths** at the start of the workshop (5mins)
Students from different modules get to know each other

- **Minute paper** – "how I used my strengths today" (understanding strengths in context) or "how are you using your strengths to understand the content of this lesson?"

- Encourage students to **form study groups** based on diversity of strengths

The four domains of strengths
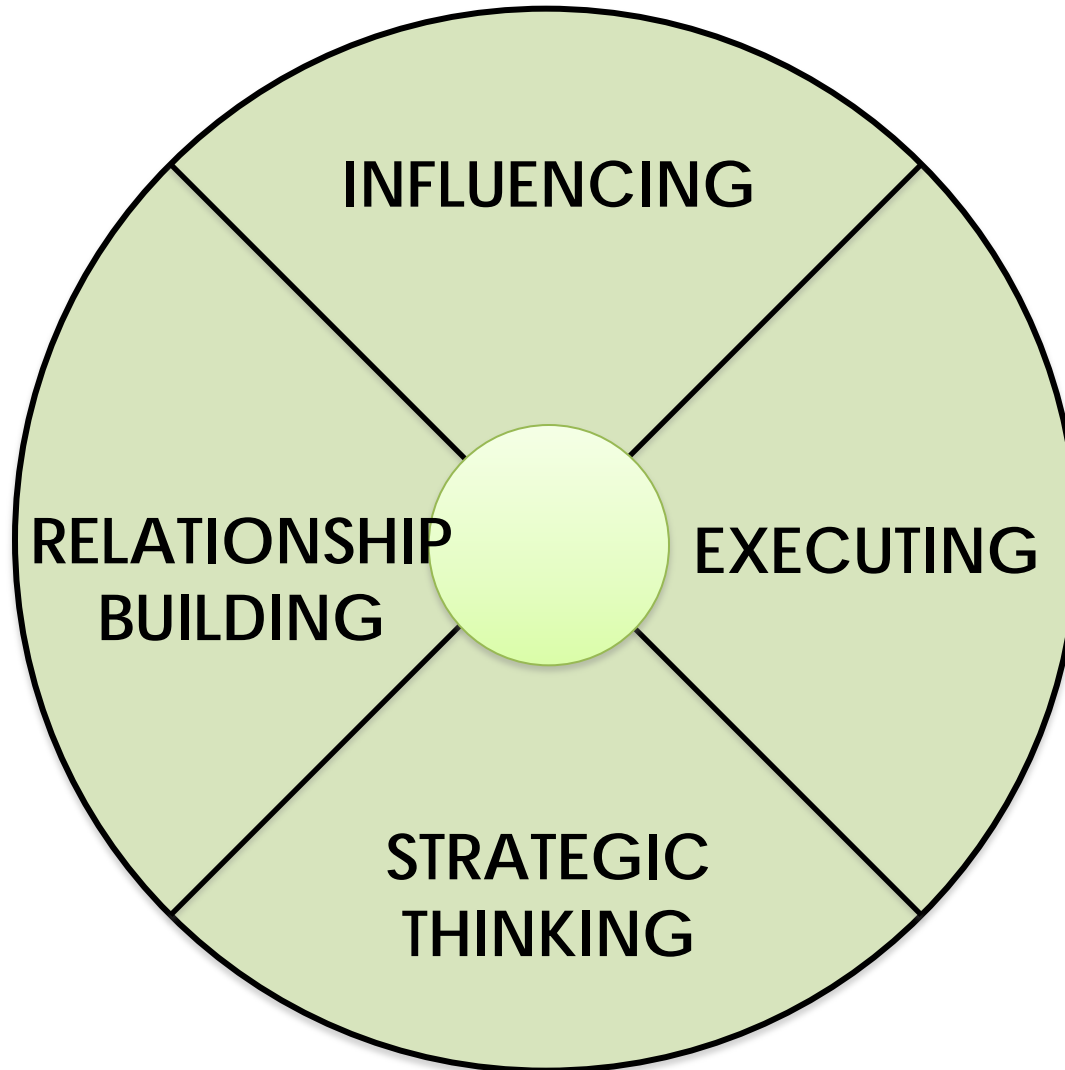
The next steps

- Ensuring buy-in from faculty (Education Conference 2017)

- Staff training

- Promoting active learning

- Personal Tutoring

- Measuring the link between strengths awareness and retention

- Embedding strengths in modules (e.g. Employability Skills)

- "Strengths Library"

- Academic review and restructure of curriculum to integrate strengths-based approaches

Thank you

@seb_krutkowski

sebastian.krutkowski@roehampton.ac.uk

Strengths-based initiatives

Further Reading

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Lopez, S.J. & Louis, M.C. (2009) The principles of strengths-based education. *Journal of College and Character* 10(4): 1-8. DOI: 10.2202/1940-1639.1041

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