Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it. (Max 650 words)

Annoyance, distaste, and ununited were the feelings I felt every Friday at 2:30 pm. At least until last year. It was our school’s weekly games event. The school’s intentions were good: they wanted the students to have fun and strengthen our sense of togetherness. Unfortunately, it turned out to be the opposite. Only half consistently showed up. The rest? They left to enjoy their weekend off-campus 45 minutes early. This frustrates me. I really wished for all of us – regardless of seniority – to have stronger bonds with each other as friends. This prompted me to think of how I could improve this event. Who would have thought that what I learned in Science class (i.e. problem solving approach) helped me accomplish this goal.

The teachers used to set up the games. Their intention was to enable students to interact more with each other. They made us form groups and compete by class. It was a good idea, but they overlooked one little fact: the games they perceive as fun and enable community-building were irrelevant to us because of generation gap. Consequently, the events became too cheesy and half of us skipped altogether. Seeing this continue each week broke my heart. So, I decided to roll up my sleeves and do something.

As the student council’s VP, I am eager to contribute and make the event better for both students and the school; something that would really strengthen the students’ relationship instead of distancing them. I voiced my concerns to fellow councils and, later, to the teachers and school directors that, with the current condition, the events would end up being counterproductive. Unfortunately, the school board ignored my “nudge.” To make them respond, I spent several weeks devising the event’s feedback surveys and collected attendance data to strengthen my argument and convince the school board. Eventually, they responded and put the student council in charge of reforming the event.

Empathy is the first step: the students’ inputs on games day are crucial. So, insight-gathering student surveys and interviews were done to determine the kinds of activities the student find attractive. My initial thought was to make the events comprised of purely competitive sports. However, the data begged to differ. The list of desired activities were much more diverse than expected: sports, arts, culinary, and even trivial games (Jenga, Twister, etc.).

As one problem is solved (the activities), another emerged (fitting all activities within 45 minutes). Defining the problem and brainstorming solutions come next. All ten of us continuously met and generated ideas to fit these activities given the allotted time, but nothing worked. Hours turned to days and discouragement started building until this one idea: scrap everything and make it a full day event.

Prototype and testing are the final step. We generated and simulated different scenarios from activities combinations/permutations, scheduling, and buffer time using the good old spreadsheet and its amazing features. Students from different Years and classes were randomly divided into teams. We incorporated a “Harry Potter” style house system – Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow Houses – to keep them engaged, increase competitiveness, and gain camaraderie (courtesy of our student council Harry Potter marathon night). Points were accumulated after each activities depending on the team’s performance. On the D-day, Google form was used to track the students’ attendance and feedbacks to validate our reformed event.

As I nervously collected the students’ responses, the reformed games day received positive reviews. Despite receiving apathetic responses from the school at first, I’m glad I pushed through in making what I desired, real. Since then, a strong togetherness started to form. Not only that, the ten of us also gain valuable lessons: problem solving, better teamwork, and delegation. Who would’ve thought that something that I learned in Science classes could be applied to making my school a more fun and unified environment. Oh… The school directors were happy and made this permanent.

Hi Octavio,

I can certainly sense your eagerness and persistence as I read this prompt, good job!

I only have a few suggestions that relates back to how the problem solving approach you have learned in Science helped you in this.

I do think it would be better if you could link it back to the problem solving approach – by writing a brief one sentence or add a few problem solving words for the steps you took (defining the problem, generating alternatives, evaluating, implementing and following up on the solution – or any other specific steps that you are referring to).

In my opinion, this will explain the problem solving approach better and demonstrates your character as a problem solver - along with other traits: eagerness, persistence and leadership. ☺

All the best! ☺