

Lasallian Professional Development

Monthly PD for the New Zealand Lasallian Family of schools - WE ARE ONE LASALLE!

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this issue

21st Century Strategies to help you grasp the idea of PATIENCE and how this applies today in your own classes.

The origins of the 12 Virtues...

In 1785, just before the French Revolution, Brother Agathon, who was the fifth Superior General of the De La Salle Brothers, wrote a document called 'The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher'. The list of virtues is like sage advice that a teacher might receive from an experienced Year Level Dean or similar.

The 12 Virtues combines two important pieces of work of St. John Baptist De La Salle's. The spiritual vision of his Meditations and the practical pedagogy of his Conduct of Christian Schools.

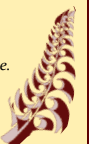
The 12 Virtues help answer the fundamental question for teachers in Lasallian schools: *"If I am to touch the hearts of my students and teach them in the best possible way, what practices should I follow and what vision should I have for them?"*

Br Agathon reminds the teacher - if you have a problem in your class, look to your own behaviour first.

12 Virtues and 12 months of 2013. Each month, I aim to provide you with useful, modern strategies, that will allow you to bring De La Salle's ideas right into your own classrooms. I kindly acknowledge Br. Jeffery Calligan for his work on this material and real insight. Enjoy learning about patience!

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The 12 Virtues of a Good Teacher - PATIENCE

Patience

The teacher who can keep cool, composed and even-tempered will be a better educator.

Do you have the PATIENCE that Kylie shows below?

Patience



Kylie approaches her classes with the attitude that "love wins love". In practice, this means that she behaves with courtesy and good manners; she shows equal kindness to all; she doesn't overlook mistakes that need to be pointed out, but she does so gently and carefully; she praises appropriately; she does not ask more of them than they have the capacity for. Her students understand that she really cares about them.

PATIENCE

A virtue that makes us overcome, without murmuring and with submission to the will of God, all of the evils of this life, especially the cares inseparable from the education of youth.



Strategy 4-9: Let Them Be

Purpose: To avoid discouraging students by expecting more than they can produce at the time.

Description: When we suspect students have not learned because they are not yet ready to learn, letting them be, not attempting to force something before its time.

Most of us have the experience of being asked to learn something when, for one reason or another, it was not the time for us to learn it. We might have been asked to tell time, or to sing on key, or grasp calculus. Unable to learn what was requested, and especially if our peers were quite able to learn it or if we wanted to please our teacher, we might have felt defeated, weak, stupid. Those are not feelings that lead us to become confident learners.

We do well to be alert for such occasions. In our zeal to get students to learn, we don't want to overlook the possibility that, from the student's perspective, we may be asking more than the student is then able to produce. Strategy 3-2 described the advantage of teaching in layers, not lumps. That strategy is a reminder to us that we can return to a topic another time, perhaps in another way, thereby avoiding pushing students too hard at any one time.

It is also helpful to remember that when in doubt, it may be wise to let students be, even if we cannot come back to the topic. There is wisdom in not discouraging students. More fundamentally, there is wisdom in communicating respect for students even when they cannot learn. Modeling such behavior is a fine way to teach students how they can accept their less capable neighbors, a primary skill in healthy community life.

Strategy 5-1: Student Procedure Mastery

Purpose: To motivate students to cooperate and follow classroom procedures smoothly and willingly.

Description: Spending enough time teaching classroom procedures early on so they become comfortable, automatic routines for students.

It is tempting to assume that students will understand and follow simple procedures: "Pick a partner and talk over last night's homework." "When you replace your folder on the shelf, replace it in alphabetical order." But if you have taught school for more than one hour, you probably notice that some students will neither comprehend nor follow directions carefully.

The remedy? Demonstrate that procedures are important by overteaching them, not underteaching them. Early on, announce that you care that things be done properly. Then aim for all students to reach absolute mastery of all key procedures and feel good about having that mastery. It's often wise to walk students through each procedure, giving explicit instructions, as does this teacher:

When I say, "Get a partner," first look around and make eye contact with someone. YOU can sit with someone nearby or not, as you choose. But if I ask you to pick someone with whom you have not recently worked, you might have to walk elsewhere to make that eye contact. Then sit close enough to that person so you can talk quietly. Let's try that. Pick a partner with whom you have not recently worked and sit together. Please do that now.

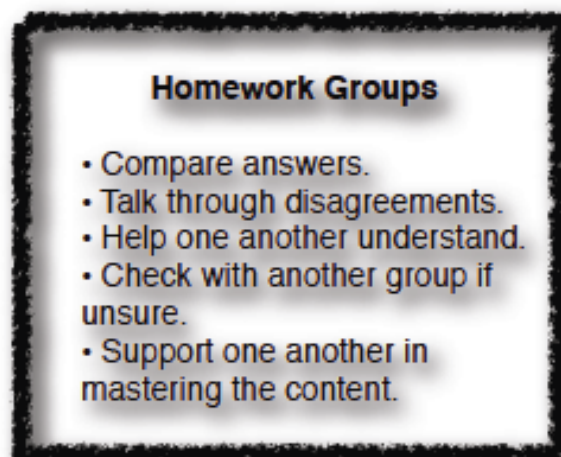
After the students have found partners, the teacher reviews what happened.

Let's talk about how we did. Maybe some of you felt anxious about being left out, and felt it was risky to get partners. I see that some of you were, in fact, left out, and it was tempting to form a trio instead of a pair, or to sit by yourself, or to come and ask me what to do. Please go back to your original seats, and let's try again.

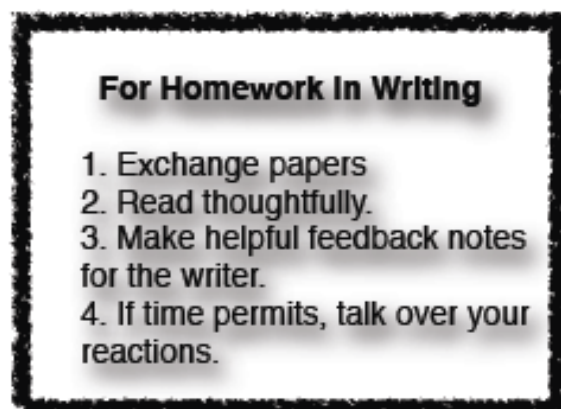
The teacher then gives more detailed instructions:

This time, when I say "go," take a risk and do not rush to sit with the first person you see. If most others are paired up and you are still without a partner, look around to see if anyone else is available. A person might have been unwilling to risk today, so you may find someone sitting alone. Look carefully, like a detective looking for someone. If you have done that and still find no one without a partner, please make a trio. Ask a pair if you might join them. Let's try it again. Please get a partner with whom you have not recently worked. Go.

Like "pick a partner," an instruction to "talk over last night's homework" invites confusion, which invites noncompliance, which invites discipline problems. One teacher posts the following chart to specify what this instruction means:



Another teacher has a chart for checking homework that involves writing clearly.



"All that we have said concerning Patience in general applies very aptly to the good teacher. As he is nearly always with his students, this virtue consists, in his case, in supporting the disagreeable and unpleasant occurrences that may be met with in his employment. Consequently, he will not take to heart the students' whims, jokes, and bad manners or those of their parents; he learns to feel sorry for the limited powers of reason displayed by the students due to their age, their light-headedness, and their inexperience ..."

-Brother Agathon, TWELVE
VIRTUES OF A GOOD
TEACHER

Note that it is generally best to teach and, if necessary, to reteach a procedure when it is first needed. Keep in mind, though, that it is also advisable not to introduce too many procedures at one time. The point: Spend enough time early on to make procedures perfectly clear and acceptable to all. And help students appreciate and enjoy their ability to perform procedures masterfully. Doing so not only eventually saves time, it also teaches students the importance of the little things in life. And mastery of classroom procedures provides all students, including the slowest learners, the opportunity to experience masterful success.

Strategy 5-3: Ask a Friend

Purpose: To have students get their questions answered efficiently and to nurture a classroom feeling of mutual support.

Description: Encouraging students who need help to ask a friend.

When a student asks what page the class is on, or asks that the homework directions be repeated, or is unsure of how to complete a worksheet, a good response is usually "Please ask a friend." The comment serves us in several ways. It eases our load; many students can easily get help they need from peers. It generates mutual respect and appreciation among students and builds a healthy, interdependent class community. And it communicates that we assume others in the class can be "friends" if only they are seen as such.

Grace Pilon (1966) notes that some students seem to create confusion for themselves so they can ask a teacher for help, perhaps because they thirst for attention. For such students, asking one friend may not be enough. Moorman and Moorman (1989) offer the phrase "Ask three then me." We might announce to the class, "Whenever you are working at individual tasks and need assistance, please ask three others before asking me." If a student approaches us, we can then simply inquire, "Did you ask three before me?"

Strategy 5-4: Once Principle

Purpose: To teach students both to listen and to live self responsibly.

Description: Announcing that from now on directions will be given only once and that students not hearing directions are to use a dignified, intelligent way to catch up.

Pilon (1996) suggests that teachers introduce this strategy by saying something like this:

Please, everyone look at me. From now on, I will say things only once. Page numbers. Directions. Anything like that. So please practice keeping yourself aware. If you miss what I say, find a way to catch up. Perhaps whisper to a friend, or watch and see what others are doing or later quietly ask a friend what you missed. Call on your good intelligence. You will know the best thing to do. Now let's get started on today's lesson.

Note that the teacher said this only once. She did not say, "Any questions?" That might well have led to a repetition of the same announcement. Note, too, that the teacher by asking all students to look at her. If a direction is to be given only once, it is fair to call for attention and insert an appropriate beat of silence so all students have a fair chance of hearing it. Imagine, then, when students later ask, "When was that due?" or "What did you say the page was?" that the teacher simply smiles warmly and says, "Ask a friend," not "I told you..." or "I say things only once." Eventually the teacher need say nothing at all to communicate to students that they are smart enough to see a teacher smile as an unspoken answer to their question. Will this strategy work? Many teachers report that it works just fine. In our experience, if we have confidence that students will learn the Once Principle, they will. It is often more difficult for the teacher to stick to the Once Principle than it is for students to learn how to live with it.