

# 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 WISDOM 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.

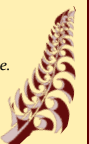
The 12 Virtues help answer the fundamental question for teachers in Lasallian schools: *"If I am to touch the hearts of my students and teach them in the best possible way, what practices should I follow and what vision should I have for them?"*

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 wisdom!

Mr. Kane Raukura

La Sallian Facilitator - De La Salle College, Mangere.  
Chairperson (NZ Mission Action Committee)  
NZ Representative  
(De La Salle Vocational Council - ANZPPNG)



## The 12 Virtues of a Good Teacher - WISDOM

### Wisdom

The teacher's knowledge and experience is applied with sound judgement. Wisdom may take time to acquire.

Do you have the WISDOM that Sateesh shows below?

### Wisdom



Sateesh is **passionate** about his teaching and is **committed** to the welfare of his students. He wants to bring them to salvation, to **fullness of life**. He instructs by his own example, believing that "children learn more by seeing than by hearing". He takes into consideration **their needs**, becoming "little with the little ones" and links his teaching to their "level of understanding and manner of appreciating things".



# WISDOM

A virtue that gives us knowledge of the most exalted things through the most excellent principles so that we may act accordingly.



## Strategy 0-1: Learning from Great Teachers

**Purpose:** To refresh and learn from great teachers.

**Description:** Through reflection, beliefs and values to provide a wisdom base for our understanding of what teaching is.

In a fantasy world, all students would march in on the first day of school, quietly seat themselves, and promptly look up, bright-eyed, ready and willing to get to work. But this is the real world. In this world, students show up with a variety of motivations, such as

1. *The fully active learners.* Some students will be ready and willing to dive into school work. When we assign four problems for homework, such students will not only do all four but do them with style. They might even recopy their work before handing it in, so it's very neat, or attach a cover sheet to make it look professional. Students in this category may not be the brightest in the classroom, and they may not get the highest exam scores. But they are our go-getters, self-motivated, ready to do the best work they possibly can. These students are a joy to teach.
2. *The responsible students.* Other students will enter the classroom ready to do whatever we ask, but not much more than that. When we assign these students four problems for homework, they will do all four carefully, but rarely will we get the sense that they did their very best. These are dutiful, respectful students, more motivated to please us than to put themselves fully into their work. These students are easy enough to teach.
3. *The halfhearted workers.* Our class is also likely to contain students who are, at best, halfhearted workers. Give them four problems and they complete only two. Or, if they do all four, their work will be sloppy, full of careless errors. These students are often slow to start work and quick to give up, and they can be quite frustrating to teach.
4. *The work avoiders.* Finally, we might have students who will do little or no work. Indeed, some will do their best to avoid work altogether. Give these students four problems for homework and they are likely to groan and then lose the assignment. They are the students most likely to become discipline problems, the ones most likely to drive us batty.

This is the array of motivations that we are likely to find when our students first arrive. Unfortunately, it is also the array of motivations we are likely to see in the last days of the school year. Despite all the books that have been written about motivation and all the teacher meetings devoted to the issue, most of us still have a hard time turning work avoiders and halfhearted workers into responsible students and fully active learners.

But this is not so for all teachers...

## Learning from Great Teachers

Some teachers, those we might call our great teachers, have a knack for moving students up those motivational levels. If we visited their classrooms, we would see, week by week, fewer and fewer students working at levels three and four, more and more at levels one and two. Somehow these teachers are able to inspire students to work harder than they were initially inclined to work. As a result the students tend to climb what we call the Active Learning Ladder

You probably remember having such teachers yourself. Most schools have at least a few. They are the ones who elicit such comments from students as

- I like coming to class. I hated being absent.
- She turned us on to history and made it come alive.
- I never worked so hard in my life.
- I didn't expect to like that class, but I really did.

We might reasonably conclude, therefore, that it is possible to inspire students to become more fully active learners. Clearly, some teachers manage to do it. Might we do it, too? If so, how?

Interestingly, those great teachers don't achieve their results in any standard way. Look at a group of great teachers and you will notice that some do a lot of lecturing, others very little. Some are strict and demanding, others lenient and accepting. Some appear warm, other to be distant. Apparently, there is no one way to motivate students to do the best work they are capable of doing. This is good news for those who would like to inspire active learning. It suggests that we need not change our teaching personality or follow any standard model. Rather, we can create our own brand of teaching, motivating higher levels of active learning in our own way. That is assuming, of course, we have a clear, realistic sense of how to go about doing so.

One of the *unrealistic* suggestions bantered about would have us start with students' interests and base all instruction on topics students are already motivated to learn more about: space travel, baseball, popular music. Another suggestion would have us build units around real-life issues that naturally motivate students: making friends, staying healthy, encouraging world peace, or the like. A third suggestion recommends that we convince students of the importance of grammar, history, or whatever else we want to teach them, so that the students will want to learn it.

These suggestions can help some of the time with some topics and some students, but rarely are they sufficient to move a classroom of students steadily up the Active Learning Ladder. Students need to be touched more deeply if they are to be inspired to do the best work they are capable of doing.

## An Inspiring Approach

After years of experimentation, we have crafted a practical approach that does stir the deep positive abilities of students. Our approach resembles those that recommend a focus on the natural needs of students.

Yet our approach is distinct in several ways. First, our focus is squarely on the *highest* needs of students, such as the need for students to become fully functioning or to be the best persons they can be. It does not ignore other needs, including what Maslow (1999) calls students' *deficiency needs*, such as the need for food and safety. But we place those needs in the background. We want to concentrate on the heart of the matter, on bringing out the very best students have in them, which often includes positive qualities the students themselves do not yet know they possess. In this regard, we agree with Erich Fromm when he says that the heart of education is "helping the child realize his potentialities." By aiming high we also take advantage of Goethe's wisdom: "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

A second key difference in our approach is that our target is not to bring out our students' best potentials in a general way. We are teachers. We have jobs to do. Our approach is grounded in classroom realities. Our target, then, is very practical: to see students apply their best potentials to *daily schoolwork*.

### The Active Learning Ladder

Level 1: Fully Active Learners
Level 2: Responsible Students
Level 3: Halfhearted Workers
Level 4: Work Avoiders



A final difference is that our target is made more concrete and manageable by focusing on five student potentials that teachers have the power to influence and that directly contribute to school success. These five student abilities are *dignity*, *energy*, *self-management*, *community*, and *awareness*. We refer to them collectively as DESCA.

## FIVE KEY STUDENT ABILITIES

All students have an inherent ability to live with *dignity*, to engage tasks with *energy*, be appropriately *self-managing*, to work in *community* with at least some others, and to be *aware* of what is going on around them. Collectively, these DESCA abilities point to the heart of students' best, most productive selves.

### D is for Dignity

Students have an innate ability to live and work with dignity, as do we all. Moreover, deep down, students *want* to live and work with dignity. They do not want to feel belittled, demeaned, diminished, unimportant, unworthy. Yet traditional school practices can fail to take advantage of this ability to work with dignity. Some practices, in fact, frustrate students' impulses to do so. Our task, if we want to inspire students to be fully active learners, is to run our classrooms in a way that is comfortable to us, nourishing, never depressing, students' ability to work with dignity. We might, for example take care to

- Avoid embarrassing students, as by temporarily backing off when some feel blocked or are otherwise unable to learn what we are asking them to learn.
- Use only those discipline procedures that communicate care and high respect for students.
- Find practical ways to give students credit whenever they do the best they can, even when that falls far short of mastery.
- Announce high expectations without raising unproductive anxieties in low-ability students.

Practically speaking, can we do those things? Is it, for instance, realistic to expect us to avoid embarrassments and to discipline in ways that always communicate care? Yes, it is as strategies presented in these papers discussing the 12 virtues of a Good Teacher will explain.

### E is for Energy

Students also have a natural ability to engage life energetically. They, in fact, *want* to engage life energetically. They suffer when they must sit still or stand around for too long with nothing much to do. We do well to nurture that ability to live energetically. It's after all what we, too, want. We certainly do not want students handling schoolwork apathetically or slumping in class listlessly. Nor do we want them running wildly out of control. Rather, we want students to engage schoolwork with a comfortable, steady flow of energy. To build o and draw out students' ability to do that, we might, for example

- Use very small groups, preferably pairs, to reduce chances that some students will be left uninvolved in group work.
- Adopt instructional procedures that allow students to occasionally move about so they can vent any built-up restlessness.
- Use whole-class choral work for information we want students to memorize.

### S Is for Self-Management

All humans also have the ability to self-manage, and we would do well to develop this in our students. We do not want students asking us every little question that comes to mind. Rather, we want them to think for themselves, managing themselves as intelligently as they can. This is what they, too, want. They do not want to be bossed. Nor do they want to fly about out of control. To nurture students' self-managing ability, we might

- Include choices in each homework assignment; for example, give options on how many questions to answer or on how to handle a topic.
- Allow students to select their own work partners, chairs in the room, or focus for a small-group discussion.
- Ask each student to make a personal plan to tutor a younger student.

### **C Is for Community**

Students, as do we all, have an ability to get along and relate comfortably with at least some others. And they want to do so. They do not want to be rejected or isolated. Rather, they want to be in community with at least some others. If, then, we want to elicit students' more cooperative and generous abilities, we might

- Structure lessons so students can often help one another.
- Encourage talkative students to create enough space for all students to be able to speak out.
- Set up support groups in which students learn to support one another over an extended time period.

### **A Is for Awareness**

Finally, all students are aware beings. They have the ability to be alert, wakeful, observant, attentive. And they have an innate *longing* to be aware. They are not meant to be bored. Indeed, it is their very nature to *avoid* boredom. And we, of course, want students to stay alert and aware. That recommends we do not repress but rather develop this awareness ability. To do this, we might

- Find a way to help slower learners without boring faster learners.
- Change whatever we are doing whenever we notice student attention sliding, as by changing topics or procedures.
- Avoid having quick thinkers answer all our questions, as by having all students jot an answer on scrap paper or share answers in pairs before we discuss correct answers.
- Include activities students are highly interested in completing, as by asking students to construct a toothpick model of an idea, teach a concept to a younger student, or solve a real problem showing up in school.

Teachers have a great deal of control over the degree to which students will express those DESCA potentials and apply them to daily school work.

