What Works For Me:
Reflections on Teaching

by
Lindback Award Recipients
La Salle University

Spring, 2005
Contents

Foreword v
Introduction vii

I Profile of the Effective Teacher 1

II Responses 7
1966 Leo Rudnytzky ...................................... 13
  1983 ................................................. 13
  1989 ................................................. 15
  2005 ............................................... 16
1968 John J. Keenan ..................................... 20
  1983 ................................................. 20
  1989 ................................................. 20
1969 John F. Reardon .................................... 22
  1983 ................................................. 22
  1989 ................................................. 23
  2005 ............................................... 24
1972 John S. Grady (1989) ................................. 26
  1983 ................................................. 29
  2005 ............................................... 30
1977 Geoffrey B. Kelly ................................... 31
  1989 ................................................. 31
  2005 ............................................... 35
1979 Paul R. Brazina (1989) ............................... 40
1980 Lester Barenbaum (1989) ............................ 41
1981 Carl P. McCarty ................................... 42
  1983 ................................................. 42
1989 ................................................................. 42
1983 Bertram Strieb ................................................... 45
  1989 ................................................................. 45
  2005 ................................................................. 45
1984 Preston D. Feden .................................................. 47
  1989 ................................................................. 47
  2005 ................................................................. 48
1984 Vincent Kling (2005) ............................................... 50
1985 Barbara Millard (2005) ............................................ 51
1986 Michael J. Kerlin .................................................. 52
  1989 ................................................................. 52
  2005 ................................................................. 52
1987 Steven I. Meisel (1989) ........................................... 54
  1989 ................................................................. 58
  2005 ................................................................. 59
1989 Zane Robinson Wolf (2005) ...................................... 60
1990 Stephen Andrilli (2005) .......................................... 61
1991 Nicholas F. Angerosa (2005) ..................................... 64
1996 Lynne A. Texter (2005) .......................................... 65
1997 Kathleen S. McNichol (2005) ................................... 67
1999 Marianne S. Gauss (2005) ....................................... 68
  Teaching Philosophy ................................................. 68
2000 Francis J. Ryan (2005) .......................................... 70
2003 George Stow (2005) .............................................. 71
Foreword

While enrolled in Honors 481 - How People Learn, we participated in a faculty reading group concerning the book “What The Best College Teachers Do,” written by Ken Bain. During one session, honors program director John Grady mentioned Brother Emery Mollenhauer’s past projects of the 1st and 2nd editions of “What works for me.” It became our ambition to produce the third edition of a similar work, inviting all winners of the Lindback Awards since 1989, as well as reissuing invitations to winners before 1989 (still teaching at La Salle), to submit a reflection on effective teaching under Brother Mollenhauer’s original rubric.

It became our objective that upon compilation and analysis of responses to these invitations, along with the 2nd edition of “What Works for Me,” we would be able to offer insight into what exactly it is that the best college teachers (at La Salle) do. Our attempt at this endeavor can be found in Part I of this publication.

With respect for Brother Mollenhauer’s original project and aspiration, we did our best to ensure that our project is a continuation of the objectives that he originally intended. As Lasallian students, we have benefited from the Christian Brothers’ emphasis on excellent teaching. It is our hope that by sharing the responses generated through our project, we will aid in the continuing emphasis on effective teaching so that future students may benefit as we have.

The responses that follow in Part II of this compilation are arranged chronologically by the year in which the writer received the Lindback Award. In cases where an original response was submitted in the form of a personal letter, minimal editing occurred. We would like to express our gratitude to all of those who have submitted responses and continue to further the teaching mission of the Christian Brothers.

Joshua H. Shrader
Class of 2005

Amy L. Davis
Class of 2005
Introduction

Effective teaching has been the capstone of the professional traditions of the Christian Brothers since their founding in 1680 and of La Salle University throughout its 126 years. Since 1961, Lindback Awards for excellence in teaching have served as living reminders that effective teaching is the top priority of our faculty and of La Salle University.

In 1982, with the objectives of recalling the primacy of teaching and of sharing some teaching tips that proved effective with our own students, I invited our forty-one Lindback awardees to offer a few paragraphs on effective teaching under the rubric “What Works for Me.” The paragraphs provided by the thirteen responding faculty were circulated in the spring, 1983.

Especially in recent years, serious colleges and universities like La Salle have also highlighted the place of research and publication as a component of the life of the total professional. Predictably and perhaps inevitably, some faculty have perceived this expansion of expectations as undermining the institutional emphasis on excellent teaching. Since my own perception and experience is that effective teaching remains our top priority, I thought it would be appropriate to offer a revised edition of “What Works for Me.” Accordingly, I wrote to our fifty-three Lindback awardees; this booklet features the responses to that invitation.

The responses are arranged chronologically; Dr. Joseph Flubacher, along with Dr. Roland Holroyd, had the distinction of being a Lindback recipient the first year we offered this recognition. Al Massimini and Brother Thomas McPhillips were Lindback recipients at commencement, 1988. Happily, a few awardees who offered paragraphs for the first edition of “What Works for Me” contributed also to this revised edition.

I want to note that many of the original responses were in the form of letters, so that some editing of those responses had to occur. Finally, I want to suggest my personal gratitude to the many faculty who have contributed to our faculty development efforts and to our basic mission of teaching and learning by their contributing their thoughts on “What Works for Me.”

Emery C. Mollenhauer, F.S.C.

Provost
Part I

Profile of the Effective Teacher
The diversity of the submitting authors is evident in their responses, but regardless of their area of expertise, title, formal position, department, or even the decade in which they taught, all submissions did have one aspect in common; they all shared elements indicative of effective teaching. Based on the compilation of responses, the following is a composite profile of the effective teacher and his/her practices.

**Enthusiasm:** The effective teacher presents course material with such excitement that it is as if they are rediscovering it for the first time. In addition to demonstrating excitement about course material, effective teachers show enthusiasm for the act of teaching as well. They enter each classroom with such contagious enthusiasm that it is all but impossible for their students to remain passive. Instead, they are encouraged to become active learners and discover exactly what it is about which their professor is so passionate. The effective teacher is never bored and, as a result, neither are their students. Students of any age can both recognize and appreciate such genuine enthusiasm as shown by the effective teacher and cannot help but want to capture the same feeling for themselves.

**Respect:** Effective teachers attempt to put themselves into their students’ shoes, and as a result, treat their students with the same respect that they expect for themselves. By making a considerable effort to talk with their students instead of at them, they create a learning environment that is comfortable, encourages discussion, and is conducive to learning. Students tend to realize when an instructor is making an effort to identify with them, and they appreciate it. One sign of respect shown by the effective teacher is to learn the students’ names in a reasonable time frame. Addressing students by name during class shows the students that, although the professor may be demanding of them as students, he/she is willing to connect with them on a personal level as well. The development of this reciprocal respect is vital to a classroom that encourages students to participate in class and to share their ideas. If implemented correctly, this concept of respect can lead professors to realize that their students have as much to offer them as they have to offer their students.

**Challenge Them:** The effective teacher enters the classroom armed with the assumption that every student seated before them has the ability, and the desire, to learn. These professors respond appropriately to that assumption by ensuring that the students will experience nothing but the most stimulating and challenging environment appropriate during the semester they are in that course. From the syllabus onward, the students are challenged to meet the strategically high, yet attainable, standards their teacher has set for them. The effective teacher posses these challenges in such a way, with just enough positive reinforcement and constructive feedback, that soon it is the students who are challenging one another, as well as themselves.
PROFILE OF THE EFFECTIVE TEACHER

**Outside the Classroom:** Although class preparation is undeniably important to ensure the smooth flow of a class, detailed plans that determine exactly what will be covered can inhibit effective teaching. The effective teacher prepares many topics that may be covered in a given class, and uses only those appropriate to match the classes progress. This practice allows for a more dynamic lesson plan that can better accommodate the needs of all students. The professor keeps up to date in his/her field and incorporates contemporary applications into the course material. This is accomplished by through continued involvement in scholarly endeavors. The classroom is not only a learning environment for students, but for professors to learn alongside of their students as well.

**Inside the Classroom:** It is no coincidence that the effective teacher almost always has an effective classroom as well. These teachers stray far from the monotony of continuous lecture, note taking, and even countless PowerPoint slides. The ability to apply course material is stressed, rather than rote memorization of its corresponding terms. The effective teaching style is a dynamic one, using a range of teaching methods that appeal to learners of all styles. These professors facilitate a variety of opportunities for students to make connections between course concepts and their other courses – no matter how unrelated they may seem – as well as the outside world. Quality of learning, rather than quantity of material covered is stressed. The effective teacher is more concerned with the students' mastery of the big ideas and key concepts of the course and their ability to use them to further their learning, rather than rushing to touch on every single chapter the textbook has to offer.

**Feedback:** Feedback is an integral part of the learning process and is best viewed as being a constructive educational tool. The University requires professors to give feedback in the form of grades, but the effective teacher compliments these grades by providing constructive criticism, indicating areas that may require improvement, and allowing the opportunity for this improvement. Removing the emphasis from the negative aspects of a student’s work to suggestions of how they may improve prevents the feeling of disappointment, failure, and discouragement among students, and allows them to use a poor grade as a learning experience. The effective teacher gives feedback freely and often, and does not require the students to ask for it, nor wait for a completed assignment. Most of these professors believe that, if their students are willing to devote the time to study for an exam or write a paper, then it is their responsibility to devote the time to provide them with constructive feedback.

Since the classroom is an educational environment for both the students and the teachers, feedback should be used by the instructor as well. These effective teachers take note of the performance of students on exams and other means of assessment, and use this data to adjust their
teaching style accordingly. The effective teacher administers a course
evaluation in some form, and uses the feedback from his/her students
to better his/her teaching.

Appropriately enough, those teachers selected to submit to “What Works
for Me” were more concerned with what works for their students. The effec-
tive teacher realizes that students’ learning come first, and adjusts his/her
teaching practices accordingly. These professors realize that teaching should
be focused on the student, and are willing to take the risk of allowing their
students to direct their own learning. The effective teacher upholds the
Christian Brothers’ traditions of placing emphasis on excellent teaching. By
following these traditions, the effective teacher places emphasis on their stu-
dents’ learning as well.
Part II

“What Works for Me”
Responses from Lindback Awardees
It appears to this instructor that what works is a combination of philosophy and technique. The most important philosophical tenet is always to show real care and concern (even “love”) for students. One must enjoy doing it so much that nothing is too trying or demanding. Mortimer Adler recently said that his favorite question to ask a teacher is, “What would you do if a rich uncle left you several millions of dollars?” If the answer is in effect a retirement from teaching, then Mortimer Adler concludes that person is not fit to be a teacher in the first place.

One must be firm but gentle; the students sense whether we really like them or merely tolerate them. All this is calculated to relax them and take away all “fear” while maintaining an atmosphere of decent respect. On that basis one can proceed to teach.

Coming to the technique level, there must, of course, be continuous growth on the part of the instructor and continuous refreshing of material (at least in a field such as economics).

Interviewing all students who get a “D” or “F” in any exam or assignment, plus inviting in all other students to discuss and review their papers helps. Not all come, but many do. Frequently but now always I conduct an extra review session (not on class time) before exams. They seem to like this.

One must learn the name of every student while that student is in one’s classes. One should inquire occasionally about their progress and interests, invite them to one’s office to discuss any questions they might have or lack of understanding about points in the material covered. I have a theory that really poor students will achieve one notch higher when one is really interested in them. Sometimes I think their parents do not pay much attention to them except when they do something wrong, and that they respond overwhelmingly to the attention and interest a faculty member manifests towards them.

In the 101–102 courses I find it useful to conduct the briefest review each day by way of an oral quiz. It serves to keep them on their toes a bit, but more importantly as a warm-up to provide continuity for the material to come.

I realize that some of this may risk the danger of paternalism but I am willing to take the risk. I believe it works.

One must have a sense of humor, be able to laugh at his own foibles or mistakes, and above all never embarrass a student and never display anger no matter what happens. One must know how to joke with them without being a clown.

In sum, if teaching is a joy to one, and a few basic principles are followed, all else falls into place.
1963  Richard P. Boudreau  
Foreign Language  

1983

I don’t know what works for me or even if it works any more. Once we believed that students should commit themselves to a definite stay with a language throughout a set of courses. We had continuity, time to delve, to make our case, to let the material prove itself, maybe even to coruscate a bit. I have always treated a language in the classroom as an object of study and contemplation, an interlocked system to be learned in its time and as a structure, starting with the simpler basics and progressing to more complex components. This approach demands a knowledge of grammar, both of one’s own language and, gradually, of the language under study, the target language often effecting an elucidation of the native language. You do not start out be “speaking” the language; you set out to learn and to know, to have knowledge of the language. If you have this knowledge, then you can always concoct some utterances in the new language and generate correct and viable statements. This surface ability waxes and wanes; but, as it should be with all courses, the method of attack and many of the fundamentals concerned with the discipline in question will have left their more durable impression. the “what” and the “why” remain; the “how” fades in and out.

When I compare the antediluvian age of a decade or more ago with the present academic era, I see a recommendation for the theory that missing links are not necessary for the evolutionary way of thinking, that they are not missing, but simply bypassed by sudden leaps and shifts. We seem to be faced with a new breed for whom basics of grammar are an undispellable mystery and acquisition and retention of principles and vocabulary a weird idea. When I include previous material in a comprehensive exam now, I find that even the better students have allowed too many of the vital pieces of the picture to slip away. The same situation holds for the advanced and upper-division level, with the mechanics of literary production and the aggregate of background facts. Continuity and decent volume are impossible to achieve in the present age of computers and calculators and communicators. Unfortunately, I know of no comparable instruments for language uses.

Do I get across to this new race? Somewhat. I have pretty much kept to my style of delivery (could I do otherwise?), which I should not, in all decency, undertake to examine further here. I cut back a bit perforce, because explanations and updating now make greater demands and the actual contact time is thereby scanted. Fortunately I experience no “crisis” in dealing with the material of my discipline year after year. My audience, an extension of myself, is always new; and if they are not pristine, then I can, with sinful glee, work at rectifying their past misguidance. Whatever the course, I proceed as if the next chapter or item were a novelty to me, too, and that I myself am looking forward to what comes next and to discovering where it fits in the total picture.

The intangible in all this is the individual instructor, his attitude and
mannerisms. Shall we run through the litany of abstract nouns? Knowledge, order, subordination, appositeness, measure, sincerity, enthusiasm (non nimis!), and, lately, indulgence. Ah, indulgence! I recall that Dante, in spite of his own protests, did not allow Virgil to become indulgent as they moved, painfully, from bolgia to bolgia.

Hence, it would seem that the topic should not be “what works for me,” but rather “what works for them.” If we cover “too much” or require excessive “continuity,” now they can simply walk away. And our hyphenated majors now have the other component of the hybrid to turn to.

It is a tightrope that we walk. I keep hammering away, in my time-worn fashion, and I get a lot - but never enough - of what I consider vital across. If the former time seems antediluvian to me, then wistfully, and with a touch of etymology, I might name

Two-thirds of the way through the reign of Louis XV, the naturalist Buffon delivered a speech before an August assembly of the Academie Francaise on the occasion of his acceptance into that venerable body. However, he departed from the custom of directing words of praise at the Immortal Forty and at the recently departed member whose chair he was assuming. Instead, he took up for the most part the question of style as found in the writings of the Academicians, and along the way devised the celebrated phrase, *Le style est l’homme meme*. I can but paraphrase Buffon and suggest the following: *L’art d’instruire est l’homme seul.*
As a part-time teacher, I can make few if any claims to innovation. However, I can offer one idea on written assignments in this age of readily-available canned papers. It is to furnish a list of topics from among which the students must choose. I work them up from the reading list, and try to fashion them so that they embody certain goals of the course, e.g. close reading of the literary works for tone and structure, with some latitude for personal reactions and interpretation. Though nothing can be foolproof, I do think it unlikely that these topics will mesh easily with marketed schlock. When the occasional miscreant tries to wrench a bought paper in under one of my topics, the results are usually comic and lead to confession. For one thing, store-bought papers are usually too long. I also keep copies of student papers for some years, just in case a current submission rings a little distant bell. There are files and friendships that can still function, and I can’t always compose an entirely new list of topics.

I am going to try a new method this semester in studying eight plays of Shakespeare. Rather than encroach upon scarce class time by running video tapes during those hours, I plan to have the students watch them, singly or in groups, in the library at a time of their choosing, usually after we have read the play in class. There will have to be fairly inventive quizzes, and of course I will have to go and view the plays myself.

In this same connection, I usually set up an “alertness committee” of the students to let the class know of any stage or film productions or works we will read in the course. These include balletic or operatic adaptations as well as the dramas themselves. I try to find ways of rewarding attendance at such performances, without requiring it because of costs and - alas - part time jobs.

For the most part, what works for me is the attempt to help the students read closely, to summon their scattered powers and really look at the page, whatever the genre at hand. Obvious as all that may seem, I submit that it isn’t self-evident, since many students have read about literature and talked about it, without - prior to college-level studies - having read closely. Thus, the rewards of very close, independent command of a challenging text can be a rare or even new experience for them.
Teaching is not just a profession, a means of making a living. It is a calling, a special state in life. Thus the teacher must be convinced that he (or she) has the best occupation in the world. He must also believe that he is indeed most suited for his position, that there is no one who could do his particular task better, and that nothing in the world is more satisfying than his work. The truly great teacher is in love with what he does.

A great teacher, I believe, must have a little bit of an actor in him to ensure lively and interesting presentations of the subject matter. At the same time I hasten to add, the teacher should not act, in the sense that an actor acts on the stage, for no one writes the teacher’s lines. His performance must be both dramatic and authentic; it must be both spontaneous and well-prepared. It is a subject for review by critics (his students), who should be encouraged to make critical remarks, to question his assumptions, and to challenge his interpretations.

To be successful, the teacher must never allow himself to become a specialist whose interest is limited to one work, or to one author or, for that matter, even to one literature. He should always place the work under discussion within the context of intellectual history and within the context of what Goethe termed “Weltliteratur.” In class, he must make meaningful analogies to other works of literature, utilizing where apropos, the comparative approach: he must make references to his own time and place; he must try to see the literary work from within, see it, as it were, with the soul of the author, and he must examine its form and content, both passionately and dispassionately, from without, with the eyes of a lover and with the critical faculties of a literary scholar. The analysis of a literary work in class involves the entire human being, his rational and his emotional self, as well as the world of the poet, those historical factors that helped shape it, and, finally, the world of the teacher and that of the students, which, alas, are not always the same.

In discussing Goethe’s Faust, for example, one must have a basic grasp of the philosophy of Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Hume, Leibniz, Rousseau, and Kant, at least a notion of the theories of Newton and Laplace, a more than casual familiarity with the medieval legend of Dr. Faustus, an acquaintance with Marlow’s play and with the puppet theater tradition, as well as a thorough knowledge of past and present Faust interpretations. And while analyzing The Sufferings of Young Werther, one must, in addition to knowing Rousseau and the philosophical tenets of rationalism and romanticism, be also familiar with Homer’s Odyssey, Macpherson’s Ossian and its impact on 18th century literature, Klopstock’s poetry, Winckelmann’s thoughts on Greek art, Lessing’s critical and dramatic writings, and abnormal psychology. And, most important: one must develop a feeling of empathy with the protagonists of the works as well as a spiritual kinship with their creator.
To be able to do this, the teacher must be indeed a Faustian human being. He should never rest on a bed of ease, although he, unlike Goethe’s hero in *Faust I*, may occasionally say to the moment; “Verweile doch, du bist so schon”–“Oh, linger on, thou art so beautiful.” The teacher must always expand his intellectual horizon, not only because he feels duty-bound to do so, and certianly not because he gets paid for it, but because it is (or should be) an organic demand of his personality. To be effective, to stay in condition, and to be fair to his students, the teacher must periodically examine himself. He must seek new insights into old subjects, he must try to establish new correlations among various phenomena, and he must constantly discipline himself by writing. Teaching and writing, however, should not be considered (as is frequently the case) as two separate often inimical or at best competing activities. They are, to be sure, the proverbial two sides of the coin, two distinct but not unrelated expressions of human creativity. In class, one should never present a “finished” paper, all set to be mailed to the publisher. For the teacher, the classroom should be a source of ideas and inspirations which might eventually culminate in an article or even a book. For this reason too, the teacher-scholar should avoid an overreliance on notes. Sometimes, while repeating a course, it is better to “start all over” rather than to build a course around old lecture notes.

Love for one’s calling, a desire for knowledge, a buoyant personality, and honesty and authenticity of expression are among the more important attributes of the teacher. His love, however, can not be limited to his subject matter. He must also love his students, his faithful, or, as the case often is at La Salle, his not so faithful, often quite fickle audience, with whom he shares a good part of his life. The teacher must be conscious, that he, as Goethe once put it, forms human beings according to his own image, and that, of course, places a great responsibility upon him. He must feel the obligation to offer to them sound and wholesome intellectual sustenance. For their as well as for his own sake, he, while attuned to the *Zeitgeist*, should not fall prey to every modern fad or fashion, but while coming to terms with the latest vogue, always present his ideas *sub specie aeternitatis*, from the standpoint of spiritual absolutes. An authenticity of expression should inform his teaching at all times; a kind of honesty with oneself is a prerequisite for honesty with others. That principle of honesty, I believe, precludes a teacher from teaching things he has no right to teach. For example, while it is perfectly all right for the student to read literary works in translation, a teacher has no business lecturing on a work of literature if he is unable to read it in the original, for the ethos of a culture which has given birth to the literary work is inherent in the language in which it was created. To lecture on Dante’s *Divine Comedy* without a reading knowledge of Italian is fatuous, to teach Dostoeysky without knowing Russian is farcial, and to expound in class on Goethe without a basic knowledge of German language and culture is both puerile and pernicious. Such “teaching” will invariably lack depth, immediacy, and authenticity; it will lure the students into a fool’s paradise. At best it is a charade, at worst – charlatantry.
In my answer to your previous request, entitled “What Works for Me,” I have tried to enunciate several general principles concerning excellence in teaching. In contrast to this essay, the response offered below is a personal statement, an attempt to answer the question, “What works for me and me alone.”

I am convinced that in order to be a great teacher one must maintain a constant intellectual vigilance, making sure that what one has to say is true, honest, and of intellectual import. While teaching today, one must be especially careful not to surrender to various fads and/or ideologies which abound in contemporary academia; one must strive to reconcile skepticism with acquiescence, while examining and re-examining newly developed theories and hypotheses. At the same time, one must avoid becoming a captive of one’s own rhetoric or teach routinely, in a desultory manner. For me personally, it is extremely important to approach every class in a state of unadulterated enthusiasm, hoping to share it with my students, hoping that what I have to offer is intellectually infectious.

I firmly believe that the degree of love for one’s subject matter is directly proportionate to one’s effectiveness as a teacher; thus it is essential to maintain one’s love for one’s calling. The question arises, how to do this. How can one day after day, week after week, semester after semester, remain in peak condition, both intellectually and emotionally? The answer to this question is twofold. First, I find it necessary to test myself periodically by reading a paper at a convention or by submitting an article to a journal. The judgment of my work by my peers is most important to me. It is a factor in confidence building and a contributing factor to teaching excellence. In this connection, I should add that student evaluations of a great teacher are at best worthless. They are an exercise in a demeaning futility and should be abandoned, at least in cases of proven teachers and definitely in cases of full professors. Second, whoever developed the idea of a sabbatical must have been a great teacher. He knew that great teaching sustained over a longer period of time is a drenching, emotional experience which requires periodic respite. Therefore it is necessary for any teacher, and essential for the great teacher, to have that “pause that refreshes,” to be able to recharge his intellectual and emotional battery, to contemplate things at leisure so that he can pursue his calling with renewed vigor and enthusiasm.

What also works for me is the knowledge that there is true academic freedom at La Salle, that I can teach here unhampered by university bureaucrats and self-appointed ideological commissars, though my achievements in the classroom and my contribution to the image of the University may not always be fully recognized.

Finally, the reward for great teaching is the act itself and the concomitant realization that one has helped generations of students in becoming better human beings.
2005

What works for me? My answer to this question is pretty much the same as it was some twenty years ago when I was in my prime. (See “What works for me” 1983 and 1989). To be sure, I have grown older, I am not as dynamic as I used to be, and my memory has appreciably weakened. I often forget names and dates, and I don’t trust myself anymore to quote from memory lengthy passages of poetry, which used to dazzle students in the old days. At times, even the *mot just*, that was always there when needed, is simply not available. There are, however, I have discovered, means to overcome these lapses of language and memory. When teaching literature, my notes now have to be more extensive and written in larger letters, but I still use them sparingly, only if the need arises. They are prompters, not notes, strictly speaking. I also move less in class than I used to in my youth. However, thanks be to God, I am still getting quite excited when I discover something new - a new author or a new work that speaks to me.

There are ways of compensating the undeniable loss of vigor and dynamism concomitant with old age: reliance on experience. I am often surprised how much my forty-plus years of teaching experience helps, especially that gained at foreign universities. The knowledge of having taught well at various European universities in various languages is for me a tremendous confidence builder. The ability to report first hand to my American students, how their counterparts in Europe live and learn, to impart to them vital information on the birth of a new nation - Europe, and to awaken their interest in global affairs is truly rewarding.

But perhaps the most important thing that works for me is the excitement that comes from teaching. I treat each class as a unique opportunity to teach myself. I use the classroom setting to elicit fresh ideas, to gain new insights, and some times to revise long held opinions. Many an article of mine grew out of class discussions. At times, I have given students credit for an idea which they have supplied, or encouraged them to write it up in a form of an article. I am always proud like a newly blessed papa, if one of my students publishes something that grew out of a class taken with me, and I am most gratified when I get a letter or a call from a former student thanking me for what I have done for him or her.

In concluding this, alas, rather inadequate attempt, to express that, which in the final analysis is ineffable, I would like to offer a suggestion. All former and future (i.e., any faculty member who is interested in good teaching) Lindback Award Recipients of La Salle University should get together from time to time in an informal setting to discuss, over coffee or tea (or preferably something stronger), their teaching experiences. This “Lindback Club” should be under the able chairmanship of Brother Emery Mollenhauer and also include selected seniors and/or graduate students. Together we could make it work even better, together we could “affect eternity.”
1968 Eugene J. Fitzgerald

1989

I am responding to your request to share some of my thoughts on what I believe to be effective teaching. Over the years certain strategies and techniques have been successful for me, with most of them being discovered as a result of trial and error. But let me be clear about any comments I shall make: in no way do I presume that others should regard my thinking “what works for me” as representing some kind of a paradigm on successful teaching. Different disciplines often must be juxtaposed with their peculiar course requirements and the special rigor traditionally associated with that kind of learning. So saying, the following remarks represent what appears to have worked for me in my discipline of philosophy:

There can be no substitute for a thorough knowledge of course materials. Either a person teaching a course is a professional, meaning the assumption of individual accountability, or someone who may have general academic credentials but who should not be teaching this particular course at this time in his or her career. I, for example, do not have a sufficient background to teach a course in the Philosophy of Science. To believe that because I have a fairly good background, generally, in philosophy to teach in that specialized area would compromise my academic integrity and be a grave injustice to those students who have elected to study under me.

The climate for learning is important to me. I must be familiar with the literature and the traditions and the problems of whatever course I am teaching. I know what I wish to do in a particular course and believe that the substance is valuable. But can the students appreciate it from their perspective, from their biases and/or preconceptions, as well as a possible unwillingness to be challenged and perhaps to become better than they are? This is the crucial question.

Knowledge of subject matter, to labor the obvious, is not enough for effective teaching. How do I express and communicate what I know? The research scholar has his place, yet it often does not translate into sound pedagogy. I have to discover the common ground on which I and my students meet. Where are these young men and women coming from? What the students know and don’t know may be as important as what the professor knows if a course is to become a valuable part of their learning repertory. I must ask myself, constantly, how I can fire their minds. Dullness is never a virtue. If I can’t generate sincere enthusiasm for what I am doing and infect my students with that enthusiasm, then my matches may look impressive but they may also be very wet.

In conducting a class I make extensive use of analogues and metaphors, along with examples from history and contemporary life, to connect some otherwise abstract principles in philosophy to their uninitiated consciousness. This seems to work rather well. I have found that when this can be done that the student feels he or she has broken through the miasma of what originally was believed to be confusing and forbidding.
Without realizing it, I believe that a professor can be intimidating to those who are novices in the discipline. To avoid that unfortunate situation, I frequently ask them if they can relate some of their own experiences to what we are discussing. In other instances, I will often say: “look, people, I need your help here,” or “I’m not completely sure of this, myself. What do you believe (or feel, or think) about this question, drawing from your own life or readings or courses?” Generally, it gets them out of their own torpor, and, importantly, causes them to feel that they have a stake in whatever may be under investigation.

I try to be accessible to my students, both inside and outside the classroom. A teacher has the responsibility to be an educator, to help whenever he can as an understanding and compassionate person. The problems they have may or may not be academic. but I believe that it is comforting for them to know they can approach the person conducting a course and find a willing ear. Moreover, without being insincere, I don’t have much difficulty sharing with them my own failures, disappointments, and inadequacies. The Courage To Be (Tillich, et al) involves the readiness to stand tall and positive, yet to be naked in terms of one’s frailties.

I think the more sophisticated and intellectually alive students want a teacher to be a “professor” – to profess his own understanding and interpretation of the state of the art. Courses that are pegged too exclusively to a text, or where teachers hide behind authoritative literature or “experts,” generate in the student’s mind the notion that the one conducting the course is an impersonal teaching machine. As a professor, I should have ideas of my own, not so insecure that I dare not venture into areas where I may be vulnerable. Good teaching may be a kind of science, but it is also an art. The late philosopher, Etienne Gilson, was fond of saying that there is a difference between one who teaches philosophy and one who is a philosopher. Yet the responsibility cannot be minimized that one has to communicate the stock consensus of agreed upon knowledge in one’s discipline. Hegel, for example, was an absolute idealist. No freedom of interpretation nor practiced art can arbitrarily make him to be a radical empiricist.

I distribute course outlines and class requirements, so that students know my expectations for them. A rambling fragmented course with no designed plan of organization, I feel, leaves students annoyed and “turned off.” I try to connect each class with the preceding one, conscious of the need to provide the student with a sense of orientation and continuity from one session to another, I start each class asking them if there are questions about the previous class (or their readings) and seek out their comments and questions.

Course evaluations have been very helpful to me in promoting effective teaching. I generally know the good things I can expect from these instruments. But I also study them, and sometimes it can be painful to discover what I may have done that is not positive. I know that no individual professor can please everyone, but if I see patterns of numbers and comments coming up with some consistency, it is then in my best interest and their’s not to ignore what is staring me in the face.

Some evaluations, it should be noted, are done too quickly and too in-
discriminately to be of much merit. Other results reflect the disgruntled
evidence of those who did poorly in exams, or who simply have little interest
in philosophy and are apathetic, no matter who may be teaching a partic-
ular course. Personally, I believe we pass out evaluations at the wrong time
in a semester. We should distribute them after the mid-term, so that the
professor and the student has the opportunity to take whatever corrective
measures may be necessary. Term papers and journals, either of which I
require, also should be examined and discussed before the term is finished.

There is much more I could say, but given the constraints of time and
space I believe that these reflections represent my experience – and my ideals.
1983

It is humbling to be asked to write observations on what makes a teacher effective. If I knew the secret, I wouldn't have those days when I leave class feeling like a blundering idiot. I suppose there isn't any one secret after all; there are many mysterious interactions that take place when a teacher is really teaching, communicating not only information but also love.

The information will soon be forgotten. It is always retrievable though if the teacher has also communicated love – the love of the discipline and a love of students. These are the things I remember about the great teachers I enjoyed as a student.

If I had to put the basics of good teaching into a few sentences, I would offer these words as a distillation of my own experience as teacher and student:

1. You have to know what you presume to teach.

2. You have to love the discipline and love communicating your devotion to the students you teach.

If you know what you teach, you will also know how much you don’t know, and this will make you tolerant of others. If you love what you teach and love those you teach, your students will sense it, and they will take the fire of your enthusiasm and the warmth of your concern with them when they depart. If you are lucky, they will have enough fire and warmth to share them with others. in this way, you may enrich the lives of others you have never met. I believe in the mystery Henry Adams describes in his Education: “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.”

1989

The longer I teach, the less confidence I have in my comments on effective teaching. There are as many techniques and philosophies of effective teaching as there are effective teachers. In my own efforts in the classroom, I try to remind myself of these general truths.

• “It’s a terrible death to be talked to death,” Mark Twain said. Students would agree.

• “Be prepared,” my Boy Scout Handbook said. That still rings true

• “Only connect,” wrote E. M. Forster. And keep trying, I would add.

• “Be concrete,” I tell my writing students, and I try to use examples and anecdotes in my explanations as well as in my writing.
And when I get discouraged with the results of my teaching, I remember the words of Finley Peter Dunne’s Mr. Dooley: “You can lade a man up to th’ university, but ye can’t make him think.”
I am not quite sure “what works for me.”

The confusion arises from several sources, not the least of which is my concern that I will not be able to capture my feelings on paper, such that they are not misunderstood. Secondly, I am not certain I truly understand when or why something clicks in the classroom.

However, all disclaimers aside, I will attempt to list concepts about teaching that I consider part of my conscious level approach to the classroom experience. Again, the subconscious level may be the more important element in the complex and vague ideal entitled effective teaching.

I. Enthusiasm For the Discipline and For Teaching

It is important that a teacher experiences a sense of fascination with his or her subject. But, it is imperative that he or she enjoys the physical act of teaching. For me, it is often a performance that is gratifying and fulfilling to the same degree that an actor and his audience share a special relationship.

Wit and humor, hopefully spontaneous but often contrived, is a very useful tool in sustaining the student’s interest and the pace of the course. Amusing anecdotes improve significantly the less exciting parts of any lecture. I’ve used certain specific stories for years. When the chalkboards are filled in the middle of a lecture, I have continued to write on the door of the classroom – silly but effective.

II. Respect For the Student

With every new class, I strive to learn everyone’s name as quickly as possible. I usually address students as Mr. or Ms. in the classroom.

Without equivocation, I never attempt to embarrass or ridicule any student at any time. When a student is embarrassed or projects a sense of feeling inadequate, I try to alleviate his discomfort. Furthermore, I never post grades. The student is assured that no one will ever know his exam, quiz, or course grade unless he releases it. The exams are returned with a pencil grade. The student is encouraged to erase the pencil grade and raise it to any level he desires. In this manner, he or she saves face with the peer group.

III. Class Preparation

There are no shortcuts allowed in this area. Regardless of how many times the course has been taught, each class must be prepared as if it were the second or third time presented. The difference between good and above average teaching is related directly to this issue. Teachers who no longer have to prepare are, in most cases, far less effective than they were in the earlier days of their careers.
IV. Examinations

Despite the disproportionate fixation with grades, students are more tolerant and adaptable in this area than many teachers realize. The students, with some exception, simply want the examinations to be fair – not easy, just fair.

The use of trick or ambiguous questions, the surprise inclusion of certain materials in a test, etc., are counterproductive to the trust and respect that should be the cornerstone of the teacher-student relationship.

It is important for the effective teacher to realize that the student’s success is the teacher’s success. If the examinations are challenging but fair, there is no need to play games with the student’s psyche.

V. Commitment

Stated simply, teaching is either one of the easiest or most demanding jobs, depending upon the person’s commitment to the task. If you are willing to involve yourself with the students as individuals, and if you are willing to continue studying and learning in your discipline, then you are in a position that can be demanding, exciting, exhausting, and fulfilling.

1989

At best, one can only conceptualize about the composition of teaching excellence. While teaching is a craft that is, most often, described or defined in general terms, it is an art form that is seemingly impossible to reduce to the simplicity of a formula. On the one hand everyone recognizes exemplary teaching. However, no one has been able to capture the essence of this elusive intangible. Countless “how-to” manuals inevitably fall short. Yet there remains an inclination to strive for definite answers. Certainly, these endeavors are nevertheless worthwhile given a goal as laudable as self improvement.

A major issue is, in my opinion, academe’s inability to articulate the elements of teaching excellence with specificity. However, when one attempts to list the components of distinguished teaching, the outcome often is interpreted as shallow or without substance. Perhaps, it can’t be done. Nonetheless, the following guidelines are offered in the spirit of sharing with the LaSallian family my personal rules of teaching, tempered with the caveat that there are occasional days when I feel none of these rules seem to be effective.

RULES

1. Never enter the classroom less than fully prepared.

2. Do not delude yourself into thinking you are supposed to know everything. This form of perfectionism is certain to cause frustration and impair one’s self-esteem.
“WHAT WORKS FOR ME” RESPONSES

3. In the beginning of the semester, explain the course requirements and refrain from supplementing them as the semester progresses.

4. Accept the reality that unfair criticism will be leveled against you by immature and irresponsible students who are seeking to rationalize their own shortcomings. Try not to personalize these accusations.

5. Recognize the importance of self-enthusiasm in your discipline.

6. In matters of grading, be fair and consistent, avoiding any suggestion of a double standard.

7. On occasion, try to have some fun in class. If someone has to bear the brunt of the joke, make it yourself.

8. Never forget the human dignity of every student

9. Take some risks. Have the courage to teach some things you don’t know well.

10. Try not to have two bad classes in a row.

11. When in doubt, trust your instincts.

2005

It should be noted that La Salle offers two of the most important ingredients for a quality education: First, the university’s primary focus is on undergraduate education; and second, class size is limited to approximately 30 students. Educational excellence is, almost always, a function of a personal and humanistic experience. At La Salle, it is assumed there is an inverse relationship between a student’s ability to learn and grow and the class size. Of course, it does not come cheaply.

Deeply rooted in the Christian Brothers’ tradition and our founder, St. John Baptiste De Lasalle, the mission to teach young people during the transitional years from teenagers to responsible, self reliant, young adults is, on reflection, both an awesome challenge and an exhilarating experience. If the professor is willing to make the commitment, the art of teaching can be the most demanding, emotionally draining yet rewarding career on the planet. The professor’s success in any one semester can bear fruit for the next 45 years. The legacy of good teaching is almost limitless.

In pursuit of “learning how to learn,” the teacher-student partnership must be a shared responsibility. The nature of this interpersonal relationship, to be effective and long lasting, must be built upon a foundation of mutual respect, trust and passion for learning. Of the three, respect is the most important. Crucial to the success of the Lasallian mission is the need to impress upon the undergraduate that the professor is not the adversary, but the advocate. In other words, the student’s success is the professor’s success.

Learning is a shared mission and, metaphorically speaking, if both professor and student have their oars in the water the boat will move in the right
direction toward the ever-expanding horizon. Conversely, if only one person
has an oar in the water, the boat moves in a small and repetitive circle.

The classroom experience is lost if both teacher and student do not play
an active role. From the professor’s perspective, the most crucial ingredient
in the teacher-learner relationship, as noted above, is mutual respect. This
tenet of academe is fundamental to the concept of recognizing the human
dignity of every individual. If the professor seeks to have his or her students
grow in self-esteem, personal pride and enhanced understanding, the student
must be challenged through academic rigor. Learning is arduous and the
professor must motivate each learner, in terms of effort, to extend beyond
the personally defined “comfort zone.” In our own lives, we remember the
teachers who cared enough to demand excellence. With the passage of time,
are we not grateful for that experience?
Any attempt to convey to other teachers reflections on “What Works for Me” must be prefaced with an emphatic disclaimer, viz., that I personally do not know that what might work well for me would necessarily work for anyone else. The type of course being taught, the personality of the teacher, the audience and, in all probability, a much more extensive menu of variables could contribute to how a person might effectively teach a course. The remarks which follow then pertain specifically to me and to my particular situation.

Based on student evaluations over these past thirty years at La Salle, the most common positive reactions to my teaching are an appreciation for the enthusiasm which is brought to the course, the ability to relate what at first appear to be very abstract theories to real world situations, and a knowledge of the material appropriate to the course. Taking as somewhat of a given that the teacher will be knowledgeable in the material to be taught, and have an understanding of that material to the degree necessary to be able to communicate it to others, I am most appreciative of the other two student comments – enthusiasm and relating the material to the real world.

My appreciation for these two student observations stems from the fact that most of the preparation for a class session focuses on attempting to take what might appear to be highly abstract and theoretical concepts and have the student develop an understanding of how these ideas and concepts are vital to how the real economic world does, could, or should function. This does not come easy to me. It requires reflection on the material to be taught, the most appropriate aides for the student – text, outside readings, videos, etc. – and considerable preparation before the attempt to present this to a group of students. There is also the need for time and reflection following the class to critique the session in terms of what worked well and what might need some re-thinking. But, for me, this is a major component of effective teaching and, consequently, receives a considerable amount of my attention. Obviously, it is very time-consuming. But I want the students to have an understanding or an insight that they did not have before entering the classroom. What do I want that insight to be? How best to communicate this to the students or, even more desirable, how to bring the students to this understanding on their own? Is there something in the material that they saw, that they felt to be highly significant, which I might have missed or downplayed? How to get the students to express this to me and to the other students in the class? It goes without saying, I guess, that the attainment of these objectives demands considerable reflection and preparation.

Once the material to be covered has been determined, and the method of presentation has been decided, there has to be a resolve to approach the class with enthusiasm. Granted, this is not always possible to the highest degree. But since I chose the discipline I teach, and I have determined the concepts
which will receive the major focus in class, most times I am able to generate some enthusiasm. The students appreciate this and, at times, I believe it can be contagious. They sense that I am interested in, and enthusiastic about, this idea and I believe they attempt to relate to that enthusiasm. The fact that students mention this characteristic with such consistency in my evaluations must mean that it holds considerable importance for them. That fact alone makes it hold considerable importance for me.

In summary, for me the key to effective teaching is preparation. I have to approach a class with a definite goal in mind – the more specific the better. I have to remind myself to be open to various methods or instruments to achieving that goal and, if at all possible, to do all of this with enthusiasm.
As a very young man, I was in some plays and I also liked to recite poems. In short, I fancied myself as an actor. When I began teaching I tried to be an actor in the classroom and I think it worked. I believe that any young person who aspires to teach well should think of the classroom as a stage and the students as an audience. I loved teaching and that also helped. It is also very important to look at students as one teaches. Of course it helps to have a sense of humor and to smile often so one should try to inject some humor into each class session. Finally, it is important to show respect for the students. Young people are quick to pick up on teachers who do not like or respect them.
I enjoy teaching. The “moment upon the stage” is exciting for me, and I love sharing my discipline with others. Yet, it becomes too easy at times, and I find myself in need of a good, swift kick. What follows are some of the mental kicks I need regularly; perhaps writing them down in this fashion will benefit others who need regular prodding.

The art of teaching is dependent upon hours of preparation and experienced practice, but the finished product must appear new, effortless, and natural if it is to inform, enthuse, and (ideally) inspire. Preparation is the key to accomplishing this. There must be two types of preparation: remote and proximate. Remote preparation is often done when the material is new and exciting, when there is time to read, integrate, and think about the subject matter. Ideally, thorough lecture notes are generated, and appropriate handouts and visual materials developed. While I may now “know” the content of the presentation, the effortlessness and excitement that must inform my lecture only come when a block of time within hours of the actual presentation is given over for review, reflection, and “re-inspiration.” The only practical way to accomplish this is to set aside the time, bar the door, silence the Mozart (or “the Irish”), and work through the notes very carefully. It has been my experience that remote preparation without proximate preparation is lifeless and awkward, and proximate (last minute) preparation without remote preparation is charade.

Parsimony is one of the essentials in the classroom, and is the direct result of adequate preparation. Brahms reportedly said that the real trick to composing was not creating music; rather, it was in letting the superfluous notes fall under the piano. This is equally true for teaching: the “trick” is to amuse, enthuse, and ignite without distracting the students from the primacy of the content itself. It is very difficult to strike this balance between intensity and relief, but suspicion is in order when either of the following situations occur: first, when all of the students are wide-eyed, smiling or laughing, and all writing instruments have been pocketed; second, when half of the students are shaking circulations back into their writing arms while the other half has opted for Morpheus over Orpheus.

Examples: good examples illustrate and enlighten. Yet, they must be selected with care before the lecture. Examples which are the product of “mid-class inspiration” often confuse rather than enlighten. Further, it is well to keep in mind the Yiddish proverb: “For example” is no proof!

These are mental kicks I give myself so that I remember that the effortless appearance of teaching is born of hard work. When teaching becomes easy, it’s time for a “good swift one.”
2005

Over the years I've read thousands of students' comments on course evaluations of colleagues' teaching, as well as my own. It is always good to see words like “enthusiasm,” “passionate,” or “exciting” among the comments. And while I think those words can be applied to my teaching style a lot of the time, I'm suspicious of it if it appears without words like “substantive,” “cutting-edge,” “challenging,” and/or “thorough.”

For me, the challenge of a long teaching career is maintaining freshness. Although there is a certain psychological freshness that must be maintained, here I am focused on course content and the mechanics of a course. I find it important to dismantle a course every couple of years. It doesn’t have to be completely changed—indeed the reassembled course may look a lot like the old one. However, the content has been updated with new information, assumptions about what should be included are tested, and the question of how best to have the students experience the content should examined. In terms of the content of a course, the hardest part for me is determining what should NOT be included in a course. A great course is typically parsimonious: enough—just enough—given the parameters of the course and its audience.

Lastly, La Salle University used to employ a tag line that said, “Because Teaching Comes First.” I have argued that it should be, “Because Learning Comes First.” There is one course that I teach that is almost entirely reading, discussion, and skill learning. There is another course that is lecture, demonstration, and discussion. There is one course where memorizing facts is unimportant. There is another course where quite the opposite is the case. What is at work here is my best take on what will work best for that type of content and that level of student. Am I always right? Hardly. But I have to keep asking the questions.
In my book, *Liberating Faith*, I acknowledge that whatever success I have experienced as a teacher and writer I have owed to the Christian Brothers, those “religious professionals in the field of education with whom I lived as a Brother.” There’s an overused saying that “religion is more caught than taught.” I would say the same thing about good teaching. I was fortunate to have been educated by the Christian Brothers and to have spent some twenty happy years as a Brother myself. These men were not only inspiring professional educators but they communicated to me an esteem for their teaching mission and a love for the learning that has to be the lifelong passion of a successful teacher. I could not but benefit from the kind of community life we led, sharing lots of camaraderie and giving mutual encouragement in some of the more difficult aspects of teaching, but also providing enough light-hearted moments and humor to cut through any “downers” in a typical teaching day. This is not even to mention the religious commitment that was both motivation and sustenance in our mission as teachers. Our life together was also an invaluable source for picking up many of the techniques or “tricks” of the trade. When students praise my teaching in their evaluations and even express gratitude for what they’ve learned, I can pass that along to the wonderful Brothers, many of whom are now dead, who helped me develop into the effective teacher I now am.

To say “what has worked for me,” as I have been asked to do in this space is, in a way, to acknowledge the formative influences of a lifetime. In particular, I believe that my teaching has always been enhanced by what I hope is evident to those who roster my courses: I have genuinely liked my students. Not only that, but I look on students and the processes of learning as utterly fascinating. In many instances, I have been privileged to observe students over a full four year span of university life growing in their capacity to absorb the material taught as they develop the critical judgments needed to sift out the essential from the peripheral, to make connections, to articulate a viewpoint, and thus to arrive at a deeper understanding of authors, historical epoches, societal structures, and the converging or clashing systems that lay claim to truth and allegiance. To help students sharpen their critical faculties in their search for truth and meaning has always been one of my greatest thrills. And so I believe that my own, and any, successful teaching begins with an honest, abiding respect for the students themselves. I try hard to learn their names and their interests, and, if possible, to promote a sense of togetherness in the learning process in which we all share. In many ways I have and continue to learn from my students.

Liking the students is of a piece with the love of learning that, like teaching itself, can best be communicated by example. In a way it is “caught.” I enjoy sharing with the students glimpses into the life and influences of any authors we study to show that they, like us, had to begin somewhere and to develop,
through similar processes, their personal strengths in a given field. I present the biographies of the authors under consideration with a view toward having the students appreciate the interwovenness of influences in their mastery of a particular area of thought or in developing religious systems that have had wide-ranging influence in church and society. Once their formative influences can be isolated and the limitedness of any given perspective on an issue exposed, I feel justified in demanding that my students be prepared to make a more careful, critical assessment of what they read. Just because it is a text with a sacrosanct history among scholars or in a church’s tradition doesn’t mean that it can’t be scrutinized for its contemporary relevance or its ability to yield answers to questions that weren’t even asked at the time the author was writing. At the same time, I try to derive the contemporary meaning of a text considered part of that tradition. In short, I try to establish a context in my approach to authors and texts that will encourage my students to be both respectful and critical in their own personal search for meaning as that pertains to the study of people and texts considered significant in the history of religious thought.

Since a major part of my research of late has been in the area of textual criticism, I don’t hesitate to share this with my students. I describe difficulties I may have encountered in this research or even in trying to compose a compelling analysis of a text. I explain how I arrived at my conclusions. I do not ignore some of the critical difficulties reviewers may have had with my work (of course, I can always get in the “last word” here!). When I assign a term paper or project, I stress the need for their being nuanced and critical in what they write. My students seem to appreciate the help I’m willing to give them in the reading for and composition of these papers. I give out my home phone number with an open invitation to contact me at any time (within reason!) to chat about anything related to the course or just about anything of interest to them. I do care about their development, not just in a scholarly direction, though that is vital to our classroom efforts, but also because they are persons with the potential for acquiring and maintaining a true sense of what should be of paramount value in their lives. I often quote Kierkegaard to the effect that it is not the truths which we possess but the truth that we are. My comments on their work get detailed enough to have prompted one student to point out that I had reacted to his masterpiece like a frustrated English teacher. I relish that comment.

In looking over my evaluation of the past several years in order to prime my pump for this statement on “what has worked for me,” I noted that students have remarked on my enthusiasm for and my thorough, even overabundant, knowledge of the subject matter. Again, I believe that my enthusiasm is something engendered in me naturally in my love for learning, but more especially by my consuming interest in my own field, Religion. As Brothers, we were urged to look on the teaching of Religion as the most important subject in the curriculum. It was “for life” in its most important dimension whether we call that the “divine,” the “transcendent,” the “supernatural,” “Torah,” commitment to Jesus, or whatever. I happen to be convinced that Religion is the most important subject my students take. I don’t mean that
in any arrogant way. In fact, I hope other teachers feel the same way about their discipline and as a mind’s-eye-opener for our students enabling them to confront, perhaps even integrate, some of the greatest expressions of the regnant values that can govern one’s life in both conscious and unconscious ways should be obvious. Here at La Salle we pride ourselves on the liberal arts education we offer our students. We are neither a mere business school nor a generator of one dimensional career people whose horizons of meaning are deadened in greed, self-serving “me-firstism,” and insensitive apathy toward those who are the “have-nots” of our American Society. We like to believe that it is the liberal arts aspect of what we offer that has turned out better citizens and people with an appreciation for the humanistic-religious dimensions of life. Now I don’t believe that the study of Religion is an elixir-like solution for the evil of insider trading or for the problems created by under-funded inner city programs. Nonetheless the very nature of the discipline is to challenge our students to confront critically the many claims to ultimate truth, the many promises of perfect fulfillment, the value systems of different religious traditions, the dynamics of Religion as a universal phenomenon, the ethical systems that have helped shape the norms by which a society lives, the great figures in the perennial search for truth, goodness, and meaning, and the points of intersection between the worlds studied by other disciplines and the religious values (or lack of values!) that inspirit them. Yes, I find Religion an exciting subject to teach. I thrill to the ideas of a Bonhoeffer, a Kierkegaard, a Niebuhr, a Dorothy Day, a Gutierrez, a Jean Vanier. I am convinced, as I hope my students are, that many of the problems that convulse our world and even threaten the future of our civilization have a religious dimension. Who can understand the issues which divide peoples today, the internecine strife if not the threat of a wider war, the peace movement, the passions on both sides of the abortion issue, the continual quest for economic justice that often foments movements of revolution in underdeveloped countries with repercussions on our own country, without some knowledge of how Religion is interstitched into both the problem and many of the possible solutions?

I should add here that this excitement for Religion as an academic discipline is something I have likewise experienced among my colleagues in the department. We do indeed reinforce each other in our striving for excellence both as individual teachers and in our offerings. We take periodic stock of ourselves, our curriculum, and our guiding principles. Each member of the department brings particular strengths to the field of Religion. We treat the study of Religion professionally as an academic discipline on a par with anything else the students take at La Salle. Yet we are conscious of the in-built value-for-life dimension in several aspects of our courses. Most of us are recognized experts in given specialties within our field, some on the national and international level. As a department, we have gifted teachers who attract many upper division students once they’re over some of the prejudices against Religion they often bring to La Salle as psychological baggage from their secondary schools, various CCD programs, and sometimes from their materialistic homelife. It has been a help to me to be teaching with
colleagues who not only like and support each other but who are themselves gifted teachers. We are a strength one to another. Call it pride in our teaching or an esprit de corps, but there is a certain indefinable chemistry between us that has made our department so attractive and our meetings to determine policy so friendly and so efficient. I can’t describe what has “worked” for me without acknowledging the excellence of those who teach with me and whose support has been part of our common cause to offer our students the very best. In these days when we speak in terms of remunerating our faculty based on their “market value,” I can’t resist remarking that the members of the Religion department are worth a lot. We give La Salle much to be proud of and constitute through our creative teaching and our sense of values a living embodiment of the stated philosophy of the university.

Nearly every year I read in my evaluations a student’s comment to the effect: “You sure know how to make a boring subject interesting.” Imagine: some expect to be bored! Even those who think they have “OD’d” on Religion are more often than not pleasantly surprised to find the courses in Religion of immense interest to them. They are stimulated to look beyond the platitudes they had been expecting toward the deeper meaning Religion can have for their lives and for the society in which they live. They are also encouraged to acquire more maturity of judgment as well as the knowledge of facts. They are urged to recognize that the ability to master an important subject matter must be accompanied by the humility to recognize the inherent limitedness of one’s own insights into the ultimate meaning of life, if one is to become an educated person in the sense of education as a lifelong venture.

Part of that stimulation comes, I believe, from my own effort to stay abreast of my field and, in the area of my expertise, to continue my research and literary productivity. I always seem to have some project to keep my creative juices flowing. Previously, it was the scholarly article. Of late, it has been the writing and editing of books. In a sense, I’ve arrived at the top of my field. But in another more important sense, I’ll never “arrive.” My research and writing, with all the demands on my time and energies, have kept me fresh. Because of our overloaded teaching schedules (we are told, rightly so, that La Salle is a “teaching” institution!), we at La Salle never seem to have enough time for the projects that are, in an important way, a boost to our institution’s pride of achievement and a good example to the students. I carve the time needed for writing out of what would otherwise be leisure moments. I feel that this has “paid off” in an increased knowledge of my field and confidence in my presentations, not to mention the enrichment that original research always brings to a student.

What has “worked for me” as a teacher is, in effect, what has worked for my students: a personal interest in and liking for them, an enthusiasm for and excitement about the field of Religion, a commitment to continuing research and writing in the field of my expertise, and an appreciation for the fact that what we have shared within the confines of a classroom may have a powerful effect on shaping our society for the better as well as far reaching application for life itself.
2005

I last addressed this question in 1989. At that time, I began with the time-worn saying that “religion is more caught than taught.” I was thinking then of the values we shared with the students to help them in their search for meaning in their lives. I also added that I had a love for the learning that should be the lifelong passion of any successful teacher and I had hopes that this would rub off on my students.

What enhances my teaching is what I trust is evident in every one of my courses, namely, I genuinely like my students. Not only that, but I look on students and the processes of their learning and becoming more mature, better educated adults as utterly fascinating to me. In some instances I have been privileged to observe students over a full four year span of their education growing in their capacity to assess the material taught in various courses as they develop the critical judgments needed to sift out the essential from the peripheral, to make connections, to articulate a viewpoint, and thus to arrive at a deeper understanding of authors, historical epochs, political and religious systems, and the converging or clashing ideologies that lay claim to truth and their allegiance. To help the students sharpen their critical faculties in their search for truth and meaning has always been one of my greatest thrills. If I have had any success in this process, it is because I have an abiding respect for the students themselves. I try hard to learn their names and their interests, and, if possible, to promote a sense of togetherness in the learning process that takes place in the classroom and in encounters anywhere on campus. In many ways I have and continue to learn from my students. To get to know the students better is why I pledged the Sigma Phi Lambda Fraternity in the early 90s.

When I wrote on what worked for me in my previous reply to this question, I was also trying to convey that I actually enjoyed sharing with the students glimpses into the life and influences of the many authors we study to show that they, like us, had to begin somewhere and to develop, through similar processes, their personal strengths in a given field. I present the biographies of the authors under consideration – sometimes through documentaries – with a view toward having the students appreciate the interwovenness of influences in the way these authors developed their own skills. We address the question of how these “movers and shakers” of theology are finally considered masters of a particular area of thought or how they became the persons most responsible for the development of religious systems that have had wide ranging influence in church and society.

Helping the students appreciate the intellectual and personal journeys of the great figures in the history of religion also encourages me to demand that my students be prepared to make a careful, critical assessment of what they read and how this applies to real life in and beyond La Salle University. Just because it is a text with a sacrosanct history in a church’s tradition doesn’t mean that it can’t be scrutinized for its contemporary relevance or its ability to yield answers to questions that weren’t even asked at the time the texts and trends were established. I tell the students that their search for meaning
is a continuum that must last a lifetime.

Since a major part of my research in my teaching career here has been in the area of textual criticism, I don’t hesitate to share this research with my students. They know through me what is involved in researching theology, religious history, biblical exegesis, Christology, or ecclesiology. I’m not bashful about using my own published works, either a book or an article, to explain how I arrived at my conclusions and to elicit their own critical assessments, even in contradiction to my own texts. I enjoy the repartee. I share with the students some of the critical difficulties reviewers may have had with my work and how I handled their critique and suggestions.

When I assign a paper or project, I emphasize the need for their being nuanced and critical (in the sense of being able to make an intelligent judgment of what they uncover in their research) in what they write. My students seem to appreciate the help I’m willing to give them in their research for and even the writing of these papers. I give out my home phone number with an open invitation to contact me at any time (within reason!) to chat about anything related to the course or just about anything of interest to them. Some students like to stop by my house to see me in my family setting, have a cup of tea, and just talk about anything they might have in mind. Some of these are friends of my sons who are both students at La Salle. My office is always open to my students. I try to stay accessible outside of office hours. My students know that I care about their development both in their scholarship and in their personal set of values that can guide them throughout their post-La Salle lives. So many stay in touch via email and visits, even to my home. In my older years and only one year away from retirement into part-time teaching, I’m beginning to feel like a Mister Chips. Still, I often quote Kierkegaard to the effect that it is not the truths which we possess but the truth that we are.

In looking over my student evaluations during my now 33 years of teaching at La Salle, I note that my students have praised me for my enthusiasm for the subject matter and for my mastery of whatever I’m teaching. They can see for themselves that I do have a consuming interest in and passion for Religion with its biblical foundations and theological, moral insights. I happen to be convinced that Religion is the most important subject my students take. I don’t mean that in any arrogant way. I hope other teachers feel the same way about their disciplines. Here at La Salle we pride ourselves on the liberal arts education we offer our students. We don’t want uni-dimensional career people whose horizons of meaning are deadened in greed, self-serving “me-firstism” and insensitive apathy toward those who are the “have-nots” of our American Society. In that respect, like my colleagues, I serve all the other disciplines of the university in their own efforts to give the students a well-rounded education that includes an appreciation for philosophical wisdom, religious values and their personal faith, all without the kind of forced indoctrination that can ruin any future role religion might play in our students’ lives.

In my teaching, I have done my best to support the mission statement of La Salle University. I join my colleagues in the Department of Religion in our effort to implement that mission. The very nature of our discipline is
to challenge our students to confront critically the many secularist claims to ultimate truth, the many political promises of perfect fulfillment, the claims to their allegiance of the ideological values systems of different religious traditions, and the demands on their behavior of various ethical systems—some questionable—that have helped shape the norms by which our society lives. I turn the students attention toward the great historical and religious figures who have taught us pathways in our perennial search for truth, goodness, and meaning. For some, it is the search for God in their faith and in their lives. For others, like Martin Luther King, it is the relentless search for justice in our society. For still others, it is in finding a cause with which they can identify such as promoting peace against war, and being compassionate in concrete ways toward the poor who remind us that there are still heartless elements among affluent power brokers in our country.

It’s for these reasons with emphasis on the sense of the mission that La Salle has embraced that I find Religion an exciting subject to teach. I thrill to the ideas of a Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Søren Kierkegaard, a Reinhold Niebuhr, a Dorothy Day, a Gustavo Gutierrez, a Jean Vanier, an Oscar Romero, a Karl Rahner and many of the authors I bring to the attention of my students. I am convinced, as I hope my students are, that many of the problems that convulse our world and even threaten the future of our society have a religious dimension. Who can understand the issues which divide peoples today, the internecine strife that takes the lives of millions in our bellicose world, the evils of modern warfare, the importance of the peace movement, the continuing quest for economic justice without some knowledge of how Religion is interstitched into both the problems we face and many of the possible solutions? I like to stimulate my students to look beyond the abstract dogmas and pious platitudes they had been expecting since the indoctrinating classes of their earlier schooling and to encounter the wider world of great authors and ideas and to see the deeper meaning religion can have for their lives.

Part of my own ability to encourage students in their becoming well-educated, more mature adults comes from my efforts to stay abreast of my own field, to continue my research and literary productivity. I always seem to have some project to keep my creative juices flowing. I continue to write scholarly articles and produce books in the areas of my expertise. In a sense I’ve arrived at the top of my field where I’m asked to review books, to act as a peer reviewer by publishers, to be on doctoral boards, and, in conventions to respond to papers presented by younger scholars. But, in another sense, I’ll never “arrive.” My writing, with all its demands on my time and energies, has kept me fresh. Because we are more of a “teaching institution” than a “research/writing” institution, we teachers never seem to have enough time for the writing projects that still are, in an important way, a boost to La Salle’s pride of achievement as they are a good example to our students. Now that I’m in my older years and no longer the workaholic of my earlier years, I have to carve the time needed for writing out of what would otherwise be my leisure moments. Even as retirement beckons I have several research and writing projects. But my plans are to continue teaching on a half-time basis.
Teaching is in my life’s blood; it’s my primary enjoyment as a professional. It is the contact with the young students of La Salle University that has given my own life a principal source of mission and meaning.
First, I believe you must like what you do. If teaching is an ordeal for you then it will have a similar impact on your students. Secondly, the teacher must respect his students and enjoy watching them grow and develop. Thirdly, I believe that a teacher should remain active in his discipline. This means doing research, writing, giving papers, attending conferences, etc. In particular, I believe that everyone should try some kind of writing about his discipline as this has a way of clarifying thinking. This doesn’t mean deep scholarly research which can be intimidating. In my view such activities revitalize the teacher and show up in enthusiasm in the classroom.

Finally, I believe a good teacher should revise his courses every couple of years or so to avoid the staleness and sameness that creeps in. One of the ways that I recharge my own batteries is to use the Special Topics concept to offer courses that force me to do reading and hone my ideas that I otherwise wouldn’t do. A pleasant side effect for me has been the way in which these Special Topics courses have led me to new research and writing themes.
Teaching is the art of taking one's expertise and enthusiasm and transferring it to an interested party. Before one can teach, the instructor must feel comfortable with the subject matter, know how to organize a presentation into a well-structured lesson, and then make the presentation appear spontaneous and relevant to the students.

Many times the instructor views the students as a group. When I enter the classroom, I am acutely aware that I am addressing thirty very different individuals. Even though I am speaking to a group, I try to establish a common ground where each student feels that I am speaking to him or her. Once that common ground is established, I try to have the student communicate with me. This communication may not be verbal, but it may be the nod of a head, an attempt to raise a hand, or a smile. Finally, I attempt to connect students with each other and develop the class into a dynamic unit. Very rarely do I achieve my goal, but when I do, it is quickly recognized by the students.

Aware of the pressures and frustrations of trying to learn new material, I have always tried to put myself in the student’s place. Most of us would prefer life being less complicated. In class, I occasionally joke with students that they love to be cheated. They look forward to a teacher cancelling class, prefer exams that are not challenging, and like when the instructor does not assign homework. On the other hand, I tell the students that it is my obligation to give them a quality education and ensure that La Salle remains a respected institution in the academic and professional communities. Inwardly, I am cognizant that the students are more concerned with their grades than the reputation of the University.

Fifteen years ago when I began teaching at La Salle, I attributed some of my success in the classroom to the fact that I was close in age and outlook to many of my students. As the years passed, I experienced times when I thought that the synergy with my classes was dissipating and other times when the excitement reemerged. At this point, I have concluded that being an effective teacher is not a matter of age, but rather, an outlook on the subject matter, relevance to the students, and interest in the educational process.
1980  Lester Barenbaum  
Finance  
1989

To a significant extent my own success in the classroom is a combination of my own efforts, support of my department and the enthusiasm of my students.

The Finance Department discusses on a regular basis what generates excellence in teaching. These discussions have lead us to develop our own mission statement which is shown below.

The Finance Department views its educational mission as providing a professional education to both undergraduate and graduate students. By professional we mean giving students a blend of financial theory needed for financial decision making, along with the pragmatic skills needed to be successful in the business community. We strongly believe that theory in the absence of pragmatic skills is as empty as are pragmatic skills with no theoretical base to stand and expand upon.

The Finance Department believes the road from theory to practice is why Finance is a social science rather than a physical science. Individual judgement becomes critical in this transition. An individual’s judgement is based upon their values as well as their theoretical foundation. This necessary role of values as a component in the business decision process is how the liberal arts nature of our curriculum is incorporated into Finance Courses.

My own sense is that students respond positively to efforts in helping them become problem solvers. A problem solver is one who has the analytical tools to model a problem as well as the pragmatic tools to work through the mechanics of a problem in order to reach an appropriate decision.

Implementing this view of the educational process has helped me and is continuing to assist me becoming a better educator.
To me, a very important aspect of teaching is the interplay between questions and answers. Any question a student asks is treated with respect and the student who asked it is made to feel that the question has made a valuable contribution to a better understanding of the subject by the entire class. This can be accomplished by first responding at an elementary level but then adding some clarification or example which extends the concept. Using answers to advance into new ground allows new material to be introduced before a formal presentation. Later, the references to the previous remarks make the new topic seem more familiar and easier to comprehend.

To me, the single biggest factor in successful teaching is preparation. When faced with teaching a course for the first time or the twentieth time, I prepare for it in the same way. I rethink the course content from the start and try to find a central thread which will hold the lectures together so that there is continuity from one lecture to the next. In this manner, the course is not a series of disjoint lectures but instead there is always a way to relate where we are with where we were and constantly preview the future so that it appears familiar when it is reached. I also feel it important not to take too much for granted and try to imagine what it is like to be exposed to the material for the first time. This will allow me to lecture as if I am experiencing the thrill of discovering new ideas along with the students.

The first paragraph describes a soft of global preparation for the whole course; but, I find preparation plays an even more important role in daily lecturing. Interesting enough, good preparation for me is most uneconomical. I try to find two or three different ways to explain each topic even though I know that better than one half of what has been prepared will never be called upon. In one sense, I consider it insurance against the strange questions which seem to arrive at inopportune moments. In another sense, it affords me the luxury of almost custom-tailoring a lecture to the individual needs of a particular class. I can pick and choose from the explanations according to what seems to be working best at the moment. In this way, the lectures appear more fresh and original.

In my mind it is crucial to be truly excited over the subject matter, find it enjoyable to talk about, and consider it valuable to know. The methods described in the above paragraphs seem to accomplish these goals for me.
The question about what works for me leaves me conflicted. On the one hand, I will use what I have written as models for what I want students to write. If the assignment calls for an historical essay about a director or a film, then I’ll give them one of my own pieces as an example of that kind of writing. The same approach applies to writing critical essays about a movie. They get samples of my own writing. During the course, I’ll distribute essays that I have written about movies. In regard to writing, I think it is important that we share the onus of research and critical thinking. I like the idea that students and teacher are partners in this kind of enterprise. I’m sweating as they’re sweating.

Paradoxically, I make no such claims when it comes to making films, which a lot of students do for their course projects. In fact while I have helped students make hundreds of movies and while students have gone on to write and produce many films and TV shows, I have never made a movie. Hands on experience, forget it. What I do know is what a producer knows, that is how to move an idea through the stages of pre-production, production, and post-production. My role is to help the students plan their movies and get around the problems. I can get them past some pitfalls: don’t use dogs, don’t zoom unless you have to, and don’t just stop shooting, end the story. The technical part of the project is theirs.

Fortunately, La Salle provides lots of expertise, faculty, staff, and peers, who show novice moviemakers how to work a camera and how to use the digital editors. In regard to this very modern enterprise and without really thinking about it, I have adopted an approach St. John Baptist de La Salle employed back in the 17th century: students learn and learn more by doing and by teaching each other.

In practice, the new filmmakers look at movies produced by former students and find models for their own productions. Habitually, they turn to each other for help with the acting, shooting and editing. In effect, rather than learning from an “expert,” the students use the strategies of life-long learners, finding out what they need to know when it’s vitally relevant to what they want to do. In that process, they also discover new approaches and new resources that are passed along to their successors.

Finally, there’s this little tactic. When I first came to La Salle, I remember a memo to the faculty from Bro. Emery Mollenhauer in which he urged faculty to be “shamelessly eclectic.” In effect, he advised us that wherever we found a good idea about teaching, we should use it. On sabbatical a couple of years ago, that advice came to mind when I audited a film theory course at another university. I learned a lot about theory and also something about pacing a course. The professor used a strategy I borrowed. Right before a holiday or before an exam, when the students are tired, stressed, and tense, games work as learning devices. They change the pace and excite interest.
Who doesn’t like to play? Without a lot of rules and so on, a contest will get students involved, especially in revisiting course materials that will be on the exams. The strategy lightens the mood and makes the repetition effortless. I divide the students into teams, show a film clip, and have them compete in citing the key techniques and their impact on the film. The groups get an extra point if they can relate that use to earlier or later parts of the movie. That kind of explication is exactly what they’ll be doing in the final exam. I referee and get booed. No prizes are needed. It’s the change of atmosphere that gets them re-engaged. They laughed, they learned and were primed for the final.
The problem of presenting fundamental ideas in physics without the use of their fundamental tool - mathematics - is a daunting one to most physicists. Nevertheless for many years I have been teaching “Physics for Poets” - type courses and, as a consequence, have developed a series of analogies which are useful in getting across the underlying physical concepts while avoiding the mathematics.

Initially, the idea of plugging these metaphors into more advanced courses for science majors and even for physics majors seemed repugnant. Surely there would be something patronizing about using techniques like these with students who are mathematically adept. On trying it however I realized that these approaches could prove just as useful with these more sophisticated students as with the “poets.” In our advanced teaching we too frequently may use the mathematics as a crutch and not adequately develop the physical insight which helps a person be at home with the concepts of our subject. These humble (and often rather silly) metaphors can serve as a way of developing this comfort in advanced students as well as in the scientifically naïve. Students, even the most advanced, need treatments which appeal to as many senses as possible – including the sense of humor – in order to bring the very beautiful abstract ideas with which we deal into a clear focus. Appreciation of their beauty must follow understanding. Too often we try to go at things too abstractly from the beginning in order to share the sophisticated excitement that the ideas stir up in us.

I increasingly become aware of the fact that I can make few assumptions about basic knowledge that I expect my students to have. Things like the metric system, the comparison of numbers such as a million and a billion, basic algebra and geometry, concepts like area, volume and density, familiarity with important cultural and historical facts / concepts / figures...often prove to be missing or only to have been very weakly mastered by many students, science majors not excepted. The reasons? I don’t really know but they may include poor high school [and earlier] teaching, lack of well coordinated curricula, TV, short attention spans developed by computers and TV, the contents of popular media, and...[very likely an important factor] my blindness to corresponding problems that have always existed in the past but which I’ve simply ignored.

So what does one do? It seems to me that one can’t simply say that these lacks are someone else’s problem for which you have no responsibility; one must address them. I attempt to do so by reviewing the ‘missing’ material at an appropriate level and in the context of the work that the course is focused on. Frequently students indicate that they are grateful for this and needed a second [or third] goround with the material in order to master it. There is
some loss of coverage [and a rise in the frustration level of the relatively small number of students who are already comfortable with the ‘missed’ material] but I feel that generally I can present novel material and still incorporate the teaching of skills or concepts which ‘should’ have been learned earlier.
There are several strategies or techniques which I have used over the past sixteen years and which I think have enhanced my effectiveness as a teacher. Those that I believe in the most are shared in this essay, but should not be mistaken for guarantees . . . I have none!

I try to personalize my teaching by making it a point to learn all of my students’ names by the end of the second week of classes at the latest. I then make use of their names during class discussions and when I give written feedback on papers and other assignments. This seems to set a tone for the course which communicates to each student the s/he is a valuable member of the class and is expected to contribute to course activities and discussions.

I hold students responsible for attending all classes, being on time, and notifying me of unavoidable absences. It is the students’ responsibility to come to class; it is my responsibility to make class interesting and worthwhile, a challenge that effective teachers take quite seriously and work hard and diligently to accomplish. In order to keep housekeeping chores associated with teaching from intruding too much on valuable time during which more interesting things can be accomplished, I routinize them – for example, in my classes an attendance sheet is passed around as soon as the buzzer sounds, and rarely do I even need to remind the students to do this after the second week of classes.

I believe that thorough preparation before a semester begins enhances one’s effectiveness as a teacher. I prepare a very detailed course syllabus complete with all major objectives, a topical outline, related readings, and descriptions of all major assignments. This syllabus serves as a guide as we journey through the course content, and I refer to it often. However, there are never dates next to topics, because I find it too difficult to predict rate of learning before I have met my students. Nor do we always stick rigidly to the syllabus; if a topic or point suggests extraordinary interest, I permit us to go with it and it is often at these times that my students begin to understand the real meaning of “magical moments” as they pertain to learning!

Because I establish objectives at the outset, I do not grade “on the curve;” I hold my students responsible for meeting course objectives, and therefore there is no need for norm-referenced measures to be applied. Rather, I employ criterion-reference procedures, using the course objectives as the criteria. In order to allow students to benefit from exams administered during the semester, I give a cumulative final exam which counts more toward the final grade than any other exam, and which includes information from each of the smaller semester exams. This encourages students to learn material that they have not previously mastered, and get credit for doing so. I believe this procedure serves as a very effective motivator, and encourages students to use feedback from tests in a constructive manner.

I try to enhance my effectiveness by varying my teaching methods, draw-
ing on such techniques as traditional lecture, simulations, games, discussion, and demonstration. In doing so, it is possible to meet a greater variety of learning styles among my students and enhance the probability that all students’ learning preferences will be met. When I do lecture I use an overhead projector with transparencies of the major points I am making. Mindful of recent theories on information processing, I attempt to limit the number of new, major ideas introduced during any single fifty minute period, since even the best students can only mindlessly copy down notes if too much is presented too quickly.

Those teachers who only lecture to students, feeding them information that is already organized and digested, rob their students of the opportunities to really learn, and I believe these teachers miss the point of what education is all about. In order to stifle my own tendency to lecture, I require students to answer questions about course reading which I develop using Bloom’s Taxonomy; higher level questions require higher level thinking, and do not lend themselves well to simple answers. These questions stimulate discussion and often lead to even better questions which are generated (and often answered) by my students, and it is at these moments that I feel most effective!

2005

It is very difficult for me to believe that 16 years have passed since I wrote What Works for Me in the last edition of this compilation. So what works for me now? Many things! I decided to use the principle of less is more and share just one strategy that is an example of how I try to set up a positive classroom environment. I use this strategy or activity upon first meeting my students in any given course. I came to use this strategy by realizing what doesn’t work for me. What doesn’t work is distributing my course syllabus at the beginning of the first class meeting, and then reading it through with them to highlight assignments, grading policies, and the like. I never do that any more. Never!

Rather, what does work for me is setting up, at the very first meeting, a classroom environment that is at once friendly and inviting, and that is squarely focused on students and their learning (rather than my teaching) and the pursuit of high standards. I work hard at establishing this environment at the outset, because I now understand how very important it is to all else that transpires during the semester. I put students into small groups and ask them to construct, together, a list of questions about the course, about La Salle, or about me. In this way, right from the start they get to know a few of their classmates, they begin to work with one another, and they get the message that they should be asking questions. Then in turn, each group asks a question, and I answer, and this goes on for several rounds. Typically this becomes more of a discussion and less of a Q/A session. In truth, the students end up not only “constructing” the syllabus I would have handed to them, but they also express their feelings about the course, what they think I expect, and so forth. This discussion may last an entire class period, but I am convinced that the time is well spent.
The tone for the course is then set - active engagement, student participation, working together, questioning - and I am able to obtain a good deal of information about the students’ expectations and prior knowledge about the course and the course concepts that will help me adjust learning activities to their current state of understanding. In fact, sometimes I make last minute adjustments to the course syllabus before distributing it at the very next class session. While I appreciate the need for a course syllabus, I have never quite understood what sense it makes, in a truly student-centered learning environment, to lay out the entire course in detail before ever meeting the members of the class!

I appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts and this activity that can be used to establish a student-centered learning environment from the very first class meeting. It works for me. And it seems to work for my students!
Any teacher in doubt – any, regardless of creed or belief system – would find guidance in the teachings of Saint John Baptist de la Salle. His designation as patron of all teachers is not just an honorific or an empty gesture, for it recognizes that his insights on classroom pedagogy in the context of the whole person are valid across eras and cultures.

That’s because his emphasis, deriving from a religiously grounded tradition going all the way back to the Greeks with their ideal of *paideia*, places the person first, insisting that every encounter contribute to the whole education of the whole young person. All college professors are meant to be specialists in defined fields of scholarship, and that is at it should be, but specialization is not in itself Lasallian. The pure content of my classes, the information and the methods I discuss, could just as easily be imparted by video or CD ROM, and if education were a matter of transmitting my specialties, there would be no need for person-to-person contact.

Look how many current and past La Salle students, though, find themselves changed by the teachers who encouraged, who challenged, who rebuked, who guided them. Look how many people say it was the atmosphere they observed in general on campus visits, especially in the classroom, that made the difference. How many stories I could tell of professors who believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself, who demanded my very best, who put aside their own schedules and worries to counsel me, who showed me through the way they treated me that I possessed a dignity and worth I hadn’t yet found in myself. In this context, my special joy is to report that Brother Emery himself was one of the main positive influences on me. I was a plodding night student and he was a meteorically energetic and supportive dean, in touch with individual students, urging them to give their best, and working always for the good of the program and especially the people in it.

The whole teacher meets the whole student, and the student is one in whom Jesus Christ lives. Hard to believe at times, hard to enact almost always, but Saint La Salle’s precept is never-failing in those moment of discouragement, frustration, and plain anger. It goes without saying that the other element is a demand that students expand their minds, hearts, and souls through the subject material. Accepting undisciplined behaviors or slovenly work is an act of universal disrespect; students may not be allowed to dumb down or fulfill only partial, undemanding expectations.

Doing it the Lasallian way calls for more than any one person has, which is why we work together and share our burdens. Brother Emery taught me what it is to be a Lasallian. As I work ever closer to that ideal, I become a better teacher – which is my highest self-definition – and a better person.
What works for me, in the teaching of literature, changes from semester to semester, from class to class. No method or approach is foolproof, so part of my plan for a course is to build in the opportunity for revision of projected activities. Next follows a “reading” of the particular group during the first two weeks to determine its character (more or less responsive, level of cohesiveness, etc.). In trying to foster active learning, I like oral presentation from students, small group collaborative assignments, dramatic student presentations, and role-playing. But these approaches require particular group dynamics. In upper division major courses, where students tend to know some of their classmates, these kinds of activities work best. I have found that lower division students in core courses are very challenged by and apprehensive of individual oral presentation or dramatic presentation. Group work and role-playing projects, however, are usually successful in engaging active participation. The investment of time in preparing students, by stages, for collaborative, small group assignments is a necessary factor, but worth the effort. I begin by inviting students to submit questions for discussion, based on their reading, early in the term. I use these questions for general class discussion, so that students begin to see what kinds of questions are best in stimulating thought. For group work, I distribute directive materials and questions (often submitted by them) to provide structure and require self-assessment as part of the activity. For lower division students who would have difficulty meeting outside of class, class time is allocated for group work, and I circulate among all groups as a visiting member. Oral “reporting” rotates among the groups frequently, so that the discussion proceeds as vigorously as possible. That is, no one group responds for more than a few minutes at a time before yielding to the next group. I ask group members to continue to pose spin-off questions for full class consideration in addition to their “answers” regarding the material for study. Like others of my colleagues, I find an anonymous midterm questionnaire (How are we doing?) to the class useful in assessing the success or need for improvement of various class activities and approaches, and make adjustments accordingly.
You ask me to say something about what works for me as a teacher. Frankly, I have to say that much of the time things don’t seem to work very well at all. But I’ll give you a few comments on the positive side, and I’ll do so under three headings.

1. Philosophy

A song of the 60’s had the refrain “if you can’t be with the one you love, love the one you’re with.” Some people made fun of the song, but I thought it had a lot of wisdom for life and for teaching. I try not to fuss much about the students (or for that matter, the colleagues and administrators) I’d rather have. I try to do my best with those who actually come my way and to do so without a lot of lamenting in the class or out of it. Perhaps this attitude will keep me from going crazy.

2. Tactical

The students who come my way often neglect the readings for the day and sit silently during class. I cannot teach well in such a circumstance. So I have taken to giving thoughtful little quizzes at the beginning of classes. This tactic keeps more students reading and it gives us something to talk about during the class. I ask very general questions, and normally I tell the students in advance what I’ll be looking for. Most students seem not to mind this approach.

3. Evaluative

The standard La Salle teacher evaluation functioned negatively for me over the years. Too often it led me to ask, “Do they like me?” or “Do they think I’m as good as their other instructors?” The worry was immature but I had it. So some years ago, I stopped reading my evaluations. I gave them to a colleague and asked him to relay to me the useful conclusions from student comments. More recently, I have given the students questionnaires asking about my tactics (quizzes, assignments, tests, and so on) and about their own work (preparation, honesty, willingness to discuss). These I have read with some profit. I never ask “How do you compare the instructor...?”, since I do not care to know.

2005

I respond to your “What Works” question as most faculty probably do, that is, with some nervousness. None of us are ever quite sure what works, and we all know that there are plenty of times when nothing seems to work very well. But here are some things I do. I’m going to focus on strategies I’ve
used in the [Honors Program] Triple. They are strategies that have developed over the years, some possibly even since you two were my students (2001–02).

A good number of years ago, I gave up on in-class exams. I never found them very useful. In my regular classes, I moved to the strategy of daily writing with me counting a certain number of reflections toward the grade in each course. I find that having the students do the reflections accomplishes at least two things: one is to focus their attention on the reading, thus helping to prepare the discussion in class, and the other is to make me very aware from early in the course about how the students are thinking. Reading the reflections is time consuming, but I have found it valuable. I don’t use this strategy in the Triple. What I have done is to have a set of review questions for the students to prod them to do the reading and come prepared to class. They should also show the students what I may be asking about in class. A problem with the strategy is that students get behind with the review questions and do them after the discussion. I should reject this late material, but I’m soft and accept it. Although I do give a final in the Triple, it is a take-home, in fact, a take-home for which I encourage collaboration, even group meetings. I have no interest in the take-home as a test of knowledge. I use it as a way to get students to go back over the readings we have done in the semester and in the year. My sense is that it is a good strategy.

In the last few years, I’ve begun to read something at the beginning of class, generally something related to the discussion of the day, have the students think quietly about it and then write for a few minutes in a notebook that I give out at the beginning of the year. I usually make this reading and writing the basis of our opening discussion. For the past few years, I have also made it a point to have everyone say something on the question. Sometimes I let the discussion go freely and then “fish in” the quiet people although I also may just go around the table. I don’t collect the notebooks until the end of the year. They are not for a grade. The students seem to take the private writing seriously. At some point I hope to use these notebooks as the basis for an article on teaching philosophy. Last year I asked the students to write a final essay about the experience of La Salle for the year. The response I got, probably not surprising to you, focused on the social experience with the other students. This year I’m going to ask them to address the “intellectual experience” of the year although they can talk about other aspects as well. Here too I hope to be able to incorporate the essays into the article.

I still play the penny whistle and recorder for St. Patrick’s Day and do Indian arm-wrestling in discussing David Hume. This year I did the hokeypokey in discussing Kierkegaard. The use of “Kant’s box” for Hegel, Marx and Engels is an elaboration of the last few years.
Adding risk to my classroom experience is a strategy that works. Risk is found in the unpredictable situation and the symptoms should be familiar to any teacher. I worry that things may look disorganized, feel unnerved, and suffer classroom performance anxiety associated with not knowing what will happen next. In short, all the things I have learned to eliminate from my daily teaching routine.

Experienced teachers know all too well how to manage a class so that work proceeds in a predictable way. Ideas are introduced, discussion is directed, and a smooth summing-up ends at twenty minutes past the hour. The more innovative approach may include a few planned surprises but only for the students. The instructor both teaches and controls the pace and style of the interaction.

The controlling classroom style results in high predictability and low risk for the instructor. I can be comfortable walking into my classes and sure about the kind of learning that will take place. But the cost of comfort is high. Spontaneity becomes planned and there are fewer opportunities for new ideas to surface. The new insight of one semester becomes institutionalized in my lecture notes and then just a note in the margins of the course outline. The students get another in a long career of comfortable classes and my learning suffers as well.

Risk is the antidote to classroom comfort. It sharpens the senses, forces me to think about the subject matter in new ways, and generates questions that I may not be prepared to answer. It can create lively classroom interaction, powerful new learning for both teacher and student, and the occasional total teaching wipe-out.

How to take more risk? Part of the answer is classroom strategy and part is attitude. As a teaching style guide, don’t always have things worked out to the last minute. Leave some space for student input even though it might ruin the teaching design. A recent campus lecturer mentioned the technique of assigning student groups to meet at the beginning of class to formulate questions about the material. The teacher sets the conceptual framework but the students set the specific class agenda. They become more active in their own learning.

Create assignments in which the students have to test the basic assumptions of the theories being taught. Do these ideas hold up under scrutiny? Do they work in real-life situations? If they do not, then I try to show why they are considered to be “great theories.” This is sometimes difficult and, occasionally, impossible. Strategy also includes the commitment to teach a new course every couple of years. Bringing a new course up from scratch is a little terrifying and involves being open to surprises that the perfectly planned class does not allow. I find that the sweat of the new class situation helps keep me focused and energizes my teaching.
There is a process of inquiry and discovery in allowing students to judge for themselves the validity of the discipline and helps the students catch some of the enthusiasm I have for my field. There is vulnerability in all of this but there is also reward. Risk creates a more dynamic learning environment and raises the expectations for both student and teacher. Will the students meet those expectations? Most of the time they will. Will I meet their expectations? I hope so.
Teaching styles are individualistic. Whether the approach is flamboyant or silent and serious is the result of basic nature and background. Indeed, an attempt to assume another’s style could result in awkward classroom performance.

Basically, consider effectiveness in imparting knowledge and efficiency in achieving that goal. Although the nature of subject matter varies, there appears to be a strong correlation between student attendance/attention and the instructor’s ability to not only teach but to do it in an amusing or entertaining fashion. Drier material requires instructional innovation to capture attention and make education fun. Given that the students have the rational expectation of learning, the task becomes how to reach and motivate them.

For me, the approach may be summarized with three “E’s”:

1. Empathy:
   Identify with the student! Be available for consultation on both academic and personal problems which may be affecting performance. Convey that there is appreciation and concern for the problems and progress of adults; that there are competing environmental and social forces for the student; and that there is faculty awareness that more than one subject comprises the roster.

2. Enthusiasm:
   Make the subject matter live by showing feeling and force of expression! The material is not just a theoretical/academic reading or an exercise designed to frustrate but, in fact, represents a “real world” phenomenon. Giving practical examples and sharing personal experiences convey that there is utility function for academic and commercial topics. The examples and experiences help students to adapt and produce awareness that choice among alternatives does impact outcome.

3. Emphasis:
   Give special attention to important items! Repeating and summarizing succinctly are both important aspects of effective instruction. Vary the pitch and tone of the voice! Rarely sit down! Give board demonstrations in a good format and provide special notes and syntheses which reduce confusion and help convey the notion that the material is important and even exam-worthy.

Lectures which are well-planned and well-executed produce an atmosphere of caring to which most students will respond. They will want to come back for more.
During Christmastime, 1988, my parish priest noted that “Christmas begins like the phantoms of smoke that crawl from an old man’s pipe. They are in no hurry to go anywhere. They are not going anywhere. They simply stay and fill a room with their pleasant aroma.”

I would like to suggest, then, that education is unlike Christmas in that is it meant to spread and be spread by teachers and students alike for the purpose of increasing understanding and quality of life for this and future generations. But the similarity to Christmas lies in the electricity that is created on certain good days through classroom interaction when it is almost possible to see light bulbs go on in students’ thinking and the instructor leaves the classroom feeling exhausted but with the deep satisfaction that comes from accomplishment.
“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” I am convinced that the special joys that I have experienced during my eleven years in the classroom have flowed largely from attempting to live this maxim. Treating students with the highest respect prompts them to treat the teacher in like manner. In an atmosphere of mutual respect the potential for learning is nearly boundless.

Respect manifests itself in various forms. For example, respectful educators will strive always to remember the struggles associated with the maturing process that students are constantly grappling with. These young people are crossing the bridge between a childhood of dependence on adults and a future where they will be on their own. During these transition years they seek to be treated as mature individuals capable of making many of their own decisions. While the classroom should certainly not be a democracy, the respectful educator realizes that students greatly benefit from making some of their own decisions concerning the learning process.

One of the easiest and most enjoyable ways that a teacher can show respect for students is to recognize each as an individual with his or her own talents, interests, and concerns. Simple comments or questions such as, “How did you do in the soccer game yesterday?”; “Nice article in the Collegian last week”; or “How is the application to graduate school progressing?” can go far in demonstrating an attitude of concern.

The demands of a schedule filled with teaching, preparation, extracurricular activities, and committee meetings make the active professor keenly aware of the value of time. While the students usually have a very different agenda, usually they value their time no less than do faculty. A respectful teacher will not waste a moment of the students’ time. This entails going to great lengths to make sure that details have been attended to before entering the classroom. Are the lecture notes in order, the slides right-side up, the papers to be handed back in alphabetical order? Is the projector working, the demonstration in order, the handout duplicated, collated, and stapled? If there is a tedious part of teaching, this is surely it.

Despite how much they might occasionally disappoint a professor by their performance on an examination, college students have proven their capabilities (or they would not be in college) and deserve to be treated as talented, intelligent beings. The respectful teacher acknowledges their potential and provides for the students courses that are both stimulating and challenging.

The list of ways teachers can show respect for students goes on. While the manifestations of the respect between teacher and students will vary among individuals, some display of attitude of respect is essential for teaching to be effective.
2005

The most important lesson that I have learned in my years of teaching experience is that the job of a teacher is much less one of a disseminator of information than it is of a motivator of students. By the time students get to college they are quite capable of learning things themselves. The teacher’s job is to make them want to learn. By contrast with disseminating information, motivating students is the much more difficult task. It takes creativity, energy, and, at least in my case, great patience in dealing with lack of success.

I have also learned that students teach each other better than I teach them. This in no way removes responsibility from me the teacher - rather it increases it. The role of the teacher is to bring the students to the point where they know enough about a subject to ask intelligent questions and to the point where they care enough to ask those questions. Some of the best moments in my classroom occur when I am leading a discussion and suddenly bedlam breaks out. In the most magical moments the students have lost patience with my leadership and lack of clarity and have begun to explain the issues and problems among themselves. Needless to say, this can get dicey, but when it works well, learning does not get any better.

In recent years I have become a big fan of teaching-learning technology. I have also learned that, when used inappropriately, technology can create boredom and, more importantly, remove the person from the teaching process. (Is there anything more boring or impersonal than a bad PowerPoint presentation?) However, when used effectively, technology can tremendously enhance learning. As a result, I have learned to carefully weigh the use of technology in my classroom and use it only when I am confident it will help me achieve my teaching goals.
I assume that students come to a course or meet me outside of a course to learn. Because of this imagined intention, I take the opportunity to develop a relationship with them that is going to benefit both me the teacher and my learners. We connect and then go on a journey in which both of us actively interact. Sometimes the journey is difficult, and students take time before they fully engage. I try to be alert to this and persist in my attempts to win them over so that they are advantaged by the course content.

I want students to be as challenged and stimulated as I am. At times I get the sense that my enthusiasm, although necessary and an absolutely essential to the teaching-learning process, is in some way unbelievable. How can I enjoy this material? The knowledge before us needs to be offered in an intellectually tempting way. They need to see the power and satisfaction that new knowledge, sharpened skills, and changed attitudes bring to their intellectual, personal, and professional lives.

I am interested in students’ welfare and their development. I enjoy arguing with students. I love to debate test questions. This and other questioning tells me that they have taken on the challenges of learning. They do not always appreciate that some facts are just what they are, indisputable. Nevertheless, I have found that I have learned a great deal about my teaching through these arguments and by their questions. Their perspectives are not always mine. I am pleasantly and consistently surprised by this and benefit by reflecting on their differing points of view. These contemplations help me to improve my class presentations and one-to-one meetings. I am also self-conscious about varying my approaches to presenting the content and consistently try to use different teaching strategies.

I make myself accessible to students by meeting them, by challenging them during the meetings to work some more on assignments and questions, and by getting back to them as rapidly as possible. I consider their schedules as much as possible. I return assignments to them within a week. If I cannot do this because of personal or professional situations, I apologize.

Teaching and nursing have been great gifts in my life. I have loved the journey of being a nurse, caring for patients, and caring for students. I am never bored: this and the joy of learning from students, my colleagues, and patients are reasons why I enjoy what I do.
Pre-Class Preparation: Preparation is vital. Before virtually all (99.9%) of the classes I have taught over the last 30 years, I have prepared extensively ahead of time. Even with material that I have taught numerous times, I still insist on reviewing the entire lesson in my mind beforehand (which takes at least an hour for each class). I also choose a stock of careful examples that will get the main points of the lesson across without redundancy. I review all definitions, theorems, proofs, examples, and problems that will be covered so that my presentation will run as smoothly as possible. In this way, I can anticipate student questions and address them ahead of time, so that in the actual lesson as little class time as necessary is wasted. Of course, it is always possible to overlook something, or to be confused on occasion, despite one’s best efforts, but thorough preparation minimizes the dangers of this, and gives the instructor more self-confidence in front of the class. (In my own student days, nothing angered me more than having an entire class wasted because an instructor did not respect his/her own students enough to prepare thoroughly.)

Entering the “Minds” of the Students: I believe that the most effective teachers are those who place themselves as fully as possible into the “mindset” of their students. This is especially important in mathematics (my subject), in which new topics constantly build upon previously learned lessons. Before beginning a new topic or reviewing a previous topic, it is crucial to have a strong sense of what the students have learned up to that point - and how much they have retained. “Knowing the audience” is, for me, the single most important element in teaching. My presentations must be geared exactly to the level of the students, and I must explain concepts in terms that the students can comprehend at that particular point in time. As I write on the board, I always say out loud exactly what I am writing, and as I do so, I constantly imagine myself as a student in the class and ask, “Would I clearly understand what is being said here?” I always strive for a more down-to-earth, straightforward way of presenting ideas, without sacrificing correctness and rigor.

Watching the Students’ Faces: Most of my classes are in “lecture” format. Nevertheless, I attempt, as far as possible, to carry on a running “conversation” with the students, as if I am speaking to each one individually about the topic at hand. As I teach, I am generally writing equations, definitions, theorems, solutions, etc... on the board, but as often as possible (once every few seconds) I scan the eyes of the students to see if they are truly following. After many years of teaching, I can often spot the moment when something goes wrong - when an
injudicious phrase or a blackboard mistake causes some consternation among the students. At that point, I know I must pause and try a different approach - perhaps a different way of saying the same thing, or taking more time to correct a misspoken statement.

**Proper Assessment:** Testing and evaluation are also very important. One of my greatest failings as a teacher is that I tend to make tests longer than they should be. When constructed correctly, test questions should be arranged to build the students' confidence. I try to begin with a relatively straightforward, simple question, to allow the students to get over their initial nervousness. I also try to distribute the test points so that credit is parceled out appropriately among “drill”-type problems, statements of definitions / theorems, and proofs. I usually include one challenging problem to separate the “A”-level students from the rest. Every test should be constructed so that students who understand the material should be able to score at least 70-80 points. I generally include an “Extra Credit” question to let students add to their point total in order to offset arithmetic errors on earlier problems. Ever since I began teaching, I have assigned daily written homework (one or two problems, due at the beginning of the next class), and collected and graded them (on a scale of 1 to 10). This forces students to look over the material of the last class before we meet again. Grading this daily homework (usually amounting to 10-15% of their overall grade) takes a lot of time but is well worth it because I quickly get to know the students’ personalities and monitor their knowledge level on a day-to-day basis.

**Enthusiasm and Humor:** There are many other factors that contribute to good teaching: high energy in class, strong enthusiasm for the subject, periodic reminders of why the subject is important, willingness to meet with students one-to-one, patience (nothing “turns off” students faster than an arrogant teacher, who believes his/her own time is more important than that of the students - who, by the way, are paying handsome sums in tuition), clarity about what is required, and an unrelenting attempt to build the confidence of struggling students. I also like to keep the class atmosphere friendly and humorous, constantly using puns or jokes to keep things light-hearted. However, I never use humor against a student in a deprecating way (only at myself on occasion). I have zero tolerance for teachers that ridicule or berate students in class - laughing at a student is one of the most destructive things a teacher can ever do. On the other hand, it is always appropriate to suggest to a student that his/her work is not up to standard, or needs improvement, when the occasion warrants, but this type of criticism is best appreciated by students in private, and not in front of their peers.

**Choice of Textbooks:** Finally, choosing appropriate textbook(s) is one of the most crucial decisions in teaching a course. I have always tried to spend a great deal of time each semester carefully sifting through
various textbooks to find the best ones for upcoming courses. The texts I choose must be readable, and have a clear, orderly sequence of topics, with good illustrations (when necessary), and a wide range of problems - some “drill” problems, but also a good selection of thought-provoking problems as well. If particular technology is used in the class (calculators, computers, etc.), the text should ideally explain how to handle the technology in as straightforward a manner as possible, with lots of examples.
What works for me as a teacher comes from the example of the great professors I have had at each of the universities I have attended. Professor Eugene Fitzgerald of La Salle University, together with Professor Elena Catena of the University of Madrid/New York University and Professors Barbara Bockus Aponte and Professor Adriana Lewis Galanes of Temple University – all succeeded in conveying to me their genuine passion for learning and commitment to excellence.

As great professors, all were rigorous, compassionate, flexible and highly creative in their approach to teaching. They valued lucidity of thought and expression, and consistently demanded as much of their students. In addition, I found each professor to be humble, grateful and willing to give unselfishly to students and colleagues alike.

In time, I came to treasure in greater degree the wonderful gifts my professors had left as their legacy. From them I learned about passion, commitment, concern, flexibility, rigor, compassion, intellectual integrity, respect for learning and great traditions, innovative teaching and spiritual vision. Their example in this regard is what has worked for me. I believe that I have succeeded as a teacher only to the extent that I have been able to communicate something of the same to my own students.
When I started teaching, I had a lot of success in the classroom and I was quite certain that I had it all figured out. To be honest, I think I got by on enthusiasm and personality during those first few years, and the positive feedback was energizing and intoxicating.

Over time, hubris has taken a backseat to humility as I realized that I must continually work at this vocation. I’ve adapted and changed as a teacher, but the basic elements of “what works for me” haven’t changed over the time I’ve been teaching. Every semester, though, I have to start anew to plan my courses and discern how I might present the material as effectively as possible.

Of course, all good teaching requires that the instructor genuinely respect and care about the students, prepare thoroughly for classes, talk with students rather than at them, and be passionate about the material. But when I ponder the things that work for me, I realize that there are several other elements that I try to weave together to develop a seamless garment to frame the learning process.

The process begins with a clear plan for what I want to accomplish in a course and how I intend to accomplish it during the semester. I devote a significant amount of time to the development of each course, even if I’ve taught it many times before. This goes beyond preparation for individual classes; I work to present a clear and detailed outline or map of the entire course before the semester begins, not just a vague list of topics from which I’d try to figure out where we need to go and what we need to do along the way.

The syllabus is the framework for what the students and I will do together in the course; it serves as our guide and is our itinerary for the journey. In the syllabus, I outline the key destinations we’re trying to reach, spell out my expectations for the journey, and list everything we’ll need to gather along the way to get the most out of all the stops on our itinerary. Of course, I’m also open to occasional “side trips” to explore any interesting yet unanticipated sights along the way, but the main highlights are clearly delineated. No wandering aimlessly and no winging it.

I work to set high expectations and challenge the students and myself to go beyond the old familiar places. I strive to meet students where they are and then provide assignments, readings, questions, or projects that will challenge them to revisit old places with a fresh look or to discover new places, beyond where they think they can or want to go.

Sometimes, we explore together and sometimes I send them off to explore on their own with the guidelines I’ve provided. Whatever the path, I’m available for support, encouragement, gentle suggestions, and a push when needed. It’s a transformative moment when the students and I arrive in a new place after stretching beyond our perceived limits.
As the semester progresses, I’m always on the lookout for the teachable moments both in and out of the classroom - those occasions when an opportunity emerges to reinforce an idea, introduce a new concept, or make a connection. For example, grading presents many possible teachable moments and can be viewed as much more than an evaluation of what students have done “correctly.” In my mind, grading shouldn’t be viewed as one more bit of drudge work that keeps us from our “real” teaching. Grading can be another venue for teaching – one more opportunity to engage the students with the material and have an ongoing dialogue about the topics and issues.

I provide extensive feedback on the work students submit. I don’t just put a grade on the paper or exam with a few comments. I detail what worked well, what they might have improved or done differently, ask questions about what they’ve written, specify why the paper or exam earned the grade it did and provide suggestions on how they could improve. It’s time-consuming to put so much energy into providing feedback and some students are only interested in the grade. Many students, though, take the opportunity to read my comments and questions carefully. They’re appreciative that I’ve rolled up my sleeves and immersed myself in the material alongside them, taking the time to really think about and respond to their work.

What works for me as a teacher is to be genuine as I lead and guide. At the end of the semester’s journey, we can reflect on the places we’ve explored, noting that some of the experiences were exciting, some were quite ordinary, and hopefully, some remain long after the class has ended.
I have pondered “what works for me” your question and have many thoughts about particular techniques that I find successful in the classroom. I will give you several ideas.

Recognize and respect the different learning styles of students. Different learning styles require that the professor create and use different delivery methods, assessment tools, and motivational techniques. Each class is different. I have found that I can be teaching two sections of the same course and not be successful with certain techniques in both sections. The professor must be innovative and flexible.

Given my discipline of finance and insurance, it is important to facilitate a context within which students can understand the concepts. How are the theories applied in practice? Many hands on activities are used in class and out of class. I ask a lot of questions during class to give students a chance to consider different aspects of a particular concept.

Students need a lot of encouragement especially in the business core courses that I teach. Finance can be a difficult discipline so I keep in mind my own undergraduate days and how I struggled in some of the classes. I can truly empathize with a student who is working hard but not “getting it” immediately.

To prepare students for an especially challenging section of the course, I will briefly outline the material via classroom discussion to show how the various parts will fit together and what they can expect to learn at the completion. It is like a “preview” and demonstrates why this particular section is important to their understanding of the major learning goals of the course.

These techniques represent only a few that I use on a continuous basis.
As I thought about “what works for me”, the first idea that came to my mind was that I try to teach as I was taught. I try to mimic those who I found to be the most enlightening and inspiring.

I spend a lot of time preparing. Perhaps, I am just inefficient, but it always takes me a lot of time. I read the book, I think about it, I write some notes, I read it again. Then I outline what I think I’ll need to put into the lecture. The next step is to imagine how it would feel to sit in a room and listen to this lecture. I am not an auditory learner, so sitting and listening is not very effective for me. The next step is to try to dream up exercises, or discussion questions that will help the student engage the topic.

In the School of Business, we often use case studies of corporations to support the theories that are being taught. Every semester, I change the list of companies. This forces me to do homework every semester. It helps me to see how much information is available and how hard or easy it is to access. But mostly, it keeps me working on staying fresh and engaged, myself. (In the summer, I often sign up for some type of seminar. There is nothing like sitting in a classroom, listening to someone else talk, to remind me how long a half hour of lecture feels.)

I try to always treat students with respect, but I do nag and correct. In my mind, this is a chance to help them to prepare for the “real world.” I would much rather help a student to correct a behavior (or an idea), than to hear later that a student lost a promotion because he didn’t know how to behave.

In summary, I take a lot of time to prepare a detailed schedule of what I want to achieve. Then I prepare some alternate plans and some exercises. Then I go into the room and “take the temperature.” Most of the time, La Salle students show up willing to play along. Class goes according to plan. However, there have been times when something more important was interfering in their life. The classes after 9/11 had to be adjusted. For some classes, it meant handing the class time over for a discussion of what the students were feeling. For other classes, it meant sticking to the plan, because they were craving structure. Too many other things in their lives were already unpredictable. Simple things like a big win can derail the discussion, but I have always felt that “covering the material” is not the same as teaching it. So I try to adjust. I can usually make up lost material with a different type of experiential exercise.

Teaching Philosophy

When I enter a classroom, it is my responsibility to be prepared and to create an environment where risks can be taken. It is particularly important in the strategy class that there be a culture where, if the best answer is in the room, it be shared. It is not necessary that I be the only one with answers.
Actually, my goal is to challenge the students to find their best way to be integrative and creative thinkers. Regardless of the class I am teaching, I work at responding to learning differences. Linking theory to recognizable experiences is very important. I use a wide variety of grading techniques and work very hard to be consistent. The strategy course demands constant review, as the use of real corporations requires constant analysis.

As a non-tenure track appointment, my primary responsibility is to respond to demands in the department. I believe that I do this. I step forward when there is a need to attend a workshop, present an award or advise a student. This keeps me connected to the students. My responsibility in the department is to be flexible and student centered. I have moved from teaching Statistics, to Organizational Behavior, to Business Strategy, to courses in the Global Management of Technology program as needs in the department arose. I continue to teach in the Honors Program, in order to make it possible for Business Students to satisfy the Honors’ requirements.

The second responsibility, of being student centered, has many indicators. I have consistently supervised the Co-operative education experiences and internships. I have also been a freshman advisor, maintaining long-term relationships with the students that I meet as freshmen. This role means that I attend plays, cheer at games and help to serve food at the Charter Dinner. I attend opening Convocation, the Honors Convocation and all of the activities related to Commencement. Each of these activities should help students feel more comfortable coming to me when they need to discuss their future.
In all of my classes, whether American Studies or History, I stress the development of intellectual curiosity and the citing of connections between and among core concepts within the course. The pedagogies to accomplish these goals vary with the material and the students (e.g., introductory courses vs. seminars vs. graduate colloquia). In most cases, the fostering of intellectual curiosity includes the practice, in fact the cultivation of the ‘habit of mind,’ of identifying and examining connections between and among concepts, themes, symbols, myths, and historical evidence. Thus, my two essential goals are, in most cases, cross-fertilizing.

My fascination with having students identify and analyze connections between concepts derives not from contemporary learning theory (although many learning theorists do discuss the benefits of having students cite such connections), but from the way the classical Greeks conceptualized the relationships between the Trivium (Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic) and the Quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy). As understood by the Greeks, and later modified and extended by Renaissance Humanists, the Trivium and the Quadrivium, which are the Seven Liberal Arts, constitute a three-way and a four-way crossroads that imply that these two paths of knowledge are interconnected. For instance, one’s knowledge of Grammar and Rhetoric are guided by the Logic inherent within Rhetoric. One’s knowledge of Arithmetic and Geometry is best operationalized when applied to Music (number in time) and Astronomy (number in time and space). Yet, these latter processes are done with language, which has been refined by the practice and precise use of rhetoric and, of course, logic.

When students identify and examine the intersection of core concepts, and/or when they see ‘X’ in terms of ‘Y’ (which is how the pedagogy of metaphor operates, an operation that, as Robert Frost explains, is the source of all creative thinking), students are more likely to have the concepts under analysis locked more firmly in their short and long term memories. And when these concepts, now firmly cemented in the mind, are applied in other courses and in other contexts within the Liberal Arts, overall meaning and understanding are enhanced. In short, students learn best and more deeply when they actually “do” something with information through the comparative/contrastive activity of analyzing connections. It is through these activities that factual information is thus transformed into deep understanding, an understanding that can then guide students to examine and make judgments about their world long after they have graduated from La Salle University. All of this works for me and, I believe, for my students.
Allow me to say at the outset that I am not only honored to have received the Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching, but also to have been asked to contribute to a volume of thoughts on successful teaching originated by Brother Emery Mollenhauer. Brother Emery was my first “boss” at the university when I arrived on campus lo these many years ago (or, in the vernacular, “back in the day”); and I have always respected his dedication to both teaching and scholarship as vital components of the academic enterprise.

Regarding “what works for me” in the classroom, after some reflection it occurs to me that I have consistently relied on three approaches. Firstly, I am what can only be described as an “old-fashioned” historian (and educator). My undergraduate education was acquired at the gowns of the so-called “Old Lions,” who were solely interested in imparting knowledge; they were as a result not interested in any sort of “shared learning” among their students. It is no accident, therefore, that I have adopted their pedagogical style as my own; my focus is on the mastering and analyzing of a corpus of historical content knowledge, which in my estimation best equips students for success in later endeavors. Secondly, and related to the foregoing, I have throughout my career in the classroom, benefited greatly from – and relied heavily upon – my experiences as a publishing scholar. To my way of thinking, not only is it imperative that bona fide university professors engage in research and publication – the true measure of the vita animae – but it is also beneficial for both professors and their students to make connections between problem-solving and analytical research on the one hand, and clearly organized and presented classroom instruction on the other. As an example, I prepare every lecture as if I were presenting a paper at a scholarly conference; and I begin every lecture with an explicit outline of the material to be covered in the lecture. Thirdly, I consider humor a vital component of successful instruction – particularly when dealing what is often – let’s be frank about this – dry-as-dust historical content material. Perhaps the best way to make History “come alive” for students is to present from time to time the comical aspect of historical personages and events.