



REMEMBER THE FIVE THINGS

A while back, I had the year-long opportunity to be the interim principal at a progressive elementary school. On the first day of school, I addressed the gathered students, families, and staff with a short talk that I titled "remember the six things."

For me, the weeks leading up to the beginning of a new school year are a period of excitement...new beginnings...optimism...hope. I wanted to communicate that, but also create touch points that we could return to during the year.

Recalling that experience, I've adapted some of those words for our work together at La Salle. In this case, *five* things to build upon for our teaching and learning together this year.

1. Have fun: Teaching, learning, research, and building communities of practice should be enjoyable. When we are having fun, we are intrinsically motivated, persist at solving problems, and collaborate more readily. I appreciate how Montuori (2008), describes [the joy of inquiry](#), and its critical connection to questioning, teaching, and learning, bringing "wonder, passion, hope, and conviviality" to our work together.

2. Think better: Many focus on quiet attention, artifacts produced, objectives ticked off, or grades earned, but if you want evidence that learning is taking place in a classroom or other setting, [look for thinking](#). Create or seek out experiences that raise relevant questions and require focused thought. Position people to share their thinking, and collaborate to think really hard about the issues they are working to better understand.

3. Get along better: Find a colleague or student (or both) who has expertise you don't have...or has an alternate perspective, different theory, or different cultural experience. Have a conversation. Create spaces to interact informally. Listen more than you speak. Learn about personal journeys, which present opportunities for insights into working and learning together.

4. Try something you didn't think you could do (or had time to do)... and keep trying: If you've been meaning to write...are considering a new line of inquiry...wanted to add a new strategy to your teaching repertoire...have concerns about a policy...now is the time to begin; and stick with it, even if progress is slow. In the classroom, build activities into courses that require student

persistence, then support them as they "keep trying." Have you ever had a true growth experience without risk-taking and persistence?

5. Take care of each other and La Salle: More often than I can count, I've heard from colleagues that a significant reason they were attracted to La Salle...and stay, is the people...the collegiality...the community. I couldn't agree more.

The pandemic has clearly accelerated cultural, economic, political, and technological shifts in academia. Our community (and we are not alone) is being strained, as fewer people populate our campus on a daily basis.

It has never been more important to appreciate the value of our campus community, and the precarious nature of our institution in the landscape of higher education. For the sake of our students, each other, and La Salle, we need to be present, together and in-person, more often.

So, I hope you'll join me in keeping "**the five things**" in mind during our journey this academic year. See you around campus!



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ENGAGING PRACTICES ON CAMPUS

**Mindy Tate, Associate Professor,
SONHS shares:**

Undergraduate nursing students are tasked with learning a significant amount of information each semester, which helps to build the foundation for clinical judgment. Upon graduation, they are required to take a licensure examination to practice as a registered nurse. The NCLEX includes several new question types designed to determine if the examinee has developed clinical judgment for safe practice.

These new exam questions have required nurse educators to critically reflect on their teaching practices and introduce new activities to facilitate the development of clinical judgment. After a wonderful presentation by my colleague Maureen Szulewski regarding the revised question types, I decided to implement a new activity in my pharmacology course to **engage students in using clinical judgment.**

Because students are often timid with information related to the cardiovascular system, especially drugs used for anticoagulation, I developed a table identifying the medications, the appropriate lab test, and three options to select after analyzing the lab values. Similar to the new questions on the NCLEX exam, using the table, students were asked to highlight whether a dose should be lowered, continued as is, or increased. This activity was conducted in groups to help

students gain confidence with the both the content and clinical judgment. Then, as a class, we debriefed and discussed the appropriate actions for each drug and lab test.

Students found that [this more authentic assignment](#) helped them to “think like a nurse.” Their **thoughtfulness** and communication with one another has encouraged me to create similar activities for other courses, and work collaboratively with my colleagues to best prepare our students for the NCLEX and their nursing careers.

HAVE AN EXCEPTIONAL FIRST DAY OF CLASS!

In [How to Teach a Good First Day of Class](#), James Lang implores: “Do not begin the first day of the semester by immediately handing out the syllabus.” Instead, he suggests, **begin by sparking curiosity** about what you will be learning together.

Start by considering what intrigues *you* about the course. Why are you passionate about the content? [Identify and pose an essential question](#). Alternately, present a problem, based on a big idea, that the students can wrestle with, even though they might not yet be able to solve it.

Give students some time to interact, **think**, and ask questions. Let them talk more than you, but engage them as necessary to encourage persistence and focus. Collect their ideas and debrief this

introductory activity as a class. Then [spend a bit of time introducing yourself](#). Credentials and expertise are important to some, but when students see us as someone they can relate to and connect with, they will be more comfortable approaching us with questions, responding in class, and visiting our offices. So, share a bit about yourself, your interests, and the activities you enjoy.

Finally, refer to the syllabus, using it, as Lang suggests, to illustrate “how the course content can help satisfy [the] curiosity” that you created with your opening activity, and how the road map you’ve developed will take you, together, on that journey. You might even consider an abbreviated version of your syllabus, styled in an alternate format, for this purpose. There is some evidence that [the way a syllabus is presented](#) impacts student understanding of course content.

No matter what we do, students will learn how we view our subject, how we will interact with them, what we believe about teaching and learning, and whether or not we are approachable and will support them as they work through the course. So, a little thought and planning now, and perhaps a shift in how we begin a course, allows us to use that first impression as an opportunity to set the tone for the semester. Creating **a first-day experience that is interesting and meaningful** can pay big dividends for student learning throughout the semester.

[Beginning class with a visible agenda](#) provides security and predictability, helps achieve objectives, keeps everyone organized, aids in communication, and focuses attention on important concepts or questions.



THINKING = LEARNING

Earlier in this newsletter, I wrote that thinking provides evidence of learning. You might have wondered how one plans for, observes, measures, or evaluates thinking. Project Zero's [Thinking Routine Toolbox](#), which is packed with ideas and activities, can help get you started.

As they explain, a **thinking routine** is "a set of questions, or brief sequence of steps, used to scaffold and support student thinking." On the website, the routines are organized into categories, such as "core thinking routines", "perspective taking", and "digging deeper into ideas." There are ten such categories. Each contains several well-explained activities that can be used with a wide variety of subjects, and will help you increase and improve how students think in your courses.

Why the focus on thinking? Often, in classrooms, it **looks like** learning is taking place, when in fact, that might not be the case at all. Returning to the blog I linked to on page one, the author refers to a 2014 report titled [What Makes Great Teaching](#). In a presentation about this report, lead author Rob Coe, identified what he called, "poor proxies for learning." He shares behaviors that we often *incorrectly attribute to learning*. For example, students who look engaged and interested, teachers covering curriculum, students responding correctly to questions, and teachers providing explanations. Paradoxically, while these behaviors are necessary in instructional situations, **none guarantee learning**, even though we assume they are evidence of effective practice.

Of course, an initial input into the cognitive system is required, however, **real learning occurs when we have to get that information back out** of our

cognitive system. That is why [retrieval practice is such a powerful learning tool](#).

In [Why Students Don't Like School](#), cognitive psychologist, Daniel Willingham writes, "memory is the residue of thought." Creating experiences that increase opportunities to think, think together, and think out loud, requires retrieval practice, and gives us the opportunity to evaluate learning. **More retrieval practice**, in lots of different ways, increases the likelihood of creating new connections in memory, and comprehensive cues to recall and use that information later.

Additionally, **low or no stakes quizzing** and testing, not necessarily for the purpose of assessment, but for the purpose of retrieval practice, [pays big dividends for learning](#). Simply put, **when we work at "thinking"...**recalling what we know, connecting that knowledge to new facts, ideas, and concepts, **learning happens**.

HELP PROMOTE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity violations often occur when students don't understand expectations, are disorganized, pressed for time, or lack support to persist through challenges. **You can help** by:

- Getting to know students and building community.
- Continuously clarifying expectations, checking for understanding, and asking for feedback.
- Challenging students, then supporting their persistence.
- Creating a climate that accepts mistakes as opportunities for learning.
- Providing enough time for students to complete assignments, specific feedback to promote improvement, and opportunities for revision.
- Offering tips for staying organized.
- Focusing more on progress, process, and products, and less on grades.
- Clarifying rules for citation of sources.
- Knowing how to get support for students who are experiencing mental health issues.

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