

To find previous emails in this series, click [here](#) (the URL has changed)

My dear resilient colleagues,

Welcome back. For the third time in slightly over a month. As all 50 U.S. states and nearly all territories have reported cases of the coronavirus and in most of these locations have declared disaster as the shared experience, we know we are not alone in what we are confronting, and that our students, in their diversity across countries, economic statuses, and historical oppressions, are connected far more broadly to the profound suffering that enlaces the world. What we do now, then, deeply influences the futures that may emerge. Resilient, well-educated, capable human beings will repair and remake a world that may be more just and more sustainable than the one we now share.

With this in mind, I invite you to think with me about how to start well this week towards achieving your course goals while even more importantly achieving deep learning with your students. Even though we are two-thirds of the way through the term, the recursive beginnings have asked us to continue to establish common territory and assumptions to give our students chances to succeed in this term's courses. Today, let's consider the importance of checking for prior knowledge and misconceptions so that we can activate our students' learning stability and increase their learning capacities.

Ascertaining students' prior knowledge is essential to designing successful learning activities. When we check for knowledge that bears directly on our current objectives for problem-solving, communicating, and critical thinking, we can address gaps in knowledge fairly quickly (or identify needs for additional academic support). We also discover misconceptions (false news and inaccurate understanding of scientific principles, for example) that hamper the learning we present. Identifying and correcting misconceptions also helps us move forward in the spiral of learning.

How do we identify prior knowledge and misconceptions quickly and effectively? First, we prioritize what we think our student should know in order to complete the assigned work. Second, we give short quizzes or writing exercises, sample problems, or simply engage in brief group discussions to check shared understandings of definitions and processes. These two steps can be accomplished in less than half an hour and can be segmented into 5-10 minutes depending on activity. The follow up will be determined by your own sense of what needs addressing and how that will fit with your lesson plans.

To pair with this reflection on prior knowledge, I want to offer you a related practice I call "track records." It's my belief that we build track records in our own histories for how we manage to survive and rebuild after crisis and challenge. Remembering our survival skills (the ones that worked) activates our senses of stability and capacity. And these in turn reinforce our strength for facing what challenges us in the present. In the past 12 years, one of my standard interview questions has been "What's the hardest thing you have had to learn and how did you do it?" I've hired nearly 225 people during this time, with a corresponding tripling of the number of interviews. This question tells me not only how someone problem-solves and what professional skills they may need to improve; it tells me how someone faces adversity and what resiliency skills they have developed. The deeper benefit of this question is that answering catalyzes confidence, a true confidence in one's own abilities that can immediately be called on.

As we begin again this week, please think about checking your students' prior knowledge and misconceptions of what they have already learned in your courses. Please think about activating their confidence based on past achievements and persistence. Please do this for yourself.

To start this week and to activate our shared sense of accomplishment, I am pleased to share evidence of our past achievements in the attached TLC Annual Report. What we have done together in three years has surely laid the basis for what we are doing together now. Thank you.

Additionally, the TLC has created a comprehensive resource page to support your needs:

Click [here](#) to find [Resources for Teaching & Learning in the Remote Learningscape](#)

And finally, please join this week's [TLC Open Conversation](#) on Thursday, April 16, 3 pm: click [here](#) to join. You will be asked to provide your name and email address to register at that time.

Please be good to yourselves and each other. Maintain social distance. Be close in heart and mind to those you love and can assist. Grieve, console, rejoice, and persist. We are here, today.

Wishing health and safety to all.

Gina

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