
Twenty-First Century Lasallian Education: Where Technology Meets Albert Borgmann and De La Salle

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This short essay is concerned with twenty-first century Lasallian education – primary, secondary, and tertiary – and with its responsible engagement as part of a techno-savvy, even techno-obsessed society. In order to do that, there are some things that we do not need to consider here, and some things that we do need to consider.

We do not need to consider how quickly technology has transformed our personal and professional worlds. We do not need to consider how technology has been embedded in our daily habits, shaped our locus of preferences, and hijacked our eyes, our face-time, and our peripheral vision. But in order to become effective twenty-first century educators, we can and should consider three things when it comes to technology:

1. *Today's Context*: These include some of the observations of contemporary writers about technology's impact on life, on relationships, on society.
2. *Today's Perspective*: These will primarily be insights from a philosopher who specializes in the topic of technology and today's society.
3. *Today's Practices*: These are some things that come out of our own deeply rooted Lasallian educational tradition, things that have stood the test of time and will do so well into the twenty-first century and beyond.

Today's Context

While we reap amazing benefits from technology in terms of connection, efficiency, and information, we are also in a situation similar to the famous frog in a pan of water on an active stove-burner. Contemporary technology carries with it an ever-warmer daze that may easily make us blissfully unaware of its potential to boil away relationships, empathy, and genuine human formation. Our digital paradigm

is so pervasive that we are largely blind to the ways that it influences the way we experience our world.³

But such apparent blindness is actually something that is not altogether opaque to our sensibilities. People around us are beginning to articulate the slightly worrying notion that something is not right with how technology seems to be creeping into all the places and spaces of

our lives, like some questionable chemical soaking into the sponge of our lives. As David Brooks, *The New York Times* columnist has written, with today's social media

You can have a day of happy touch points without any of the scary revelations, or the boring, awkward or uncontrollable moments that constitute actual intimacy . . . Being online isn't just something we do. It has become who we are, transforming the very nature of the self.⁴

An essay by Andrew Sullivan with the title "I Used to Be a Human Being" summarizes the experience well. This is what he writes:

By rapidly substituting virtual reality for reality, we are diminishing the scope of [intimate] interaction even as we multiply the number of people with whom we interact. We remove or drastically filter all the information we might get by [actually] being with another person. We reduce them to some outlines – a Facebook "friend," an Instagram photo, a text message – in a controlled and sequestered world that exists largely free of the sudden eruptions or encumbrances of actual human interaction. We become . . . efficient shadows of ourselves.⁵

David Brooks says in his commentary that social media encourages social multitasking.

You're with the people you're with, but you're also monitoring the six billion people who might be communicating something more interesting from far away. It flattens the range of emotional experiences.

Social media cannot make that same claim – yet. He concludes that online

every moment is fun and diverting, but the whole thing is profoundly unsatisfying. I guess [he says] a modern version of heroism is . . . regaining control of social impulses, saying no to a thousand shallow contacts for the sake of a few daring plunges.⁶

Lasallian Partners, Brothers, students, and parents all swim in the waters of technology, just like billions of people around the world. The way that they use those technologies, and the way those technologies shape or structure their attention, are as varied as the backgrounds, habits, priorities, and friends or acquaintances that each of them has. The technological component is now an irreversible, irresistible, constituent aspect of any education or formation context, whether Lasallian or otherwise.

Mary Hess, a Catholic theologian whose specialty is technology, points out two helpful things.

[P]opular media structure most of our forms of attention in ways that we barely even notice anymore.

And

Digital technologies can certainly be extraordinarily useful in expanding access to our learning programs, but only if we implement them in ways that follow from our goals, not that drive them.⁷

I find these insights to be very important. This is because digital technologies are not fully benign. Just like the invention of the light bulb, or solar-powered lights, the item itself may be inert, but its effect is socially and personally transformative, in either positive or negative ways. These inventions may have allowed people to read longer, speak to one another longer, feel more safe, and provide for more flexible work hours; but they also enabled employers to demand longer work times, led to a lack of sufficient sleep, and introduced new night-time entertainments of questionable value. If such technological innovations are not directly attached to clear, limited goals, then anything can happen, and usually does happen.

When applied to an educational context, especially a Lasallian Catholic educational context, an awareness and an integration of those “goals” are even more essential, because some of these goals necessarily deal with a unique kind of knowledge, that of the Gospel, which sociologist Peter Berger has called a “cosmic redefinition of reality.” Another sociologist, Parker Palmer helps us situate the unique kind of knowledge that deals with faith traditions, specifically the faith of Christianity. Transcendence is not an exclusively objective form of knowledge.

Palmer writes that in Jesus, God “. . . was announcing and incarnating a new understanding of reality and our relation to it. Truth . . . is personal, to be known in personal relationships” and we must “. . . allow love to inform the relations that our knowledge creates”⁸ “Truth is not a statement about reality but a living relationship between ourselves and the world” and teaching is “an invitation into personal relationship with reality.”⁹ Adopting such a viewpoint would radically alter the way in which we teach, because, as he says elsewhere, what happens is that “. . . our epistemology is quietly transformed into our ethic.”¹⁰ In other words, what we believe becomes what we do.

This echoes something that Jordan Peterson, a popular modern philosopher, says:

the great myths and religious stories of the past, particularly those derived from an earlier, oral tradition, were moral in their intent, rather than descriptive . . . [They concern themselves] with how a human being should act.¹¹

And so a pervasive technological environment brings implications for how we understand, or come to understand, knowledge, learning, and teaching, and subsequently how we do all that. Therefore, this deserves careful initial attention and ongoing vigilance, especially if we intend to pursue specific goals and not have such goals driven for us by the sheer weight and momentum of technology’s reach; to allow technology to hijack our attention, our epistemology (how we think), and our ethic (how we act).

As Lasallian educators, we bring Gospel value to our relationships with our students. The truth of Jesus Christ is personal and known in personal relationships and in community. In the words of Anthony Spadaro, Christianity is fundamentally a communicative event. The Church both *announces a message* and *engages in relationships of communion*. Therefore, the internet

is not a new means of evangelization but is, above all, a context to which the faith is called to express itself . . . [within] . . . the lives of human beings.¹²

However (and it's a big however), the sacred is not an online search away. Google's search algorithm does not include transcendent realities. And the Gospel is not simply one piece of news among many. It attempts to answer humanity's questions by the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is *meant to be* countercultural on many levels, including the culture of technology. Pope Francis put it into a nutshell: "There are no sacraments on the internet."

And so the goals that we pursue as twenty-first century educators, and the way that today's technology supports, serves, or subverts those goals, all come from a very specific understanding of what we are all about. This is our context.

Today's Perspective

One of the most articulate voices on the topic of technology and society is Albert Borgmann, a philosopher professor at the University of Montana. I was exposed to his writings through Richard Gaillardetz, a systematic theologian at Boston College, who wrote a thought-provoking small book called *Transforming Our Days*. In that book, he shows how technology can and does make it difficult to cultivate an authentic Christian spirituality. He wrote the book because he noticed that each of his four sons had a different "take" on technology, depending on their age, with resulting different perspectives on things. And, being a systematic theologian, he wanted to know what was going on here. He found Albert Borgmann, who already back in 1987 had written a book called *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*.¹³ Among writers on the topic, Borgmann was among the best. For me also, he has provided a perspective that I find very compelling, and more importantly, profoundly accurate.

Borgmann says that for us today, technology operates as a pervasive set of influences about which we are largely blind. It is a largely unrecognized paradigm, which he defines as

a consistent and patterned framework in and through which people encounter their world.¹⁴

The best way to get a handle on how this paradigm operates among us is to look at specific kinds of experiences and the radically different ways that they are an experience. One set of experiences he calls "focal things," ones that involve "focal practices;" and the other set of experiences he centers around the word "devices." These involve little or absolutely no "focal practices" and are encountered more like commodities – specific results or goods that simply are what they are. The best way to get a sense of each is to look at a couple of examples.

Think of what a fire or wood-burning stove was all about in a pre-modern home. It was a place for heat, certainly. But it was also a gathering place for the family, for stories and conversation, for companionship and relaxation. In most houses, the kitchen – where the fire was – was the place where the family gathered the most; where they relaxed and talked and ate. But you needed

somebody who knew how to build the fire, who went out to cut the wood, who kept it going, who became the family expert. And the fire determined rhythms of life; who did what chores, when to eat, when to come together. People were tutored about fires, about wood; and all sorts of relationships were fostered around that one fire. Here, the fire was a “focal thing.” It’s much more than simply heat. It’s the kind of thing where the context and the good that is sought and produced, directly and implicitly, are inseparable.

This is an important point so I’ll say it again. A “focal thing” is the kind of thing where the context and the good that is sought and produced are inseparable. There are all sorts of other very subtle “goods” and benefits that go way beyond simply the heat that is produced by the fire. There is a whole complex world of what he calls “manifold engagement,” a multi-textured, multilayered web of relationships within the much larger world than simply a person and a fire. A focal thing, such as the fire in this case, demands engagement with others on all sorts of levels; and the richness of the whole experience makes it a much more “eloquent reality” than is achieved by the simple production of heat.

Another example is food and the preparation of a meal. Whether large or small, a meal requires going out to shop; knowing how to pick out the best fish or veggies or fruit; gathering the pots and pans and tools and spices called for by the recipe; spending the time cutting, chopping, marinating, kneading, or waiting; getting the dishes and setting up the table; thinking about the environment or context; and cleaning up afterwards. Everyone in the family or group may be involved in any of those activities. Lots of time and energy are invested for the relatively short time of leisurely family enjoyment and conversation that is the dinner itself. And the whole thing is certainly not only about the food, about getting fed. In Gaillardetz’s words,

Meals such as these are “focal” because in diverse ways they gather our attention and hold us in patterns of meaningful engagement with others and with the fruit of the earth.¹⁵

Specific skills are involved, limits are encountered – even problems, and the world outside is engaged in many different ways – some obvious, some subtle.

The web of interactions, relationships, and requirements that are part of a focal thing are inseparable from its value. Focal things call for, and come about, because of focal practices, a wide range of activities that we must engage in in order to obtain a desired good. With focal practices, which lead to the eloquent realities that are focal things, the goods, the benefits, the results that we desire are *internal to the practice*. They cannot be separated from it. If you take out the practices, the desired goods – especially the ones that we don’t readily recognize – disappear. The center cannot hold. It’s no longer a “focal thing”; and something else takes its place, something that is more like a commodity than a rich experience.

With the rise of technology, we have developed things that may have formerly been a focal thing but today have been experientially flattened out into single, one-dimensional, strictly functional reality. They are sought and obtained simply, directly, and without human texture or depth, usually comes through a device, and may themselves be thought of more as a device, rather than a focal thing, an eloquent reality. They function more as commodities, coming from something that has no other relationship with the good or service beyond efficiently producing it. Following

our examples, a “device” that takes the place of a fire is the wall thermostat; and a “device” that takes the place of a prepared meal is a microwaved dish. Each requires little skill to get the immediately desired results (heat in the one case, food in the other), involves no web of relationships, no learned talents, minimal time engagement, and no other people.

The microwave achieves a proximate good that has a single purpose (efficient heating) and does that very well and quickly. We don’t know how a microwave works, and we don’t care. Just do the job and give me warm food. If it breaks, I’ll just get another one. It works in the background. It’s well concealed. Borgmann says that something that is a “device” actually functions best when it’s completely unnoticed. It “disburdens” us; no longer intrudes on our lives like creating a meal from scratch might intrude on our lives.

Focal practices require maintenance, while devices discourage maintenance. Focal practices are time-consuming, could actually be boring, and involve a lot of different sorts of engagements, while devices are fast, somewhat flashy, and do one thing really well. Focal practices involve a web of relationships and activities, while devices generally are single-person centered and involve just one actual, real activity (usually involving just the eyes and the fingers).

There is not enough time to pursue the realities surrounding today’s social media: internet addictions, and screen-dominance in people’s lives, along with their implications for social interaction, relationship-building, empathy development, and personal maturity. I’ll end this section with the concluding statement that Gaillardetz makes in his book about focal practices and device practices. His analysis

suggests the importance of preserving practices of human engagement with one another and with the larger world. When goods are reduced to commodities and procured for enjoyment in ways that do not demand or even allow for real engagement with our world, the paradoxical result is a decreased capacity for enjoyment.¹⁶

Before leaving this section, however, it’s important to point out that technology can and does provide a huge amount of benefits for the world and for ourselves. Who wants to go back to the time before washing machines, for example? And there’s nothing sinful about having microwaved popcorn, is there? There are also real indications that younger people today are quite aware of the limits of technology; and they actively seek focal practices, eloquent realities, multi-faceted interpersonal experiences. Just recently, I saw this story in *Popular Mechanics*¹⁷ about the growth of new craftsman (creating furniture, boats, bike-frames, etc.). One story was about people interested in spending two days with others in a Brooklyn smithy in order to learn how to make a really good knife.¹⁸ People are seeking out and paying for focal experiences that once might have been part of the normal course of daily life. We hunger for something that seems to be missing.

Today’s Practices

So what could Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the educational movement he founded contribute to this conversation? Why should anything Lasallian make a difference for the twenty-first century educator?

A story was told about Anna, an elderly lady in San Francisco, who as a little girl had experienced the 1906 earthquake there. When she came to a third grade class to speak about her recollections, there was a time for questions afterwards. But whatever she was asked about –her early traveling, entertainment, toys – she had to answer that there were no cars, radios, televisions, electronic toys, etc. when she was a little girl. Finally, one little boy asked, “Anna, is there anything the same now as it was when you were our age?” She looked around, thought a little, and said, “Well, the classroom is still pretty much the same.”

John Baptist de La Salle may not be around today; but his writings and living charism carry forward the core educational convictions, perceptions, and practices that animate all Lasallian institutions. The Lasallian teaching encounter today is, also, still pretty much the same as when he and others developed and applied those elements that came to be consistently considered as essential. How might they be applied anew today?

Five specific elements in De La Salle’s approach are worth bringing forward. They are drawn from classroom contexts; but they are applicable to educational situations that all of us encounter on a daily basis, with or without technology.

Individualized Attention

In today’s Gospel, Jesus Christ compares those who have charge of souls to a good shepherd who has great care for the sheep. One quality he must possess, according to our Savior, is to know each one of them individually. This ought, also, to be one of the main concerns of those who instruct others: to be able to understand their students and to discern the right way to guide them.¹⁹

De La Salle uses the metaphor of the good shepherd to describe how Lasallian teachers should approach their students, specifically by knowing them individually. Some need more attention, others need patience and encouragement, and so on. In order to do this well, one must pray for the gift of discernment, he says, which takes time, attention, conversations, and collaboration. In an educational environment inundated with technological requirements, requests, and relationships, it is not only easy to avoid such individual attention and care, it may often become the norm to do so, or to claim that we simply don’t have the time to give this kind of individualized attention, by which I mean face-time, not efficient email responses.²⁰

To Introduce: In a conversation, obtain a “digital profile” for each person with whom you work – favorite websites, preferred means of interacting online, social media profiles, etc.

To Enhance: Send those with whom you work links to articles, websites, videos, etc. in areas that you know are part of their interest, whether directly related to formation or not.

The Integration of Faith & Zeal

The spirit of this Institute is first a spirit of faith which should lead those who belong to it to look upon nothing except with the eyes of faith, to do nothing except in view of God

and to attribute all to God . . . Secondly, the spirit of this Institute consists in an ardent zeal for the instruction of children and for bringing them up in the fear²¹ of God²²

The spirit of faith looks through, within, behind, and around things, seeking their deeper dimensions, evoking wonder, mystery, and new relationships. Faith is lived out, practiced, and realized in our expressed zeal for education. This dual spirit of faith and zeal invites us to uncover the depth structures of things, by way of today's technology, enabling students to discover grander and deeper dimensions of what is studied, and facilitating a personally-driven engagement with the subject matter. This is as true of mathematics as it is of Scripture or history, of chemistry or of literature, philosophy, and theology. *In that process of engaging those deeper dimensions*, the capacity for understanding, for wonder, and for the transcendent is widened and stretched. As the Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe once wrote: "As we engage a mystery, it increases our capacity for understanding it." Along the way, there are many opportunities to foster the development of discernment skills and even simple internet politeness skills. The two habitual partners of faith and zeal in the one educational endeavor equip us to also integrate technology opportunities and educational opportunities.

To Introduce: Recommend websites that engage the visitor to enter into and more deeply develop an understanding of specific topics or areas of study. Include verbal reports, discussions, and the sharing of digital resources.

To Enhance: Invite remote individuals or groups to join your discussion via Skype, Zoom, or similar "live" means, providing appropriate prior readings or topic materials.

Personal Example

Example makes a much greater impression on the mind and heart than words. This is especially true of children . . . They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than to carry out what they hear told to them, particularly when the words they hear are not in harmony with the actions they see.²³

Education happens through genuine personal relationships. Technology is indifferent to personal relationships and may seduce us toward seemingly equivalent substitutes. If education and technology are to be integrated, they will do so via the dynamics of personal relationships. And one of the dynamics that is most powerful is that of personal example. This means that how teachers and friends *actually use technology*, both personally and professionally, may be teaching more than what they are teaching *through technology* – the teacher who is wedded to his or her cell phone, who spends more time looking at a screen than at the students, who can't wait for class to end so that they can check their social media accounts.

The first question for the use of technology in most settings should be: will this enhance what I'm trying to accomplish, or not? If not, then it may simply be in the way and a stumbling block to the ends that we are called to pursue. All of us should occasionally review how we use technology – a media-use inventory – ideally with the help of others, so that we can be sure we are using it for the benefit of others and not as an excuse to benefit ourselves.²⁴

To Introduce: Like De La Salle did, write down “Rules I Have Imposed on Myself”²⁵ in terms of your personal use of technology.

To Enhance: Ask a good friend, relative, or colleague who knows you well to give you some feedback about your use of personal technology, and then decide the better course ahead.

Practical Orientation

It is, then, not enough to procure for children the Christian spirit and teach them the mysteries and doctrines of our religion. You must also teach them the practical maxims that are found throughout the holy Gospel.²⁶

De La Salle told his Brothers that it wasn’t enough to only teach students the content of the faith, of the Gospel, but also the practical directions and principles that are found in the Gospel.²⁷

The practical curricular elements in the schools that he introduced (learning to read in French first, practicing writing by copying contracts, using real-world arithmetic examples, and so on) . . . these have their parallels in the integration of technology in our educational milieu today. Technology is essentially a practical reality; there is no “spirituality of technology” that can stand on its own. Technology is a spirituality sponge, absorbing how and what it does from those whom it touches. The kind of communication involved in education is essentially personal communication, communication that builds from and into relationships. It is those relationships, bringing them into community and finally into communion with Christ, that are our focus and passion. This is who we are and want to be. Technology may be one attractive way of facilitating its development, but it is by no means the only one or the best one. We have a responsibility to help others become aware of technology and its influence, and teach them to develop ways of negotiating its potential and power in their lives.

To Introduce: Search and share apps and online resources that improve positive personal relationships or help develop a better awareness of their potential.

To Enhance: Monitor the use of your smartphone, alone or with others, using an app such as *Moment*; and, then, discuss the results. Include a practical or “practices” component in each formation activity.

Community & Tradition

Union in a community is a precious gem, which is why Our Lord so often recommended it to his apostles before he died. If we lose this, we lose everything. Preserve it with care, therefore, if you want your community to survive.²⁸

It has been well said by others that the decisive innovation of the Founder is that education is conducted within the context of community. If there is one thing that stands out brightly within our Lasallian tradition, it is the precious gem of community. The kind of community we are defines who we are – whether as Brothers, faculty and staff, coaches, volunteers, parents, and

others. It is educational communities that ultimately “shape the practices by which we structure our attention.”²⁹ Community is the engine that powers the charism forward. In order to be sustained, to be maintained like a wood-burning fire, community requires certain “focal practices.” The risk with some popular manifestations of technology is that, as a perhaps unintentional side effect, community dissipates through slow attrition. It is gradually transferred to a virtual platform, one that draws its essential life from somewhere else, somewhere less engaged, somewhere less risky or demanding. Just in the Brothers context, and borrowing a thought from Mary Hess, a community with five members and one television will have a different community dynamic than a community with five members and six televisions. Although today, the analogy might be better applied to personal laptops and iPads.

I hasten to add that we could have a virtual Lasallian community that is positive and helpful, as indeed exists on Facebook and other platforms, one that maintains a welcome form of our Lasallian connections, even if these are weaker and less embodied. The important thing is not to mistake the benefits of a virtual community with the dynamic immediacy of a real one. Our Lasallian community is the carrier for our Lasallian tradition. If others are to grow into what they learn from our tradition, there must be occasions when that form of enfolded community exists on a regular basis. Our individual vocational journeys depend on it. Technology’s benefits may be in service to that goal, but it will never be a substitute for it.

To Introduce: Demonstrate the diversity of the Lasallian world online, plus the variety of resources that are available via Institute, Regional, and District websites.

To Enhance: Brainstorm with a Lasallian group the various ways that technology might be used to build and support this particular community, and monitor its progress as different means are pursued.

Sensible Cautions & Suggestions

Here are some cautions, skills and recommended practices in the area of education and today’s technologies. The caution centers around internet addictions, and the suggestions around conversation, discernment, awareness, silence, and hobbies.

The major area of caution will be very familiar to everyone. Adam Alter, who has studied internet use extensively, writes in a recent book that

the environment and circumstance of the digital age are far more conducive to addiction than anything humans have experienced in history.³⁰

That’s a big claim. But it is supported by the simple example of Facebook, which currently has 1.86 billion active users who spend an average of twenty minutes for each visit, scrolling through posts that *are designed* to keep you hungry for the next entry, the next person, the next click-through. While appreciated by those who use the service to stay in touch with family and close friends, for those who make as many as possible so-called “friends” (a misnomer if ever there was one), it is a bottomless well of essentially weak relationality. For some people, Facebook or Snapchat may easily become a habit that perfectly fits the definition of an addiction. During the

course of the last five years, multiplayer online games (almost all of them focused on battles of one kind or another) such as *Worlds of Warcraft*, *League of Legends*, and *Fortnite*, have each garnered over 100 million subscribers worldwide. Adam Alter calls such virtual gaming one of the most addictive behavioral experiences on the planet. Along with email addiction and pornography addiction,

one recent study suggested that up to 40 percent of the population suffers from some form of internet-based addiction.³¹

I am assuming that this forty percent refers to the group of all those who have internet access. Whatever the numbers, we do not need to let those facts prevent us from engaging technology for positive purposes. It is all the more reason to provide our students, and others, with the tools that will help them understand, discern, and cultivate practices with new technologies that promote and support positive Lasallian goals. A caution may be given when positive results are desired and possible, and that is the case here.

There are also developed skills and habits that actively resist the possible negative influences of new technologies. They are “live” sorts of ongoing focal practices.

Conversation

One of the essential skills that deserves to be promoted is the simple practice of conversation. Sherry Turkle points out that conversation cures. It reclaims our attention. Conversations become graced opportunities for growing genuine relationships. She writes,

Conversation implies something kinetic . . . To converse, you don't just have to perform turn taking, you have to listen to someone else, to read their body, their voice, their tone, and their silences. You bring your concern and experience to bear, and you expect the same from the other.³²

Such conversations in educational contexts may be deliberate, circumstantial, casual, or pre-planned. But they are where God's providence becomes immediate and real. If De La Salle's life was profoundly shaped by the conversations that he had, we could hardly object to doing the same ourselves.

Discernment

Another essential skill has been mentioned already. It is the skill of discernment, the ability to tell the differences between people, perspectives, influences, situations, and the like. In the present context, it is the ability to tell the difference between various technologies and media, which ones are more or less likely to be helpful, healthy, or positive, and why. This skill requires both training and monitoring. It is a topic that should be a key element in any education program. Without such discernment skills, the steering wheel for making good choices is untouched, and we go wherever the road might lead.

Awareness

Then there is simply the responsibility to remain aware of what new technologies are being developed or are popular. Reading articles and stories about new technologies is a prerequisite for being informed and able to make good choices and good education programs.

Silence

The cultivation of silence is something with which most of us are already very familiar. However, it is less common to find an appreciation for silence in technologically-rich settings. About ten years ago, I was in Rome and had a chance to briefly speak with Cardinal Carlo Martini, an elderly archbishop best known for how well he connected with young people all of his life. I asked him how best to help young people discover their vocation in life. He thought for a minute and said,

Brother, there are two things. Give them an experience of silence, and help them open up Scripture for themselves. The Holy Spirit will take care of the rest.

Wise words that I have reflected on frequently. God's presence will become all the more accessible as silence becomes the foundation for our conversations. With today's technology, it is very difficult to mistake noise for something else when coming from a place of silence.

Hobbies

Lastly, one suggestion is simply the pursuit of a non-technology-related hobby or interest. Taking on a hobby or interest that is personally rewarding reorients a person's perspective, especially if it is something that must be done slowly, at its own pace, that is difficult but manageable, and that is personally rewarding. It slows down our attention, counterbalances the ease of finding solutions to things online – whether informational or emotionally satisfying – and draws us out from our deeper selves and into the community of interest in which we partake. Such practices also introduce us to other dimensions of life, other people, and other realities where God yet dwells.

Conclusion

So, finally, we reach the conclusion. I hope that you will have come to realize that when we are dealing with the twenty-first century Lasallian educator and new information and communication technologies, the operative word is “may.” All these new technologies, which will certainly become more compelling, inviting, and even helpful during the years ahead, *may* support, enhance, and carry forward education . . . or they *may not*. We need to pay attention when Silicon Valley executives send their kids to Waldorf schools, where they use zero technology,³³ when articles regularly appear that feature young people dealing with their technology addictions,³⁴ when writers question the future of college education.³⁵ We can only benefit from the input of both philosophers like Albert Borgmann and visionary educators like De La Salle, because they will inform our decisions and structure our habits, our priorities, and our attention.

I have always liked the way that Brother John Johnston, FSC,³⁶ described the Lasallian vocation. He said that the Lasallian vocation was

to make the loving and saving presence of Christ a visible and effective reality in the world of education and among the young.³⁷

This is a vocation that deserves our best efforts, using whatever resources and methodologies are available to us.³⁸ New technologies are a potentially powerful asset in facilitating genuine conversations with the Lasallian tradition and with the larger Church.

The practices that emerge from our best appropriation of our own tradition structure the boundaries within which education takes place. Technology may be a flashy, popular, and demanding voice for our attention today, but it is by no means the most important or finally the most attractive. For Christians and Lasallians, Jesus Christ and the student deserve more attention than the voices of technology should ever demand. We must shape that attention intentionally rather than have it shaped for us unintentionally.

Genuine Lasallian education emerges through relationships, through conversations, and through community experiences that grow out of what we have learned from our Lasallian Catholic tradition. If we do so with well-informed discernment and with courageous decisions in favor of our students, then we may confidently send out the following piece of De La Salle's advice as a tweet or a text message today:

Be satisfied with what you can do, since this satisfies God. But do not spare yourself in what you can do with the help of grace. Be convinced that, provided you are willing, you can do more with the help of God's grace than you imagine.³⁹

Endnotes

1. The genesis of this essay was a presentation made on 24 April 2018 during "De La Salle Week" at Saint Mary's College in Moraga, CA.

2. Brother George Van Grieken, FSC, is a frequent presenter and facilitator at the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies and the Brother John Johnston Institute of Contemporary Lasallian Practice. He holds a PhD in Religion and Education from Boston College and has given board and staff workshops on Lasallian themes in the Philippines, Australia, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. Brother George currently serves as the director of the Lasallian Resource Center in Napa, CA.

3. Richard Gaillardetz, *Transforming Our Days: Finding God Amid the Noise of Modern Life* (Ligouri Publications, 2007), page 6ff.

4. David Brooks, "Intimacy for the Avoidant" in *The New York Times*, 7 October 2016. [Retrieved from <https://nyti.ms/2JZ69Zv>].

5. Andrew Sullivan, "I Used to Be a Human Being" in *New York Magazine*, 19 September 2016. [Retrieved from <https://slct.al/2JcNvMK>].
6. Brooks, "Intimacy for the Avoidant."
7. Mary E. Hess, "Engaging Technology" in *Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).
8. Parker Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), page 49.
9. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*, page 47.
10. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*, page 21.
11. Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life* (Canada: Random House, 2018), page xxvii.
12. Anthony Spadaro & Maria Way, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pages 7-8.
13. Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).
14. Gaillardetz, *Transforming Our Days*, page 6.
15. Gaillardetz, *Transforming Our Days*, page 4.
16. Gaillardetz, *Transforming Our Days*, page 8.
17. A focal-practices-based magazine, in my opinion.
18. Cf. *Popular Mechanics*, April 2018.
19. Meditation #33.1 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, translated by Brother Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Brother Augustine Loes, FSC and edited by Brother Augustine Loes, FSC and Brother Francis Huether, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1994).
20. Some deliberate healthy practices coming from this principle might include spending more time conversing with students than emailing them; having genuine and frequent eye contact in classrooms; and noticing which students and friends get lost in technology, or which ones don't get engaged with technology at all. You get the idea.
21. This word "fear" might be better translated in its original Hebrew meaning of "awe," especially in an educational setting, as further explained by Abraham Joshua Heschel. "Awe is an intuition for the dignity of all things, a realization that things not only are what they are but also stand, however remotely, for something supreme. Awe is a sense of transcendence, for the

mystery beyond all things. It enables us to perceive in world intimations of the divine, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple: to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal. What we cannot comprehend by analysis, we become aware of in awe” [Abraham J. Heschel, *Who is Man* (Stanford University Press, 1965)].

22. John Baptist de La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents*, translated and edited by Brother Augustine Loes, FSC and Ronald Isetti (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), pages 16, 18.

23. Meditation #202.3 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (1994).

24. There is a story that illustrates the point. A little boy kept bothering his mother, asking her to listen to him while she was perpetually distracted by her smart phone. She would smile and say that she was listening, and she may even have been listening, but she looked mostly at her phone. More was required. Finally, the little boy said, “Mommy, Mommy, please listen to me; but this time with your eyes.”

25. Cf. De La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents* (2002), pages 199-202.

26. Meditation #196.2 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (1994).

27. Meditation #196.2 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (1994).

28. Meditation #91.2 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (1994).

29. Mary E. Hess, “Engaging Technology,” page 17.

30. Adam L. Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), page 4.

31. Alter, 2017, *Irresistible*, page 26.

32. Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), page 45.

33. Matt Richtel, “A Silicon Valley School That Doesn’t Compute” in *The New York Times*, 2 October 2011.

34. Bianca Bosker, “The Binge Breaker” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 2016 [Retrieved from <https://theatl.in.tc/2HxJyVt>].

35. Kevin Carey, *The End of College: Creating the Future of Learning and the University of Everywhere* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2015).

36. The late Brother John Johnston, FSC, was superior general (1986-2000) and vicar general (1976-1986) of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

37. Cf. John Johnston, FSC, *Pastoral Letter: Representing Jesus Christ Himself* (Rome, 1990).

38. A few other resources that influenced the articulation of ideas shared in this essay are the following: Ross Douthat, “Resist the Internet” in *The New York Times*, 11 March 2017 [Retrieved from <https://nyti.ms/2JZ69Zv>]; Claudia Dreifus, “Why We Can’t Look Away from Our Screens” in *The New York Times*, 6 March 2017 [Retrieved from <https://nyti.ms/2HdnGzr>]; Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America’s Nones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012); Vigen Guroian, “Restoring the Senses: Gardening and Orthodox Easter,” taken from Krista Tippett’s *On Being* podcast [Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2qJOuNq>]; James Nuechterlein, “Remembering Peter Berger” in *First Things*, October 2017 [Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2HKC5A8>]; Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Allen St. John, “DIY Underground: America’s Hidden Communities of Craftsmen” in *Popular Mechanics*, 19 May 2011 [Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2F0ofqt>]; and Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age* (Collegeville, MN : Liturgical Press, 2014).

39. John Baptist de La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, translated by Brother William J. Battersby, FSC and edited by Brother Daniel Burke, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993), page 80.