Association and Advocacy

Specifically, the acts of collaboration and mutual respect embedded in *association* are responses to my upbringing and identity development. Growing up in Chicago, I have dealt directly with the oppressive forces of institutional racism and a city on a mission to gentrify. But more importantly, I have witnessed and participated in my share of social movements, protests, and marches. When I was just a teenager, I began working with children as a nanny and teacher's assistant. Over the decades, I have taught a variety of students: from middle school, to college freshmen, to high school push-outs working toward their GED, to teachers in Guatemala, and to doctoral students. Each of these experiences is rooted in *association*. With every teaching position, I consider what I learned from and with my students and all the colleagues who took me under their wing and offered unwavering support and mentoring. Furthermore, the aspect of mutual respect has been woven throughout my experiences. With constant struggle, mutual respect is a must. In the literature of social movements, it is clear that the victories cannot be achieved in isolation. Instead, the people have to value humanity and see the need to collaborate authentically and work in *association*.

Throughout these lived experiences of teaching and learning, one constant has been my advocacy for *social justice* pushing up against restrictive educational policies that aim to maintain the status quo. Being an educator within these multitudes of contexts both in Chicago and in Philadelphia, I was and am continuously resisting the master narratives that use education as a vehicle to maintain inequities in education. Instead, I work from a space rooted in possibility and liberation. About 20 years ago, I began developing my teaching identity as scholar-activist; and I hope to stay on this journey throughout my personal and professional life. This socio-historical context informs my teaching trajectory. Currently, as an associate professor at a Lasallian university, I believe each of those previous experiences has prepared me for the work I do today.

International Association

In June 2018, I attended a Lasallian international institute in Bogotá, Colombia, where my co-presenters (Dr. Jung Kim and Mr. Michael Dieter) and I worked together to analyze our coursework as Lasallian educators to reflect and intertwine with our stance as critical educators. In our proposal abstract we stated:

> Two teacher educators and a secondary teacher (all Lasallian schools) will share their experience teaching and implementing a critical literacy framework in their respective classrooms. The secondary social studies teacher is also a doctoral student who took coursework with both teacher educators – one an education foundations professor and the other a literacy professor. These two different perspectives on critical literacy – one grounded more in broader curriculum theory and the other in reading and literacy research – allowed the teacher to approach teaching critical literacy through Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in a multi-layered approach that addressed both the conceptual and technical needs of grappling with the text. All three educators will share the kinds of work they do in their classrooms, with a particular focus on the ways in which the high school and university students responded to Freire.

This was a pivotal moment in my career as a Lasallian scholar because I was able to be in *association* and meet and build with other Latinx Spanish-speaking Lasallian teachers and professors. This is rare for me at Lewis University, as we only have a total of 7 Latinx faculty. We are spread all over campus in various departments, and the dominant language is English. However, in Bogotá, I was affirmed as a Spanish-speaking Lasallian scholar. Hearing so many brilliant scholars from all over the globe – but mostly Central and South America – was an empowering moment for me. After this experience, I have felt much more rooted in my Lasallian identity; and I am applying to teach a summer course at *Universidad de La Salle* in Bogotá, where the institute in summer 2018 was held.

Knowledge

According to our Lewis University mission and values statements, *knowledge* is "the result of a lifelong pursuit of learning fostered through creative and critical interaction in a community of learners" (Lewis University, 2018). In what follows, I offer a reflection on and describe personal and professional changes in view as a result of the 2018 Racial Justice Colloquy in Baltimore. The Colloquy was an invaluable experience that has impacted, and continues to impact, how I teach students, approach community members, and think about our world. Among my favorite takeaways from the Colloquy include the critical interaction with others to talk through my own challenges. There were several small group discussions throughout the Colloquy that provided food for thought. Specifically, one of the first discussion questions for the group was to think about what experiences led up to why I wanted to be at the Colloquy. This question was both a challenge and a gift to me; it enabled me to be able to begin to process a recent experience with a patient whose complex social situation prevented them from seeking the health care needed. Of course, there was more to the situation; but to protect patient privacy, I will leave it at that. This patient experience had a profound impact on me, bringing to life what you only read about in textbooks. It challenged me to focus on what kind of person I wanted to be and how I saw my role in this world. Never before did I so value formation, appreciate how past experiences shape thought, and allow myself the gift of time for reflection to regain focus. I feel this is a work in progress for me, and I will continue to strive for gaining *knowledge* now through a lens that has been sharpened in and through the Colloquy experience.

For me, being a part of the Lasallian community has completely broadened my view of what *knowledge* is and how it applies in multiple aspects of my life -- as a nurse practitioner, as an educator, as a scholar, and as a human being of Filipino descent. I am the daughter of first-generation immigrant parents who ingrained me in the Filipino culture, being family-focused with traditions embedded with music, art, and religion. Despite this foundation with holistic values, I see that my original view of *knowledge* was quite narrow. *Knowledge* goes beyond reading books and taking tests. It is truly in appreciation with others, seeking a global view within a community that is implicit to a diversity of perspectives, which I now see for me as a way to gain a fuller understanding of *knowledge*.

Knowledge in Teaching

Philosophically, for me, teaching is a type of relationship where the teacher facilitates learning. One way to facilitate learning is to ensure a safe space for students. For implementing engaging

learning activities, such as simulation or role-play, it is critical to "set the stage" in the classroom or lab with a space where students feel comfortable, respected, and their voices valued. To do this, we intentionally and critically review our university mission statement and values together. We reaffirm our Sanctified Zone statement that, though we are at a satellite campus, the Sanctified Zone remains with us regardless of physical location. There is emphasis placed on the critical interactions with others to gain *knowledge*. Everyone in the class is learning, seeking out *knowledge*, and a safe space is required to do this successfully. The learning space needs to be free of judgment and bias to engage fully without fear. This reaffirmation is an enhancement to my teaching approach as a result of our work together at the Colloquy. As a result of this change, students have offered positive feedback on class evaluations stating that they enjoy engaging with others and feel respected by the teacher. In the end, students gain *knowledge* in respecting the diversity of others' viewpoints, helping each other in the learning process, and encouraging each other in fruitful discussions. In a safe space, such as a Sanctified Zone, students are welcomed to share thoughts and ideas. I am convinced that it is through engagement with others that students truly learn with long-lasting impact.

Knowledge in My Discipline as a Nurse Practitioner

From this renewed understanding of *knowledge*, I believe it has helped me evolve my approach to patients and their families to incorporate *knowledge* in every patient encounter. This evolution expands my view beyond books or facts and incorporates key concepts of continual learning in a creative fashion with others. A key concept in gaining *knowledge* is the emphasis on interacting with others. As a nurse practitioner caring for patients, I can confidently say that I gain *knowledge* from my patients every day. I learn from the experiences and information they share with me to help another patient who might be in a similar situation.

In closing this section about *knowledge*, I would like to emphasize that what I have come to believe is key to *knowledge* is its reliance on social interaction with others. For years, I was under the narrow impression that *knowledge* was gained through books and other peer-reviewed publications, or only from experts who use the scientific process. While this approach addresses one piece of gaining *knowledge*, I have come to understand--post-Colloquy-- that *knowledge* is richer, deeper, and more fully appreciated when fostered through critical interaction in a community of diverse perspectives.

Fidelity

Fidelity as defined by Lewis University is

> the spirit which recognizes God as ultimate reality, unifying the diverse forms of knowledge in the pursuit of fullness of truth, while recognizing the diversity of human experience.

Upon initial glance and based on practical experiences, this statement seems to consist of contradictory appeals. When considering diverse forms of knowledge and recognizing the diversity of human experience, the fullness of truth does not include the opinion or, in some cases, the lifestyle of the "other." Perhaps there is an ultimate truth that somehow allows all of

God's children to live in harmony with each other. However, one has to wonder if our sense of oneness can overcome the reality of divisiveness. As I heard in one conference, this would take a radical humility and overwhelming sense of oneness. It is living these characteristics that may lead us to put God, and not the devil, in the details. Ironically, this saying started off that way historically; that God is in the details, not the devil. Unfortunately, in practice we tend to lose our way in our pursuit of the fullness of truth when we forget to treat each other as children of God, which makes us all brothers and sisters. However, I do believe if we prioritize our humanity above creating our own sense of *fidelity*, true *fidelity* can be achieved – or at least our journey toward it will be righteous. As *1 John* 3:18 says, "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

As a professor in healthcare management in the college of business, it is challenging to show the connection between business practice and current social issues. During these times, I think back, for guidance, to my former role as a mercy and justice pastor of a nondenominational church. Reflecting on the following account has helped me to better understand *fidelity* within my classroom.

"The Devil Is in the Details"

As I was recalling one of the most difficult experiences in my role as a mercy and justice pastor at a multi-denominational church, which consisted of those with all types of religious and ethnic backgrounds including Catholic, Jewish, Baptist, Methodist, and others, , something a coworker said to me resurfaced. She used a common phrase used by many people in all kinds of situations saying, "The devil is in the details." In this case, the context included a church-splitting issue about same-sex relationships. The isolated detail in this story was a person in the LGBTQ community who was told they could not teach Sunday school. For years, my church had individuals from the LGBTQ community attend church regularly and contribute to the fellowship in myriad ways. For the entire history of the church, there was an unspoken tradition that the issue LGBTQ membership and participation was not discussed. This tradition persisted because of varying opinions regarding same-sex relationships among members of the fellowship. However, one of the founding pastors, after eight years of keeping his opinion silent, changed his stance on the issue and decided that it was important he let the church know about this change of heart.

To address this desire for the pastor to share his thoughts, the leadership of the church decided to meet to plan out the delivery of this news to the congregation. With much discussion from all sides of the issue, it was decided that in order to minimize the distress of the fellowship the founding pastor would share his change of heart about the issue at a congregational meeting. Additionally, another senior and founding pastor would share his thoughts reflecting the other end of the spectrum. The intent was to present both sides of the LGBTQ debate as to reflect the varying beliefs of the members of the fellowship. It is important to note that this fellowship emphasized relationship with one another more than anything else.

When the meeting with the entire fellowship occurred, the first pastor shared his change of heart as planned; and surprisingly, it seemed to go off without a hitch. Then it was the senior pastor's turn to share his thoughts. However, at that time, he deviated from the plan because he felt

sharing an opposing viewpoint at that time would only have created more division. No one knows if the senior pastor not sharing led to less divisiveness: but what did occur was an immediate response from those expecting to hear their side of the issue from the other founding pastor. When they did not hear what they wanted, there were strong reactions with one couple, who had attended the church for 30 years, walking out, never to return. In the ensuing weeks, months, and years, more people began to leave the church due to the unsettled atmosphere formed by this debated issue. People on both sides of the issue felt victimized; and as many left, the friends of those who left followed suit. After the "dust settled," the number of people attending the fellowship was reduced by half with many of those remaining still wavering whether they should stay or not. Today the church is a shadow of itself, consisting only of approximately 20 percent of where it was before the controversy began. Sadly, this is not an uncommon story among churches and even entire denominations.

Taking It to the Classroom

Reflecting on this experience at my church and the value of *fidelity* has helped me to remember the welcoming nature of the Lasallian heritage. All faiths and identities are welcome and invited to participate. We need to cultivate this notion of belonging and actively explore what it means to be Lasallian. "We are all God's Children." I have heard these words spoken in churches for decades of my life. Any person who subscribes to a particular faith would not deny these words, as every religion upholds human life and dignity as unquestionable constants. After all, if God created everything, including human life, how could one deny that we are all God's children?

John Baptist de La Salle created practical solutions to teaching to educate the disenfranchised. For instance, he used common vernacular (French as the language of instruction instead of Latin), separated students according to academic developmental stages, and understood the importance of visual learning (using the blackboard).
Education leads to the freedom of ignorance and development of critical thought. It is no wonder, for example, that those who attempt to rule through dictatorship treat education as an enemy or force to be minimized. De La Salle, it seems to me, recognized that liberation of the oppressed and poor could be achieved, in part, through education. It is my contention that if we can take the same approach for those not oppressed and poor, we would live in a world that accepts one another despite our differences.

Wisdom

The 2018 Racial Justice Colloquy has become the impetus for the four of us to band together to affect meaningful change at our institution related to equity *and racial justice*. Through the final mission pillar of *wisdom*, we integrate our four perspectives to tackle institutional and cultural change related to racial justice on our campus. *Wisdom*, according to the Lewis University mission is the "result of the integration of reflection and action developed through higher learning throughout all of life" (Lewis University, 2018). *Wisdom* through this definition may be understood as a personal and singular endeavor; but considering the other pillars of the university mission, *wisdom* becomes a communal pursuit. For the four of us, it has been through *association* among ourselves and our Lasallian colleagues at other universities that our *wisdom* has grown and evolved. Our positionality has been integral in fostering this growth. It is through

the joining of our histories and blending of our perspectives that we have developed initiatives to extend our experience at the Racial Justice Colloquy to the faculty, administration, and students of Lewis University.

Immediately following our return from the Colloquy our small group was invigorated. We knew that there was much to do to make an impact regarding *racial justice* on our campus, but we now felt that we had partners among ourselves and from the greater Lasallian community. The support we found within this partnership ensured that the momentum started at the Colloquy would continue. For our part, the four of us felt strongly that we needed to share our experiences of the Colloquy with the Lewis University community. We developed initiatives throughout the spring 2018 semester to reinvigorate the conversation on race with faculty and administration. We planned two presentations (1) to inform the community of the work that was done at the Colloquy and (2) to bring a taste of the Colloquy to the faculty. We utilized two well-established institutional events to engage with the faculty. The first – Celebration of Scholarship – is a day-long event dedicated to honoring the scholarship of students and faculty. We used this platform to report the proceedings of the Colloquy and to advertise plans of our group and the larger Lasallian network. The second event we employed – May Institute – is a four-day faculty development event that includes a keynote speaker and various pedagogically focused workshops presented by the faculty.

For our workshop, we felt strongly that the faculty should be given the opportunity to experience the Colloquy in a small way. We modeled the workshop activities after the ones that resonated the most with our group from the Colloquy. These included the use of improvised skits to work through racially charged situations, the sharing of personal stories and positionality, and the discussion of how to promote *racial justice* institutionally and within the classroom. The workshop was well received by the faculty and has helped us to continue to identify *racial justice allies*.

By expanding the discussion of *racial justice* on campus, we are building upon the *association* of our small group of four to incorporate an even wider variety of perspectives. The pillar of *wisdom* encourages this growth and challenges us to continue to expand on it "throughout all of life." This phrase reminds us that our work is not finished. We need to strive to maintain the energy that the 2018 Racial Justice Colloquy inspired in us, and we need to continue to energize others on campus to continue the conversation and make advancements toward change.

A Lasallian Call to Action

Together the four co-authors have assembled to move the work of *racial justice* at Lewis University and within the larger Lasallian community. From the Colloquy, there were several work groups formed to continue to address *social justice* as unified voices among the LACU[7] universities. One of these groups worked on a grant application to the National Endowment of the Humanities to secure financial support and resources for continuing the annual Colloquy while enhancing its offerings and expanding its impact. Furthermore, some of our goals for 2019 include publishing this article in the special issue of *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education*, as well as presenting this joint auto-ethnography paper at the conference of the National Association of African American Studies and Affiliates in February 2019 as well as the

Celebration of Scholarship at Lewis University in April of 2019. Although each of these scholarly projects is integral to our own professional development, our most important context for the work of *racial justice* is within our classrooms. We strive to embed these values in our day-to-day practice, and we are calling on other Lasallians to reflect on their processes and practices within the work of *racial justice*.

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Endnotes

1. Kristin Callahan, who is an assistant professor of art and design at Lewis University, earned her master's degree in fine arts at Rochester Institute of Technology.

2. Erica R. Dávila, who is a professor of educational leadership at Lewis University, earned her doctorate at the University of Illinois.

3. Daisy Sherry, who is an assistant professor in the college of nursing and health professions at Lewis University, earned her doctorate at the University of Illinois.

4. Jeffrey Trask, who is an associate professor at Lewis University, earned his doctorate in community health at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

5. The Racial Justice Colloquy, a project sponsored by the Lasallian Association of Colleges and Universities (LACU), was organized by Brother Jack Curran, FSC, PhD, of Manhattan College and Brother Ernest Miller, FSC, DMin, of La Salle University.

6. Although this journal usually requires that all citations use the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) format, an exception has been made in this issue to allow citations to be made using the American Psychological Association (APA) format.

7. LACU is an acronym for the Lasallian Association of Colleges and Universities, which is a region of the International Association of La Salle Universities (IALU). There are presently nine colleges and universities that constitute LACU: Christian Brothers University in Tennessee; La Salle University in Pennsylvania; Lewis University in Illinois; Manhattan College in New York; Saint Mary's College in California; Saint Mary's University in Minnesota; Bethlehem University in Palestine; Christ the Teacher School of Education of Tangaza University College in Kenya; and Ethiopia Catholic University La Salle in Ethiopia.