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Envisioning a Lasallian Online Pedagogy: Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher in a Digital Environment

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Lasallian educators are faced with a rapidly changing educational environment as technology becomes a means by which we educate. Online education is seen by some as a "necessary evil" while others embrace its new opportunities. No matter how it is perceived, the reality is that online education will play an ever-increasing role in our educational system. The question is, how do we teach in the online environment while still maintaining our historically rich practices as Lasallian teachers?

This question was posed in a faculty discussion group from which this research stems. The results start to address how we continue to be guided by the Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher in a digital environment. This paper will provide an overview of the history of the virtues in Lasallian contexts, the development of online education, and the results of our study.

Literature Review

Lasallian Pedagogy

Hallmark practices of Lasallian pedagogy are that it is practical, meets students where they are, sets the academic bar high, provides scaffolding to help students rise to the level of excellence, incorporates zeal, and it teaches minds while touching hearts.² Started by John Baptist de La Salle in Rheims, France in 1679, the educational system fostered by the Brothers of the Christian Schools has been marked by strategic, deliberate pedagogy that is responsive to the socio-political context.³ In addition, as noted by Landeros, through the formation of teachers, higher education has been a priority from the beginning of the Institute.⁴

From the outset, a Lasallian pedagogy was unique in the particular combination of teaching strategies, but not necessarily unique in each of the pieces.⁵ In fact, De La Salle incorporated successful strategies from others as the need arose. Thus, the quiet, orderly Lasallian classroom was very different from the standards of the Little Schools and from the chaos in the classrooms of the teaching masters. Additionally, the importance of relationship-building was paramount as evidenced in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, written by De La Salle.⁶ This seminal work described how to teach, what to teach, how to start and end each day, appropriate demeanor for teaching, necessary virtues for teaching, which prayers students should recite and when, how to daily review students and how to record those observations. Throughout, it articulates that teachers (brothers and lay educators) should be brothers and sisters to one another and older siblings to their pupils.

In 1706, John Baptist de La Salle delineated expectations for teachers and pupils in the *Conduct*. Brother Agathon, the fifth Superior General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian

Schools, updated the “principles and maxims” of De La Salle and offered *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Master* (1785), nearly 100 years after the first publication. Throughout the history of the Christian Brothers’ work, the description of *The Twelve Virtues* has been regularly updated to reflect the practice of the day.⁷

Further, De La Salle discussed formation of new teachers from the very beginning. New teachers needed to know their material, cultivate relationships as brothers and sisters of their colleagues and their pupils, practice the virtues of a good teacher, and love teaching.⁸ The method for formation included a description very similar to the twelve virtues necessary for teaching students.

It is this rich history that prompted this research to consider the importance of the twelve virtues in online environments. Similar to Lasallian educators of the past, adaptation to the cultural landscape is essential. However, when one thinks of a “Lasallian educator,” rarely does one think of a person behind a computer interacting with students online. More often, we envision an educator who is fully present, face-to-face with students, participating in and outside the classroom. This “hands on” approach to education is quickly changing with the increase of online education. How then do we reconcile our idyllic picture of the Lasallian educator that of the online educator? More importantly, how do we preserve our core Lasallian traditions while remaining competitive in today’s educational markets?

Online Education

Online education is growing in popularity and demand. According to the 2013 Sloan Survey, over 7.1 million learners took at least one online course during the fall 2012 term. This was a 6.1% increase from the previous year.⁹ The student population in online courses is reportedly increasing, despite a decline in traditional courses. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* projects that, by 2020, there won’t be enough traditional four year students to sustain current universities’ status. It states, “The idyll of four years away from home—spent living and learning and growing into adulthood—will continue to wane. It will still have a place in higher education, but it will be a smaller piece of the overall picture”.¹⁰ The four year degree program is projected to be replaced by three and five year (with a remedial first year) programs. According to the 2012 Sloan Report, “The proportion of chief academic leaders that say that online learning is critical to their long-term strategy is at a new high of 69.1 percent”.¹¹ In 2013, 74% of administrators indicated that online learning outcomes were equivalent or better than face-to-face instructions.¹²

Student expectations for higher education are also changing. This generation of college students is a native to the culture of technology. With the exception of the diminishing but still very real exclusion of the poorest, learners in this generation have never been without access to the information stream of technology. In research conducted by Levine and Dean (2012), the college graduating class of 2012 indicated that, when asked about the events that define their generation, three of the five top six events included technology (World Wide Web, cell phones, and Yahoo!). They continue with this anecdotal example,

When we asked college students how they adapted to the tidal wave of new technology, one explained, ‘It’s only technology if it happened after you were born.’ (At the time, the comment seemed to us a confession of ignorance with the

potential to someday grace the bumper of a car as opposed to a very wise observation.) If the technology exists before you were born, it's a fact of life, a given. The question would be the equivalent of asking their parents or professors how they adapted to the telephone, radio, or automobile. They didn't have to. These things were just there".¹³

It is not surprising then, that students are increasing their participation in online education. In 2012, thirty-two percent of high school students took at least one course online.¹⁴ Those high school students will enter college with an online expectation. This number is only expected to increase. Additionally, students' financial constraints combined with an increasing need for an undergraduate degree to secure a job, creates an urgency for students to complete their education in a cost-effective manner. Therefore, students will need the convenience and flexibility that online and hybrid courses offer. As the Sloan Report explains, "In other words, the product colleges are offering is in greater demand than ever. But impatience over how slowly colleges are changing is perhaps higher than ever, too. This is reflected in significantly higher enrollment levels at community colleges and for-profit colleges".¹⁵

It is apparent that online learning is a secure part of higher education. Learning is, or usually strives to be, central to *all* online curricula in *all* universities. The question, then, is how each university develops its curricula to be unique to that university's mission. Specifically, how does a Catholic university hold true to its traditions within its online education? Although the literature is limited in this area, Gresham suggests that online education can reflect a "divine pedagogy".¹⁶ In a response to Kelsey's (2002) concerns regarding online education in theological education,¹⁷ he articulates that online education can follow the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998). He points out that online education is "adaptive" (pp. 25 – 26) to students' needs, context, culture and learning style.¹⁸ It also creates a learning community and allows for active student participation that can use multi-media information to communicate. He also points out that online education allows opportunities for "divine condescension".¹⁹ He states,

Perhaps, online education might be seen as reflective of a similar 'academic condescension.' The theologian, from her or his lofty ivory tower with its time honored traditions of classroom lectures and seminars, rather than demanding that students leave home and hearth to climb that tower and join him or her there, condescends to stoop down, via the tools of computer mediated communication, to the student's own humble home. Accommodating oneself to the new digital environment, one adapts one's teaching style to communicate one's wisdom into the student's world.²⁰

Arguing further that online education can follow a divine pedagogy, Gresham also suggests that "incarnational pedagogy"²¹ is also possible with online education. He writes,

Critics of online education are correct to emphasize the need for an incarnational pedagogy but they err in focusing such pedagogy on the physical presence of the instructor in the classroom. Rather, according to these catechetical documents, it is the sphere outside the classroom, in the daily life of instructor and students where one should look for the embodiment of divine truth. The instructional

environment is less significant. It seems that virtual instruction can be incarnational if it points students toward response to the gospel in their daily lives and if the instructor communicates his or her own lived participation in the truth.²²

Lowe, Estep and Maddix, protestant authors, echo Gresham's Catholic application of purposeful, faith-driven online pedagogy. In their book, *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education*, they state, "...our faith perspective should profoundly impact what, how, and why we do *any form* of teaching and learning. Christian education remains Christian by its theological orientation and assumptions, not by the methods of delivery."²³

How does the Lasallian educational system respond to the changing landscape of education? Besides the obvious "move it or lose it" reaction, the Lasallian system must maintain its core traditions. While faculty and administrators scramble to get classes online, the *value* of a Lasallian education *must not be lost*. Jose Antonio Bowen insists "as competition increases and accountability provides easier ways to comparing outcomes, traditional education will need to provide justification for its added expense"²⁴. The Lasallian education is a *value* which we cannot afford (economically or ethically) to lose. Lasallian education provides relational, high quality education based in the belief that each student is a unique child of God. Lasallian educators believe in the transformative power of education. How then, do we translate that into the (inevitable) online classroom?

The Present Study

As our Lasallian Catholic university moved to summer online offerings, we gathered together a group of faculty members and administrators to discuss the implications of this new method of teaching, in light of our mission. What would a Lasallian online pedagogy include? What aspects of best practice in online teaching work for a Lasallian classroom? Which aspects of a Lasallian face-to-face classroom can make the shift to an online format? How will we make this happen?

One of our early steps was to consider *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*, a body of thought that has been translated at several points in the history of Lasallian pedagogy. Our goal was to consider whether Lasallian practices were possible online and, if found to be possible, to establish our own guide to best practices in this endeavor.

Participants

Eight faculty members, one instructional technology expert, and two administrators at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, a Lasallian, Catholic University, responded to a call for discussion. Participants included men and women, and faculty ranks included adjunct and assistant, associate, and full professors. Further, most participants had not taught online courses, one participant had experience with online teaching that was not in a Lasallian context, and two participants had experience with teaching graduate level courses in an online environment.

Procedure

An open invitation was extended to faculty and administrators to participate in a discussion group about envisioning an online Lasallian pedagogy. Weekly meetings began and continued throughout that semester. Topics included: whether we should attempt to teach in an online

environment, the importance of and strategies to create community in a digital world, “best practices” empirical literature, and how online teaching might inform our face-to-face classes.

Three sessions were dedicated to considering the *Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher* (1785) and translation of those virtues into an online pedagogical framework. Each of the participants was provided digital access to Brother George Van Grieken’s 2002 translation of the twelve virtues.²⁵ Each discussion session focused on consideration of four of the virtues and translation into an online format. Notes were taken at each of these sessions and are the foundation for the results of this study.

Results

The results of these discussions will include Brother George Van Grieken’s (2002) summary for each virtue (in quotes) followed by online teaching strategies which may facilitate that virtue. A bulleted summary of the results are presented in Appendix A.

I: Gravity (Seriousness)

“Teachers earn respect by acting with dignity. They cultivate an assured and calming presence.”

Technology can, itself, be less than a “calming presence” in a student’s life. It can be infuriating, scary, yet essential to their success. Combined with learning new material, the online educational experience can be daunting. The professor, therefore, needs to allow students to know that they see their role as a serious academic endeavor that has been strategically designed and organized to heighten their learning experience. This does not mean that the professor cannot have fun while teaching, but rather, that they see their profession as one of import and that they possess the knowledge on which students will learn. In the online course, this is especially important. Students may come into an online class with perceptions that may influence their expectations, e.g. that the online experience will be easier, harder, more confusing, etc., than traditional courses. The instructor, therefore, should start by clearly articulating the overall strategy in meeting the course objectives with their course design. The instructor may also create a short welcome video for the course that delineates the importance of what students will learn and the professor’s credibility. The introduction to and the course itself should engage students in the discipline’s discussions that are deeply rooted in scholarly work and wonder. It is also important that a faculty member makes it clear that academic work is different from social venues such as online chatting, texting, Facebook postings, Vining, etc. At minimum, the course introduction and design should convey the expectation that thought processes and writing must reflect the academic process by observing rules of grammar, civility and decorum, and academic rigor marked by quality and purpose.

Throughout the course, the implicit must be explicitly stated to increase the clarity of the course. Expectations, timelines, and grading criteria should all be forthright and clear. Students should also know that their inquiry into deep scholarly meaning is appreciated. In response to student questions, for example, the instructor might respond, “That’s a good question. I’m glad you asked,” prior to responding to the question. In response to inappropriate discussion, or statements that denigrate the work or growth of others, the professor needs to model gravity and dignity while aiding all of the students in learning how to become a community and how to engage in respectful discourse. It should also be noted that sarcasm and humor can very easily

be misunderstood online. The use of emoticons sometimes helps but miscommunication can easily occur with their use as well. Clarity of content and intent is key in assuring students.

II: Silence

“The classroom environment should normally be harmonious and quiet, leading to more effective teaching. The teacher will not talk too much.

The online Lasallian professor is charged with creating a learning environment that is harmonious and supportive of each student in order to facilitate the development of the student’s own voice. The process of silence can also be used within synchronized chat room discussions. A professor can set up symbolic (~) or literal (“Let’s slow down and think for 30 seconds”) protocols when chat rooms are moving too fast and prohibiting thoughtful reflection. Synchronized virtual classrooms can become too fast and chaotic as students try to read what is being said while trying to post their own messages.

A professor can initiate “silence” in asynchronous interactions by setting up protocols for discussion board interactions and in email responses. For discussion board protocols, an explicit demonstration of silence could include the faculty member’s initial responses to discussion board postings. When responding to postings, the professor can refrain from jumping in with their own ideas or learning agenda. In this instance, silence should be differentiated from absence. To do so, faculty could first comment on the discussion *process* and be silent on the *content*. Students will then be able continue their discussion with each other and pursue their ideas without stopping to consider the professor’s “words of wisdom”. For example, a professor might need to guide and redirect depth of entries or respectfulness of the community, but be “silent” in the early part of a discussion with respect to content to allow students to explore ideas and find their voices. Clear directions as to how students should respond to others’ postings can also be used to promote silence. The directions could include a request that, before posting, students should pause and re-read their response to see if it adequately expresses their ideas and voice. It is important for the online learner to recognize that faster does not necessarily mean better. Planned and explicit pauses, in synchronous and asynchronous interactions, allow for the reflection, ownership, and mindful processes that are to be cultivated in the online classroom.

III: Humility

“We are human. We make mistakes. We therefore never abuse our powers and instead make pupils feel respected.”

Professors often demonstrate humility in face-to-face classes. In the Lasallian tradition, faculty often begin class by stating, “Let us remember we are in the holy presence of God.” In doing so, the faculty member is acknowledging who they serve -- God and the students who God created. This need not change in an online venue.

Humility is modeled when a professor is able to acknowledge errors and adapt to students’ needs. A brief weekly recorded class announcement can be used for commenting on successes and problems, delineating necessary changes and setting the stage for the coming week. During these announcements, a faculty member’s tone of voice, posture, and content utilize a good

opportunity to model humility (and many of the other virtues). Thus, changes in plans convey an awareness of a strategy that did not work and a humble redirection to help each person learn.

Student perception of a power imbalance with faculty should be considered when put into the communication context. For example, to a faculty member answering a question within 24 *hours* is a timely response. However, to a student who views 24 *minutes* as a timely response, 24 hours may appear to be a power play. It is important, then, to set response time expectations to circumvent this perception.

Written feedback is another venue in which misperception can occur. Comments should be written as direct and specific as possible. Remarks such as “unbelievable” or “really?” can be misconstrued as arrogant. Online etiquette should also be considered. For example, an online norm for yelling is typing in capital letters. Faculty should be mindful of word choice, punctuation, and capitalization.

IV: Prudence

“Teachers use their common sense, understanding what they need to do and what they need to avoid when dealing with (students).”

Prudence is informed by the scholarship of teaching and learning (“common sense”). When a pedagogical tool works, this knowledge is shared with others (together and by association). When it does not work, we are humbled and explore alternative methods. The Lasallian educator should be well-versed in the literature which connects them to their community of scholars. These practices become “common sense” as they are embedded in the work. A professor who does not practice prudence, who develops a class and never assesses or revises that class, is limiting the learning environment. As an online instructor, it is important to not only stay current in one’s professional discipline, but also in “best practices” regarding online education. Attending conferences about online learning, reading journals and, of course, sharing new information will facilitate this practice.

A prudent professor also knows the importance of building community to facilitate teaching, learning, and transforming. The building of community is two-fold. One, the professor should establish a strong presence – as leader and as a human being. This can be done by writing, Skyping, or creating audiovisual recordings in ways that illuminate the professor’s persona. This allows students to establish a relationship with the instructor. Two, the professor should develop a collaborative atmosphere. This can be done within the course through integrative assignments, establishing criteria for assessing and grading collaboration, incorporating personal web pages, and articulating purposeful discussion board guidelines. Faculty can also encourage the use of students’ names when addressing one another to build peer relationships.

Creating opportunities for social interactions or common experiences can also build community. Online students often feel removed from campus life, so providing ways for students to feel a part of the campus community can be helpful. For examples, faculty can create “coffee-house” chat rooms, presidential talks and /or alumni postings. They can also provide links to live streaming or archived campus sports or other important events.

Within the course, it is important that faculty create purposeful beginning and ending experiences that bring the group together. During the course, the dynamics of a class often change from day to day. However, these changes are more difficult to discern when in an online environment due to the lack of nonverbal cues. Therefore, the use of weekly reflection and assessment assignments allow for questions and frustrations to be addressed.

Prudence must also be exercised in a faculty member's personal use of social media. It is important to remember that interacting with students via personal Facebook/Twitter accounts is akin to inviting them to your college, high school, and family reunions; your political rally; or showing them pictures of your latest meal. If you wouldn't do these activities in face-to-face interactions, you should not do so with social media.

V: Wisdom

"The teacher's knowledge and experience is applied with sound judgment. Wisdom may take time to acquire."

As we enter teaching in a digital environment, an issue with wisdom is that most of us are far from wise, because wisdom comes with time and experience. However, if a professor works together and by association with members of the community through discussions and collaboration, and utilizes ongoing assessment, wisdom will be generated. The Lasallian educator can do this by providing other online and traditional instructors access to their online course for the purposes of observation and inviting feedback and critique. Allowing peers to assess our written interactions, directions, and syllabi allows for insights into our own biases and assumptions. For example, one faculty member reported having written that students should "Xerox their assignment." Students had never heard of "Xeroxing" and did not know it meant to "make copies." This simple instruction had created much consternation among students. The online course also allows for the technological ability to invite objective observers from other universities or organizations. This might encourage the detection of inaccurate or confusing processes that someone embedded in that organizational system would be less likely to perceive.

Online technologies provide opportunities to involve voices of wisdom (by association) from those we could never connect with in a traditional classroom. For example, a class could Skype with an international scholar, engage in discussion board interactions with alumni, or participate in a chat room with learners in a similar class from across the world. With deliberate and steady steps, wisdom will be attained.

VI: Patience

"The teacher who can keep cool, composed and even-tempered will be a better educator."

It is difficult to convey patience through only written and verbal means. This virtue must be explicitly portrayed in an online environment even though it would probably be an implicit exchange in a face-to-face environment. Faculty members are readily able to filter emotional responses when teaching in a digital environment. Students, however, may never witness the enactment of patience. The classroom-based opportunity to model patience is lost when moved to a digital environment if we do not give voice to the process. Thus, we need to make patience visible in our responses to students.

An example would be an instructor's response to an inappropriate or disrespectful post by a student. A faculty member may practice patience in providing even-tempered redirection. In the response, a professor could explain that the post could be interpreted as disrespectful or inappropriate and, hence, coach the student to exercise greater care in assuring a respectful written "voice." This explanation could include the professor's initial reaction to a post and the thought processes inherent to defusing and reframing his/her response. This allows student insights as to the impact of one's words, and models patient response behaviors.

There are other ways in which to show patience. In synchronous chats, instructors can set protocols that allow slower typists to catch up in the discussion. In personal dialogue or social media, do not type or say something in haste. For example, just as a professor would never voice negative emotions about the state of "students today," a hasty comment on one's Facebook or Twitter is also ill-advised. It is also important for instructors to keep in check their mental reactions to student behavior – especially misguided behavior. Often how one thinks about a topic can leak into every day reactions. To be clear, however, patience must not be misconstrued as being permissive. An online instructor can and should hold students accountable to deadlines and other responsibilities. And, the same instructor can be patient in how they respond to a student missing those deadlines and responsibilities – while still letting the student experience the consequences of their conduct.

VII: Reserve (Self-Control)

"De La Salle wants teachers to control themselves and show restraint in the face of annoyance."

Students and faculty are both susceptible to misperceptions and the dehumanizing effects of technology. It is important that faculty model the proper use of and attitude toward technology to enable students – or colleagues - to side step those issues.

The faculty member should make a conscious choice to read e-mail and discussion entries in the best possible light, providing correction or requesting a phone call or videoconference conversation when there appears to be no positive interpretation of the message or if it is unclear. When there is confusion about the intent of an email message, the professor should clarify, rather than assume, a student's intended "tone". For example, the faculty member could write, "I'm uncertain how to interpret your message. Are you frustrated or were you joking – or both?" In doing so, a faculty member does not respond in haste but rather seeks to understand. This type of cognitive coaching serves two functions. One, it allows student insights as to the particular importance of tone in their writing when using technology. Two, it models purposeful response rather than an emotional reaction to online content. It should be noted that in response to corrections students have reported that they sometimes assume professors are mad at them. Provide structure in advance to clarify any miscommunication. For example, let them know that, "please call me" means that a longer exchange is needed and not that the instructor is angry.

The use of technology can have a "dehumanizing" effect on its participants. As instructors, it is important to stay vigilant to keep this from occurring. A simple, yet effective, means to maintain sensitivity to each learner's humanity is to always use students' names when corresponding with them. Ask students to do this with each other as well. If possible, faculty can keep students' pictures near their computer to remind them of their students' humanity. Encouraging students to

form relationships and use each other's names allows everyone to remember that there is a human being receiving their messages.

The most difficult time for maintaining self-control is when there is conflict between students or between faculty and student. Student "flaming" (quick unfiltered angry online responses) should be met with cognitive coaching and the modeling of self-control. At the onset of the class, guidelines can aid in self-control by writing clear expectations about respect and development of community. Throughout the course, it is helpful to remind students that they should not "say" or type or engage in any kind of dialogue online that they would not do in a face-to-face encounter. If a faculty member is angry, it is important to recognize one's emotions yet respond in a constructive, caring manner.

Self-control can also be modeled by how one uses technology. A faculty member should realize that "multi-tasking" between Facebook, an online chat, one's phone, etc., does not model self-control. In that same thought, although the teaching is online, how and when we use our computers (for example, in meetings, during conversations, etc.) model our expectations to students. Demonstrating self-control with the use of technology is sometimes a personal struggle.

VIII: Gentleness

"Firmness and authority is tempered with kindness and courtesy such that the teacher is always approachable."

Finding a balance between being firm and gentle is difficult for all faculty in all learning communities. A professor needs to be firm and gentle, authoritative and courteous -- and use discernment as to when one is more necessary than the others. The discernment process starts with understanding and appreciation of the developmental process. The instructor understands that students' depth and breadth of knowledge develops incrementally -- and that the journey of education is just as important as the outcome. When puzzled about a student's behavior, an instructor can think with humility, "What might I not know that would help me understand this student?"

To develop an online learning community that promotes a climate in which the faculty member is approachable, the professor can start by noticing and appreciating students' realities, creating opportunities for students to show their interests and experiences. When evaluation begins, faculty should give feedback and evaluate work early and frequently. Feedback need not always be graded, but can be used to engage students in critical thinking and dialogue. Content-driven feedback creates a learning community wherein a professor's feedback is seen as part of the process and not as a form of discipline.

A Lasallian educator creates an environment in which kindness and courtesy are expected and modeled. It is important for students to know that they have permission to disagree -- expectations must be communicated respectfully and in a manner that facilitates understanding. It is also important to remember that the written word is easily misunderstood as unkind or disrespectful. Therefore, an instructor should be careful with word choice and use emoticons when using humor or sarcasm -- both of which should be used carefully. It is important to read a

sentence and determine how it might be perceived, if it were to be perceived incorrectly. Then, specifically address this concern in writing or pick up the phone to clarify. Discerning which technology to use for specific types of communication is also important in student and faculty interactions.

IX: Zeal

“The Lasallian teacher is dedicated and committed whether it be in class preparation, correcting work, encouraging effort, supervising or coaching.”

The Lasallian instructor must cultivate a proactive, vigilant posture from the outset of the class. The instructor should explicitly state a dedication to student learning and that the course has been specifically crafted to those outcomes. Professors have a responsibility to show students a reverence for the sacred nature of learning. The preparation, structure, and responsive tone of the class are all important in demonstrating zeal.

“Zeal” is vibrant, energetic, and responsive. A professor’s timely and personalized response to inquiries, discussion entries, and assignments demonstrates zeal. Once again, it is important to set clear expectations for response times between faculty and students.

The online instructor has the technology to use materials that will add vibrancy to the course. The use of interesting visual material, videos, current or cutting edge material, and vivid language can be used to stimulate responses, questions, and pursuit of answers. It is important to be repetitive and responsible in explicitly modeling zeal.

When evaluating student work, the instructor should not just correct, but provide feedback, encourage insight, and notice the process as well as the content. For example the feedback, “I see you have moved this idea to a deeper level...” could be used regarding a student’s discussion board posting. The professor’s rudimentary job is to facilitate knowledge construction.

The Lasallian instructor should be adaptive to new ideas and events that may present themselves during the course. The practice of teaching a course the same way year after year is not possible in this paradigm. The educator is doing something *with* each student, not *to* each student. The educator is dedicated and committed to the transformation of the learner. The goal is for each student to see one’s self, the world, and the future in a new way. Zeal should shine through in all interactions with each student. The goal is not just information transmission, but transformation.

Therefore, as an online Lasallian educator, technology is never the teacher. The professor is the teacher. And, technology is never used simply because it can be used...it is used because it will enhance student learning. Zeal is a human quality.

X: Vigilance

“The teacher is to be observant and discerning so as to promote values and prevent damage and danger. A caring teacher is vigilant.”

An online Lasallian professor cannot be vigilant without being fully present. Monitoring the discussions is only the first step in vigilance. From there, the task is to observe patterns, discern

hidden warrants, articulate misguided thought processes, and proactively seek the excavation of ideas. This, plainly stated, is hard work. Online teaching is labor-intensive and often different than what is familiar. Because of this, it is important that the professor chooses wisely the amount of student work needing feedback and in-depth response. It is better to do less and do it well, than to do a lot and do it poorly. Wise choices in this regard also protect your time so that feedback is manageable.

The written aspect of the online course is especially important. The instructor must be attentive to all his/her writing. This is more than just “netiquette”; it stems from a deep commitment to humankind. All that is written online is forever in cyberspace. The instructor should understand and protect students from this reality. Therefore, students should be explicitly told in the syllabus that, although getting to know each other as individuals is important, they should never put their address, phone number, or other such personal information online.

The online Lasallian professor is also vigilant in protecting the learning environment by advocating for policies that support student learning. They must pay attention to and advocate for a reasonable number of students in each class. They should also support reasonable background check and disclosure policies regarding students who are incarcerated or are registered sex offenders. The academic policies that govern online education can seriously impede a professor’s ability to teach. As much as many professors hate “politics,” it is important for the instructor to be attentive to the policies that affect one’s ability to fulfill his/her job or put students at risk.

XI: Piety

“The teacher, knowing each pupil is a child of God, will confide them to God’s protection while doing everything possible to prepare them for life.”

This virtue is the impetus for why a Lasallian professor teaches. How each professor conveys this message, however, is as different as is each professor. In the face-to-face classroom, some professors will start with a devotional or prayer, whereas others may implicitly acknowledge it by recognizing the uniqueness of each student. The same is true with the online professor. A professor may want to explicitly state in his/her introduction their beliefs regarding their own vocation and God’s unique design of each student. The professor could post, add to their email signature, or otherwise integrate prayers, quotes, or Bible verses that indicate the professor’s desire for God’s protection of each of them. Still others may create a podcast of chapel services or other major events on campus to instill a sense of community.

Professors also support this virtue by truly understanding and acknowledging the uniqueness of each student. This can be facilitated in a number of ways. First, it is important that a professor individualize communications as often as possible. As mentioned earlier, use the student’s name as often as possible. For example, if a student questions, “Do we need to read Chapter 7?” we convey a very different message with “Yes” versus “Anne, I’m glad you asked about the reading. Yes, you will benefit from reading chapter 7 to move forward in the discussion from your last post when you discussed . . . I hope this clears up any confusion.” In doing so, the professor not only acknowledges the student by name but adds to the human element by acknowledging their

work and the on-going dialogue of the class. Additionally, the professor could remember a detail or event in a post and refer to it in a later communication.

When developing bulletin board questions, a professor should develop questions that allow students to answer with their unique lived-experiences. When responding to bulletin board posts, it is important that the faculty member goes beyond writing, “Good post”. Instead, the response should clearly articulate the professor’s thoughts and reflection on that particular topic. Creating and responding in this manner means that the faculty member must listen intently and draw on uniqueness of each student. By doing so, we make it clear to students that their questions and comments are part of an academic dialogue, not merely an inquiry followed by an answer.

Second, just as a face-to-face professor sees students in the hallway and asks about their game the past weekend or the test about which they were worried, the online professor can follow up through Skype or email asking about their unique life situation.

Third, the online professor can create venues by which students can demonstrate their experiences and growth. An “Aha” bulletin board area on which students can share their own moments of inspiration or insights will contribute to acknowledging their unique perspectives. Students could create their own web page or introductory paragraph to highlight their unique life experiences, being mindful, however, of the earlier discussion regarding personal information safety.

Fourth, it is the professor’s job to assess the growth of each student. Doing so acknowledges where the student began in the learning process and to what degree the student successfully mastered the material. Although it may seem obvious, this means the faculty member must adequately understand what each student initially brings to the class.

XII: Generosity

“This puts service before personal convenience. De La Salle wants teachers to be unselfish in their giving, always available and approachable whether in or out of the classroom.”

A Lasallian educator never sees students as an interruption to their work. There should be an attitude of giving what time is necessary to be effective teachers. Especially in online courses, which are often compressed in time, it is important to guard the time available to grade, respond, read, and reflect. Academic integrity sometimes means sacrificing expediency. Generosity should also be cultivated within classroom culture wherein students share resources and help each other learn.

De La Salle suggests that educators be “always available and approachable.” As educators and not Brothers, is this possible? Furthermore, ought not educators model that behavior? Christian Brothers take vows that narrow their focus. Lasallian educators who are not Brothers also make vows to their professions, significant others, families, communities, etc. Those vows are also to be kept. De La Salle, or perhaps more accurately our Lasallian heritage, asks us to put service before personal convenience and to be unselfish in giving to our students – but also to our families and personal lives as well. Therefore, it is important to set limits in order to give

unselfishly to fulfill all the vows inherent to personal and professional lives. Generosity, then, might entail setting a clear structure so students know when the faculty member is available by acknowledging their personal boundaries. By explaining the days/times in which a faculty member is unavailable (family time, worship, volunteer work), the professor is modeling what it means to keep one's commitments to a profession and as parents, spouses, and citizens. However, it also means that when a professor is available, he/she is fully present and engaged with their time and talent.

In developing a collaborative environment, the expectation is not one of individualized learning but of building a community of learners. To create a spirit of generosity within the class culture, a professor should set clear expectations and grading criteria that encourage students to be generous in helping each other explore and grow. To facilitate this the faculty member could also respond early and often to student comments, and work early in the course to model the type of feedback expected in student-to-student interaction.

Conclusion

The intent of this study is to facilitate important dialogue about how we keep the rich Lasallian teaching tradition alive within online education. The application of *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher* to online pedagogical strategies can serve as a structure for starting those conversations. Within our Lasallian educational systems, we hope to preserve that which is unique and vital to what we do as Lasallian educators by mindfully exploring ways to adapt to online education.

Appendix A

Envisioning a Lasallian Online Pedagogy Practical Suggestions for Educators

I: Gravity (Seriousness)

“Teachers earn respect by acting with dignity. They cultivate an assured and calming presence.”

- Tell students the course is an academic endeavor that has been strategically designed and organized to heighten their learning experience.
- Start the course by clearly articulating the overall strategy in connecting the course objectives with the course design.
- Create a short welcome video for the course that delineates the importance of what they will be learning and the professor’s credibility.
- Engage students into the discipline’s discussion that is deeply rooted in scholarly work and wonder.
- Explicitly clarify that academic work is different from social media.
- The implicit must be explicitly stated to increase the clarity of the course. Expectations, timelines, grading criteria, should all be forthright and clear.
- Explain that inquiry into deeper, scholarly meaning is appreciated.
- Model gravity and dignity while aiding students to learn how to become a community and engage in respectful discourse – especially in response to inappropriate comments or statements that denigrate the work or growth of others.
- Be aware that sarcasm, humor and emoticons can very easily be misunderstood online.
- Be clear in content and intent.

II: Silence

“The classroom environment should normally be harmonious and quiet, leading to more effective teaching. The teacher will not talk too much.”

- Create a classroom environment that is harmonious and supportive of each student in order to facilitate the development of the student’s own voice.
- In synchronous classroom discussions, set up symbolic (~) or literal (“Let’s slow down and think for 30 seconds”) protocols when chat rooms are moving too fast and prohibiting thoughtful reflection.
- Refrain from jumping in with your own ideas/learning agenda when initially responding to posts. Comment first on discussion process and be silent on content.
- Tell students to pause and re-read their discussion board posts to see if each post adequately expresses their ideas and voice.
- Remind the online learner that faster does not necessarily mean better.

III: Humility

“We are human. We make mistakes. We therefore never abuse our powers and instead make pupils feel respected.”

- Acknowledge errors and adapt to student needs when you make a mistake or an ineffective decision.
- Create a brief weekly recorded class announcement that can be used for commenting on successes and problems, delineating necessary changes and setting the stage for the coming week.
- Overtly indicate changes in plans to convey an awareness that a strategy did not work and be humble in your response to the redirection needed to help each person learn.
- Set clear expectations for response times to emails to circumvent a misinterpretation of a “power play” when your reply takes longer than anticipated by the student.
- Be direct and specific in your written comments. Remarks such as “unbelievable” or “really?” can be misconstrued as arrogant.
- Follow online etiquette in capitalization, punctuation, and acronyms.

IV: Prudence

“Teachers use their common sense, understanding what they need to do and what they need to avoid when dealing with (students).”

- Be well-versed in the literature which connects you to your community of scholars.
- Teach, assess, revise – repeat.
- Attend conferences, read journals, and share information regarding the “best practices” of online education.
- Establishes a strong presence within the course by writing, videoconferencing, or podcasting in ways that illuminate your persona and helps develop relationships with your students.
- Develop a collaborative student environment through integrative assignments, establish criteria for assessing and grading collaboration, use personal web pages, and articulate purposeful discussion board guidelines.
- Encourage students to use names when addressing one another to build peer relationships.
- Create a “coffee-house” chat room.
- Link to live streaming or archived presidential talks, alumni postings, campus sports and/or important events to help connect online students to the university.
- Assign weekly reflections and assessment tasks that allow you to address student questions and frustrations.
- Be mindful of your social media use. When including students in your social media, ask yourself, “Would I share this information or invite them to this event in a face-to-face venue?”

V: Wisdom

“The teacher’s knowledge and experience is applied with sound judgment. Wisdom may take time to acquire.”

- Invite feedback from other online and traditional instructors to observe and critique your online teaching (just as you do for your traditional teaching.)

- Allow your peers to assess your written interactions, directions, and syllabi to mitigate problems with biases and assumptions.
- Take advantage of what technology provides by involving voices of wisdom (by association) from those you could never connect with in a traditional classroom.
- Learn from your mistakes.

VI: Patience

“The teacher who can keep cool, composed and even-tempered will be a better educator.”

- Explicitly model patience by providing an even-tempered redirection to an inappropriate or disrespectful post by a student.
- When responding to an uncivil post or email, provide your initial reaction and then the thought process inherent to defusing and reframing your response.
- In synchronous chats, set protocols that allow slower typists to catch up in the discussion.
- Never remark on your social media about the idiocy of a student’s actions. Don’t write anything on social media that you wouldn’t yell in the hallway in the traditional setting.
- Keep in check your mental negative reactions to student behaviors. How one thinks can leak into every day reactions.
- Make clear that patience is not the same as being permissive.

VII: Reserve (Self-Control)

“De La Salle wants teachers to control themselves and show restraint in the face of annoyance.”

- Read e-mail and discussion entries in the best possible light; provide correction by requesting a phone call or videoconference when there appears to be no positive interpretation of the message or if uncertain.
- When there is confusion about the intent of an email message, you should clarify, rather than assume, a student’s intended “tone”.
- When giving direct commands via email, be explicit as to how students should interpret the message.
- Stay vigilant to avoid the dehumanizing effect technology can have on its participants. Have pictures of each of your students near your computer.
- Create the norm within your course that everyone addresses each other by name in all correspondence.
- Encouraging students to form relationships with one another.
- If you get angry with a student, acknowledge your emotions yet respond in a constructive and caring manner.
- Student “flaming” (quick unfiltered angry online responses) should be met with cognitive coaching and self-control.
- Model appropriate use of technology by refraining from multi-tasking when in conversations with others (online or face-to-face).

VIII: Gentleness

“Firmness and authority is tempered with kindness and courtesy such that the teacher is always approachable.”

- Your response to students should be based on your understanding of students' incremental development process.
- When puzzled about a student's behaviors, ask yourself, "What might I not know - that would help me understand this student?"
- Create opportunities for students to show their interests and experiences.
- Give feedback and evaluation early and frequently; it need not always be graded.
- Use content-driven feedback to develop a learning community wherein your feedback is seen as a part of the process and not as a form of discipline.
- Develop an environment in which kindness and courtesy are expected and modeled.
- Be careful with your word choice and use emoticons when joking or being sarcastic. It is important to read a sentence and determine how it might be perceived, if it were to be perceived incorrectly. Then, specifically address this concern in writing or pick up the phone to clarify.
- Discern which technology to use for specific types of communication with your students.

IX: Zeal

"The Lasallian teacher is dedicated and committed whether it be in class preparation, correcting work, encouraging effort, supervising, or coaching."

- Explicitly state a dedication to student learning and that the course has been specifically crafted to those outcomes as its core. Professors have a responsibility to show students a reverence for the sacred nature of learning.
- Your preparation, structure, and responsive tone of the class are all important in demonstrating zeal.
- Respond in a timely and personal manner to inquiries, discussion entries, and assignments.
- Utilize technology's ability to add vibrancy to your course by using interesting visual material, videos, current, cutting edge material, and vivid language.
- When evaluating student work, don't just correct assignments, but provide feedback, encourage insight, and notice the process as well as the content.
- Be adaptive to new ideas and events that may present themselves during the course. The practice of teaching a class the same way year after year is not possible in this paradigm.
- As an educator you are doing something *with* each student, not *to* each student. Your goal is not just information transmission, but transformation.
- Technology is never the teacher. You are the teacher. And, technology is never used because it can be used...it is used because it will enhance student learning. Zeal is a human quality.

X: Vigilance

"The teacher is to be observant and discerning so as to promote values and prevent damage and danger. A caring teacher is vigilant."

- An online Lasallian professor cannot be vigilant without being fully present.
- Monitor your face-to-face and online discussions with students to be sure you are being fully present.

- Observe patterns, discern hidden warrants, articulate misguided thought processes, and proactively seek the excavation of ideas.
- Choose wisely the amount of work needing feedback and in-depth responses. It is better to do less and do it well, than do a lot and do it poorly. It also protects your time so it is manageable.
- Unequivocally state in your syllabus that, although getting to know each other as individuals is important, they should never put their address, phone number, or other such personal information online.
- Protect your learning environment by advocating for policies that support student learning with issues such as class enrollment sizes and program purchases.
- Protect your students by being proactive about policies regarding reasonable background checks and disclosure policies -- especially regarding students who are incarcerated or are registered sex offenders.

XI: Piety

“The teacher, knowing each pupil is a child of God, will confide them to God’s protection while doing everything possible to prepare them for life.”

- In our interactions with other faculty, it is important to remember that this virtue is the impetus for why a Lasallian professor teaches. However, how each professor conveys this message is as different as is each professor. There is not a “right way” to show this.
- If you start with a devotion or prayer in the face-to-face classroom, you can do so in the online class with a post, video, or online link.
- Share your beliefs regarding your own vocation and God’s unique design of each student in your introductory video.
- Use your email signature to include an important verse or quote that indicates your desire for God’s protection for each of your students.
- Create a podcast of chapel services or other major events on campus to instill a sense of community and purpose.
- In the Lasallian tradition, faculty often begin class by stating, “Let us remember we are in the holy presence of God.” This need not change in an online venue.
- Whenever possible, let a student know that you recognize his or her unique experiences and abilities.
- Develop bulletin board questions that allow students to answer with their unique lived experiences.
- Respond to bulletin board posts in a manner that clearly articulate the professor’s thoughts and reflection on that particular student’s post.
- Follow up with students on their life or activities through Skype or email.
- Create venues by which students can demonstrate their experiences and growth. An “Aha” bulletin board area on which students can share their own moments of inspiration or insights will contribute to acknowledging their unique perspectives.
- Allow students to create their own web page or introductory paragraph to highlight their unique life experiences.
- Assess the growth of each student individually.

XII: Generosity

“This puts service before personal convenience. De La Salle wants teachers to be unselfish in their giving, always available and approachable whether in or out of the classroom.”

- Never see your students as an interruption to your work.
- Protect your time available to grade, respond, read and reflect.
- Academic integrity sometimes means sacrificing expediency. Create an environment in which students share resources and help each other learn.
- Set and announce clear time boundaries that allow you to give unselfishly to fulfill all the vows inherent to personal and professional lives.
- Be fully present in the time set aside for your students.

Notes

1. Dr. Seebach is Associate Professor and Chair in the Psychology Department, and Dr. Charron is Professor in the Communication Department, both at the Undergraduate College at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota.

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