

AUGUSTINIAN LEARNING PRACTICES FOR A TECHNOLOGICAL WORLD

Prácticas de aprendizaje agustiniano para un mundo tecnológico

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Abstract

Cognizant that Saint Augustine's world of Latin Antiquity is foreign to a technological world, this essay explores the application of compelling Augustinian learning practices to learning in a technological world. In particular, the 3 Augustinian Learning Practices of Augustinian Interiority, Augustinian Humility and Augustinian Insights on Friendship as a learning practice are explored for application to learning in a technological world of radical exteriority, pervasive presence of technologies of persuasion and a participatory/social web imbued

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with pervasive individualism, isolation, anonymity and the quest for fame.

Keywords: Augustinian pedagogy, learning practices, information age, technological world.

Resumen

Teniendo en cuenta que el mundo de la antigüedad latina de San Agustín es ajeno a un mundo tecnológico, este ensayo explora la aplicación de prácticas de aprendizaje agustinianas convincentes para aprender en un mundo tecnológico. En particular, se exploran las tres Prácticas de Aprendizaje Agustino de la Interioridad Agustiniana, la Humildad Agustiniana y las Perspectivas Agustinianas de la Amistad, como práctica de aprendizaje para su aplicación en el aprendizaje en un mundo tecnológico de exterioridad radical, presencia omnipresente de tecnologías de persuasión y una red participativa/social impregnada de individualismo, aislamiento, anonimato y búsqueda de la fama.

Palabras claves: pedagogía agustiniana, prácticas de aprendizaje, era de la información, mundo tecnológico.

This essay will lay out areas in which learning practices that can be found in the life and writings of Saint Augustine of Hippo can provide insights into approaching the realities of a technological world¹. To achieve this purpose, I will rely on two dimensions of my teaching work and pedagogical research. The first dimension is my work in Augustinian Pedagogy writing and teaching. The second is my training and work in Instructional Technology.

A Note of Caution: While I think that Saint Augustine's insights can inform approaches to learning in a technological world, I am very cognizant that Saint Augustine is a person of radically different times. In being cautious I am guided by an insight from Robert Dodaro, O.S.A., the Augustinian scholar, who observed,

The more I read Augustine and read studies about him and about his time, the more I come to two conclusions, apparently disjunctive. They continue to strike me forcefully. First, I find it increasingly difficult to domesticate Augustine, that is, to make him appear at home in our times. Secondly, I find his theology and approach to various pastoral issues increasingly more relevant for our times. On the one hand I am saying that Augustine's Church and the times in which he lived, late Roman antiquity, have to be seen as strange even alien to our own times, between his Church and our Church and secondly, in spite of the fact that I continue to reach this difficult conclusion, I continue to see the urgency of Augustine's theology and his pastoral responses for the Church in his times (Dodaro, 1999, p. 76).

I am proceeding focusing on Augustinian learning practices that are relevant to our technological world. In particular, I will address the saliency of Augustinian Interiority, Saint Augustine's notion of humility and his insights on friendship.

What is a Learning Practice?

In classical philosophical and religious thinking, like that of Saint Augustine, the term "exercise(s)" would be used

to express the idea of cohesive actions employing our wills in learning and advancing our lives. Hadot (1995) presents the history of “exercise(s)” in his text “Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault”. In this essay I am using the term “practice”. For me this is the pedagogical equivalent of the philosophical and religious term “exercises”. Using the term practice avoids confusion with the normal pedagogical meaning of “exercise(s)” in North American settings where the term is connected to follow up seatwork, school homework or daily follow-up assignments. Pedagogical exercises carry the message of a lack of depth rather than the depth of experience implied by the philosophical term “exercise(s)”. It is these deeper Augustinian learning practices that I am will be presenting for consideration here.

Augustinian interiority

The first of the Augustinian Learning Practices we will look at is Augustinian Interiority. We will view this practice in relation to the speed and efficiency-focus as well as the rampant exteriority that technology has brought to us in the last several generations.

The quintessential expression for describing the growth of the speed and efficiency of technology is “Moore’s Law” which understands that the number of transistors on a computer microchip doubles every two years while the costs are halved. This “law” derives from observations by Intel, the computer chip manufacturer, co-founder Gordon Moore (1965). This expansion has led to the expectation of greater speed and efficiency on the part of workers and learners in the accomplishment of their tasks. Such expectations may have led to

the interest in multitasking. This multitasking for work time has bled into the time outside of work. In 2017, “A national study of the impact of electronic communication on Canadian school leaders” reported that show that on average, Canadian School Leaders, who participated in the study, worked on 111 e-mails at work as well as sending/recieving 27 work emails at home. The stress relating to this additional off-the-clock work has led those surveyed to feel they have less control over their lives.

Paralleling this growth in speed and efficiency expectation, the Internet with “Web 2.0” (DiNucci, 1999, p. 32) has moved us to a more participatory/social experience of technology. This is the ambience in which people can have global notoriety from their mobile devices. People can share all that they do, what they see and who they are with. The number of friends, fans and likes can be for some people the measure of who they are. These are the platforms where posts go viral and cyberbullying can be rampant. The platforms they use buy and sell their information so that they can be targeted for products and opportunities. Evidence of the impact can be seen in restlessness to view a latest item on cellphones. Along with more restlessness, participatory/social experience of technology has exteriorized people’s lives on the internet increasing our “exteriority”. Newport sees such factors as creating distractions that need to be overcome through “deep work,” i.e., “professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limits” (Newport, 2016, p. 3), he calls for a practice of “Internet Sabbath” (Newport, 2016, p. 160) reiterating an idea popularized by journalist, William Powers (2010).

Describing Augustinian interiority

In the face of the restlessness arising from the speed and efficiency of technology as well as the “exteriority” arising from the participatory/social web, Augustinian interiority may be a learning practice that can aid learners in bringing a measure of peace, a sabbath, to their lives. A key insight into Augustinian interiority can be found when Augustine posits, “Do not stay outside yourself, but enter within since the truth dwells in the interior person.... Therefore, step to where the light of reason is lit” (Agustin, 2011, p. 39, 72). Miguel Angel Keller, O.S.A. and Francisco Galende, O.S.A. have worked on gleaning from this insight processes for engaging in Augustinian Interiority.

For Keller (2001, p. 210), Augustinian interiority is a spiritual dynamic/process involving four steps. These steps can be summarized as:

1. Return to yourself, i.e., go from outer life to inner life.
2. Go beyond yourself, i.e., go from inner life to the truths of reason.
3. Transcend truths, i.e., go from the varied truths of reason to ultimate Truth.
4. Experience Enlightenment, i.e., return to the outer life with a truer vision of self and reality.

In a different way, Galende (2006, pp. 278-279) summarizes the inner dialogue, this style of interiority, as another four-step process through which Saint Augustine invites us to join him.

1. Do not be eager to expend all your energy on external things.
2. Go within yourself.
3. Transcend yourself.
4. Now experience all things external from your interior life.

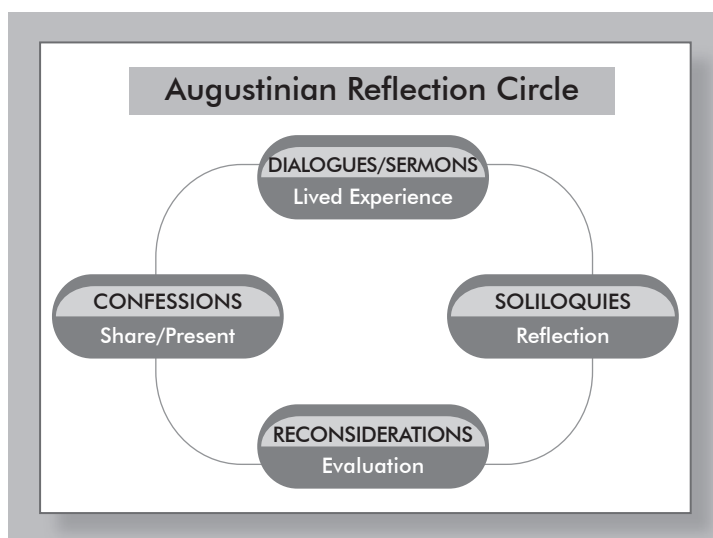
There is movement from contemplation back to the world of action and social interaction in the fourth step of both of these processes. There is a notion here of contemplation impacting action in similar ways to those that Saint Augustine describes in *De Civitate Dei* (The city of God) (Galende, 2006, p 278).

In my Augustinian pedagogy work I have worked to apply these insights on Augustinian interiority to teaching and learning settings. Doing further investigation, I have arrived at the view that Saint Augustine's writings can give us insights to his processes of interiority. His "Sermons and Dialogues", "The Soliloquies", "The *Retractationes*", and "The Confessions" each give us some insights into the ways that Saint Augustine processed his interiority. To aid in understanding the elements I have found in Augustine's interiority and the relationship among them, I have developed a "Augustinian Reflection Circle" to do the deep work that Saint Augustine expects in his approach to interiority. In Figure 1: Augustinian Reflection Circle, the reader can find an infographic to visual the parts and the relationships that I have deduced.

In Figure 1 you can see the representation of the four writings, "Sermons and Dialogues", "The Soliloquies", "*Retractationes*", and "The Confessions" placed in a circular relationship to one another and each type of

writing is connected to an element of reflective thinking, lived experience, reflection, evaluation, and share/present. For easier understanding I have term the latin term, *retractationes* as “Reconsiderations” following the observations of Chadwick (2009). I find “Reconsiderations” a better translation of “*Retractationes*” than the New City Press title, “Revisions”. In “*Retractationes*” when Saint Augustine reviewed his booklet, “*De Magistro*”, revised nothing. So, not all parts of the text are revisions.

Figure 1. Augustinian reflection circle.



While the elements in the Augustinian Reflection Circle are related to one another in a cyclical pattern, there is not a lock-step pattern that has to be followed. In using this Augustinian Reflection Circle to deal with the speed and efficiency and the restlessness engendered by the participatory/social web of technology, educators can provide students with helpful learning practices, as follows.

Valuing lived experience: insights about Saint Augustine's Dialogues/Sermons/Letters

Like Saint Augustine, an important arena for us is the dialogues we have with our friends. He tells us in his "Confessions",

My soul found all manner of joy when I was in their company — to talk and to laugh and to be kind to each other — to read engaging books together, to go from the lightest joking to talk of the deepest things and back again — to differ without discord, as I might differ with myself, and when on the rarest occasion disagreement arose, to find it highlights the sweetness of our normal agreement — to teach or to learn from each other — to be impatient for those absent and welcome them with joy when they return — these and similar things, emanating from our hearts as we gave and received affection, shown in our faces, our voices, our eyes, and a thousand other gratifying ways, ignited a flame which fused our very souls together and made the many of us one.

In his "Sermons", "Letters", and "Dialogues" we can see and even hear Saint Augustine in dialogue with his congregation and friends. We can even hear him responding to previous conversations that we have no record of. It has often struck me that Saint Augustine wrote his books in response to requests from people he conversed with in conversation or writing. Given the deep thinking that it takes to understand his book, "The Trinity", I wonder what Marcellinus and others who were asking him to finish it thought when they read it. In these rela-

tionships around his writing, we can find an important point for our students in conveying to them to not take for granted what is around them. We should be teaching them to listen to one another, to nature and the larger world around them. Even though there can be many difficulties they will find in conversations and the world around them, particularly through technology, they should learn to listen in a world where we are largely talked at by others. We should help our students learn, like Saint Augustine that, “Those who listen are luckier than those who speak. The learner is humble, but the teacher must work hard at not being proud”.

Valuing reflection experience: insights about Saint Augustine’s Soliloquies

Sharing his own experience of moving from lived experience (outer dialogues) to inner reflection, Saint Augustine observed, “Listen to the voice of truth in reflection and in silence so that you are able to understand it”. Probably the best model of his inner reflection/dialogue can be found in his “Soliloquies”. In this work, Saint Augustine is in a dialogue with reason about what he had heard, learned, and come to know. While it is a dialogue with reason, it does include the prayer to the Lord, “Let me know myself. Let me know You”. It is in this type of reflection that Saint Augustine finds illumination. In such reflection we should be teaching our students to seek and find such illumination, such enlightenment. We should be teaching them to find the truth in their experience, particularly understanding the true meaning of the bad experiences in a technological world, which at times can be truly evil.

In valuing reflection, we should be enabling our students to step back from the noise of the speed and efficiency of technology as well as participation in the social web. This is not a rejection, but rather a right ordering of our experiences. With all the noise and distractions from technology this will require directive work on enabling students to have a meditative/contemplative mindset to foster easy and regular reflection. Arguably, this was easier for Saint Augustine because he did not live in a technological world, but more importantly he was schooled in reflective spiritual exercises like those identified by Hadot (1995).

Working on the development of such reflection is not just an Augustinian endeavor. The value of meditation in a larger scope has become a project of some educators (MindSpace, w.d.). Recently, it has been announced in that in England in an effort to improve youth mental health, students will practice mindfulness in as many as 370 schools. This study will continue into 2021 (Magra, 2019). Educators are already finding not only personal impacts of meditation, but also improvements in interpersonal relationships and school climates. So, this work may not only help individual students, but help in developing a more Augustinian climate in our schools.

Valuing evaluation of our experience: insights about Saint Augustine's Reconsiderations

In some ways the working in the Reflection/*Soliloquies* aspect of the Augustinian Reflection Circle is finding the “what” of our experiences. In the Evaluation/*Reconsiderations* aspect, we are finding the “so what” of our experiences. This is finding meaning in relation to

what we have already known and experienced. We are finding here what supports or differs from our previous thoughts and experiences. Here we and our students are really getting into making sense of our experience. For Saint Augustine understanding is more important than knowledge. He tells us, “Use knowledge as a kind of scaffolding to help build the structure of love and understanding, which will last forever even after knowledge destroys itself. Knowledge is useful when it is used to promote love. But it becomes useless, even harmful in itself, if separated from such an end”. How powerful it can be to ask if the posts and likes we experience in social media building a structure of “love and understanding” in our lives! Likewise, the scaffolding notion should remind us to recognize the provisional nature of what we know and that we continue in this world to construct understandings, hopefully leading us forward.

For Saint Augustine going forward is upward to the light. As he notes, “To reach a high spot you need a ladder. To get to the height of greatness, use the ladder of humility”. In a technological world filled with self-important postings and assertions, humility will be something that will also need to be taught. Humility may be a new experience for some of us and our students. While the *Evaluation/Reconsiderations* aspect of the Augustinian Reflection Circle can be seen as building love and understanding by using scaffolding or ladders, this aspect may also be seen as tending a garden, i.e., “Intellectual Gardening”. Gardens have been seen as an important aspect of Saint Augustine’s spiritual development (Lawless, 1988). No less than six gardens of import can be found in his writings or the writings of Saint Possidius (Agustin, 2002).

Whether under the motif of building or gardening Augustinian educators need to teach their students to tend to the true understanding of their experience. This is especially true in a technological world filled with fake news and false understandings.

Valuing sharing/presenting of our discoveries: insights about Saint Augustine's Confessions

In the Share/Present/*Confessions* aspect of the Augustinian Reflection Circle we make a turn from an interior reflective dialogue/evaluation to moving out to share and present our discoveries to others. This akin to the fourth aspect of both the Keller and Galende Augustinian Interiority frameworks presented above. This is also connected to the move from contemplation to action that Saint Augustine describes in "The City of God", also noted above. The process here is aptly described by Saint Augustine when he advises, "Search in ways by which we can make discoveries and discover in ways by which we can keep on searching".

His "Confessions", were for Saint Augustine, a sharing and presenting of his experience of searching, leading him to become a Christian. He also presents what found along the way – both the good and the bad. He did not stop at the *Confessions*. He continued on searching and sharing through his preaching and writing. In using the Augustinian Reflection Circle, we need to help our students to both conclude and start anew their searching. Also, we need to teach them how to share (confess) what they have with others through dialogues. It is these dialogues that become part of the lived experience of a further round of the Augustinian Reflection Circle. Thus,

in our teaching we need to prepare students for continuing rounds of Augustinian reflection and Augustinian interiority.

In this Share/Prepare/*Confessions* we are moving beyond the “what” and “so what” to the “now what” aspect of reflection. We need to prepare students how to share discoveries from interior reflection with a world steeped in exteriority. Learners need to be able to see what can be shared with others in dialogues and what may need some more reflection. Also, there may be things one is not ready to share but need some further exploration to feed into further reflection. Further, there may be things one is not ready to share but need some further experimentation rather than exploration to feed into further reflection. Thus, the “now what” can be sharing/presenting or further preparation through exploration, experimentation or more reflection. Since Augustinian searching leads to discoveries that enable us to keep on searching, this is an ongoing set of cycles. In the repeating of the processes, learners should come to a level where they can manage their learning practices and processes of interiority for themselves.

Pahomov (2014, p. 109) posits that “For student reflection to be meaningful, it must be *metacognitive*, *applicable*, and *shared* with others”. In sum, Augustinian interiority and the Augustinian reflection circle involve meaningful reflection in that they lead learners to not only know, but to know what they know and how they know it (metacognitive). In the processes learners apply new learning to past understandings and future directions (applicable). Learners are also challenged to share/present what they have learned to others (shared).

Saint Augustine's notion of humility

The second of the Augustinian Learning Practices for a technological world that we will look at is Augustinian humility. Our investigation of the efficacy of Augustinian humility will be in the areas of The Humble Christ a Grounding for Saint Augustine, Cracked Pots with Technological Power, Humility as a Virtue in the Face of Persuasion, Mirroring as a Means to Aid Learners Move toward Humility, and Doubt as Method within Humility.

The humble Christ a grounding for Saint Augustine

Arbemann, O.S.A. (1954, p. 9) observes that,

The ethical ideals of ancient philosophy had fascinated the imagination of Augustine until he discovered their fallacy by studying St. Paul, who made him see the Incarnation in a completely new light. He himself tells us (Agustin, 2002, VII, 9, 14) about the deep impression made on him by the words of the Apostle in his Epistle to the Philippians (2.5-8): 'Christ Jesus, who though He was by nature God, ... emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave, and being made like unto man. And appearing in the form of man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even to the death on a cross.' The same St. Paul taught him that only a humble soul is capable of following Christ. (Agustin, 2002, VII, 18, 24).

For Saint Augustine this humble Christ was his teacher. As he observes,

We have heard Him [Christ] say: 'Learn from Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart.' This is

our complete medicine: 'Learn from Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart.' What does it profit if one performs miracles and is proud, but is not meek, and humble of heart?

What was the most important thing that Jesus teaches us? It is for Saint Augustine that, "Christ came before all else so that people might learn how much God loves them and might learn this so that they would catch fire with love for him who first loved them".

Learning of God's love was for Saint Augustine a steady ground from which he could go out to face a difficult world. Similarly, Schultze sees the need for humility for living virtuously in an information age. He posits,

Rather than marching proudly ahead with our minds in celestial dreams, we fall back to earth, to the dirty life-giving soil, to *humus*. We should fear the information age because it lacks humility; it puts in the business of authoring paeans to efficiency and control rather than admitting our foolishness (Schultze, 2002, p. 90).

Being grounded in an Augustinian humility, we need to teach our students about honestly facing limitations rather than foolishly pursuing the unattainable. Schultze also observes that, "Information technology cannot transcend the gap between expansive human hopes, on the one hand, and the moral limits of actual knowing, on the other hand" (Schultze, 2002, p. 103). Learning humility aids us in working with what we actually know, rather than focus on unrealistic hopes in an information age. As Schultze also notes, "The virtue of humility directs us away from selfish cyber-desires and toward the

needs of our neighbors” (Schultze, 2002, p.107). In all learning humility can give us and our students the power, Crouch (2017) asserts to put technology in its proper place.

Cracked pots with technological power

Schultze (2002, p. 94) also notes that,

Because of the dominant triumphalistic rhetoric of the high-tech revolution, we lose track of what it means to be a foolish user of information technology. A fool can be well informed, even quite knowledgeable. His or her problem is not merely technical or informational but rather a lack of wisdom.

This lack of wisdom can flow from an inflated sense of self that technology with its power can foster. In commenting on Saint Augustine’s “Exposition on Psalm 99, 11” the Augustinian Donald Burt understands Saint Augustine as seeing us as clay pots going into the furnace well-crafted yet coming out cracked. Saint Paul in 2 Corinthians 4,7 sees us as fragile earthen vessels (clay jars). Burt (2003) presents Saint Augustine seeing himself and each of us as cracked pots, cracked selves. When we do not accept our cracked selves, ourselves as cracked pots, we suffer from a pride which connects to the lack of wisdom that Schultze identifies.

For Saint Augustine, “Christ’s humility is the remedy for our pride” and He has “come to teach humility and overturn pride”. The power of technology as it inflates our pride and can easily get us into troubled waters. We need to prepare our students to undergo such difficulties in their use of technology. As Saint Augustine observes,

Listen to what scripture has to say about going in and coming out: 'Pots are proved in the kiln, and righteous people in temptation and trouble.' (Sir 27,6) If good people are like a potter's vessels, it is necessary for them to be put in the fire like pots.

In his work Burt gives us another insight that can inform how we can educate our students with a humility for an information age. As Saint Augustine understood himself as a "cracked pot" struggling toward wisdom, he also realized that he needed a right will to overcome the fears of his struggles. Rather than an act of the mind, having such a right will is an act of the heart. In the face of navigating stormy seas it needs to be what Burt (2003) would see as a "brave heart"², or as Schultze (2002) terms it, a high-tech heart. Augustinian educators need to build up the hearts of their students to exercise a right will in their use of technology, cognizant of their reality as humble cracked pots.

While Schultze writes of habits of a high-tech heart, Saint Augustine would probably rather speak of diligence in the building up of hearts, since he is not in favor of habits. Diligence derives from *diligo* which translates as love but is a loving rightly. Saint Augustine is famous for saying, "Love, and do what you will". This love in Latin is *dilige*. So that to do things with a right will, Saint Augustine actually wants us to love diligently and not in a "free love" way. To build up this diligence our students need the encouragement that Saint Augustine gives to Deogratias. The hallmark of that Augustinian encouragement is having a "cheerful attitude"³ in support of students facing difficulties.

²This notion of "brave heart" extends work on Augustine and fortitude.

³"Cheerful attitude" is Raymond Canning's translation of Augustine's use of "*de hilaritate comparanda*" (Saint Augustine, 2006, p. 16).

Humility as a virtue in the face of persuasion

The information age is heir to a persuasive atmosphere that predated it. In the 1930s,

[Claude] Hopkins turned Pepsodent into one of the best-known products on earth.... The secret to his success, Hopkins would later boast, was that he had found a certain kind of cue and reward that fueled a particular habit, It's an alchemy so powerful that even today the basic principles are still used by video game designers, food companies, hospitals, and millions of salesmen around the world (Duhigg, 2014, p. 23).

This has led to a “Golden Rule”: “If you use the same cue, and provide the same reward, you can shift the routine and change the habit” (Duhigg, 2014, p. 62). If Saint Augustine were alive today, he might find some connection with this world of persuasion based on his, “job as a salesman of words in the marketplace of rhetoric”⁴.

Saint Augustine overcame his own penchant for unbridled persuasion through his conversion. In a reality where 88% of smartphone users are on their phones more than 1 hour per day (Alter, 2017) no one can credibly argue that information age persuasion is not successful. While Eyal (2014, p. 12) believes that, “the trinity of access, data, and speed presents unprecedented opportunities to create positive habits”, this trinity can just as easily create negative habits. He has reduced his findings to a “Hook Model: a four-phase process companies use to form habits” Eyal (2014, p. 5). The parts of the model are trigger, action, variable reward, investment (Eyal, 2014). A great number of us have acquired,

⁴This translation of *Confessions*, IX, 2, 2 is from Toppin (2010, p. 46).

through this model or equally salient methods of hooking us, what Alter (2017) terms, “Behavioral Addiction”. He also observes that, “The key to overcoming addictive behaviors, then, is to replace them with something else” (Alter, 2017, p. 267).

Saint Augustine replaced the persuasions of his earlier life through his conversion animated by the love of God, *caritas*. *Caritas* “is the centerpiece of God’s ‘rhetoric’ in communicating with us, God’s persuasion of us, not in argument but in fleshly life. The weakness of God, the presence of God in a mortal life, undermines whatever we take for strength” (Williams, 2016, p. 11). As Augustinian educators we are called to help learners find substitutes for any addictive technological behavior they may have developed and find opportunities of loving experiences that can help them humbly reorient their curiosity and interests.

Mirroring as a means to aid learners move toward humility

Facing addictive behaviors requires speaking difficult truths. As Saint Augustine tells us,

You must tell yourselves the truth. I have simply put a mirror in front of you for you to look at yourselves. I am the mirror’s reflective power showing those who look into the mirror their faces. Note that the faces I am talking about now are the ones that are inside of us. I can address these faces through your ears even though I cannot see them. Now that I am presenting you with a mirror, each of you should look at yourselves and tell yourselves what you see.

To be effective mirrors to our students we need to learn to truly listen to them. Such listening provides the information for mirroring back to students what they have said and are thinking. According to Taft (2015, p. 167), “learning to listen means learning to actually pay attention to – to concentrate on – what other people are saying... This kind of concentrated listening is also called “active listening” or “deep listening”. To assist in credibly listening it may be helpful for us to have a pattern of listening that students can understand as resulting in a mirroring of the truth of their experience. As an example of a pattern of listening Duhigg (2014, p. 145) reports this conversation with a Starbucks manager, “One of the system terms we use is called the LATTE method. We Listen to the customer, Acknowledge the complaint, Take action by solving the problem, Thank them, and then Explain why the problem occurred”.

Doubt as a method within humility

Townsend (2016, p.1) in discussing the dark side of technology posits, “Computer and communication advances are unquestionably beneficial, but they have opened up opportunities for cybercrime, malicious access to electronically stored data, lack of privacy, and a powerful weapon for warfare and terrorism”. We can add to that the spreading of fake news as elements of the information age that can easily be seen as sowing doubt about the power of technology for good. This doubt about the good of technology is further sown when we realize the inequality technology brings. Eubanks (2016, p. 216) reminds us that,

At the same time, the professional middle class and wealthy will have to acknowledge the im-

mense suffering economic inequality causes, recognize their culpability, and reassess their role in creating a more just world. This is doubly true for technology professionals who hold immense resources, including specialized knowledge, tools, time, and money. Though they may have been unwitting participants in its construction, they must bend their tools toward dismantling the digital poorhouse.

A humble use of doubt may be a powerful tool to learn how to overcome some of the addictive behaviors and results connected to technology. While doubt may be for some an obstacle to learning, according to Howie (1969, p. 148), “Augustine regards the condition of doubt in positive terms as implying a desire to learn, i.e., a readiness for learning”.

Descartes (1850, p. 75) is renowned for saying, “I think, therefore I am”. But, Augustine’s certainty of his own existence came through another path. As he put it, “If I am deceived, I exist”. As Saint Augustine further notes,

Anyone, knowing that he doubts, knows with certainty something true, namely that he doubts. In this, he is sure about a truth. As a result, anyone, doubting that there is such a thing as the truth has at least a truth limiting his doubt”⁵.

Saint Augustine even doubted the efficacy of the teacher when he asked, “What foolish oddity could ever lead someone to send a child to school so that he can learn

⁵ *On True Religion*, 39, 73. For additional discussions of doubt and limited certainty by Saint Augustine, see also *Soliloquies*, II, 1, 1; *The Happy Life*, 7; *Answer to the Skeptics*, III, 9, 18-19; *Free Choice of the Will*, I, 7, 16; and II, 3, 7; *The Trinity*, XV, 11, 21; and *Teaching Christianity*, IV, 11, 26)

what the teacher thinks?” Saint Augustine answered his own question/doubt from the standpoint of the truth and coherence as known to the learner in these words,

After teachers have used words to explain all the branches of learning that they claim to teach, including those dealing with virtue and wisdom, students ponder interiorly if what has been said is true, that is, they contemplate on the inner truth according to their capacity.

Doubt in external teaching, in part, leads Saint Augustine, according to Jacobs, O.S.A. (2000, p. 117), to move away “from the truth of authority communicated externally to the authority of truth discovered internally”. Such doubt within a technological world and the need to assist students to learn from within can be helpful tools to help learners humbly embrace the incompleteness of our technological world, which a good deal of technology tries to persuade us in complete.

We have to grow, says Saint Augustine, if we are to feed on the truth. And the heart of that growth is humility, facing our essential incompleteness at every level, metaphysical, spiritual, cognitive, moral. Where does God actually meet us? In the free action by which he accepts the limits of mortal life so that he can speak directly to us using our own language. When you see God in Jesus, it is as if you see him at your feet, the suffering or dead body laid out before you; throw yourself on that level, ‘and when He rises, you will rise (Williams, 2016, p. 132).

Thus, as we humbly teach our students, Saint Augustine can help us see through doubt and incompleteness that

we need to lead learners to grow in the depths of their inner understandings while technology presses them to a world of exteriority.

Saint Augustine's insights on friendship

The third of the Augustinian learning practices we are looking at is Augustinian friendship. Saint Augustine was a natural at friendship. I see him having genius for friendship. We can see this in the people gathered around him in Thagaste, Carthage, Rome, Milan and Hippo Regius. I would go so far as to see friendship as one of his natural gifts, which through his conversion were transformed into part of his Christian persona. As I see it, the chief gifts that Saint Augustine had were:

- A passionate curiosity becoming through his conversion a pursuit of right love and a right will.
- An ear for eloquence becoming through his conversion the search for the truth.
- A genius for friendship becoming through his conversion a love of community.

Saint Augustine speaks of his gifts in these words,

Early I had an instinct for the care of my own being. In my interior sense...in my small thoughts I had come to delight in the truth. I hated to be wrong, had a vigorous memory and delighted in friendship... All these were gifts, and these were I.

These were not just personal gifts but also became the framework for the spirituality that Saint Augustine shared. According to Insunza (2006, p. 405), interiority (dialogue with the Teacher Within) and communion (friendship and community) “are the principle catego-

ries of Augustinian thought”. The community aspect can be seen, as noted above, when he reflects on his days as a student in Carthage in these words,

My soul found all manner of joy when I was in their company — to talk and to laugh and to be kind to each other — to read engaging books together, to go from the lightest joking to talk of the deepest things and back again — to differ without discord, as I might differ with myself, and when on the rarest occasion disagreement arose, to find it highlights the sweetness of our normal agreement — to teach or to learn from each other — to be impatient for those absent and welcome them with joy when they return — these and similar things, emanating from our hearts as we gave and received affection, shown in our faces, our voices, our eyes, and a thousand other gratifying ways, ignited a flame which fused our very souls together and made the many of us one.

Augustinian educators also have in the friendship/com-munion aspect a gift that is needed in the information age. I will identify how we can do this in 3 dimensions: the gift of friendship vs. technological isolation, the gift of friendship in a faceless virtual world, and the gift of friendship as spirituality of togetherness in a technological world.

Gift of friendship vs. technological isolation

Townsend (2016, pp. 230-231) describes the impact of isolating technologies in these words:

For the young, the primary villain in my accounting scheme is our fixation on constant communi-

cation with mobile phones and computers. This is not real human contact, as the electronics do not provide tones of voice that distinguish between threats, affection, irony, humour, or puns, any of which might have been implied with the same set of words. Therefore, misunderstanding can easily be triggered by prejudice, a misreading of the text, or reading into it what we want to hear.

We, like Saint Augustine, should view things from a relational vantage point where,

A person's well-shaped countenance is good, with its living beauty and glowing color. The soul of a friend is good, with the joy of unity and loyalty of affection. An upright person is good, as are the riches that make life more enjoyable. The heavens are good, with sun, moon and stars. Speech is good, when it teaches with patience, or gently rebukes.

From such an Augustinian viewpoint we should be teaching our students to be in deep relationships rather than seeing one another as technological resources, i.e., to see each other as subjects rather objects. In our workplaces rather than having offices of human resources we should envision ourselves in a culture where we value those we work and learn with. A review of Saint Augustine's *uti/frui*⁶ distinctions might contribute to our understanding of the gift of friendship we share with others.

It is important to remember that among the 5 million words we have from the Doctor of Grace are writings

⁶ A possible starting point for educators could be Saint Augustine's *Teaching Christianity* which presents the *uti/frui* distinction in a teaching context.

to/for people Saint Augustine had never met or had infrequent connections like Paulinus of Nola, the monks at Hadrumetum, and Saint Jerome. These interchanges reflect deep exchanges. We need to view this Augustinian work of enriching isolated technological enclaves with the gift of friendship as what the Cistercian, Merton (1985, p. 482) termed an “Apostolate of Friendship”.

To change our view toward technology and the people we engage with through technology will take a cultural reorientation of sorts. Maybe our schools can be places of such a cultural reorientation. Yet, Duhigg (2014, p. 244) reminds us that,

Movements don't emerge because everyone suddenly decides to face the same direction at once. They rely on social patterns that begin as the habits of friendship, grow through the habits of communities, and are sustained by new habits that change participants sense of self.

Hopefully, our work may enable our students to be what Seligman (2011) terms as, “Flourishing.” As such they will have what he identifies as PERMA, i.e., they will possess positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments they can rightly be proud of and draw strength from.

The gift of friendship in a faceless virtual world

In Virtual Reality (VR) we have something that would be totally alien to Saint Augustine and may be beyond his comprehension. Schultze (2002, pp. 117-118) describes cyberspace reality when he notes,

In cyberspace's open rhetoric, growing numbers of people imagine self-identity as a fluid product of on-going self-discovery. Moreover, the anonymity of online communication seemingly makes such self-discovery far less risky and more intimate. "We who populate cyberspace", writes Howard Rheingold, "deliberately experiment with fracturing traditional notions of memory by living multiple personae in different virtual neighborhoods.... The way we use these words, in stories, (true and false) we tell about ourselves (or about the identities we want people to believe us to be), is what determines our identities in cyberspace". Cyberspace creates an arena in which some people believe they can act on the wishes of their hearts to become particular kinds of people.

Such anonymity to create our virtual identities is easier said than done. In cyberspace many times the "free" access to the virtual worlds comes at a steep price. The creators of cyberspace platforms are often collecting information and monetizing it. Facebook's problems with Cambridge Analytica in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election emanated from Facebook's own efforts to monetize and increase the monetization of its "free" platform. The imagined privacy in the participatory/social media world became for some, painfully public. Augustinian friendship/community calls us to educate our students about the dark realities of virtual reality. We need to teach our students in VR about the internet acronym IRL, that is, what happens In Real Life.

Virtual worlds are not just "out there". Crouch (2017, pp. 26-27) reminds us of the encroaching on the impact of virtual reality and other cyberspaces, when he observes,

The kids know we need help too. They see how addicted their own parents are to devices. Apple introduced the groundbreaking iPhone in 2007. An awful lot of children born in 2007, turning ten years old as this book is published, have been competing with their parents' screens for attention their whole lives. They see their parents tethered to laptops, trying to stay ahead of work that has spilled out of the office into the evenings and weekends. Older kids know the sick-to-the-stomach feeling of having binged on a video game for days on end (just as their parents know the queasy too-much-Netflix feeling). They've watched as their most media-savvy peers, the ones with a thousand followers from their high school or a million followers from all over the world, first expose themselves, then overexpose themselves. And go from reveling in the attention to breaking under the weight of others' expectations and derision.

The need for exposure comes in part from what is termed with the Internet acronym, "FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out)" (Eyal, 2014, p. 57). Fear of the isolation of missing out, too often results in an isolation of shame through the reactions of others to our cyber presence. We may understand Saint Augustine's pear tree experience as akin to this. His involvement may have arisen from a 4th century form of FOMO.

In the faceless mass of the virtual reality and communities of isolation in gaming and other aspects of technological gathering, Augustinian educators need to teach their students to become "assemblies/communities of compassion". Even though we may believe that technol-

ogy is bringing us together, we must be cognizant that it is continuing to divide us. Eubanks (2017, p. 8) has found that,

Even in the early 2000s: high-tech economic development was increasing economic inequality in my hometown, intensive electronic surveillance was being integrated into public housing and benefits programs, and policy-makers were actively ignoring the needs and insights of poor working people. Nevertheless, my collaborators articulated hopeful visions that information technology could help them tell their stories, connect with others, and strengthen embattled communities.

Our Augustinian gift of a spirituality of communion/ friendship calls us to align ourselves with the hopes of those being excluded. This is part of the biblical injunction to “Bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2). Saint Augustine uses the image of deer to help us visualize the responsibility of bearing one another’s burden.

When deer cross over a body of water to an island in order to feed, they arrange themselves so as to put the burden of their heads, which are heavy with antlers, upon each other in such a way that the one behind stretches his neck and places his head on the one before him. And since there has to be one who leads the rest and has no one in front of him to lay his head on, they are said to take turns, so that the one who is in the lead and is worn out by the burden of his head goes to the end of the line, and the one whose head he bore when he himself was first, takes his place. Bearing one another’s burdens in this fashion,

they cross over the water until they come to solid ground... Nothing so proves a friend as bearing a friend's burden.

This clearly conveys our corporate communion/friendship responsibility and calls us to positive action to assist in overcoming the disparity. In the responsibility to help the excluded, Saint Augustine also ties us back to the Augustinian Humility we described above. Canning (1981, p. 170) reminds us that for Saint Augustine the self-emptying Christ of *Philippians 2, 5-8*.

Urges us, even in contemplation of the sublime, to acknowledge our own condition as slaves, to be grateful for the higher gifts we have received, and not to look down upon those who are weaker than ourselves and incapable of the heights of contemplation, but to adapt ourselves to them. If we fail to do this, we ignore the needs of Christ himself and court eternal confusion, for Christ has unreservedly identified himself with the weak.

The gift of friendship as spirituality of togetherness in a technological world

Saint Augustine's gift of friendship brings his friends with him into the embrace of God. As he wrote,

“I do confess I find it easy to give myself entirely to the love of those who are my intimate friends... In this love I am completely at ease, because I believe that God is there, on whom I cast myself confidently and in whom I take my rest”.

Quicke (2015, p. xi) identifies this spirit as a “spirituality of togetherness”.

This togetherness involves a distinctive Augustinian learning and teaching characteristic of “with others”. When contrasted with “for others” we can see a key distinction between Augustinian and Jesuit/Ignatian pedagogies. Saint Ignatius wanted the Jesuits to be “men for others”. Saint Augustine’s emphasis on “with others” can be understood through this observation he made,

My place as your head frightens me, but what I share with you comforts me. I am a bishop set over you, but together with you I am a Christian. The first is the title of the office I have assumed, the second is a grace; the first is a danger, the second is salvation. The office seems like a storm tossing us about in a raging sea. But when we remember who redeemed us by His blood, it seems we enter the safety of a harbor in the stillness of that thought. Even though this office is personally hard work, the common benefit gives me rest.

This “with” aspect of Augustinian spirituality should shape our Augustinian learning environments in general and our technological learning environments in particular. Despite the nomenclature of virtual worlds and technology communities, cyberspace is to a great extent a world of individualism. As Schultze (2002, p. 18) notes, “Although information technologies increase our capacity for acquiring and disseminating information, the resulting informational practices actually foster individualism and self-interest over community and responsibility”. Since the “with others” Augustinian approach is any thing but individualistic, we need to recognize that we are technologically countercultural. Our spirituality of togetherness needs to be a leaven in the information age, and we need to educate our students to row against some technological currents.

In her interpretation of Acts 4,32-35, Scott (2009, p. 6) sees Christians as “Table-People”. With the relation of Acts 4,32-35 to Saint Augustine’s *Rule*, arguably Augustinians are fundamentally table-people in our Spirituality of Togetherness. This gives a special meaning to the beginning of Saint Augustine’s rule I, “Before all else, dear brothers, love God and then your neighbor, because these are the chief commandments given to us. The following are the precepts we order you living in the monastery to observe. The main purpose for you having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart”. As we share the Augustinian Spirituality of Togetherness in an Information Age we need to engender in our learners that being online is being around the table with the sense of respect for others as those who have joined us around a table of communion.

Caltagirone (1988) has written about “Friendship as Sacrament”. This takes us from the dining table to altar table. In Sermons 227 and 272, Saint Augustine takes the “with others” spiritual dimension to a Eucharistic level where he preaches that we are to be the Body of Christ with others in the world having Christ as the Head of our Body. Williams (2018, p. 74) has written that,

Augustine is the first to use the expression *totus Christus*, ‘the complete Christ’, to denote the complex unity that is not only the Word and Jesus but Jesus and the members of his Body, understood as making up together a single persona, a single acting and speaking subject.

In this sacramental understanding we as Augustinian educators need to learn ourselves and teach our students that, as Christians, when we go into cyberspace we are taking Christ with us and meeting him there. As part of the “complete Christ” we are acting in cyberspace *in loco Jesu*, in the place of Jesus. By our presence in cyberspace we make sacred what to most people is simply technological.

Conclusions

As a conclusion, I hope that I have not made the 4th and 5th century Saint Augustine a man of 21st century technology. Rather, I hope that in sharing his spiritual and pastoral insights you have found compelling thoughts for working in an Information Age. I hope that Augustinian interiority as a learning practice provides compelling insights applicable to the radical exteriority of cyberspace, that Augustinian humility as a learning practice provides compelling insights applicable to the apparent lack of limitations and somewhat predatory tactics of technological persuasion, and that Augustinian insights on friendship as a learning practice provides compelling insights applicable to the pervasive individualism, isolation, seeming anonymity and the quest for fame of the participatory/ social web.

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