Dear Colleague,

I would appreciate your help with something. Would you let me know what you think is a distinguishing trait of Lasallian pedagogy? This can be something that you do in the classroom because you believe it to be particularly Lasallian, or it can be simply an idea you have about Lasallian pedagogy that you have not actually put into practice. This need not be long and complicated. You could simply respond: “I do this or I would like to do this (_______) in the classroom. It is Lasallian because (______).”

Many thanks for taking the time to respond.

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Richard,

From all my ponderings on this topic, I believe the distinguishing trait of Lasallian pedagogy is teaching with love. By the way, I’m including Lasallian pedagogy in my dissertation. Would you have any scholarly articles I could look at, including what you’ve written? Thanks for any help.

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I would like to be patient when confronted with sloth, incompetence, recalcitrance, self-indulgence, or irresponsibility. I think this is Lasallian because it attempts to embrace the spiritually- or intellectually-impoverished in their poverty, to see them as entrusted by Christ to my care, to care for them as Christ would. It is extraordinarily difficult, partially because it means I must first confront my own sinfulness, my own sloth, incompetence, recalcitrance, self-indulgence, and irresponsibility; and partially because it require me to minister not according to the ways I prefer to minister, but according to the needs of the (apparently unappreciative, often) recipient of my ministry.

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I do pay attention to students’ affections to what we study in the classroom. It is Lasallian because it advises me of their zeal, or lack thereof, for what we’re studying. Consequently, our learning can become more contextual rather than pedantic and my teaching can me more goal-oriented than abstract.
Hope we get to see your compilation when you are finished. In my education classes, I try very hard to form assignments around the students our students will teach. I do not treat my junior undergrads or my MAI students as students. I treat them as teachers. I hope that is Lasallian in that it takes them outside themselves and their own learning and growth and has them consider continually that they are in training to serve - for kids. Was good for me to stop and think about this.

Since you already know not to expect a simple answer from someone who works in ________ dept., I won't apologize for not providing one. As briefly as I can, however, I'd say that beyond the “herding” of (only) 24-26 into a room for the purposes of “vocational” sufficiency (getting a job), I don’t know that I do anything that hadn’t been done prior to de la Salle. So, he may have been the first to stop in a class and consider our selves as God’s holy people or pray, but it wasn’t like previous teachers never prayed with their (more intimate numbers of) pupils. Likewise, I realize that in house lore notes he "created" the multi-tasking of teaching "reading" with "ethics" by having them read catechetical stuff. But that had often been the pre-mass production mode for the rich family "tutors" hadn't it? (One would learn penmenship and Greek grammar by reading / copying the ancient grammarians.) I know that, quite contrary to his mission, I bring mostly well to (upper middle class) people who see their desired job as a “better” job rather than any job. And, for that matter these students often see St. Mary’s as a third choice rather than the only choice - to the credentials that will provide that “better” job. Though, here I guess we have our fair share of 8-18 ACT scorers who like de la Salle’s bunch have only us and community colleges as a choice.

Hi Richard - I want to respond before this gets buried under all the other mail in my in-box. Being new to SMU, and feeling like I'm still learning what Lasallian pedagogy is, and also being relatively new to teaching, (how's that for a disclaimer!) here's my response: I am trying to shift from lecturing or questioning students to having a conversation with them - something I would like to be able to do, and something that I see as Lasallian because it reflects the idea of education as engaging the whole person (rather than just the intellect).

Hi Richard: these would examples of things I do...
1. start class with a prayer
2. try to consider each student as an individual 
3. try to make connections to other areas of study on campus, Winona or world community 
4. try to "light the fire" … getting students excited about learning and being open to exploration 
5. positive mentoring 
6. striving for humility and grace under pressure 
7. trying to get students to think about others who are less fortunate than us… especially in terms of access to education.. and do something about it.

Thanks for the opportunity to share. I start each class with a Lasallian blessing. I say, "Let us remember we are in God's holy presence as we gather today. I would also like to ask you to remember that this is your university, your course, and that I am here to serve you in your journey to become a great teacher, someone who influences the lives of others in positive ways." I then ask if there are others for whom we can pray and students may name a friend or relative. It is Lasallian because the recognition of God's presence is common to Lasallian education. I also remind them of their ownership of learning because I believe that to be present in Lasallian charism - it is a sort of access to deep and personal learning and responsibility for the learning of self and others.

I don't know much about the LaSallian educational base. What I do remember was when I was taking Pat Costello's Shakespeare class. He would always start class with, "……Saint John Baptist DeLaSalle pray for us……" It had a wonderfully calming influence on the class. What a beautiful ambience in which to learn! Hope you don't mind a response from somebody that is no longer in the classroom but I just couldn't help myself.

Great question and I can hardly wait to see the responses. For me, learning students' names the very first day and calling them by name from that point on is one of the things I do which I see as Lasallian - having a "particular" relationship with each student that is neither "sentimental" nor "romantic" but specific. Throughout my classes, I work very hard to note each student individually, to be aware of the particular strengths, talents and weaknesses of each. As DeLaSalle noted, each needs a different type of encouragement, suited to the individual.
To me, these are the essential Lasallian characteristics. Beyond these, I could wax on about particular pedagogy, but I believe these things that I have stated are the foundations upon which - for me - the Lasallian relationship between teacher and student is founded. Thanks for asking.

This need not be long and complicated. You could simply respond: “I do this or I would like to do this (to remind and/or help learners understand (make the connections) we belong to many nested families/multiple associations) in the classroom. It is Lasallian because (_in part, explains the in association aspect).”

I treat students like grown-ups even when their behavior indicates otherwise. I hold them accountable for their actions. I impose sanctions on their behaviors when appropriate, not to be punitive, but to help them learn how to negotiate as adults in an adult world and when it is their best academic interest. I also explain principles of academic integrity to students when it appears their sense of this is distorted. When dealing with students I always ask myself what is best for them in the context of academic principles.

I look closely in their eyes, because I teach an entire human being and need to know how they truly are. No one can learn if life is excruciating, be it academically, personally, or physically. To me, it is Lasallian because it is awareness on a deeper level that opens the door for understanding and compassion, which can then open the door for learning.

Whenever possible, I like to acknowledge the accomplishments of my students outside the classroom (and even outside the discipline) in class. Mentioning the success of an athletic team, the excellence of a musical or theatrical performance, or a specific act of service or contribution to the campus community is a very good way of letting students know that you value more than their performance in the very narrow context of your class.
I believe that the above is Lasallian, because such acknowledgement communicates to students that you care about them as complete beings, and not just about their test scores or proficiency in the class at hand. It also is important in demonstrating that we as educators have a broader experience of the SMU community, and that we understand how our students are fully citizens of this community, contributing in diverse ways to the educational environment.

This is not to say that our classrooms need to be "mutual admiration societies," but a few well-placed words to congratulate an accomplishment can be very powerful, and can open a deeper dialog with a student both in and out of class.

In the classroom, I try to facilitate a number of community building activities so that I can create a learning environment in which students feel they can safely reveal things about themselves. I am looking to find insights into their learning style, cultural experiences and behaviors, communication style, and strengths and areas that need growth in terms of both content and relationship building. This allows me to assess how best to proceed with instructional design and delivery of content. It allows for better groupwork, better avenues for individuals to find personal meaning and relevance. This is LaSallian because although there are certain content goals to the course, the ways in which we get there are more personal, compelling, and lasting. Being able to learn through others, co-constructing knowledge, is an inclusive and awakening experience. This goes way beyond merely community building. Our commitment to excellence in teacher preparation includes building knowledge, skills and disposition...this in itself is LaSallian. Although the content is the heart of the course, teachers also need the right heart to best apply their knowledge and skills.

I try to know each student personally and then attempt to use this connection to 1) make them feel comfortable engaging in the class and w/ me if they need assistance w/ the material and 2) to make the material more relevant to their experiences and interests. This is Lasallian in that it stresses caring about the whole person, not merely the student as learner in a class.
I believe the most significant Lasallian thing I do in the classroom (and outside it, for that matter) is to treat the students as individuals and with respect. While I continue to remind them that I have knowledge that I hope to communicate to them, I am very clear that I do not believe that I am “better” than they are; we are all on equal footing in God’s eyes, so we are all on equal footing in my eyes, too. I do remind them, however, that I ultimately control what goes on in the classroom - I call it a “benevolent dictatorship”!

I “stuggle” with these kinds of questions all the time, every time. Does it mean that some “practice” is solely Lasallian (then we will NEVER have ANYTHING to say, as there is nothing that is SOLELY Lasallian).

Does it mean “uniquely” Lasallian? Then, too, could it possibly be the case that no one else (religious order/congregation, secular group, professional society) has done this “thing” before, since, or in the future that we Lasallians do? To fill in your sentence, ONE thing I might say is “to care for each student in particular, to know each students name, to “teach to” each student....”

Now, I imagine huge state and/or research universities could hardly do this.... but neither do some of my colleagues with classes of 10-20! And, is this kind of care and concern, specificity and particularity SOLELY or UNIQUELY Lasallian? I should pray that it is not.

One of the most defining characteristics of Lasallian pedagogy is INNOVATION. This presupposes an educational philosophy that is person centered (all of the rhetoric of starting where the student is, educating the whole person, and relating to the student’s humanity using Christ as a model apply here). De Lasalle was adaptive and practical in his orientation- INNOVATIVE, in order to adjust to changing times and needs and even the differences between one student and the next in terms of preparation, academic strengths and weaknesses, and personal history. His practical focus was also oriented toward what we would today call “vocational training,” but because it was delivered in the context of a Christian school it was not merely vo-tech training. But De Lasalle exposed his students to vocational arts in order that they might be prepared to make a living. How do we live out that heritage, particularly in the humanities? In my teaching, I have tried to be innovative, and thus Lasallian, by 1) connecting theoretical learning in the great books with the arts and other “experiences” in order to develop students’ appreciation of the larger context in which their learning exists, and 2) mentoring students into service- particularly educational service like tutoring and service to the poor, so that they themselves are given the opportunity to live De Lasalle’s mission and not just read about it. Examples of innovative pedagogies in the service of the person
centered Lasallian educational philosophy are 1) experiential learning that takes dry theoretical material (The Buddhist scriptures, for example) and through an experiential project creates an opening into the world context in which that theoretical material lives. In approaching World Religions, for example, and specifically the Buddhist scriptures, I use instruction in classical Chinese calligraphy, which is a Zen Buddhist art form (Brush Meditation), and to set the context for Taoism, I use hands-on instruction in Japanese tea ceramics and teaism.

2) The second method I use is service learning that is focused on the kind of work that De Lasalle and the early brothers did—tutoring of children in need of extra support (as well as incarcerated adolescents) and service to nursing home residents. Each student reflects on his/her experience in writing several times over the course of the semester and receives guidance, questioning, and support from me. My comments are formative and the dialogue I establish with students attempts to help them grow intellectually (what are the main questions that your service experience raises), spiritually (often the experience raises spiritual questions concerning the students’ relation to God or God’s role in suffering…) and personally (what are your strengths in this service arena…what areas do you need to grow in). This kind of personalism is very Lasallian in its orientation.

In the writing courses I teach, both upper- and lower-division I schedule appointments with students outside of class time to offer them suggestions about how they might improve their written drafts. This is Lasallian, I believe, because it 1) offers students individual attention and 2) accounts for different writing (learning) styles.

One colleague came to see me personally and shared a particular classroom technique: double-entry journaling. For example, she might ask the class to respond to a reading a) in a scholarly way such as connections to other readings and class discussion and b) how the reading affects me personally. In this way both the instructor and the students can relate on two levels: scholarly and the personal, two sides of Lasallian pedagogy! [RT]