

## Who Is A Lasallian Educator? A Personal Saga

By

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I was a Lasallian Educator long before I came to Saint Mary's in 2007 but just did not know it. *Nosce te ipsum* became the touchstone of my search for the identity of my pedagogy post my arrival at Saint Mary's. It has been a rewarding quest that culminated in its fulfillment at Saint Mary's. Let me explain.

My education began at a Catholic girl's convent in Vishakhapatnam, India. I went to a girl's school since there was no good local public school to educate me. At this school, I learned about Jesus Christ and his message of peace, love and salvation. I was very much taken up with the parable of the Good Samaritan and remember admiring an illustration of the injured man on the ground being helped by the Samaritan (whom I always thought was Jesus Christ). These and other bible stories became the basis of my ethical and moral upbringing intermixed with stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata that I was told at home. The ideals of selfless sacrifice, concern for the poor and down-trodden and dedication to one's duty and calling in life grew out of these childhood stories and teachings.

Growing up in India, my teachers always extolled the *guru Kula* system as the ideal system of learning. Literally meaning "of the house of the teacher", this system required the pupil to leave his home at the age of five and live with his guru till he (but not a she) completed his study. The rationale for this system was to produce men who have immersed themselves in their education and are thoroughly pure and moral in their behavior. While I appreciated the transformational ideals of this system, two things did not sit well with me – the notion of the learned teacher separated from the learner and the emphasis on the education of males with little place for a female education (though there were exceptions).

Between the ages of eight and sixteen, my mother continued my spiritual education by taking me on weekends to the Ramakrishna Mission, where the power of faith and rational thought as embodied in the Indian savant, Swami Vivekananda and the vision of a caste-less and class-less Indian society was both inspiring and addictive. I discovered Buddhism at the same time and devoured any books that I could find on the life of Gautama, the Buddha. Mine was an ever-expanding inner dialogue of combining these disparate traditions to understand how one could live a life of goodness and service to mankind. As I came close to my graduation year, the desire to contribute and help those less fortunate than the life that had been granted to me by my genetic lottery led me to join the Gandhi Peace Foundation, with the Mahatma a strong influence on my thinking. I worked in the slums and taught at a village school outside Delhi in Patpadganj, a poor agricultural community near the big city.

At the very impressionable age of sixteen, I read Plato (CWP, 1961) and Aristotle (CWP, 1965) and was thoroughly impressed by the ideal of the peripatetic Socrates or Aristotle as teacher with his pupil who walked side by side in the grounds of the *Lyceum* debating, arguing and educating. While many of the arguments remained hazy and obscure at that impressionable age, nevertheless the exciting issues discussed were exhilarating, exciting and intoxicating. But here too, and too soon, disquiet set in later. The division in to classes with learning focused on the *aristocratoi* was an affront to my young democratic soul, especially given the class and caste-ridden society around me in India. The second half of *The Republic* epitomized the demise of the seductive vision of an education at the *Akademia*. "On the shoulders of giants stand we" should have led to a more liberal understanding of the elite education provided to the propertied and aristocratic class in Ancient Greece but while immensely attracted and

stimulated by the Socratic dialogues (mainly the early ones), I was disappointed at the class and gender-based educational process that was the result.

Then followed some difficult years in Saint Stephen's College, where I worked in street theater in the slums of Delhi and flirted with a revolutionary movement in the attempt to change the life of the wretched of the earth that surrounded me in my everyday existence in India. Nevertheless, the Christian ideal remained nascent even as my teachers focused on a first class liberal arts education. I became a semi-professional actor on the New Delhi stage as I finished up my undergraduate degree in economics with honors. During these undergraduate years, I also learned of other ways of human development which were more benign than revolution in understanding the role of the market, the power of voluntary action and cooperation and key role of education.

At the age of nineteen-and-a-half, I went to business school to learn about management and good governance in two extremely intense years of full-time study. My summer internship was with the Indian Planning Commission, India's central planning agency, where I thought I would serve the poor and the development of India best by working on development plans in the area of public investment project appraisal and management. After obtaining my MBA, I re-joined the Planning Commission as a full-time employee to continue my work in project evaluation and perspective planning. However, disappointment set in early. I realized that there were intractable problems of planning and implementation that actually caused me as a central planner to make the lives of the poor worse by well-intentioned but fundamentally flawed and poorly implemented investments and public sector decisions. I realized that centralized planning and control were fundamentally incompatible with human freedom, distributed knowledge, decentralized management and voluntary action. The stifling bureaucracy did not help either. It was at this juncture that I read intensely about the United States and its formation, creation of opportunity for millions and its very successful development.

However, my desire to contribute through public service still remained. I left the Planning Commission for one of India's largest public sector energy-equipment companies, Bharat Heavy Electricals, where I joined the Chairman and Managing Director's office as a planning manager. What followed was five years of very intensive and rewarding managerial work that changed my path in life. In the beginning, I was involved in setting up, effecting and implementing strategic planning and organizational change processes that fundamentally transformed the company from an also-ran public sector corporation to one of the most dynamic, fast-growing and successful public sector companies that affected the life of millions. I chose to move from the head office in Delhi to one of the manufacturing units in rural south India. There, in addition to continuing my role as a strategic planning manager for the manufacturing unit, I became the project coordinator for \$22 million (in 1975 dollars) boiler house auxiliaries project that taught me a lot about integrated project management tempered by local rural conditions and how the poor needed to be integrated in to all management thinking.

But the life-changing turning point came at this juncture when I started to teach on a regular basis in the company's executive management development center. I also taught engineering management and economics at a leading local engineering college. I wrote my first journal article about intellectual learning and freedom (Kamath, BR, 1977).

It became clear to me through these experiences that education was the means to transform and upgrade the human capabilities that would help the poor and mankind in general improve their own lives. I decided to become a teacher in spite of the fact that I was simultaneously selected to become a

member of the Indian Foreign Service and Indian Administrative Service, where I could have served as a public servant for the development of India.

I applied for and completed another master's degree and a doctorate in economics in Canada with a focus on international and development economics and finance. This was where my sub-conscious "Lasallian educator" transformation took place. As a tutorial leader and apprentice teacher, I recognized the role of quality education through an immersive and engaged pedagogy, dedication to learning and effective communication and discipline. In the classroom and outside, I "walked beside" my students, helping them learn deeply about the subject but also learned about their life goals, aspirations and dreams. My dedication to their learning and success was total and the reward of the "aha" moment immense. I lived and breathed for learning and teaching. Yet, while my teaching evaluations always put me at the top of my cohort, I was the "hardest" teacher in terms of discipline and expectations in the comments on these evaluations. My students thanked me for my dedication to their learning and how much they enjoyed my classes.

At this time, I was hired by Dalhousie University, Canada's oldest university to teach international business and finance. Here my "Lasallian educator" development continued. I experimented with engaged pedagogy, introducing projects in my class that were integrated with the local community. I continued to develop methods of participative learning such as role plays, experiential exercises and mini-case based learning methods in what was called the *CaseRole* method (Kamath, JTIB, 1990).

In the middle of my second year at Dalhousie, I was selected by the Canadian International Agency (CIDA) to travel to China to establish a Masters in Management program at one of the Big Ten universities (Xiamen University) of that country. This visit was transformative since I experimented with new classroom teaching methods, including *CaseRole*, which energized students who had been lectured to through uninspiring teaching methods. I was able to have my students engage in classroom exercises, debates, field visits and intensive discussions. They were engaged completely and became my friends, even though many of them were older than me and from the "lost generation" of Mao's Cultural Revolution. I view these attempts at an engaged and interactive pedagogy as fundamentally Lasallian since the objective was to engage the learner completely in their intellectual and human potential development.

It was at this time that I moved to the United States. I had met Anthony Fisher, a renowned San – Francisco based philanthropist and backer of public policy institutes and intellectual think-tanks and he offered to help me start a public policy institute in India. I moved to the California State University, Hayward in the San Francisco Bay Area where I began teaching undergraduates and graduate students in economics and business on a regular basis even as I participated in and started innovative new interactive global immersion and experiential learning programs such as the Pacific Rim Marketing, the Asian International Marketing and the European International Marketing programs (MacNab and Kamath, JTIB, 1996). These programs required the teacher and student to work closely together on large-scale business projects for international clients where they applied classroom learning to real-world problems while traveling to the countries where the projects were based.

In these programs, my colleagues and I experimented with new experiential and service learning pedagogical methods to develop a new paradigm of immersive experiential learning pedagogy. One of these programs won the national Levy Award for Excellence in Private Education from the Valley Forge Foundation in Valley Forge, PA (see Kamath and MacNab, WMEAC, 1996 and JME, 1998) as well as the Decision Sciences Institute Outstanding Program Runner Up Award (Kamath and MacNab, DL, 1997). At

this time, I also started training business executives from the Soviet Union (then Russia after the break-up of the Soviet Union), China, Korea, Belgium and Thailand and developed MBA programs for launch in countries like the former Soviet Union/Russia (Wiley, Kamath and MacNab, SMEIUS, 1992 and Kamath and Wiley, MECIT, 1997). All these programs used the experiential learning methods developed and involved cross-cultural learning experiences. In 2000, I created a new global immersion and experiential learning MBA program called the Transnational Executive MBA (TEMBA) program, which embodied the principles of practice-based experiential learning, cross-cultural pedagogy and service learning. The program was a great success with two cohorts of 25-30 students twice a year and learning outcomes that were reflected in high scores on independent exit surveys (Kamath, Agrawal and Krickx, JTIB, 2008). Post facto, these can all be viewed as my version of Saint La Salle's "simultaneous method" and engaged pedagogy where the intellectual and moral development of the student was paramount.

My passion for "side-by-side" group learning and teaching at CSUH (now CSU, East Bay) resulted in my developing life-long close bonds with my students. TEMBA students still get together regularly to discuss their lives, learning and shared experiences and I get invited to these get-togethers on a regular basis. In addition, the staff team that ran the program meets periodically as the Global Lunch Club to renew their energy and share the experiences of a close-knit community.

When I arrived at Saint Mary's in 2007, all these proto-Lasallian experiences came together in my teaching and program development efforts. In class, I further developed the intellectual and experiential engagement pedagogy I had developed over the years. I tied these to my program development efforts when I proposed and was successful in starting the Trans-Global Executive MBA program in collaboration with the then Graduate Business faculty in the School of Economics and Business Administration (SEBA). We incorporated experiential Lasallian social justice global consulting projects aimed at helping those below the poverty line in developing countries (Kamath et. al. 2008, 2009, and 2011).

Enrolled T-GEMBA participants work for 10-12 months with non-profits, not-for-profit arms of for-profit corporations, for-profit corporations, NGOs and government agencies to solve complex management problems that created livelihoods for those below the poverty line or improved their lives in six areas: Healthcare, Opportunity (or entrepreneurship), Peace, Education, Infrastructure and Microfinance (in what we called the HOPE-IM model) to offer systemic and integrated solutions to problems of poverty, destitution and lack of empowerment that adversely affected the lives of millions. Program participants work in teams of 4-6 individuals on 3-5 different global projects in each cohort. The projects are focused on one or more of the elements of the HOPE-IM model to enable program participants to apply their learning in the program in the real-world. These projects are done with the help of SEBA faculty advisors who literally work side-by-side with program participants in a collaborative learning mode. The focus is on people (society), ethics, planet (environment) in addition to the traditional concern with profit/performance. The projects embody the five Lasallian principles.

The program has completed or is in the process of completing a total of almost 30 projects in countries as diverse as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, India, the Philippines, Thailand and Zanzibar and is expanding to Indonesia and Vietnam. Program participants have tackled problems covering ambulance services for the poor, child labor, early childhood care and education, village and rural area employment cluster development, microfinance provision, hospital development and financing for the poor, eco-tourism, agricultural supply chain development, integrated farming and seaweed agriculture development among other HOPE-IM areas.

The underlying pedagogical paradigm is essentially the same as that taught by Saint La Salle and his beloved Christian Brothers in France over 300 years ago of action-oriented experiential service learning. A series of classes focused on global and responsible business are interspersed with global immersions where participants learn through classes, interactions, exercises, case studies, simulations, organizational visits, cross-cultural immersion, first-hand visits with those below the poverty line and interaction with project principals and personnel. Immersion exercises with overseas counterparts round out the global experience. We are now extending all these elements to all our graduate and undergraduate programs focused on the Lasallian principles and mission.

Reflecting on this personal saga of engaged and principles-focused education, the following Lasallian elements and lessons emerge:

(1) A well-rounded education is essential for the whole person, especially in the area of business management, where intellectual inquiry combines with a humble attitude, dedicated service, a desire to learn and serve, and good manners/attitude. This is the direct outcome of educating well-mannered and civic conscious individuals as laid out by Saint La Salle in his *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* (1702/1990) which is a remarkable book about politeness and is also a text in the reading of manuscripts.

(2) Discipline and dedication to one's vocation are stepping stones to a life fully examined (especially in an area like business) as epitomized in the context of elementary, middle and high schools by Saint La Salle in his *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* (1720/1996), a treatise on pedagogic method.

(3) Learning is facilitated by the use of Saint La Salle's *Simultaneous Method* where the different capabilities of the learners are recognized and their learning is done side-by-side as laid out in *De La Salle* (1720/1996).

(4) Teaching is a vocation characterized by total dedication and commitment as evidenced by all of Saint La Salle's writings.

(5) An education, especially in areas like business and economics, needs to be practical and about practice rather than only about theory. Saint La Salle's educational approach was grounded in practice as is evident from the practical education emphasized in Lasallian schools but also the majority of the 80+ Lasallian universities in the world emphasizing programs in vocational subjects such as applied science, architecture, engineering, accounting, business, medicine, nursing, law and the practical arts such as dance, music, theater and the creative arts. His practical educational approach also introduced group cooperative Learning methods to replace the tutorial approach of his time, something very much embedded in my teaching methods and today's Lasallian institutions of secondary and post-secondary education.

(6) A Lasallian education also needs to have broad inquiry-based roots where the goal is *to probe deeply the mystery of existence by cultivating the ways of knowing and the arts of thinking* (see Saint Mary's mission at <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/about-saint-marys-college/our-mission#sthash.NsNJNmek.dpuf>). This is the essence of a Lasallian education where a holistic and inquiry based approach in the liberal arts tradition is the epitome of a good education in any field, including business.

(6) Lifelong engagement is an integral part of a Lasallian education with a pedagogy focused on concern for the poor and social justice. Our programs and methods have to be focused on these issues to engage our students while improving the education and life of those less fortunate than us. This was *the raison d'être* of Saint La Salle's life work.

(7) Faith and dedication are essential to good teaching and learning. While Saint La Salle emphasized the Christian faith in his writings though focusing on lay teachers and not priests, today we recognize the importance of all faiths and even those who deny religious faith as being dedicated to the educational mission. As Lasallian educators, it is dedication to and faith in educating people that drives our excellence in education.

The journey thus far as a Lasallian educator has been rewarding and uplifting. I can only hope that I continue to deliver on Saint La Salle's vision on the road ahead, wherever it may take me.

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