

# a new culture of learning

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implications for missional leaders

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# to begin...

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- *A New Culture of Learning*
- MacArthur Foundation's project on digital media and learning (see also *homago*, and *Now You See It*)
- core ideas of that research, my own reflections on its implications for faith education more generally, and strategies for lay leadership and formation

what is the “new culture of learning”?  
how does it intersect with theological/religious  
education and pastoral leadership?

limitless information  
bounded environments

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metaphors of an information  
network, and the culture  
of a petri dish (31)





# learning-based

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argues that a teaching-based approach is sharing stable information “about” the world, whereas a learning-based approach is learning through engagement “with” the world (37)



personal & collective

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as contrasted to the public and  
the private (56)

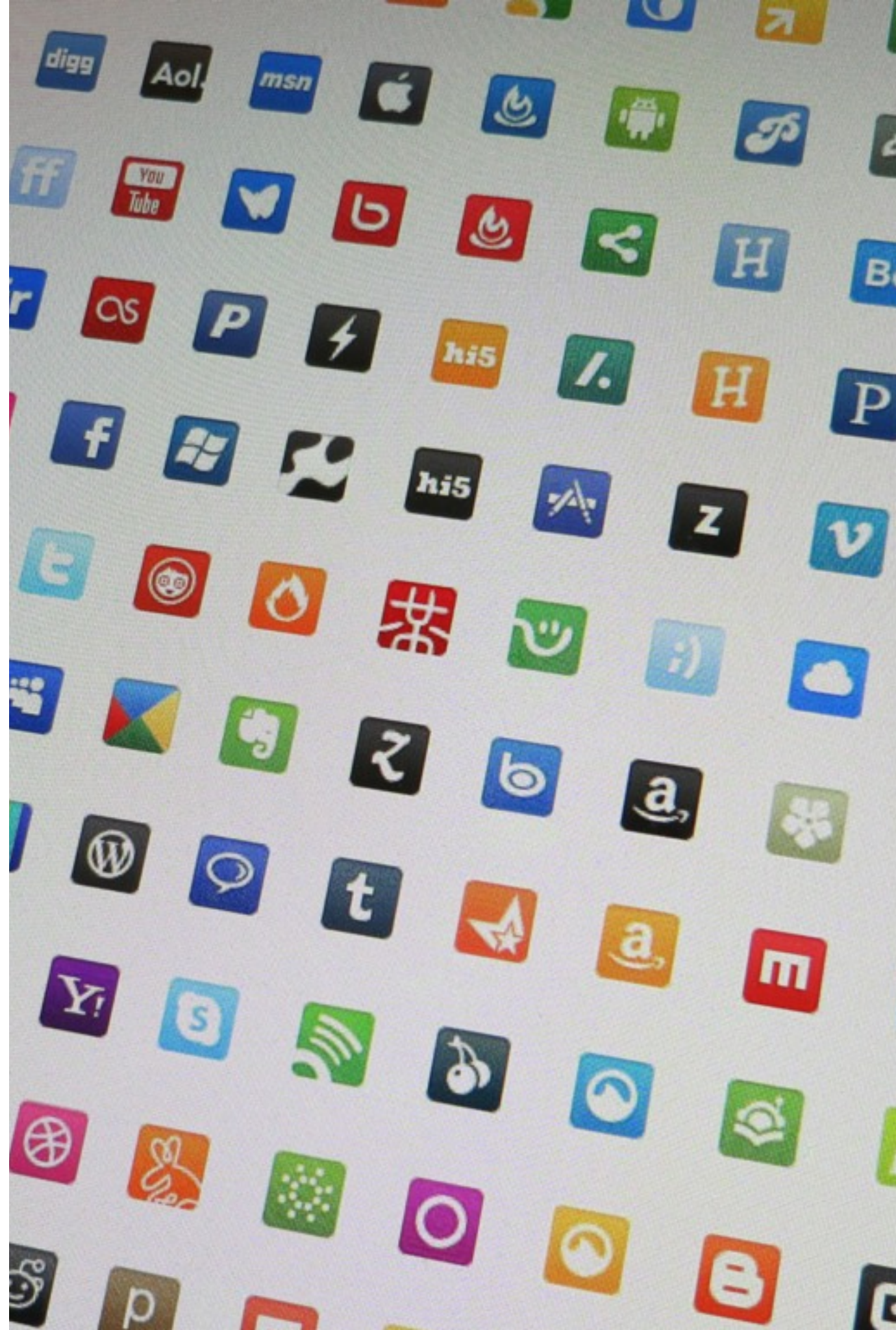




# construction of interpretive communities

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blogging is one example, but  
there are others as well (66)



in communities people learn in order to belong,  
in collectives people participate in order to learn  
(56)



# tacit knowing

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stable knowledge is explicit  
knowledge, constantly changing  
knowledge is tacit (77)







tacit knowing: we learn by doing, watching and experiencing (77)

inquiry: not learning what we know, but asking  
‘what are the things we don’t know, and what  
questions can we ask about them?’ (83)



# inquiry → indwelling

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“indwelling is the set of practices we use and develop to find and make connections among the tacit dimensions of things” (85)



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# build inquiry from passion

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“the new culture of learning is about the kind of tension that develops when students with an interest or passion that they want to explore are faced with a set of constraints that allow them to act only within given boundaries” (81)





what could all of this suggest to pastoral leaders?

is this really all that new?



A photograph of a forest floor. The ground is covered with a dense carpet of small, white, star-shaped flowers, likely wild garlic, interspersed with green foliage. Several thin, light-colored tree trunks stand vertically in the background, creating a sense of depth. The lighting is soft and diffused, typical of a forest interior.

Buechner: vocation is where your deep gladness  
and the world's deep hungers meet.



world's needs... what of brokenness?  
what of the hiddenness of God?  
what of faith in a world of pain?

# strengths of theological/religious education

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- esoteric knowledge
- Rahner: the recognition of our finitude points to awareness of the infinite (that is, in acknowledging our limits we recognize the limitless)
- Parker Palmer: whole sight of mind and heart
- we have practice with making explicit the knowing which comes from tacit sources (spirituality, practices of faith, etc.)
- we have practice with bounded environments that are open (worship, church teaching, mission trips, etc.)

# challenges of theological/religious education

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- certain of our esoteric knowledge has become nearly inaccessible
- our lived sense of God's agency and power has been diminished
- our "bounded environments" are crumbling all around us (denominational shifts, sacred/secular, etc.)
- tacit knowing is often disavowed in certain religious contexts; some of our "tacit knowing" is hierarchical power over, rather than kenosis
- much of religious education errs on the side of being "teaching-based" rather than "learning-based"



what could/should we do?

*homo sapiens, homo faber, homo ludens*  
(90)

# where are we *knowing*?

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- in churches
- in schools
- in neighborhoods
- around the globe
- with the Spirit





# what/who are we *making*?

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- disciples (Matthew 28:19)?
- communities?
- collectives?
- scholars?
- teachers?
- learners?





# how are we *playing*?

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- with ritual?
- with music?
- with the arts more generally?
- with philosophical argument?
- with social justice organizing?
- with theological argument?
- with institutional transformation?



“the new culture of learning is a culture of collective inquiry that harnesses the resources of the network and transforms them into nutrients within the petri dish environment, turning it into a space of play and experimentation” (118)



# eg: strengths of Catholic theology and pedagogy

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- complex ways of imagining and embodying authority
- clear emphasis on incarnation and analogical imagination
- deep experiential resources within the tradition
- vigorous commitment to social teaching
- global reach and diversity
- clear emphasis on God's agency

“that moment of fusion between unlimited resources and a bounded environment creates a space that does not simply allow for imagination, it *requires* it” (118)



what of your contexts?

these ideas are an interaction with Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown's book *A New Culture of Learning*, published in 2011

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