

a new culture of learning

nalm: implications for forming lay leaders

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to begin...

- *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

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



learning-based

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)



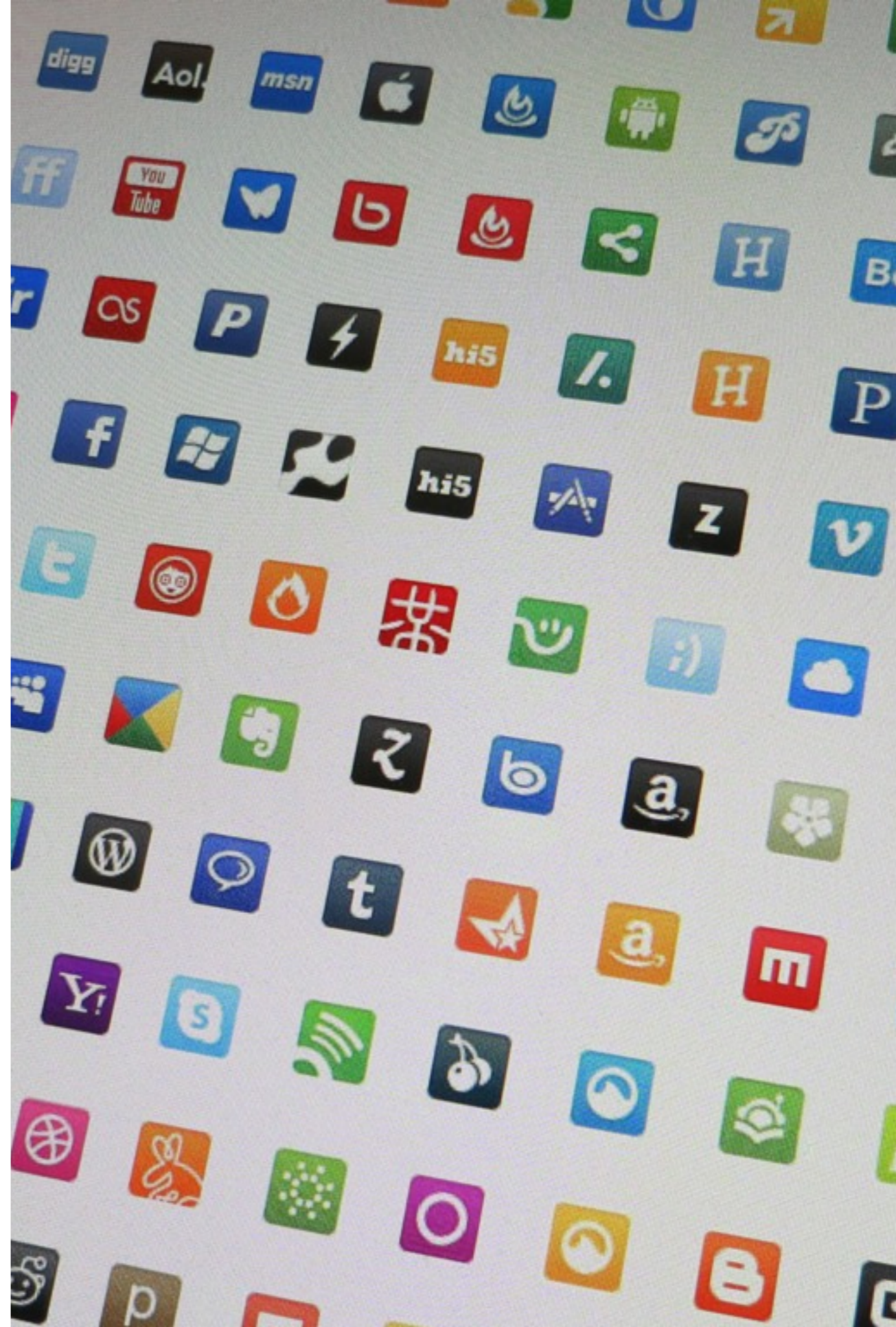
personal & collective

as contrasted to the public and
the private (56)



construction of interpretive communities

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

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

“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

“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 theological educators who are preparing people for pastoral leadership?

is this really all that new?

A photograph of a forest floor covered in a dense carpet of small white flowers, likely wild garlic, with green foliage interspersed. Several thin tree trunks are visible, and there are some piles of sticks or brush on the ground. The background is filled with more trees and a canopy of green leaves.

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

- 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, parochial schools, etc.)

challenges of theological/religious education

- 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 Catholic 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?*

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



what/who are we *making*?

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



how are we *playing*?

- 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)

strengths of Catholic theology and pedagogy

- 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

strengths of lay ministry formation

- adult learning focus
- extensive experience with lay learning and leadership
- deep connections to ecclesial landscape and the academy
- clear accountability through scholarship and ministerial leadership
- multiple connections locally to service organizations, non-profit entities, and businesses (health industry, leadership, etc.)

continue to support excellence and reflective work in areas in which NALM members are already strong, and grow new initiatives that “know, make and play” in a new culture of learning

“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)

can NALM “hang out, mess around, and geek out”?

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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