



*Occasional Paper # 4*

*Encounters of Learning:  
Saint Augustine on Education*

*by*

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I would like to thank my Augustinian brothers for the kind invitation to share with you thoughts on Saint Augustine of Hippo's ideas on education. I hope that my humble presentation may help you to encounter Saint Augustine and come through this "knowledge to wisdom."<sup>1</sup>

Where should I begin? With a thinker like Saint Augustine this is difficult. While many educational thinkers like Maria Montessori provide a plan or blueprint for education, Saint Augustine does not. Likewise, he does not give us a systematic presentation of educational ideas or designs for learning activities. This is not necessarily a problem. Anton Pegis describes Saint Augustine as "the disciple of the love of God." According to Pegis, Saint Augustine's love of God is "not a doctrine but a life, not an abstract analysis but a journey, not a theory but an experience."<sup>2</sup> Just as we can find Saint Augustine's theology in his life and writings, we can also find there his ideas on education.

Recently, Neuhaus described Pope Benedict XVI as an Augustinian thinker. He found this synthesized when Pope Benedict "said at a funeral of a friend 'Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or a moral system. Christianity is an encounter, a love story, an event.'"<sup>3</sup> Using Pope Benedict's description, we can see education for Saint Augustine as "encounters of learning." From my studies I would say that there are for Saint Augustine 4 major ways of encountering learning. They are 1) Learning through Transforming Experiences, 2) Learning as a Journey in Search of

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<sup>1</sup> *De Trinitate*, 13, 24

<sup>2</sup> Anton C. Pegis, "The Mind of Saint Augustine." *Medieval Studies* 6 (1944), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Neuhaus, "The Heart and Mind of Benedict." *On Faith - Guest Voices: Washingtonpost.com*. Posted April 11, 2008. [http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/guestvoices/2008/04/the\\_heart\\_and\\_mind\\_of\\_benedict.html](http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/guestvoices/2008/04/the_heart_and_mind_of_benedict.html) . Retrieved on April 15, 2008.

Understanding/Meaning/Truth, 3) Learning with Others in Community, and 4) Building the Habits (Love) of Learning. Even though I have numbered these encounters and put them in an order for this presentation, there is not a priority among them. Likewise, one does not necessarily precede another.

### **Encounter 1: Learning through Transforming Experiences**

In attempting to identify the educational thought of Saint Augustine, a good starting point could be his work, *De magistro* (The Teacher). This contains insights about teaching that come from early in his writing career. Yet, if we look at the life of Saint Augustine there is evidence that his ideas changed when he found better directions or better ways of expressing his ideas. Based on these changes, it may be better to look at the end of his life. In the last years of his life Saint Augustine wrote his *Retractationes*. In this work Saint Augustine reviewed his writings and made comments improving specific texts. Henry Chadwick believes an accurate translation of *retractationes* may be *reconsiderations* rather than *retractions*. Reconsiderations can be seen as an overarching theme of the way Saint Augustine learned. In the *Confessions*, Saint Augustine presents his learning development through his various conversions (philosophical, moral, and religious) as a series of reconsiderations. In each of his conversions Saint Augustine's *Confessions* presents encounters leading to reconsideration and transformation of himself beyond his previous understandings.

For Saint Augustine learning through transforming experiences came through dialogue with the Inner Teacher (Augustinian interiority). In *De magistro* (the Teacher) he introduces this dialogue as a practice of teaching and learning that assists students to understand abstract concepts like signs and symbols. While an Augustinian style of

education does not demand teaching Saint Augustine's thoughts on signs and symbols, it should involve encouragement of dialogue with the Inner Teacher as an important means to foster in the learner a Desire for Authenticity, a Capacity for Discernment and a Sense of Transcendence.<sup>4</sup>

For Saint Augustine, each new truth moved him forward – lifted him upward in his dialogue with the Inner Teacher. Galende summarizes this dialogue, this style of interiority, as a four step process through which Saint Augustine invites us 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.<sup>5</sup>

For Saint Augustine this dialogue moves us to transcend and to transform where we have been and what we know. To engage in this dialogue requires Active Listening where the hearer listens attentively to the speaker and responds to the speaker's message. In the *Confessions* Saint Augustine recalls how he has actively listened to the Inner Teacher reflecting on when he understood and when he misunderstood this teacher.

In *De magistro* (The Teacher) Saint Augustine reminds us that no earthly teacher is a real expert. In his words, "What foolishness could ever lead someone to send a child to school so that he can learn what the teacher thinks?"<sup>6</sup> It is the Inner Teacher that matters. Drucker sees Saint Augustine conveying to us an understanding that earthly

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<sup>4</sup> M.A. Keller, Human formation and Augustinian Anthropology in *Elements of an Augustinian formation*. Rome: Pubblicazione Agostiniane, 2001, 210-211.

<sup>5</sup> F. Galende, Augustinian Interiority in *Our journey back to God: Reflections on Augustinian Spirituality*. Rome: Pubblicazione Agostiniane, 2006, 279.

<sup>6</sup> *De magistro*, 45.

“teaching is best understood through a metaphor of pointing,”<sup>7</sup> where the teacher facilitates a discussion or provides information that points the way to understanding.

Further, Saint Augustine sees practice in reasoning as crucial to the interior dialogue. He even devotes the *Soliloquia* (The Soliloquies) to an interior dialogue with Reason. For him, Illumination must be added to reason with the help of the Inner Teacher to reach truth (wisdom). He shows the way to transform reasoning through an encounter with illumination when he says, “Return to yourself. Truth resides inside a person. When you discover that you can change, transcend yourself.... Go where the light of reason is illuminated.”<sup>8</sup>

In applying this Encounter 1: Learning through Transforming Experiences to ourselves or our educational programs we can ask: What are the learning encounters that transform us? What are the learning encounters that should have transformed us but did not? Where is our dialogue with the Inner Teacher? What light/lights illuminate our reasoning leading us to wisdom?

## **Encounter 2: Learning as a Journey in Search of Understanding/Meaning/Truth**

In attempting to understand Saint Augustine’s encounter of Learning as a Journey in Search of Understanding/Meaning/Truth, it is good for us to recall his book *Retractationes* (Reconsiderations). Here Saint Augustine’s “reconsiderations” point out an ongoing journey in learning the truth. He never captured truth once for all. Unlike fundamentalism, traditionalism, scientism, literalism, an Augustinian approach to education does not convey objective truth as something that can be captured in a frozen

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<sup>7</sup> J.P. Drucker, “Teaching as Pointing in ‘The Teacher’.” *Augustinian Studies* 28-2 (1997), 132.

<sup>8</sup> *De vera religione*, 39,72.

way. Rather it supports learning how to move upward on the learning journey pointing beyond ourselves. While we can have knowledge we are always on the way to wisdom. Even when we can know our reality in concrete ways, an Augustinian education is always calling us to wonder beyond what we know. In this way, Augustinian pedagogy can be helpful in a post-modern world which questions all “frozen” truth claims.

This transcending approach to truth and transforming approach to learning also connects well to what Tracy calls “Analogical Imagination”<sup>9</sup> and Greeley calls “Catholic Imagination.”<sup>10</sup> For Tracy and Greeley, Catholic understanding of sacraments has an impact on how people think about the world. Here Saint Augustine’s teaching on mystery and sacrament should inform our teaching and learning. Saint Augustine is giving an insight into how we should understand the truth we learn from the Inner Teacher when preaches to his congregation that what you experience in the Eucharist, “You must not attribute it to your own powers, your own merits, your own efforts, this lifting up of your hearts to the Lord, because it is God’s gift that you should have your hearts up above.”<sup>11</sup> Equally, he is giving us insight into how we should learn from the Inner Teacher, when he tells his congregation as they prepare to receive the Body and Blood of Christ “If you receive them well, you become what you receive.”<sup>12</sup>

True to his understanding of learning as a journey Saint Augustine did not think that we should wait for a final set of reconsiderations. Instead he tells us, “Search in ways to make discoveries, and discover in ways to keep on searching,”<sup>13</sup> In a word, Saint

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<sup>9</sup> Tracy, D. *The analogical imagination: Christian theology and the culture of pluralism*. New York: Crossroad, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> Greeley, A. *The Catholic imagination*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> *Sermo* 227.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *De Trinitate*, 9, 1, 1.

Augustine is reminding us that one encounter of learning understanding/meaning/truth builds upon another. It works as a chain of learning and reasoning. This chain was not limited to his personal encounters. Saint Augustine found insights into truth when he searched for answers to other people's questions.<sup>14</sup> The encounter with life's questions may be at the heart of Saint Augustine's image of life in the *Confessions* as a "restless" journey.<sup>15</sup> With no assurance that we now truly understand the truth, this learning encounter is a restless journey on which we will make mistakes and hopefully learn from them. Saint Augustine's image for the mistakes we make on the journey is that we are pots going into the furnace well crafted yet coming out cracked.<sup>16</sup> To compensate for our being cracked pots – limited beings – Augustinian education should teach learners to triangulate their learning through dialogue with the Inner Teacher, that is, to be sure that our conclusions can be arrived at from different directions and under multiple circumstances. Honesty should result from testing our reflections, as Saint Augustine did, against standards beyond our own making.

Since Saint Augustine tells us dialogue/dialectic/discussion is the best means for learning<sup>17</sup> this method should serve as a model for learning encounters between teachers and students. Saint Augustine's dialogue writings also model the need for lively interactive dialogue among learners. Likewise, in the works *De Trinitate* (The Trinity) and *De civitate Dei* (The City of God) Saint Augustine models how he learned through observation in a dialogic fashion with the world and people around him.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 1, 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Confessiones*, 1, 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 99, 11. The use of the concept "cracked" extends work on Augustine and the cracked self in Donald X. Burt, "Let Me Know Myself..." *Reflections on the Prayer of Saint Augustine*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> *Soliloquia*, 2, 7, 14.

An Augustinian teacher can assist students on their learning journeys by remembering that he or she does not provide truth but acts as a mirror facilitating the search for insight by their students.<sup>18</sup> To help us see this, Saint Augustine in the *Confessions* provided two models – one for poor teaching and one for good teaching. Faustus was a poor teacher because he acted as an authority communicating “truth” externally. He gave answers but they did not really answer Saint Augustine’s questions. In Saint Augustine’s eyes, Ambrose became a good teacher because he pointed to the authority of truth discovered by learners within themselves as the answer to their questions.<sup>19</sup> It is not just the way we point to understanding/meaning/truth but what we point to that is important. Saint Augustine models the importance of attention to good content in *De doctrina Chistiana* (Teaching Christianity) through his insights on scriptural interpretation and the value of liberal education<sup>20</sup> as aids in our search for truth.

Also, in his understanding of the search for understanding/meaning/truth as a restless journey Saint Augustine also leaves room for doubt, development and change. These are not always problems or difficulties for him. They can be the active exercise of good reasoning.<sup>21</sup> Doubt can be evidence of a desire or readiness to learn.<sup>22</sup>

In applying this Encounter 2: Learning as a Journey in Search of Understanding/Meaning/Truth to ourselves or our educational programs we can ask: Is our learning journey moving us beyond our limitations? Who do we dialogue with in our

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<sup>18</sup> *Sermo 306B*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> R. M. Jacobs, O.S.A. Augustine’s Pedagogy of Intellectual Liberation: Turning Students from the “Truth of Authority” to the “Authority of Truth” in K. Paffenroth and K. L. Hughes, *Augustine and Liberal Education*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000, 117.

<sup>20</sup> Saint Augustine also has important insights on liberal education in *De ordine*, I, 8, 24 and *Retractationes*, I, 3, 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Epistula 138*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> G. Howie, *Educational Theory and Practice in St. Augustine*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, 148.



learning encounters? In what ways are we qualitatively better through our dialogues in these encounters? How do doubt, development and change advance us on our learning journeys?

### **Encounter 3: Learning with Others in Community**

As already noted Saint Augustine does not see learning as individualistic. He sees us going beyond ourselves when we find communion with others. Community as a place for learning encounters can be found in the *Rule*, *De opere monachorum*, *De civitate Dei*, his Sermons and his Letters. Saint Augustine tells his community in the *Rule*, “Live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart.”<sup>23</sup> His emphasis on the importance of community as a means of learning distinguishes his pedagogy from some others. In Ignatian (Jesuit) pedagogy the emphasis is on learning to be a “man for others.” But, in Augustinian pedagogy learning “with” others is a primary concern. Learning with others can be seen in Saint Augustine’s emphasis on dialogue as the best way to learn. Also, learning with others shows up in Saint Augustine’s life when we see that all of the important events in his life occurred in the company of others. We can see this in the influence of his friends at school, his conversion with Alypius and his experience of spiritual ecstasy with his mother Monica. Even the learning triad of memory-understanding-will in *De Trinitate*<sup>24</sup> (The Trinity) is a learning community reflecting the life of the Trinity within us. Insunza observes that “interiority and communion are the principle categories of Augustinian thought.”<sup>25</sup> Learning with others for Saint Augustine is part of the search for communion.

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<sup>23</sup> *Regula*, 1,2.

<sup>24</sup> *De Trinitate*, 14, 10

<sup>25</sup> S. Insunza, *op.cit*, 405.

While Saint Augustine experienced the major events of his life in the company of others, friendship was not always an easy experience. Saint Augustine knew the difficulties of community life. His reflections on what he has learned from difficult community experiences can evidence disenchantment,<sup>26</sup> even pessimism. Even his teaching, through writing, placed many annoying and distracting demands on him.<sup>27</sup> He became weary from the scandals of the world,<sup>28</sup> the divisions of the Church in Africa<sup>29</sup> and his community at Hippo<sup>30</sup> as well as his own bad decisions.<sup>31</sup>

Paradoxically these troubles were also liberating. They were liberating because they led him to insights about right relations and justice. Difficulties enabled Saint Augustine to see that right order and justice in the community always needed to be restored by acting on what we have learned. He complained about the troubles and distractions he experienced in the demands of writing. Yet, he tells us how he learned from his own writing.<sup>32</sup> Through writing he encountered a larger community of learners. His writings also helped him learn by dialoguing with others. As he challenged a community in Carthage, “You all say, ‘The times are troubled, the times are hard, the times are wretched.’ Live good lives and you will change the times. By living good lives you will change the times and have nothing to grumble about.”<sup>33</sup>

Saint Augustine’s own learning taught him how to build a structure of cohesive interdependence (unity) among the elements and ways of knowing. As he tells us,

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<sup>26</sup> R.A. Markus. *Conversion and Disenchantment in Augustine’s Spiritual Career* (Saint Augustine Lecture Series 1984). Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1989, 39.

<sup>27</sup> *Epistula 23A\**, 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Epistula 73*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *In Ioannis evangelium tractus*, 13, 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Sermo 355* and *Sermo 356*.

<sup>31</sup> *Epistula 270* and *Epistula 20\**.

<sup>32</sup> *Sermo 162C*, 15 (Dolbeau 10).

<sup>33</sup> *Sermo 311*, 8.

“Reason is the faculty that enables me to analyze and synthesize the things that ought to be learned.... Both in analyzing and in synthesizing it is a unity that I seek, a unity that I love. But when I analyze, I seek an homogenous unity; when I synthesize, I look for an integral unity.”<sup>34</sup> Beyond the forms of reasoning, Saint Augustine expects the learning community to attend to varying levels of development and pace of learning when he advises us: “Let those quicker in understanding show that they walk along the road together with those who are slower. When one is faster than a companion, he has the power to let the slower one catch up, not vice versa. If the faster one walks as fast as possible, the slower will not succeed in following. The faster one must slow the pace to avoid abandoning the slower companion.”<sup>35</sup> Saint Augustine also challenges us to remember, “When deer need to cross a river, each one carries on its rear the head of the one behind it while it rests its head on the rear of another in front. Supporting and helping each other, they cross wide rivers safely, until they reach the firmness of the land together.”<sup>36</sup>

The friendship aspects of community are well known through Saint Augustine’s insights such as, “We need our companions to be ourselves”<sup>37</sup> and “Life without friends is an exile.”<sup>38</sup> Even one of the seminal thoughts of Saint Augustine is actually formulated in the context of a learning community, as he remembered,

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

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<sup>34</sup> *De ordine*, 2, 18, 48.

<sup>35</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 90, 2, 1 and 17.

<sup>36</sup> *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, 71, 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 125, 13.

<sup>38</sup> *De fide rerum invisibilium*, 1, 2.

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 and 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.<sup>39</sup>

For Saint Augustine the community dimension of education is not just about human friendship. It is a means to know God. This is more than a group dialogue with the Inner Teacher. Community for Saint Augustine is a venue for us to encounter Christ in His Fullness (*Totus Christus*). Encountering Christ in His Fullness has implications for an Augustinian education in Social Justice, Social Interdependence and Social Responsibility. According to van Bavel,

Augustine refers time and again to Mt. 25:40 “*Anything you did to the least of mine, you did it to me*” and Acts 9:4 “*Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?*”

Augustine says: “*He too is us. If it were not him, the sentence ‘Anything you did to the least of mine, you did it to me’ would not be true. If it were not him, the sentence ‘Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?’ would not be true.*”

*Consequently, we are him, for we are his members, we are his body, for he is our head, for the whole Christ [Totus Christus] is head and body.*”<sup>40</sup> This idea confers a special dignity on every human being, whoever he or she may be. It emphasizes the universality of Christian love. At the same time, it is a summons to take care

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<sup>39</sup> *Confessiones*, 4, 8, 13.

<sup>40</sup> *Sermo 133*, 8.

of the suffering, the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, and the dying neighbor. It is an appeal to solidarity, to world consciousness, to common responsibility, to a more united humanity, and consequently to a more united world.<sup>41</sup>

In applying implications of encountering Christ in His Fullness to Augustinian education we are teaching and learning not only the love of God but also the love of neighbor. Saint Augustine, according to van Bavel sees a “double face of love,”<sup>42</sup> that is love of God and love of neighbor are united together. For Augustinian education to convey this encounter it must teach what van Bavel names, “the practical primacy of love of neighbor,”<sup>43</sup> or Burt calls the “practice in loving God,”<sup>44</sup> or what Canning identifies as a “crucial criterion.”<sup>45</sup> In Saint Augustine’s words, “Since the love of God is not so frequently put to the test, people can deceive themselves about it. In love of neighbor, however, they can more easily be convinced that they do not possess the love of God, if they are unjust towards other people.”<sup>46</sup> In a word, learning with other in community brings with it responsibility for service and solidarity. This educational service and solidarity can be seen when Saint Augustine adds to the words of Jesus “When one of the least of mine learns, I learn.”<sup>47</sup>

In applying this Encounter 3: Learning with Others in Community to ourselves or our educational programs we can ask: Have difficulties with others led me to limit my

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<sup>41</sup> T.J. van Bavel, Augustine’s spirituality for the Church in the modern world in *The Augustinian Family Prepares for the Third Millennium*. T. Cooney (ed.) Rome: Pubblicazione Agostiniane – Curia Generalizia Agostiniana, 1986, 57. The italics are van Bavel’s.

<sup>42</sup> van Bavel, T.J. The Double Face of Love in Augustine. *Augustinian Studies*, 17 (1986), 169-181.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>44</sup> D.X. Burt. *Reflections on a Dying Life*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004, 24.

<sup>45</sup> R. Canning. *The Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbour*. Heverlee-Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993, 353.

<sup>46</sup> *Expositio epistulae ad Galatas*, 45.

<sup>47</sup> *In Johannis evangelium tractus* 21, 7, 2.

opportunities for learning? Have I been a friend in helping others to learn? Have I been of service to or in solidarity with others who have been marginalized through education?

#### **Encounter 4: Building the Habits (Love) of Learning**

Saint Augustine's life experiences taught him humility. He saw his plans not providing the results he wanted. Yet, when he learned the right ways of living he received renown and success. In this he learned that the struggle to build the habits (love) of learning was really a struggle within himself. As he observed, "The struggle in my heart was solely between myself and me."<sup>48</sup> It is a struggle of the will to love rightly (*caritas*). The centrality of the will in Saint Augustine differentiates his educational thought from many others whose centrality is on the mind.

Key to Saint Augustine's understanding of the will is developing it to act rightly. For him the will is divided. So strong is the struggle of a divided will, Augustinian education must work to strengthen the habits of the will so that we act rightly. Saint Augustine sees such education of the will as building character.<sup>49</sup> Character building and the good habits reinforcing dialogue with the Inner Teacher, when connected to reasoning, help us to transcend (climb above ourselves).<sup>50</sup>

In contemporary times education is often connected to personal advancement. Saint Augustine is concerned about such ambitions because they may emanate from a wrongly directed will. As Saint Augustine reminds us, "Pride lurks even in good works in order to destroy them."<sup>51</sup> To build good habits of learning he suggests using knowledge

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<sup>48</sup> *Confessiones*, 8, 11.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 17.

<sup>50</sup> *De vera religione*, 39, 72.

<sup>51</sup> *Regula*, 1, 7.

as a kind of scaffolding<sup>52</sup> or a ladder of humility.<sup>53</sup> In this way an Augustinian educator can serve as a coach, mentor or intellectual guide. To know when such modeling is appropriate the teacher needs to develop strong skills in observation. Such modeling is best at the “teachable moment,” that is, the time that students are best ready to receive the instruction. While *De doctrina christiana* (Teaching Christianity) describes teaching about faith to a general audience, *De catechizandis rudibus* (Instructing Beginners in the Faith) is a presentation of what Saint Augustine has observed in teaching the special audience of beginners. In responding to the request for help by Deogratias, a deacon famous for instructing converts, Saint Augustine presents to Deogratias “teachable moments” to assist Deogratias to move up his own ladder of learning and as scaffolding for excellence in teaching. The encounters of learning difficulties that Saint Augustine identified for Deogratias<sup>54</sup> can be summarized this way:

- When students are tired encourage them with a cheerful attitude.
- When students are discouraged encourage them with consideration and patience.
- When students are bored encourage them with care to find new and exciting things.
- When students are sad encourage them with love and joy.
- When students are apathetic encourage them with compassion and energetic exhortation.
- When students are tense or fearful encourage them with kindness and tact to build trust.

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<sup>52</sup> *Epistula* 55, 33.

<sup>53</sup> *Sermo* 96, 3.

<sup>54</sup> *De catechizandis rudibus*, 10,14-13,19.

Development of the will is not just a one-on-one teacher and student relationship. One can read Saint Augustine's *Rule* as a guide to building the will to act rightly with a community as a support. In the *Rule* Saint Augustine not only sets out expectations but also presents means for accountability for ensuring that the desired actions and results are occurring. The depth of Saint Augustine's insights into the political and authority relations in a community is evident in the *Rule* even though it is a very short work. As Stevenson reminds us, "For Augustine, political authority has a twofold purpose.... It is both a remedy and a punishment for sin, its purposes are both rehabilitative and retributive."<sup>55</sup>

Building the habits (love) of learning is building a brave heart through good attitudes and dispositions. We can see this when Saint Augustine prayed,

Say anything you wish but heal my ears so that I may pay attention to what you say. Heal my eyes so that I may see you when you beckon. Heal my stupidity so that I may recognize you when you come. Tell me where to look to see you and then I will hope that I will have the strength to do what you want of me.<sup>56</sup>

In applying this Encounter 4: Building the Habits (Love) of Learning to ourselves or our educational programs we can ask: How do our habits help us to learn? How do our habits hinder our learning? Do we have enough humility to learn? When have we experienced encouragement as crucial to our learning? How much have we encouraged others to learn?

### **Continued Encountering**

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<sup>55</sup> W.R. Stevenson, *Christian Love and Just War: Moral Paradox and Political Life in St. Augustine and his Modern Interpreters*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987,59.

<sup>56</sup> *Soliloquia*, 1, 3.



If I have presented well what I see as the 4 learning encounters in Saint Augustine's ideas on education, that is, 1) Learning through Transforming Experiences, 2) Learning as a Journey in Search of Understanding/Meaning/Truth, 3) Learning with Others in Community, and 4) Building the Habits (Love) of Learning, then it follows that for Saint Augustine learning and education have no conclusion in this life. Assuming no conclusion, how can we go forward?

To end the *Confessions*<sup>57</sup> Saint Augustine uses the biblical advice, "Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened for you."<sup>58</sup> From the way he uses that scriptural reference it also seems to be educational advice in relation to the encounters I have described. If so, we may apply this scripture as advice to:

- Seek so that you will find the way along your learning journey to understanding/meaning/truth
- Ask for help so that you may receive support in building the habits (love) of learning
- Knock on the "doors" of those you live and work with so that they open up for you communities where you can learn with others

However little or much you succeed at any of these, you will encounter an Augustinian sense of learning through transforming experiences.

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<sup>57</sup> *Confessiones* 13, 38, 53

<sup>58</sup> Matthew 7:7