

Ignatian Pedagogy

An abridged version of the document on
teaching and learning in a Jesuit school



Ignatian Pedagogy – An Abridged Version

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The full text of *Ignatian Pedagogy – A Practical Approach* (1993) is available in print or online from the Jesuit Institute.

The Characteristics of Jesuit Education (1986) is also available from the Jesuit Institute, in both full text and abridged versions.

Jesuit Institute
114 Mount Street
LONDON W1K 3AH

07557 902004
jesuitinstitute.org
mail@jesuitinstitute.org

The Jesuit Institute is a work of the British Province of the Society of Jesus

Introduction

Ignatian Pedagogy was published in 1993, after worldwide discussion and consultation, as a response to questions teachers in Jesuit schools were asking about whether there was a distinctively Jesuit approach to teaching itself. The foundational document *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (1986) had articulated the identity and mission of Jesuit schools and was received with an enthusiasm which led to a renewal of how Jesuit schools understood themselves. *Ignatian Pedagogy* aims to do the same for the classroom teacher in a Jesuit school.

A Jesuit method of teaching

This document suggests some practical guidelines for **teaching which promotes the explicit vision of the contemporary Jesuit educational mission** and which involves a particular style and process of teaching. (3/4)

This teaching method needs to be understood in conjunction with the Ignatian spirit and apostolic thrust of *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*. How do we move from an understanding of the principles guiding Jesuit education today to the practical level of making these principles real in the classroom? (1/121)

Ignatian pedagogy is inspired by faith. Those who do not share this faith can gather valuable experiences from this document because **the**

pedagogy inspired by St Ignatius is profoundly human and consequently universal. (6)

Attention to care for the individual student (known by the Jesuit term *cura personalis*) made the first Jesuit teachers attentive to what really helped learning and human growth. And they shared their findings across many parts of the world, set out in the *Ratio Studiorum*, the Jesuit code of liberal education which became normative for all Jesuit schools. (8)

How a teacher relates to students, how a teacher conceives of learning, how a teacher engages students in the quest for truth, what a teacher expects of students, a teacher's own integrity and ideals – all of these have significant formative effects upon student growth. Through them the goals of Jesuit education can be realized. (11)

The goals of Jesuit education

The ultimate aim of Jesuit education is that full growth of the person which leads to action; action, especially, that is suffused with the spirit and presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the 'man for others'. (12)

Such a goal requires a full and deeper formation of the human person, an educational process of **formation that calls for excellence** (a striving to excel, to achieve one's potential) that encompasses the intellectual, the academic and more. (13)

We are beginning to realize that education does not inevitably humanize or Christianize people and society. We are losing faith in the naïve notion that all education, regardless of its quality or thrust or purpose, will lead to virtue. Increasingly, it becomes clear that if we in Jesuit education are to exercise a moral force in society, we must insist that **the process of education takes place in a moral as well as an intellectual framework of inquiry** by which students discuss significant issues and complex values of life, and have teachers capable and willing to guide that inquiry. (13)

Ignatian pedagogy

Pedagogy is the way in which teachers accompany learners in their growth and development. Pedagogy must include a world view and a vision of the human person. (11)

In today's world, there is a tendency to view the aim of education in excessively utilitarian terms. To avoid such distortion, **teachers in Jesuit schools present academic subjects out of a human centeredness**, with stress on uncovering and exploring the patterns, relationships, facts, questions, insights, conclusions, problems, solutions, and implications which a particular discipline brings to light about what it means to be a human being. **Education thus becomes a carefully reasoned investigation through which the student forms or reforms his or her habitual attitudes towards other people and the world.** (15)

From a Christian standpoint, the model for human life is the person of Jesus. Jesus teaches

us by word and example that the realization of our fullest human potential is achieved ultimately in our union with God, a union that is sought and reached through a loving, just and compassionate relationship with our brothers and sisters. (16)

This means assisting young people to enter into the sacrifice and joy of sharing their lives with others. It means helping them to discover that what they most have to offer is who they are rather than what they have. It means helping them to understand and appreciate that other people are their richest treasure. It means walking with them in their own journeys toward greater knowledge, freedom and love. (18)

Education in Jesuit schools seeks to transform how young people look at themselves and other human beings, at social systems and structures, at the global community and the whole of natural creation. If truly successful, **Jesuit education results ultimately in a radical transformation not only of the way in which people habitually think and act, but of the very way in which they live in the world**, as men and women of competence, conscience and compassion, seeking the greater good (the *magis*). (19)

How do we do this? By being attentive to the Word of God and inspired by the Ignatian tradition. By allowing for a transformation of students' habitual patterns of thought through a constant interplay of experience, reflection and action. (21/22)

The role of the teacher

In a Jesuit school, the chief responsibility for moral as well as for intellectual formation rests finally not upon any procedure or curricular or extra-curricular activity, but upon the teacher, under God. (140)

A Jesuit school is to be a face-to-face community in which an authentic personal relationship between teachers and students may flourish. The relationship of trust and friendship between the teacher and pupil is an invaluable dispositive condition for any genuine growth in commitment to values. (140)

St Ignatius places the teacher's personal example ahead of learning as a means to help students grow in values. Within the school community, the teacher will persuasively influence character, for better or for worse, by the example of what he himself is. Pope Paul VI observed incisively that, "Today, students do not listen seriously to teachers but to witnesses; and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." (142)

The role of teacher is not merely to inform but to help the student progress in the truth. If they are to use the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm successfully, teachers must be sensitive to their own experience, attitudes, opinions, lest they impose their own agenda on their students. (26)

The teacher creates the conditions, lays the foundations and provides the opportunities for

the continual interplay of the student's experience, reflection and action to occur. (27)

During their years in school, young men and women are still relatively free to listen and to explore. The world has not yet closed in on them. They are concerned about the deeper questions of the 'why' and 'wherefore' of life. They can dream impossible dreams and be stirred by the vision of what might be. Surely, **every teacher worthy of the name must believe in young people and want to encourage their reaching for the stars.** This means that your own unifying vision of life must be tantalizingly attractive to your students, inviting them to dialogue on the things that count. (123)

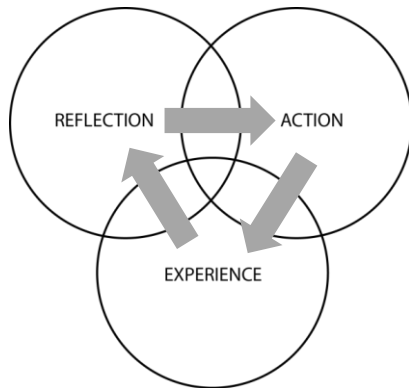
The Ignatian pedagogical paradigm

Starting with experience, the teacher creates the conditions whereby students gather and recollect the material of their own experience in order to distil what they understand already in terms of facts, feelings, values, insights and intuitions they bring to the subject matter at hand. (28)

Later the teacher guides the students in assimilating new information and further experience so that their knowledge will grow in completeness and truth. The teacher lays the foundations for learning how to learn by engaging students in skills and **techniques of reflection.** (28)

Memory, understanding, imagination and feelings are used to grasp the essential meaning and value

of what is being studied, to discover its relationship to other facets of human knowledge and activity, and to appreciate its implications in the continuing search for truth. (28)



The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm:
a constant interplay of *experience – reflection – action*

Reflection should be a formative and liberating process that so shapes the consciousness of students, their habitual attitudes, values and beliefs as well as ways of thinking, so that they are impelled to **move beyond knowing to action**. It is then the role of the teacher to see that the opportunities are provided that will challenge the imagination and exercise the will of the students to choose the best possible course of action to flow from and follow up on what they have learned. (28)

What they do as a result under the teacher's direction, while it may not immediately transform the world into a global community of justice,

peace and love, should at least be an educational step in that direction and toward that goal. (28)

This continual interplay of experience, reflection and action lies at the heart of Ignatian pedagogy. It is our way of proceeding in Jesuit schools as we accompany the learner on his or her journey of becoming a fully human person. It is a fresh yet familiar way of proceeding which all of us can confidently follow in our efforts to help students truly grow. (29/30)

The context of learning

Personal care and concern for the individual (*cura personalis*) is a hallmark of Jesuit education which requires that the teacher become as conversant as possible with the life experience of the learner. We must know as much as we can about the actual context within which teaching and learning take place. (35)

As teachers, we need to understand the world of the student, including the ways in which family, friends, peers, youth culture and *mores* as well as social pressures, school life, politics, economics, religion, media, art, music, and other realities impact that world and affect the student for better or worse. Indeed, from time to time we should work seriously with students to reflect on the contextual realities of both our worlds. What forces are at work in them? How do they experience those forces influencing their attitudes, values and beliefs, and shaping perceptions, judgments and choices? How do world experiences affect the way in which students

learn, helping to mould their habitual patterns of thinking and acting? What practical steps can they, and are they, willing to take to gain greater freedom and control over their destinies? (35)

‘Praise, reverence and service’ should mark the relationship that exists not only between teachers and students but among all members of the school community. Ideally, Jesuit schools should be places where people are believed in, honoured and cared for; where natural talents and creative abilities are recognized and celebrated; where individual contributions and accomplishments are appreciated; where everyone is treated fairly and justly; where sacrifice on behalf of the economically poor, the socially deprived, and the educationally disadvantaged is commonplace; **where each of us finds the challenge, encouragement and support we need to reach our fullest individual potential for excellence;** where we help one another and work together with enthusiasm and generosity, attempting to model in word and action the ideals we uphold for our students and ourselves. (37)

Experience

Experience goes beyond a purely intellectual grasp. St Ignatius urges that **the whole person (mind, heart and will) should enter the learning experience.** He encourages use of the imagination and the feelings as well as the mind in experience. Affective as well as cognitive dimensions of the human person are involved, because without internal feeling joined to intellectual grasp, learning will not move a person to action. It is rare

that a student experiences something new in studies without referring it to what he or she already knows. (42/44)

Through questioning, imagining, investigating its elements and relationships, the student organizes information and knowledge into a whole, or a hypothesis: What is this? Is it like anything I already know? How does it work? (43)

Teachers need to be aware of and draw upon direct and indirect experience:

Direct experience in school usually occurs in experiences such as conversations or discussions, laboratory investigations, field trips, service projects, participation in sports, etc. It is one thing to read a newspaper account of a hurricane striking the coastal towns of Puerto Rico. You can know all the facts: windspeed, direction, numbers of persons dead and injured, physical damage caused, etc. It is quite different to being out where the wind is blowing, where one feels the force of the storm, senses the immediate danger to life, home, and all one's possessions, and feels the fear in the pit of one's stomach as the shrill wind becomes deafening. Direct experience is usually fuller and more engaging. (45)

In school, students often learn through vicarious or **indirect experience** – in reading or listening to a lecture. In order to involve students more fully, teachers are challenged to stimulate students' imagination and use of the senses precisely so that students can enter the reality studied more fully. Historical settings, assumptions of the times,

cultural, social, political and economic factors affecting the lives of people at the time of what is being studied need to be filled out. Simulations, role playing, use of audio visual materials and the like may be helpful. (45)

By responding to reflective questions such as 'What is this?' and 'How do I react to it?', students become attentive and active in achieving comprehension and understanding of the human reality that confronts them. (46)

Reflection

Throughout his life, St Ignatius knew himself to be constantly subjected to different stirrings, invitations, alternatives which were often contradictory. His greatest effort was to try to discover what moved him in each situation – the impulse that led him to good or the one that inclined him to evil. He became the master of discernment that he continues to be today because he succeeded in distinguishing this difference, discovering what best leads to being a free person who seeks, finds, and carries out the will of God in each situation. (47)

A fundamental dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius is the continual call to reflect upon one's experience in prayer in order to discern where the Spirit of God is leading. Only after adequate reflection on experience, grasping the meaning and implications of what we study, can we proceed freely and confidently toward choosing appropriate courses of action that foster our growth as human beings. (25)

The memory, the understanding, the imagination and the feelings are used, at this deep level of reflection, to capture the meaning and the essential value of what is being studied, to discover its relationship with other aspects of knowledge and human activity, and to appreciate its implications in the ongoing search for truth and freedom. It forms the conscience of learners, their beliefs, values, attitudes, and their entire way of thinking. (48)

A major challenge to a teacher at this stage of the learning paradigm is to formulate questions that will broaden students' awareness and impel them to consider the viewpoints of others, especially of the poor. (55)

Reflection encourages teaching that is personalized and learner-active, and whose aim is not merely the assimilation of subject-matter but the development of the person. In the Ignatian tradition of education, these terms are particularly significant as they express **a way of proceeding that is more effective in leading the student not only to delve deeply into the subject itself but to look for meaning in life**, and to make personal options (ie. to take action) according to a comprehensive world vision. (58)

These habits of reflection are not formed by chance happenings. Habits develop by consistent, planned practice. And so the goal of forming habits of reflection needs to be worked on by all teachers in Jesuit schools, colleges and universities in all subjects, in ways appropriate to the maturity of students at different levels. (152)

Action

For St Ignatius, the acid test of love is what one does, not what one says: "Love is shown in deeds, not words." **The first Jesuits were most concerned with the formation of students' attitudes, values, ideals according to which they would make decisions about what was to be done.** St Ignatius wanted Jesuit schools to form young people who could and would contribute intelligently and effectively to the welfare of society. (59)

Reflection only develops and matures when it fosters decision and commitment. St Ignatius does not seek just any action or commitment. While respecting human freedom, he strives to encourage decision and commitment for the *magis* – the *better* service of God and of our sisters and brothers. (66/61)

The process of Jesuit education leads to students making interior choices which are externally manifested. The student chooses to make the truth his or her own, while remaining open to where the truth might lead. In time, these meanings, attitudes, values which have been interiorized impel the student to act, to do something consistent with his or her new convictions. (62)

Teachers in Jesuit schools are urged to have great confidence that their students are called to be leaders in their world. Freed from the fetters of ideology and insecurity, **teachers are called to introduce them to a more complete vision of the**

meaning of being human and equip them for service to their brothers and sisters, sensitive to and deeply concerned about using their influence to right social wrongs and to bring wholesome values into each of their professional, social and private lives. The example of teachers' own social sensitivity and concern will be a major source of inspiration for their students. (127)

The Jesuit educational tradition has always insisted that the adequate criterion for success in Jesuit schools is not simply mastery of propositions, formulae, philosophies and the like. **The test is in deeds, not words. What will our students do with the empowerment which is their education?** (129)

Evaluation

All teachers know that, from time to time, it is important to evaluate a student's progress in academic achievement. Periodic testing alerts the teacher and the student both to intellectual growth and to lacunae where further work is necessary. This type of feedback also offers special opportunities to individualize encouragement and advice for academic improvement for each student. (63)

Ignatian pedagogy aims at formation which includes but goes beyond academic mastery. Here we are concerned about **students' well-rounded growth as men and women for others.** (64)

Periodic evaluation of the student's growth in attitudes, priorities and actions consistent with being a person for others is essential. This can be

a privileged moment for a teacher both to congratulate and encourage the student for progress made, as well as an opportunity to stimulate further reflection in light of blind spots or lacunae in the student's point of view. (64/66)

The importance of values

There is no value-free education. Every academic discipline, when honest with itself, is well aware that the values it transmits depend upon its assumptions about the human person and human society. **All teaching imparts values, and these values can be such as to promote justice, or work partially or entirely at cross purposes to the mission of the Society of Jesus.** (152/83/80)

Teachers in a Jesuit school aim to form the whole person. They are challenged to chart a path and to employ a pedagogy that helps our students to grasp a more (*magis*) comprehensive truth and the human implications of their learning precisely so that they can more (*magis*) effectively contribute to healing the human family, building a world that is more (*magis*) human and more (*magis*) divine. (86)

Conclusion

The continual interplay of context, experience, reflection, action and evaluation provides us with a pedagogical model that is relevant to our cultures and times. It is a carefully reasoned way of proceeding from the principles of Ignatian

spirituality and Jesuit education. It consistently maintains the importance and integrity of the interrelationship of teacher, learner and subject matter within the real context in which they live. Most importantly, it addresses the realities as well as ideals of teaching in practical and systematic ways while, at the same time, offering **the radical means we need to meet our educational mission of forming young men and women for others.** (71)

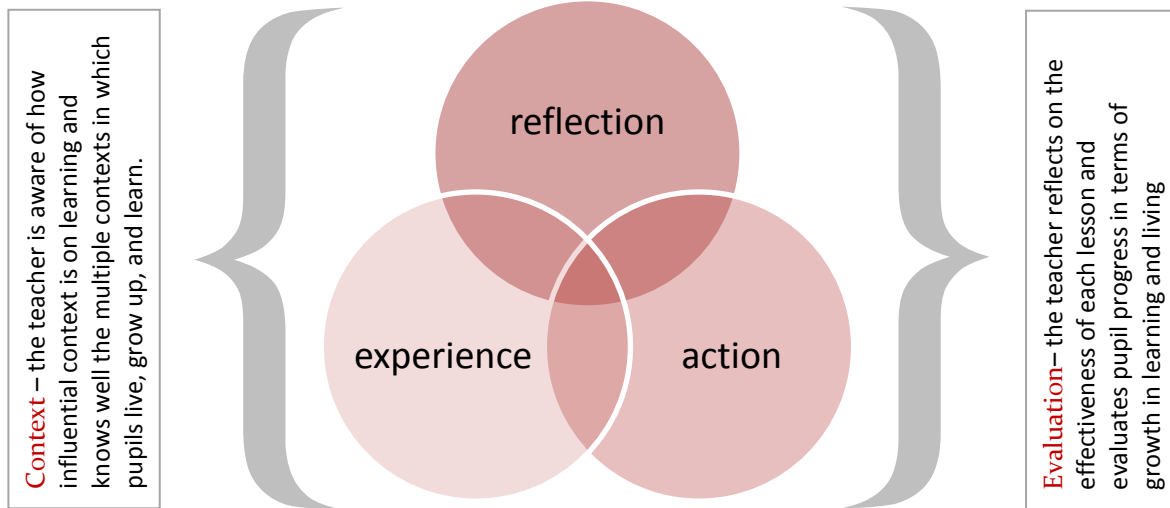
The Ignatian pedagogical paradigm promises to help teachers be better teachers by enriching the content and structure of what they are teaching. **It allows teachers to expect more of students, to call upon them to take greater responsibility for and be more active in their own learning.** Reflection should always move toward greater appreciation of the lives of others, and of the actions, policies or structures that help or hinder mutual growth as members of the human family. (74/76)

In our contemporary mission, **the basic pedagogy of St Ignatius can be an immense help in winning the minds and hearts of new generations,** for Ignatian pedagogy focuses upon formation of the whole person, heart, mind and will, not just the intellect. (153)

Our success will always fall short of the ideal. But it is the striving for that ideal, the greater glory of God, which has always been the hallmark of the Jesuit enterprise. (154)

The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm

A model for teaching and learning in a Jesuit school



Experience – the teacher draws on the experience of the pupils, seeking to draw out what they know, feel, and believe, and giving them new language and means of expression to refine and articulate their experience. The teacher also contributes his or her own experience without allowing it to lessen the value of pupils' own experience.

Reflection – is at the heart of the Ignatian model. It is about being attentive to experience and then building upon it, discovering new things, acquiring new knowledge and skills, deepening understanding, and adding detail and truth to the picture pupils have of the universe, of human beings, and of themselves.

Action – in Jesuit education, learning leads to action. Teachers provide imaginative and engaging opportunities for pupils to try out new skills, to use new knowledge, to exercise new ways of expressing themselves, their beliefs, values and questions. Through action, rooted in reflection on experience, pupils begin to develop a truthful and coherent vision of the world and their place in it. Above all, they become 'men and women for others', agents of change who will, in ways big and small, make the world a better place.



“Today, students do not listen seriously to teachers but to witnesses; and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”

Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)

