

Living Competence, Conscience, and Compassion

Principled Reflecting and Acting: A Reading of "*Ignatian Pedagogy*"

by Paul Sharkey

Ignatian Network introduces the second in a series of briefing papers entitled *Living Competence, Conscience and Compassion* that highlight different aspects of the Ignatian School Renewal. The briefing papers will appear from time to time as a stimulus to principals and teachers.

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IGNATIAN PEDAGOGY: A PRACTICAL APPROACH

The last 15 years have been good ones for the clarification of the meaning of the "*Ignatian-ness*" of Jesuit schools around the world at this time late in the 20th Century. Over the last 15 years, the Society of Jesus has asked its schools to undertake a program of renewal so that every school more authentically reflects the spirit of the founder of the Jesuits, St Ignatius of Loyola (d 1556). The release of Ignatian Pedagogy needs to be understood as the latest step in that 15 year renewal process. Previous steps in the process have included programs like: the Colloquium on the Ministry of Teaching, the Curriculum Improvement Process and the release of the Characteristics of Jesuit Education.

THE JESUIT MISSION

To begin to understand Ignatian Pedagogy, one needs to understand where its authors are coming from. Ignatian Pedagogy attempts to spell out in practical terms how the Jesuit mission can be realised through the curricula of its schools around the world. To understand Ignatian Pedagogy, one needs to understand the Jesuit mission.

The mission of the Society of Jesus today as a religious order in the Catholic Church is the service of faith of which the promotion of justice is an essential element. It is a mission rooted in the belief that a new world community of justice, love and peace needs educated persons of competence, conscience and compassion, men and women who are ready to embrace all that is fully human, who are committed to working for the freedom and dignity of all peoples, and who are willing to do so in cooperation with

others equally dedicated to the reform of society and its structures. ... It calls for persons educated in faith and justice, who have a powerful and ever growing sense of how they can be effective advocates, agents and models of God's justice, love and peace within as well as beyond the ordinary opportunities of daily life and work. (IP # 17)

Ignatian Pedagogy articulates a process whereby teachers can promote this Jesuit mission in the classes they teach and in the various other ways in which they are engaged with their students. Put another way, the educational outcome envisaged by Ignatian Pedagogy is the formation of students who are "*leaders in service, in imitation of Christ Jesus, men and women of competence, conscience and compassionate commitment.*" (IP # 13) A noble aspiration surely, but how can this educational outcome be achieved?

When the authors of Ignatian Pedagogy were searching for the best practical method to promote the Jesuit mission, they found something very helpful in the proceedings of the General Congregation (their international policy making body). The 33rd General Congregation called for a review of all the Society's

ministries and asked Jesuits to review their endeavours "*through a constant interplay of experience, reflection and action.*" These three words: experience, reflection and action, lie at the centre of the teaching model articulated in Ignatian Pedagogy. Ignatian Pedagogy is largely an unfolding of what Experience, Reflection and Action might mean for the teacher who wants to teach faithfully in the tradition of Ignatius of Loyola.

THE PROBLEM

Before considering the meaning intended by the authors when they use the words Experience, Reflection and Action, it seems necessary to talk about "*the problem*". Surely if time, energy and money is to be spent asking teachers to embrace yet another change to their practice, some justification must be offered. What is the problem? Why is it necessary to undertake a program of Ignatian renewal in Jesuit schools at all?

There are at least two major problems being addressed by Ignatian Pedagogy.

The first problem arises out of the post-modern world's shrinking of the educational agenda to view schooling as a kind of ladder to a career laden with status or financial reward. The authors of Ignatian Pedagogy also identify a number of "*-isms*" that are anti-thetical to the aim of Jesuit education: "*secularism, materialism, pragmatism, utilitarianism, fundamentalism, racism, nationalism, sexism, consumerism - to name but a few*". (IP # 20 note 2) The success of the Ignatian teacher can be measured by the extent to which he or she has managed to expand the educational agenda to stand against these forces which move against a properly Ignatian education.

The second problem arises out of the inadequacies of the so-called "*Two-Step*" teaching model. (IP # 31) Teachers who teach from the "*Two-Step*" model unconsciously treat their students like sponges who passively soak up the facts and figures presented to them. In this model, there is a one-way exchange of information between the teacher who "*knows*" to the student who "*does not know*". In colloquial terms the "*Two-Step*" model can be summed up as the "*chalk-and-talk*" style of teaching. This style of teaching falls short of the Ignatian ideal for at least two reasons. Firstly, the higher order cognitive skills of understanding, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation are not promoted. Secondly, and more importantly, students are taught by this model to become passive acceptors of the world as it is presented to them. These students are not challenged by their schooling to become seekers of truth who move out into the world to critically engage with it, nor are they challenged to become leaders who are

agents for change based on a self-appropriated, evangelical value system.

Given the two problems above, one would expect Ignatian Pedagogy to provide a way for teachers to encourage their students to become active in their learning and sensitive to the "*humanising*" elements of all they learn.

IGNATIAN PEDAGOGY

The three key elements of the teaching method described in Ignatian Pedagogy have already been mentioned: Experience, Reflection and Action. To these three central elements the authors add a further two to create a model of teaching that begins with a clear understanding of the Context of the group being taught and ends with a commitment to Evaluate the effectiveness of the learning process. In actual fact there is neither beginning nor end in the learning process as it has been described in Ignatian Pedagogy; rather there is a continuing interplay between the five moments of Context, Experience, Reflection, Action and Evaluation.

CONTEXT

Ignatius encouraged his spiritual directors to become as familiar as possible with the life experience of those they directed so that they would be better equipped to help them in the process of the retreat. The same advice is given to teachers about the process of education by the authors of Ignatian Pedagogy. Because the Ignatian way of teaching always begins with the life experience of the learner, the teacher needs to understand as much as possible about the actual context in which the learning and teaching of their students takes place. The authors raise many elements of Context for the teacher to consider: relationships with family and friends, youth culture and mores, economics, religion, previous experiences of learning, media ... Paragraphs # 33-41 list many more factors for the Ignatian educator to consider as he or she engages in the teaching process.

EXPERIENCE

The authors of Ignatian Pedagogy define Experience in broad and rich terms. They make the point a number of times that the Experience of learning for the student needs to be more than just a cognitive activity. Students need to be encouraged to do more than just know the material they study - they should savour it. Ignatian education includes the knowing of facts, concepts and principles, but it moves beyond such knowing to stimulate affective ways of knowing (for example: intuition, imagination and the emotional responses the student has to the matter being covered). There are two reasons given for this insistence on the inclusion of an affective dimension to the learning process. Firstly, the whole person is called to

growth by Ignatian education - this includes the maturing of the mind, heart and will. Secondly, and more importantly, Ignatian education has not taken place until such time as the student is moved to action. Students are not moved to act simply by an intellectual grasp of a piece of information; they are moved to act "*when internal feeling is joined to an intellectual grasp*" of the matter being covered. (IP # 42) In other words, students need to feel something about what they learn if they are going to end up doing something about it.

REFLECTION

In some places Ignatian Pedagogy is known as "*Reflective Education*". This is an indication of how important Reflection is in the learning process as it is described by the authors of Ignatian Pedagogy. Reflection is not presented as an "*armchair philosophising*" moment in the educational process, rather it is described as the type of reflection that leads to Action. When students Reflect, the memory, understanding, imagination and feelings are all harnessed to capture the meaning and essential value of what is being studied. The student, having gained insight into the meaning of the material, is encouraged to consider the implications for the ongoing search for truth and freedom. Reflection is a formative and liberating process.

ACTION

The "*bottom line*" for Ignatius was never the word, it was always the act. "*Love is shown in deeds, not words.*" Ignatian education climaxes when the student is led to Action. Cognitive and affective responses have been stimulated in Experience, the essential meaning and values implied in the experience have been drawn out in Reflection and the student is led to a new commitment in Action. The authors are keen to make it clear that it is not just any commitment that the student is led to, rather, whilst respecting human freedom, the Ignatian educator encourages a "*decision and commitment for the magis, the better service of God and our sisters and brothers*". (IP # 61) Actions are described on two levels by the authors of Ignatian Pedagogy: "*interiorised choices*" and "*choices externally manifested*". Interiorised choices take place when students, in light of all that has happened in Experience and Reflection, make a commitment to conform their lives more closely to what is the magis for them. In time, the deepening of this commitment will impel the student to act, to do something consistent with the new conviction.

EVALUATION

Few teachers would argue with the need to measure the academic progress of their students from time to time. The authors of Ignatian Pedagogy include this type of measurement when they use the term Evaluation, but they also have other measurements in mind. Because Ignatian educators are concerned with the development of the whole person, "*periodic evaluation of the student's growth in*

attitudes, priorities and actions consistent with being a person for others is essential." (IP # 64) The authors provide a number of strategies for the teacher to measure this "*well-rounded growth*"; these strategies include: insights arising out of the relationship between tutors and their charges, the use of student profiles, self-assessment by the student, goal-setting activities and student journals. (IP # 65,163)

A SPIRAL NOT A STRAIGHT LINE

When the authors speak of the five dimensions of Ignatian education, they have in mind a spiral rather than a straight line. The educative process does not begin with Context and proceed in a linear fashion to Evaluation, rather a spiral movement is envisaged so that teachers create the conditions for an ongoing process where there is a constant interplay between Context, Experience, Reflection, Action and Evaluation.

NOT AFRAID TO BORROW

The authors make the point that Ignatian Pedagogy has been eclectic from the beginning in its selection of methods for teaching and learning. (IP # 7) All teaching methods are considered desirable "*in so far as they contribute to the goals of Jesuit education*". "*A perennial characteristic of Ignatian Pedagogy is the ongoing systematic incorporation of sources which better contribute to the integral intellectual,*

social, moral and religious formation of the whole person." (IP # 8)

It is with this justification that a range of teaching methodologies is offered to Ignatian educators in Ignatian Pedagogy and in the workshops which accompany it. These teaching methodologies provide concrete strategies for the educator to facilitate the processes involved in Context, Experience, Reflection, Action and Evaluation. A list of headings is given in Appendix Three of Ignatian Pedagogy and there is little point in reproducing each heading below. A number of methodologies are cited however to give some flesh to the skeleton of Ignatian education described thus far.

A whole range of strategies is offered to educators who want to come to terms with the Context of the students they teach. One example given was that of student learning styles - a recognition that learning happens quite differently for one person to the next. Broad categories for learning style offered included: Visual learners: learning by reading or seeing the material (40-50% of population); Auditory learners: learning by hearing the material (10-20% of population); and Kinaesthetic learners: learning by physically interacting with the material - hands on (20-50%) of the population.

The authors affirm a range of teaching methodologies as being of value to the Ignatian educator in regard to Experience. The value of the traditional Jesuit technique of "*Prelection*" is given some prominence. Here the teacher gives a short

account of the matter to be studied without short-circuiting the essential self-activity of the student. When the prelection is done well, the students have a clear understanding of the main lines the course/topic will take, they understand what they ought to be able to do once they have completed the course/topic, and they will be motivated to engage with the material of the course/topic - the students' attention and interest will be caught. The importance of formulating and asking questions well is stressed so that the students are not only given factual and descriptive questions, but are challenged by questions that probe higher-order skills like evaluation, inferences, implications, cause and effect. Problem solving exercises, cooperative learning, small group processes and peer tutoring are all assessed as having positive possibilities for Experience by the authors.

Teaching methodologies given as examples of good ways to facilitate Reflection include: the use of student journals, interaction with a Tutor, the use of Case Studies, Simulation Games, Role Playing and debating.

Action strategies offered include: projects and assignments, service experiences, essays, career choices.

IN CONCLUSION

The reader who wants to see the educational endeavour described in its totality in the pages of Ignatian Pedagogy will be disappointed. I would be surprised if the authors of that document had ever intended to set this large an agenda for themselves, rather they have highlighted some key features of a Pedagogy that can properly be described as Ignatian. It must be remembered that the document forms only one part of a much larger project of Ignatian renewal in education.

As they have provided a practical description of how to go about Ignatian education the authors have highlighted the necessity of taking the Context of students into account as well as the need to engage the student actively in the learning process, particularly an engagement that catches up both the affectivity and cognition of the student. It is never sufficient to view the teaching process simply as the transmission of a body of information. The Ignatian educator encourages the students to develop a range of higher order skills beyond that of simply being able to recall and repeat facts and figures learnt by

rote. The vocation of being an Ignatian educator is graced with an even higher dignity than this when the commitment to accompany the student into freedom is recognised - a freedom where the student is able to commit him or herself to the magis - the better service of God and one's sisters and brothers.

The word "*paradigm*" appears throughout Ignatian Pedagogy and it may raise problems for some readers. Those readers who know very little about the word will obviously be confused by what is meant by it. Those who know more will wonder in which sense the word is being used. Is it the sense in which T.S. Kuhn used it when he popularised the term in Science and spoke of the "*paradigm shift*" - a revolutionary and fundamental shift in the assumptions, insights and techniques used in particular research methods and theory? Or is it the lesser sense in which the word is used where it becomes a synonym for "*model*" - a representative form or pattern which guides one's way of proceeding? It seems clear from reading the document that it is this latter sense in which the word is used.

Ignatian Pedagogy articulates a form or pattern of teaching which will not be strange to those who are already good educators in the Ignatian tradition. Whilst the processes outlined in Ignatian Pedagogy might not be received as "*strange*" by Ignatian educators, they may well be received gratefully as a clear "*naming*" of the various ingredients that have always been present (though sometimes un-named) in education worthy of the name Ignatian. The authors of Ignatian Pedagogy ask teachers to do more than just read the document, they ask them to practise the skills and sensitivities outlined in it. The authors estimate that it will take three to four years for teachers to "*gradually master and be comfortable with the Ignatian pedagogical approaches.*" (IP p ii) Time will tell if they are right.

In this series <u>Living Competence, Conscience, and Compassion</u>
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