

Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm Synopsis

Part I

The *Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm* is the art of teaching and way of learning cut from the fabric of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. As such the *IPP* seeks to educate students within a world view grounded in the particular mysticism of Ignatius. His profound experience of the Incarnate God led him “like a schoolchild” to understand that God is gracious, creation renewed and human experience and human history have been transformed. We are created to participate in the life of this God, now and forever.

Therefore, in our search for God we are not asked to forgo the world. Rather, our search begins in the world and so everything in creation has the potential to bring us closer to the end for which we were created. Ignatius offers the *Spiritual Exercises* as a means to increase our freedom to choose those things, desires, actions and attitudes that most conform to the gospel and so are most conducive in helping us live our life’s deepest purpose – helping souls by meeting the Incarnate God in the lives of others.

The Jesuit educational enterprise embraces the world view that God is in all things by positing the inquiry into human life, human nature and destiny as an endeavor in which God is present. Through the rational and critical dialogue with the depth and breath of human experience, Jesuit education encourages us toward the end for which we were created. It does so by offering a means by which the student, accompanied by the educator, can come to know that the profound concerns, attitudes, and commitments directing one’s heart are where God moves about. It offers a means by which a student, guided by the educator, can ask what reality in his or her life gives value to everything else. It offers a means by which the student, challenged by the educator, can come to understand that excellence is measured against the service one can, through one’s achievements, provide for the greater glory of God. Jesuit education offers the *Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm* as a means by which the student can become a man or woman for and with others.

The *IPP* is a dynamic process that employs five steps: Context, Experience, Reflection, Action and Evaluation. Each step finds its root in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Just as the *Exercises* seek to bring the retreatant to knowledge of Jesus Christ that is, not only conceptually grasped, but personally appropriated¹, the *IPP* strives to lead the student toward a learned understanding that includes in it its significance here and now for the student, for society, for building a better world.

¹ John J. English, S.J. “*The Ignatian Method and Social Theology*” *Notes on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*. Ed. David L. Fleming, S.J. Review for Religious. St Louis. 1989. 261

Context

Crucial to the success of the *Spiritual Exercises* is trust between the director and the retreatant. To establish this trust, Ignatius exhorts the director to first presume the best in the retreatant, to put the best interpretation on his or her motives, intent, desires and commitment. To further deepen the level of trust, it is important for the director to accept the realities of the retreatant's life - their predispositions, attitudes, level of religious experience, moral questions² - the context of his or her life. It is most important that the retreatant also understand the context of his or her own life, the setting of his or her life, as he or she begin the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Similarly, to meet the goals of Jesuit education, it is important that the educator presume the best of the student in terms of his or her motives, desires and commitment to learn. And the educator should understand and accept, as much as possible, the context of the student's life –the cultural, social, economic, political, family and peer influences, as well as the school's particular culture and environment. These factors contribute to the presuppositions, predispositions and “previously acquired concepts students bring with them into the start of the learning process.”³

If the student understands the context of his or her own life, he or she will be better able to grasp and appropriate the material presented. It is for the educator then to facilitate this process by asking the questions, shaping the discussions and constructing the conversations that enable the student's own context to emerge and be recognized. When a student arrives at a certain awareness of his or her own context, the material within the goal of the class, the unit, the course, and the larger mission of the school can be reached.

Experience

During the *Spiritual Exercises* the retreatant comes to understand that his or her experiences are what give one's spiritual life texture and meaning. The time, place, events and people that constitute our experience generate the content of prayer because it is where God is encountered. The retreatant comes to realize that God moves about within the circumstances of one's life.⁴ We learn to recognize, within our experience, the way God speaks, calls, draws, cajoles and consoles us. We learn to let God's presence “sink into our consciousness . . . to reach our innermost hearts, the most fundamental

² George P. Leach. “*Growing Freedom in the Spiritual Director*” *Notes on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*. Ed. David Fleming, S.J. St. Louis. Review for Religious. 1989. 41

³ The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education. “*Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach*” *Foundations*. Washington, D.C. JSEA. 1994. 248

⁴ David Lonsdale, S.J. *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear; an Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*. Maryknoll, New York. Orbis Books. 2004. 114

attitudes and disposition that give shape and color to our lives.”⁵ God, active in our experiences, shapes our self and, subsequently, our experiences.

As it is in the *Spiritual Exercises*, remembering, comprehending, articulating and interpreting one’s experience are important components in the *Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm*. Attention paid to experience will enable a student to achieve an understanding of the material that reaches beyond the cognitive. Attention paid to experience will evoke an affective response to the material which can spur personal as well as intellectual growth.⁶ It is for the educator to help to provide experiences for the student that will help the student to engage to the greatest extent possible the mind, heart, body, and soul, thus evoking both intellectual and affective responses from the student.⁷ When the material is not directly related to one’s experience the educator can guide the student through the use of his or her imagination to a vicarious experience which can lead to a cognitive and affective understanding of the human reality presented.⁸

Reflection

One fundamental premise of the *Spiritual Exercises* is the conviction “that a person is free, can change and will grow.”⁹ It is the retreatant who is responsible for his or her own personal growth, deepening faith and strengthened conviction. It is the role of the director to assist or guide the retreatant in this process. Therefore the director must be careful not to assume the role of the spiritual authority who knows the answer to the question not yet asked. Rather, the director seeks to increase the level of freedom experienced by the retreatant during the *Spiritual Exercises*. The practice of reflection is an effective means toward an increase in personal freedom. Through reflection, one learns to recognize the movement of God in one’s life; learns to interpret, evaluate and assign meaning to significant experiences; and thus learns to give direction to one’s life. The habit of reflection can empower and enable one to consciously act rather than unknowingly react to and within the circumstances of one’s life.¹⁰

Reflection, then, is a key component in the *IPP*. Within Jesuit education it is the practice and process that bring a student to understand the value and meaning of the material presented, enable the student to recognize the place of the material within the whole of what is being learned and how it contributes or detracts from the pursuit of freedom and truth. The educator, like the director, then should not be inclined toward providing the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ International Commission on Apostolate of Jesuit Education. 249

⁷ James F. X. Lyness, unpublished IPP Synopsis recommendation. Loyola School, NY. March 17, 2006.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ George P. Leach, S.J. 43

¹⁰ Ibid. 41-42

answer, indoctrination or simply being the conduit of information. Rather, the educator should not impose his or her own viewpoints but should seek to increase the freedom of the student by exposing the student to different viewpoints and by asking questions that lead the student to understand his or her own personal reaction to the material and the implication of the material for them and for others. The subsequent decision of the student to act or not in light of the insight gained will remain a freer choice.¹¹

Action

The *Spiritual Exercises* brings one to experience profoundly the steadfast love of God residing at the center of all reality and in the center of one's life. In grateful response the retreatant experiences a deepening desire to help souls as "Love ought to manifest itself more in deeds than by words". (Exx230) The retreatant has an understanding of self that includes the other. Being drawn across social, economic, cultural, racial and religious boundaries and into the life and times of those in need is constitutive of faith in the Incarnate God. The one who seriously contemplates the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth discovers within him or herself the call to act on behalf of those in need and for the greater glory of God.

Just as faith is never merely private, Jesuit education is never meant to end in mere personal satisfaction for academic achievement. It is presumed that the dynamic that has occurred in the education process has propelled intellectual growth, and has brought insight and personal appropriation of the meaning and value of what has been learned. But still, this is not the end of the process. The goal of Jesuit education is to move the student to act. This action can occur internally and externally. Internally, the student may choose to accept or reject the truth that has been discovered, or choose to adopt an attitude, predisposition or value by which everything else will be measured. Externally, the student may choose to study a topic more in depth, develop more effective study habits, reconsider a career choice, create a cooperative project or pursue opportunities for service.¹² In short, do something different or differently. Finally, it is the goal of Jesuit education that the student "not bury in the earth all the gifts" that have been bestowed, but instead use them to influence the world for the better by laboring alongside God who labors to bring about a more just and humane world.

¹¹ International Commission on Apostolate of Jesuit Education. 250-251

¹² Ibid. 252

Evaluation

During the *Spiritual Exercises* the retreatant is introduced to the practice of the examen, a dynamically reflective prayer form central to Ignatian spirituality, the intent of which is to bring the individual to better recognize the presence of God in one's life and to honestly assess one's response to that presence.¹³ While it is a prayer that focuses on the experiences, circumstances, relationships and events in an individual's life, it is not self-centered. Instead, it is a prayer that is other centered first on God and then on the good one can do for another with an increase of freedom that arises with deeper self awareness. It is an ongoing prayer that commits one to the future by an evaluation process that evokes a resolve to amend, adopt, adapt or accept that which leads to greater service for the greater good.¹⁴

For the student, educator and school community to grow and progress toward the future in a way consistent with the values inherent in Jesuit education evaluation is essential. Evaluation, then, means more than measuring intellectual mastery, artistic talent, or athletic ability. Success is in proportion to both the student and educator's growth in attitude and action toward becoming a man or woman for and with others.¹⁵ And so evaluation is an important component in the *Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm*. Whether it is the student and educator's evaluation of an immediate action prompted by the process of context, experience and reflection or an institution wide self-study, evaluation is key in an ongoing learning process. Student development, educator effectiveness, the quality of the program, the efficiency of the process and school culture all need to be honestly critiqued. An ongoing evaluation process makes real the commitment to the student, educator and school's future by assessing concretely the objectives and outcomes of the classroom, areas beyond the classroom, and the school. Without an effective evaluation process neither an awareness of the real needs nor a responsible response to those needs will be possible. Stagnation or misdirection, instead of conscious commitment to move toward a particular vision, will result.

¹³ Donald St. Louis. "The Ignatian Examen" *The Way of Ignatius Loyola: Contemporary Approaches to the Spiritual Exercises*. Ed. Philip Sheldrake, S.J. St. Louis. The Institute of Jesuit Resources. 1991.154.

¹⁴ Ibid. 162

¹⁵ International Commission on Apostolate of Jesuit Education. 252

Part II

Examples of Practical Application of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm Beyond the Classroom

Just as Ignatius believed nothing in creation was beyond redemption and everything in creation had the potential to bring us closer to the end for which we were created, Jesuit education posits every aspect of school life as having the potential to bring student, teacher, administrator, coach, counselor, staff and board member closer to the end for which we were all created. There is no meeting, interaction, experience, event, program, production or game that is outside of or irrelevant to school's mission to form men and women for others. Therefore, the *Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm* can be utilized in areas of school life beyond the classroom.

The following are practical applications of the IPP in school settings other than the classroom.

Context

Definition: start school discussions, activities, experiences, administrative meetings, coaching or counseling session, or classes by verbally establishing the starting point (or setting the context). Ask the questions: What is our starting point? Where are we situated in the context of the larger mission, vision, or goal (of what we are trying to achieve)? What is the background or history? Seek to establish where the material fits into the whole.

Example: (Campus Ministry Team) "Okay, before we begin planning this year's faculty retreat, let's jot down what we remember from last year's faculty retreat. Recall the theme, materials used, the presenter; and the design of the day. Does this raise any questions or issues for us now?"

Example: (Administrative Team) "Before we begin to the process of implementing this immersion service program let's take a moment to review from where the impetus for this initiative came. Where was the resistance? And let's identify how we believe this initiative furthers our education and formation mission as a Jesuit school. What are we giving up, gaining in this shift in how our students do community service?"

Experience

Definition: during school discussions, activities, experiences, administrative meeting, coaching or counseling sessions, or classes, allow personal experience to permeate the discussion and allow others to think about how their personal experiences relate to the material or the discussion. Experience can be handled in a variety of ways: bringing to mind one's own experience or that of others, imagining, journaling, showing a video clip, playing a song, playing a game, etc. The experiences shared that somehow relate to the material are almost always practical and hands-on. It is less philosophical and theoretical.

Example: (Board Meeting) Before we come to a decision on a plan for faculty retirement and health benefits, let's hear from both the faculty committee who met to discuss the proposals, as well as the faculty and board group that gathered information for how other Jesuit high schools across the country have handled the two issues.

Example: (Ignatian Identity Committee) Before we decide on a new format for our Ignatian Evenings, let's hear from the Province representative on the experiences of adult formation happening at other schools in the Province, and from the faculty and staff who went through our initial three year program.

Reflection

Definition: during school discussions, activities, experiences, administrative meetings, coaching or counseling sessions, or classes, take a step back and look at the material. Maybe disassociate from the material. Ask new and challenging questions about it. Such new and challenging questions could be addressed in journals, discussions, meditations, or contemplation. This portion of the frame ought to force us to look at the information in a new or different way.

Example: (Co-Curricular) Okay, now that we have set up for the dance that will take place this evening, is there anything we have missed? Can we anticipate how this might actually play out tonight?

Example: (Sports Team) Okay, here is the workout schedule and rationale to prepare us to move into the post-season. Take some time to digest it. Tomorrow, I'd like to get your feedback on what you think about the schedule and rationale.

Action

Definition: school discussions, activities, experiences, administrative meetings, coaching, counseling sessions, or classes usually end in action. The assumption is that we want to think or act differently. It could be a new way of thinking, a new way of feeling, or a desire literally to do something differently. We ought to walk away with something new and realize it.

Example: (Staff Meeting) Now that we have organized and discussed how we will proceed with Cognitive Coaching as a component to the faculty growth plan, let's execute our plan. After a month or so of being "in the trenches" we will re-convene and debrief.

Evaluation

Definition: when school discussions, activities, experiences, administrative meetings, coaching, counseling sessions, or classes come to close, evaluation offers the opportunity to look back on the action or experience and say, "How did things go?" "Did we accomplish our goals? What was good? What was bad?" "How is the class going?" "How did the presentation, activity, discussion, experience meet our expectations?"

Example: (Executive Committee of the Board) Now that our first board meeting is over let's evaluate how it went. Our first agenda was to establish clear goals and objectives for the board for the upcoming year? Was there adequate discussion on board priorities? Was everyone's voice heard? Did each board member leave with a clear understanding of his or her role and responsibility in the board meeting its goals and objectives for the year? Is there a way to better arrange the agenda, facilitate discussion; communicate expectations?

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