

Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy

"We aim to form leaders in service, men and women of competence, conscience and compassionate commitment."

Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J, Superior General of the Society of Jesus

Since the time they launched their first school in 1548, the Jesuits have believed that a high quality education is the best path to meaningful lives of leadership and service. They have understood that the liberal arts, the natural and social sciences, and the performing arts, joined with all the other branches of knowledge, were a powerful means to develop leaders with the potential for influencing and transforming society. Committed from the very beginning to educating the whole person, the Jesuits adapted the best educational models available while developing their own pedagogical methods to become the "schoolmasters of Europe."

Jesuit education has been historically successful in many cultures because it is eminently adaptable to the environment of the learner. Jesuit education is adaptable to many diverse learners--traditional age and adult, full-time and part-time, on-campus and online. Present and future learners can expect Jesuit education to continue to adapt in appropriate ways to meet their evolving needs.

Some Characteristics of a Jesuit Education

Jesuit education is a call to human excellence, to the fullest possible development of all human qualities. It is a call to critical thinking and disciplined studies, a call to develop the whole person, head and heart, intellect and feelings.

Jesuit education systematically incorporates methods from a variety of sources which better contribute to the intellectual, social, moral, and religious formation of the whole person. In the underlying principle of *Tantum Quantum*, that which may work better is adopted and assessed while that which is proven ineffective is discarded.

Jesuit education presents academic subjects out of a human "centredness", 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.

Jesuit education strives to give learners ongoing development of their imagination, feelings, conscience and intellect, and to encourage and help them recognize new experiences as opportunities to further growth. Learners see service to others as more self-fulfilling than personal success or prosperity.

Jesuit education moves the learning experience beyond rote knowledge to the development of the more complex learning skills of understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Learners write and speak about subject matter with stylistic excellence--*Eloquentia Perfecta*--and engage in public debate.

The Ignatian Pedagogical Model

The Ratio Studiorum of 1599 provided a coherent statement of operating methods and objectives for the hundreds of Jesuit colleges in Europe, Asia and the Americas that constituted a vast and growing education operation. While such a universal curriculum is impossible today, a systematically organized pedagogy whose substance and methods promote the explicit vision of the contemporary Jesuit educational mission is consistent with the Jesuit tradition. The Jesuit tradition of Ignatian Pedagogy is a process by which teachers accompany learners in the lifelong pursuit of competence, conscience, and compassionate commitment. Such an Ignatian pedagogical paradigm can help teachers and learners to focus their work in a manner that is academically sound and at the same time formative of persons for others.

In order to translate the Jesuit educational characteristics into action, the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE) issued Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach in 1993 as a model that speaks to the Jesuit teaching-learning process, that addresses the teacher-learner relationship, and that has practical meaning and application for the classroom.

Ignatian Pedagogy embodies five key teaching elements--Context, Experience, Reflection, Action, and Evaluation.

Context - What needs to be known about learners (their environment, background, community, and potential) to teach them well?

Cura personalis--personal care and concern for the individual--is a hallmark of Jesuit education, and requires that teachers become as conversant as possible with the context or life experience of the learner. Since human experience, always the starting point in a Jesuit education, never occurs in a vacuum, educators must know as much as possible about the actual context within which teaching and learning take place. Teachers need to understand the world of the learner, including the ways in which family, friends, peers, and the larger society impact that world and effect the learner for better or worse.

Experience - What is the best way to engage learners as whole persons in the teaching and learning process?

Teachers must create the conditions whereby learners 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. Teachers later guide the learners in assimilating new information and further experience so that their knowledge will grow in completeness and truth.

Reflection - How may learners become more reflective so they more deeply understand what they have learned?

Teachers lay the foundations for learning how to learn by engaging students in skills and techniques of reflection. Here 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.

Action - How do we compel learners to move beyond knowledge to action?

Teachers provide opportunities that will challenge the imagination and exercise the will of the learners to choose the best possible course of action from what they have learned. 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 towards that goal even if it merely leads to new experiences, further reflections and consequent actions within the subject area under consideration.

Evaluation -How do we assess learners growth in mind, heart, and spirit?

Daily quizzes, weekly or monthly tests and semester examinations are familiar instruments to assess the degree of mastery of knowledge and skills achieved. Ignatian pedagogy, however, aims at evaluation which includes but goes beyond academic mastery to the learners well-rounded growth as persons for others. Observant teachers will perceive indications of growth or lack of growth in class discussions and students' generosity in response to common needs much more frequently.

The Benefits of Ignatian Pedagogy

Ignatian Pedagogy promises to help teachers be better teachers. It enables teachers to enrich the content and structure of what they are teaching. It gives teachers additional means of encouraging learner initiative. 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. It helps teachers to motivate learners by providing the occasion and rationale for them to relate what is being studied to their own world experiences.

Ignatian Pedagogy personalizes learning. It asks learners to reflect upon the meaning and significance of what they are studying. It attempts to motivate students by involving them as critical active participants in the teaching-learning process. It aims for more personal learning by bringing student and teacher experiences closer together. It invites integration of learning experiences in the classroom with those of home, workplace, community, and ever-present human need.

Ignatian Pedagogy stresses the social dimension of both learning and teaching. It encourages close cooperation and mutual sharing of experiences and reflective dialogue among learners. It relates student learning and growth to personal interaction and human relationships.

Guided by the Ignatian pedagogical model, Jesuit colleges and universities are places of intellectual integrity, critical inquiry, and mutual respect, where open dialogue characterizes an environment of teaching, research and professional development. The Jesuit ideal of giving serious attention to the profound questions about the meaning of life encourages an openness of mind and heart, and seeks to establish campus communities which support the intellectual growth of all of its members while providing them with opportunities for spiritual growth and development and a lifelong commitment to social justice.