

EDUCATION

The Teaching Vocation and the Jesuit Mission: Student Perceptions

Sally M. Barnhart, M.Ed.

Mentor: Barbara Harland, R.N., MSN, M.Ed. (Nursing)

As a Clinical Faculty member my job assignment includes classroom instruction, field placement, and supervising responsibility for Xavier students in Early and Middle Childhood Education from their first field experience (EDFD 100), through their methods classes (Math, Science, Language Arts & Social Studies) and their 15 week intern assignment for student teaching during their senior year. Additionally, I currently serve as the Co-President of the Ohio Field Directors, which represents all Public and Private Universities in Ohio. I am a participating member of the National Field Directors' Forum for the American Association of Teacher Educators. I am an active member of the 2008-2009 Ohio Department of Education Pre-Service Connections Committee convened by ODE which is providing research & data for the classroom of the 21st Century and the stakeholders.

Ignatian Mentoring Research Project: Hypothesis included the belief that a high percentage of the Xavier Freshmen, as Majors in Early and Middle Childhood Education, do not identify or connect their chosen teaching vocation with the Jesuit Mission.

EDFD 100: Introduction to Education: Coursework Inclusion

The work begins in EDFD 100 an Undergraduate Course for 3 Hours credit. As per Xavier's Catalog, this course provides an introduction to the foundational, philosophical and organizational patterns of United States education. Topics include the review of history, philosophy societal impact and school culture. There is an Ohio Pathwise emphasis, along with the Ohio Academic Content Standards. Lesson planning is introduced. All students are placed in a public/private school for a related field experience.

Research Component

After IRB approval, in January 2009, thirty second semester freshmen freely consented and were surveyed during this research project. The questions were rated with a scaled score of;

1= I am not aware of this

2=I am somewhat aware of this

3= I am very aware of this

The survey included the following questions:

- I chose Xavier University specifically for its' Jesuit tradition
- I have read and understand Xavier's Mission Statement
- I have heard of St. Ignatius of Loyola
- I have read The Spiritual Exercises
- I know the meaning of the term *Cura personalis*
- I have an understanding of who founded the Society of Jesus
- I have an understanding of "Discernment of Spirits"

- Through my Jesuit Education, I have learned about “**Finding God in All Things**”
- I believe that Jesuit pedagogy is a model that seeks to develop men and women of competence, conscience and compassion.

Survey Results and Reflection:

Research results:

94% of the students surveyed were unaware of “**The Spiritual Exercise**.”

96% of the students surveyed were unaware of the meaning of the Term *Cura personalis*.

92% of the students responded that they were unaware of who founded the Society of Jesus.

96% of the students surveyed were not aware of or have an understanding of “**Discernment of Spirits**”.

The good news reported in the survey results:

98% of the students responded that they were very aware that the **Jesuit pedagogy** is a model that seeks to develop men and women of competence.

Therefore from the students surveyed, the research results indicated that the freshmen did not identify with terminology or specific vocabulary that identifies the Jesuit pedagogy.

Reflection and Questions Asked:

Reflecting on the purpose of this survey and study brought forth many challenges and questions, which required this researcher to begin a rigorous self-study. The thirst for knowledge and understanding of the Xavier students became a conscious decision to reflect on my role as a model and mentor for the Xavier freshmen. The questions from the research survey were overwhelmingly obvious to this researcher.

- How will the freshmen students read, reflect and assimilate the Jesuit Mission into their daily lives, unless they are intentionally instructed on the meaning of the questions surveyed?
- How can the young future teaching professionals identify with the philosophy of St. Ignatius and **The Spiritual Exercises** without reading and having open classroom discussion?
- How can each student “**Find God in All Things**” or the meaning of *Cura Personalis*, as it pertains to their chosen profession of becoming an Early or Middle Childhood Educator?

These questions and answers required specific attention and research from the writings of William A. Barry, S.J. **A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Finding God in All things.** Along with the work of John Patrick Donnelly’s *Ignatius of Loyola*, both readings inspired the researcher to connect the Xavier Mission within the daily life of each student.

Education Pedagogy and The Xavier Mission:

The EDFD 100 course design is deeply rooted in the students’ desire to learn educational pedagogy, along with actual hands on classroom field experiences. The Xavier freshmen begin their vocation within the Cincinnati area by observing teachers, reading about the past and looking to the future for educational practices of the 21st Century classroom. The responsibility to mentor the young aspiring teachers in developing “**Best Teaching Practices**”, along with finding a “**Servant’s Heart**” is imbedded in the instructional strategies. It is from this research that the transference of systematically teaching the Ohio Academic Content Standards and embracing the Xavier Jesuit Mission become so clearly defined. It is recognized through this research that facilitating the

personal growth and development of the young educator is important, but equally as daunting is the responsibility to assist each student in their understanding that teaching is a service to others.

The results of the survey clearly identified the challenge within the EDFD 100 classroom setting to connect the Jesuit mission and Ignatian pedagogy with the young education majors. In collaboration with Mary Lisa Vertuca, the teaching model for EDFD 100: Introduction to Education included intentional instruction of assigned readings, oral discussion and personal reflections written by each student. As an assigned reading and reflection, each student in EDFD 100 was given a personal copy of *“Go Forth” Student Life in The Jesuit Tradition and Do you Speak Ignatian?* The goal of connecting and integrating the Xavier Mission Statement, the Xavier Core Values, The Department of Childhood Education and Literacy Mission Statement and the Dispositions for Teaching were written in the course Syllabi. Included in the intentional instruction for the Xavier freshmen was the following:

Department of Childhood Education & Literacy Mission Statement , which was written under the direction of Dr. Cindy Geer, Chair and all the colleagues within the department.

Xavier University’s Department of Childhood Education and Literacy is dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and to the orderly discussion of critical issues confronting educators in a free, inquiry-based environment committed to current and relevant scholarship and research related to our profession. Xavier University seeks to create awareness of social justice in all disciplines through its emphasis on living the Jesuit tradition of intellectual, moral and spiritual preparation. The candidates in the Early Childhood, Middle Childhood, Montessori and Literacy programs, through their academic and professional training, are prepared to value the lives of children regardless of racial linguistic, socio-economic, religious, or ethnic background and to work with and value family and school structures in both urban, rural, and suburban settings. Special attention is given to developmentally effective practices and advocacy for all children, with ethical issues and values as expressed through the Jesuit tradition. Thus, the Childhood Education and Literacy preparation at Xavier University strives to send out into the education community candidates who are morally sensitive to the academic and social needs of our time, foster an appreciation for human diversity, reason critically, and think creatively. Candidates in the Childhood Education and Literacy Department are encouraged to develop and maintain a disposition toward lifelong learning in the profession of education and to the service of their students and their students’ families and communities.

The Coach Effect

The mission statement breathes life in the EDFD 100 Introduction to Education coursework as the freshmen proceed to digest the responsibilities that are ahead as a classroom teacher. The challenge of this energizing research can be compared to Xavier’s Basketball Program and the Coaches’ strategy for the team. The freshmen come to Xavier with an adequate offense in their portfolio, which includes academic excellence, moral and ethical character, and an understanding of their personal responsibilities within the Xavier community. However, it is important to arm the young freshmen with a strong defensive ability through the development of their intellect, along with their interpersonal skills, while building their individual process for discernment within the community. This process must provide opportunities to embrace the Xavier Core Values, understand how the Spiritual Exercises impact their own life and how to “Find God in All Things”. It is widely known in the world of basketball that a good defense produces a strong offense. Therefore in the Xavier environment, the freshmen will be prepared to find their “Servant’s Heart” within the teaching profession.

Research Readings and Class Discussions

It is important to note that selected readings solidified and stimulated questions and reflections concerning the Jesuit Mission during the class discussion. The reading of *Finding God in All Things*, the author, William Barry states, “It doesn’t bother me that people have not heard of *The Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius of Loyola, but that those people who have heard of The Exercises think that it is reserved for only religious or holy people.” (Barry 11) He invites the reader to willingly incorporate and discern the ability to find God in the dispositions of life, which brought forth a discussion of the importance of Teacher Dispositions from the Xavier Early and Middle Childhood Handbook. Through the readings of Ignatius of Loyola, Donnelly reviews two main

purposes of The Exercises: "To teach people to pray more effectively and help people who were trying to reshape their lives to find and embrace what they see as God's will for them." (Donnelly 79) This is a personal "Aha" moment in the research and study of St. Ignatius and The Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius' teachings declare to all that study his writings, that each of us encounters God at every moment of our existence. (Barry 20). The question becomes, "How does faith connect with the Xavier student?" The Xavier freshmen recognize and understand that their chosen vocation incorporates a diverse society that is rapidly changing, but their response to their environment does not reflect attentiveness to the Ignatian pedagogy. An open discussion of the Jesuit vocabulary builds a connection and knowledge base that serves the Xavier freshmen in their quest for future endeavors and understanding of the past. Examples of the important Ignatian words were discussed in class from the handout *Do You Speak Ignatian?* Students contributed their personal thoughts and understanding of the term "cura personalis" and the Jesuit pedagogy, which are intertwined in their attitudes, along with their responsibility to become leaders in service. Through additional discussion, it was identified that the freshmen came to Xavier for various reasons; such as scholarship money, athletics and/or influence of their parents. The research found that the Xavier freshmen were excited, enthusiastic and possessed a broad base of academic content knowledge, while their religious values were kept in a separate compartment and were not considered when discussing their chosen profession. Without oversimplifying the task at hand, it is the Mission of the Xavier's Department of Childhood Education and Literacy to prepare the Xavier students, beginning with EDFD 100: Introduction to Education and follow each of them through the four year educational process, so that the students can be mentored and assisted in cultivating their ability to discern the connection between their chosen vocation of teaching and *Finding God in All Things*.

Future Opportunities for Growth & Development

The research for EDFD 100 has just begun and the work will continue with more readings, class discussion and a follow up survey. As a clinical faculty member, it is the mission of this instructor to influence the Early and Middle Childhood Majors to find and develop their own "Personal Mission". As written in *The Xavier Mission Statement* and given to the Xavier Freshmen to incorporate in their community, "*to develop intellectually, morally and spiritually with rigor and compassion toward lives of solidarity and service.*" This should be a mission for each of us that mentor and touch the lives of all students at Xavier University.

Reference Materials:

John Patrick Donnelly (2004) *Ignatius of Loyola Founder of the Jesuits*, New York, Peason.

William A. Barry, S.J. (2008) *Finding God :in all things*, Notre dame, Indiana, Ava Maria Press.

George W. Traub, S.J. (2006) *Do you speak Ignatian?* Ohio, Xavier University

Division of Mission & Identity (2007) *Go Forth and set the world on Fire*, Ohio, Xavier University

Thanks to:

Mentor: Barbara Harland, MSN., M.Ed., RN., CNL; Department of Nursing