

# EDUCATION

## Teaching Reflectively through Ignatian Pedagogy

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### Introduction

Jesuit education seeks to develop the whole student - mind, body, and spirit. Ignatian pedagogy is a model that seeks to develop men and woman of competence, conscience, and compassion (Traub, 2008, p. 403). The mission of Xavier University's Department of Childhood Education and Literacy reinforces these goals:

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 backgrounds 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.

Guided by the above mission statements, I reflected on the courses I teach at Xavier. I also reviewed the five educational principles comprising the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm: context [understanding student life and culture], experience [providing intellectual and affective learning opportunities], reflection of meaning for self and others, action [the external expression of learned content] and evaluation of student growth (Korth, 2008, pp. 281-283). Realizing that these tenets promote the goal of Jesuit education and speak to the teaching-learning process, I questioned how I could make these principles and, specifically, Ignatian Pedagogy apparent in my courses? This became the foundation for the Ignatian Mentoring Project.

### Ignatian Mentoring Project: Guiding Principles and Research Focus

To strengthen my understanding of Jesuit education and Ignatian Pedagogical Strands, I reviewed several websites, specifically the Jesuit Resources at Xavier University ([www.jesuitresource.org](http://www.jesuitresource.org)). I also used *Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy, A Desktop Primer* (Mooney) to determine how I might infuse this approach into my courses. I could incorporate the mission into all of my courses but there was a natural connection to the Language Arts/Social Studies Methods course offered spring semester. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to infuse the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands into the course content in order to assist students in assimilating these ideas into their teaching and reflection process. After reviewing the websites, course syllabi, meetings with my mentor, Thomas Kessinger, I used the principles of Ignatian pedagogy to develop the focus for the Ignatian Mentoring Project.

Ignatian pedagogy is a model that promotes the goal of Jesuit education, speaks to the teaching-learning process, addresses the faculty-student relationship, and has practical meaning and application for the classroom. Similar to the process of guiding others in the Spiritual Exercises, faculty accompany students in their intellectual, spiritual, and emotional development. They do this by creating the conditions, laying the foundations, and providing the opportunities for the continual interplay of the student's experience, reflection, and action to occur (Korth, 2008, pp. 280 - 281).

### Ignatian Mentoring Project: Teaching Reflectively through Ignatian Pedagogy

As part of the Ignatian Mentoring Project, I conducted a seven-week research study in which the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands were presented and discussed during the Language Arts/Social Studies course for Early Childhood Education offered Tuesday and Thursday mornings, 8:00 - 12:00. The Language Arts/Social Studies course incorporates language arts and social studies instructional strategies, oral and written language skills, and reading and children's literature for the integrated curriculum.

This course is designed to prepare students to teach language arts and social studies to children in preschool through third grade from a holistic, developmentally appropriate perspective. Students are familiar with best practices, teaching strategies, and classroom application in regards to the disciplines of language arts and social studies instruction. In addition, national and Ohio standards relating to early childhood are explored in both disciplines as well as through an interdisciplinary approach. A field component experience allows for observation and strategy implementation in the early childhood classroom. Students observe, plan and implement lessons guided by their cooperating teacher.

In week one, I shared the objectives and goals of my participation in the Ignatian Mentoring Project. I described to students that the Ignatian Mentoring Program started in 2004 with a grant from *Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts*. This program currently allows faculty to incorporate and assimilate the Ignatian vision into their professional identities. As part of this program, this project incorporated two parts. First, students anonymously completed a survey (Figure 1) outlining their understanding of the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands. The second part of the project involved student responses to weekly reflection statements.

### The Ignatian Pedagogy Survey

Figure 1

Ignatian Pedagogy

Please answer the following questions. Do not include your name.

- 1.) Can you identify any of the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands?
- 2.) If yes, please list the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands you can identify.
- 3.) If you answered yes to 2 above, identify any of the strands you incorporate
  - a.) in your daily life.
  - b.) in your classroom experiences.
  - c.) in your field practicum experiences.
- 4.) Is reflection a part of your daily routine? If yes, how?
- 5.) Is reflection a part of your teaching experience? If yes, how?

*I have been given information about this research study and its risks and benefits and have had the opportunity to ask questions and to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. By my completion and return of this survey, I freely give my consent to participate in this research project.*

After completing the survey, I distributed the *Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy, A Desktop Primer*. We discussed each of Ignatian Pedagogical Strands and students commented on their understanding of how these statements could be incorporated into their teaching (See a complete list of the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands in Appendix A). I also reviewed *Ignatian Pedagogy, A Practical Approach* (Korth, 2008), which included the following elements: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation (pp. 281-283). We specifically discussed reflection, and I incorporated the following statement as a part of our discussion:

Reflection and discernment were integral parts of Ignatius' learning process. Reflection is a thoughtful reconsideration of some subject matter, experience, idea, purpose, or spontaneous reaction, in order to grasp its significance more fully. Thus, reflection is the process by which meaning surfaces in human experience by understanding the truth being studied more clearly; understanding the sources of one's sensations or reactions in the consideration; deepening one's understanding of the implications for oneself and others; achieving personal insights into events, ideas, truths, or the distortion of truth; coming to an understanding of who I am...and who I might be in relation to others. Reflection is informative and a liberating process that forms the conscience of learners in such a manner that they are led to move beyond knowing to undertake action. Faculty lay the foundations for 'learning how to learn' by engaging students in the skills and techniques of reflection. A major

challenge to faculty is to formulate questions that will broaden students' awareness and impel them to consider viewpoints of others (Korth, 2008, pp. 282-283).

Because students would be completing weekly reflections, we elaborated on our understanding of the definition of reflection and how to use this process in the course content. "Reflection is the process of assessing information or events, thinking about and analyzing them, and then using the results to change or enhance future events. The process of reflection includes the cyclic process of description, analysis and planning" (Bullock and Hawk, 2001, pp. 29 - 30). We discussed the importance of reflection in their interaction with children, lesson planning, and learning the language arts and social studies content. I emphasized how reflection would be an important part of this course and their continual understandings about learning to teach.

After we discussed the overview of the Ignatian Mentoring Project, and students completed the survey, I organized and analyzed the survey data. The students' responses are listed in Figure 2. Twenty students completed the survey. It was apparent from this analysis that students were unfamiliar with any of the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands. However, students were incorporating reflection as part of their daily routines and in their teaching practices.

### Ignatian Pedagogy Survey Results

Figure 2

Question 1: 0 students could identify the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands

Question 2: 0, not applicable because students could not answer question 1

Question 3: 0, not applicable because students could not answer question 1

Question 4: 16 out of 20 students responded that they use reflection in their daily routine. Specifically students reflected on their work, daily activities, goals, and conversations and interactions.

Question 5: 17 out of 20 students responded that they use reflection as a part of their teaching experiences. Students incorporated reflection to determine if their teaching was effective, to examine ways to improve their teaching, and to review student achievement.

### Weekly Reflections: Incorporating the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands

I selected specific Ignatian Pedagogical Strands that supported the course topics. Each week, through lectures and activities, students were introduced to these Ignatian Pedagogical Strands. Other strands were also observed and mentioned in our classroom discussion and in students' field experiences. On Thursday mornings, students anonymously completed reflection statements. The following is a list the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands incorporated in the weekly reflections:

- Who am I as a teacher of young children?
- How do I view teaching as a vocation and as a service to others?
- How will I embrace the unique qualities in each student through teaching methodologies and strategies?
  
- How do I assess the students in my field experiences?
- How am I developing a teaching plan for my field experiences?

Students' reflection statements were read each week. I connected students' comments to future lectures and continually reviewed the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands relating them to the course content and their field experiences. At the end of the study, I examined all of the students' responses to the weekly reflection statements again and identified similar comments related to the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands. Reviews of the weekly reflections and excerpts highlighting these statements are described below.

**Reflection Question, Week 2: What is your philosophy of teaching, specifically "Who am I as a teacher of young children?"**

The students provided many examples in their reflections of how they felt they are teachers of young children. Narrative descriptions addressed their responsibility to students as motivators, role models, and a life-long learners. Many students stated the importance of embracing the unique qualities of each child and developing a relationship with their students. The following excerpt highlights the students' reflections:

*Example:*

"My philosophy of teaching is to value each child as an individual and build rapport with each child and their families. I, as a teacher of young children, am someone who values each student and tries to incorporate all learning styles to help each child succeed. I want to be an encourager and motivator to each of my students. I also believe it is essential to model what is important in my own life to my students so they have a better understanding of who I am and can relate to me."

**Reflection Question, Week 3: "How do I view teaching as a vocation and as a service to others?"**

The theme of responsibility to educate children was evident in students' responses to this reflection question. Students clearly stated that they believe they are role models for students and they saw the multiple roles teachers play in educating children. Students also believed that teaching is a way for them to "give back" and help children achieve their potential. The following examples explain students' feelings about teaching as a vocation and service to others.

*Example One:* "I think that each student brings unique qualities to the classroom. I think it's important to make children feel comfortable enough with themselves and their qualities to invite them to share with the class. Teaching allows us to show or bring out each quality in all of our students. It's important to show the students that they are unique and embrace our classroom."

*Example Two:* "Teaching to me is all about giving back. The greatest part of being an educator is being able to give a gift to each of my students. My gift is to help each of them reach their academic goals as well as personal goals."

*Example Three:* "Teaching is about helping others and serving others. Teachers work to help students succeed and reach their highest potential. As a teacher, I will do all that I can to understand and serve others in the community. Teaching, all in all, is a great way to give back to the community and help others!"

Several students also indicated that they felt like teaching was a calling for them. They acknowledged the importance of serving the students that they teach and being a part of the community as well. They want to make a difference in the world and believe they can accomplish this through teaching. One student stated, "I have wanted to be a teacher since I was five and I know deep down it is what I have been called to do. I want to be a good teacher more than anything else."

**Reflection Question, Week 4: "Embracing the unique qualities in each student through teaching methodologies and strategies."**

Students responded to this question as it relates to their thoughts about future teaching experiences. One student commented, "I will embrace the unique qualities of each student by understanding they all have different ability levels and are not always able to learn the same way." This theme resonated with several of the students. They indicated the importance of learning as much as they can about their students and then providing appropriate instructional approaches to meet various students' needs. Another student responded, "I feel that it is extremely important for teachers to know the interest of the students." Students planned on talking with their students and establishing relationships that extended the children's learning.

**Reflection Question, Week 5: "How do I assess the students in my field experience?"**

This statement encompassed the Ignatian Pedagogical Strand of utilizing clear and specific evaluation methods. During their field experiences, students spend time in classrooms participating in observation, creating lesson plans and teaching language arts strategies and skills. As a part of lesson planning, they create evaluative methods to measure student success. They also spend a great deal of time observing students and their cooperating teachers to learn about the complexities of the classroom. When asked to respond to how they assess their students, overwhelmingly students responded to using observation in the classroom. The following excerpts depict the students' commitment to learning about students and then using this knowledge to inform their instruction.

*Example One:* "I do a lot of observing when I am in my field experience placement. I also take

anecdotal notes while the students are doing reader's workshop. These notes come from the conferencing I do with the students."

*Example Two:* "I observe and take anecdotal records as I walk around. I create checklists to help me keep track of where my students are and what I need to teach. I get to know my students and see where they are."

*Example Three:* "It is important to use multiple methods of assessment whether it is just observation, anecdotal records, keeping checklists, projects, creating rubrics, or having actual written assessments. Not all students are able to express themselves the same way. They may have the knowledge, but sometimes they can't express their knowledge."

Students responded to using observation as a form of assessment; however, they also emphasized the importance of evaluation methods being authentic. One student responded that she wants to use multiple methods so that she could see the full developmental spectrum of the children she was teaching. She believed assessment should occur before, during, and after teaching so that she could alter her teaching to best fit the students' needs.

### Reflection Question, Week 6: "How am I developing a teaching plan for my field experience?"

Students responded to this question in a variety of ways. Many felt that they were very much in the "process" of creating a teaching plan. They were completing observational notes, watching their cooperating teachers, and getting to know the students. They were also asking their cooperating teachers many questions about the "how and why" of teaching and reflecting on their own knowledge to make sense of their evolving understandings. Many of the students indicated that they were quite concerned with meeting the needs of all of their students. They felt their lesson plans and instruction should focus on all of the students in their classrooms. The following examples explain students' feelings about creating teaching plans that are systematic, sequential and purposeful.

#### *Example One:*

"I am taking observational notes on what my students know and what their interests are. I have also spoken with my cooperating teacher about where the students are going or need to go in their Language Arts and Social Studies. When I develop my lessons, I use Internet resources to get ideas about what may work. I also refer back to my text books and class worksheets to see how to correctly layout a writing/reading workshop. When writing the lesson, I try to think of questions that my students may have and then make sure I am clear in my teaching. I ask questions that will help the students think deeply about the topic. I also try to make my lessons interactive so my students are engaged."

#### *Example Two:*

"I am developing a teaching plan through my field experience. Within my field experience, I am learning different techniques for discipline and am constantly learning of new activities and ideas for centers, as well as how to approach different learning styles. Everything within my field experience is experience that I can call on when I am a classroom teacher. Everything serves as an inspiration for future teaching and helps to develop my teaching plan."

### Ignatian Pedagogy Survey Results

In Week seven, I repeated the survey with the students. Figure 3 represents the students' responses to the same survey questions that they responded to in Week one.

Figure 3

Question 1: 19 of the 19\* participants answered "yes" to being able to identify any of the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands. One student completed the course as an independent study.

Question 2: If yes, please list the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands you can identify. The following strands were identified and the number in parenthesis indicates how many students responded to the same Ignatian Pedagogical Strands:

- Reflection (12)
- Embracing the unique qualities of each child (7)
- Interdisciplinary (7)
- Student responsibility and independence (6)
- Challenging and rigorous (3)
- Teaching as a service (3)

- Assessment (2)
- Respect (2)
- Creating relationships with students (2)
- Student-centered learning (1)

Question 3: If you answered yes to 2 above, identify any of the strands you incorporate in your daily life, classroom experiences, and field practicum experiences. The following strands were identified and the number in parenthesis indicates how many students responded to the same Ignatian Pedagogical Strands:

(a) in your daily life: Reflection (9)

- Forming relationships (2)
- Embracing the unique qualities of students (1)
- Showing and sharing skills (1)
- Student responsibility (1)

(b) in your classroom experiences:

- Reflection (6)
- Embracing the unique qualities of students (5)
- Teaching as a service (3)
- Interdisciplinary (1)
- Respect differences in classmates (1)
- Student independence (1)
- Challenging students to think (1)

(c) in your field experiences:

- Reflection (7)
- Challenging and rigorous (2)
- Student responsibility and independence (2)
- Teaching as a service (2)
- Embracing the unique qualities of students (2)
- Learning from professors and cooperating teachers (1)
- Interdisciplinary (1)
- Observation (1)
- Providing multiple pathways for learning and assessing (1)
- Different instruction (1)

Question 4: 18 out of 19 students responded that they use reflection in their daily routine. Specifically students reflect on their work, daily activities, goals, and conversations and interactions. This was an increase of 2 students from the initial survey.

Question 5: 19 out of 19 or 100% students responded that they use reflection as a part of their teaching experiences. Students incorporated reflection to determine teaching effectiveness and student achievement. They also searched for ways to improve their teaching. Students included observation and field notes as part of their reflection. Students also reflected on assignments and conversations. This was an increase of 2 students from the initial survey.

\*One student completed the course as an independent study.

The final survey results clearly indicated that students were able to acknowledge and identify the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands discussed in the course and observed in their field placements. Students were able to provide specific examples which they were unable to complete in the first survey. In part, the continual review of the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands during discussions and assignments made them relevant and reoccurring and I believe, influenced the final survey results.

## Conclusion

“Jesuit education is instrumental, student centered, characterized by structure and flexibility, eclectic, and personal” (Traub, 2008, p. 403). For this project, I presented the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands to incorporate the tenets of Jesuit education and help students learn how they could infuse this foundation into their teaching experiences. As previously outlined, “The Ignatian pedagogical process includes the elements of context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation” (Korth, 2008, p. 283). During class discussions, we talked about the dynamic structure of experience, action and used reflection to make sense of the learning that took place in the students’ field placements. I used the weekly reflection statements to make the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands explicit and assist students in connecting course content to these ideas. Although students were not initially aware of the specific Ignatian Pedagogical Strands, making them

explicit was effective as students assimilated this knowledge and responded to these ideas in their weekly reflections. It was apparent from the final survey results how important it was to present the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands in detail, and make them relevant to the students' learning. The final survey results indicated that students' comments focused on specific Ignatian Pedagogical Strands such as the unique qualities of each child, teaching as a service to others, the interdisciplinary nature of teaching, helping students to be responsible and independent, and incorporating reflection in their daily lives and teaching experiences. The results also showed how students learned and applied the skill of reflecting in their classroom conversations, observations, and field experiences.

As part of a culminating experience for this course, students create a reflective journal that represents the content materials and knowledge they have learned during the semester. Weekly classroom observations, learning techniques, lesson plans, and other relevant and important information are included in their journals. The journals are designed to focus students' attention on the school and its resources, the thought processes of elementary children, and the instructional flavor of the environment. It is my hope that the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands will be a part of this journal, and information from the *Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy Desktop Primer* will serve as a reference for students to include and implement in their future teaching experiences. I will continue to purposefully infuse the Ignatian Pedagogical Strands into the Language Art/Social Studies course to assist students in the reflection process and in assimilating these ideas into their teaching practices.

*This project could not have been completed without the support and guidance of my mentor, Tom Kessinger - thank you for helping me achieve my goal.*

#### References

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#### Appendix A

#### ***Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy, A Desktop Primer***

##### **Ignatian Pedagogy**

- Embraces the unique qualities in each student
- Facilitates students' understanding of information in a personally relevant and personally appropriate manner.
- Employs a systematic, sequential and purposeful teaching plan
- Encourages students to decide what is truly good for themselves and society through a process of discernment.
- Is challenging and rigorous
- Is interdisciplinary
- Makes use of novel teaching methods and technologies as they arise.
- Relies on professors to serve as model "women and men for others" both in and out of the classroom.
- Encourages attentiveness, reverence and devotion to reveal truth and wisdom.
- Utilizes clear and specific evaluation methods.
- Encourages student responsibility and independence.
- Emphasizes eloquentia perfecta - speaking and writing excellence.
- Views teaching as a vocation and as a service to others.
- Values the five educational principles comprising the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm: context {understanding student life and culture}, experience {providing intellectual and affective learning opportunities}, reflection of meaning for self and others, action {the external expression of learned content} and evaluation of student growth.