

## “Ignatian Pedagogy in the Classroom: Toward the Development of a Responsible Self”

Daniel Chornet-Roses, Ph.D., Communication, Madrid Campus

In the words of Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, “there is no alibi in being,” and thus, our mere existence exerts an unavoidable influence on others. *Ethical responsibility* is the requirement for existing. Awareness of such responsibility toward our peers is one of the learning outcomes that I foster in my classes. Consistent with one of the Jesuit ideals, this tenet amounts to “being a person for others.” Teaching ethical responsibility requires that students engage in self-reflection. Self-reflection leads them to become aware of the imprint we inescapably leave on others. Throughout the semester, I illustrate this process with an example that they experience everyday: the relationship between the professor and the student. On the one hand, students clearly realize the kind of impressions—whether positive or negative—that professors may leave on them. Don’t we all remember that professor from college who enlightened us about a particular scholastic skill or about life? On the other hand, students sometimes do not realize the power they have when it comes to influencing professors’ actions within and outside the classroom. For example, a student’s grimace while the professor is talking, a yawn, chit-chat in the background and so on. These behaviors and others may affect what professors think and do while they are teaching and how they perceive themselves as instructors (boring, useful, engaging, insightful, etc.). I encourage students to extrapolate this example to their everyday lives outside the classroom and to reflect on their daily interactions. The goal of this activity is to foster tolerance and sensitivity to differences and similarities; thus, students become more ethically responsible human beings who are able to coexist with others in today’s increasingly diverse world. I usually put this activity into practice in classes, such as Interpersonal and Intercultural Communication, in which the relationship among the self, the other, and culture is at the center.

## “Where is the Agonist When You Need Her/Him?”

Benjamin de Foy, Ph.D., Earth and Atmospheric Sciences

Something struck me recently when talking with a graduate student about a panel discussion between professors. She was shocked that one of the faculty members openly disagreed with the one whose book was being discussed, and felt embarrassed on his behalf. I was shocked, in turn, because I had

thought the disagreement pretty mild and the discussion very civil. Speaking for the scientists I've observed, passions can run high in Q&A sessions after seminars. For the most part, this is not just normal, it is expected.

In a separate incident, one of my undergraduates reported being surprised that, "there are many topics in the field of science that are not agreed on." Science had always been taught to him as a collection of theories that were "the only theories," and that these were "the right theories."

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently asked why we expect students to think critically, but are so reluctant to engage in intellectual battles among ourselves.<sup>1</sup> Where does this unwritten rule to avoid public disagreements come from? How are students supposed to develop the skills they need without models and without practice? For discussion classes, the luxury solution is a team-taught class where two professors can take opposing views, debate with each other, and draw the whole class into the discussion.<sup>2</sup> A stripped down alternative might be guest lecturers with an expectation of generating some heat: visit my class, and I'll supply the rotten tomatoes.

In science, the debates and open questions can be so specialized that you don't encounter them until you attend your first conference in grad school. This is a long time to wait before seeing the bread and butter of the discipline. Our teaching model has been bottom-up: start with the basics and build on those. But now that students have to learn in high school the discoveries that earned Isaac Newton his fame, it's a long climb up. Top-down efforts are too easily relegated to a half page box in the textbook. But given that so much of science is the result of feuds and battles, there must be plenty of debate that we can draw on: have the students start with a current controversy, and then find out what needs to be known to understand it. After all, isn't this how research progresses anyway?

1. "In Praise of Tough Criticism", Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jun 13, 2010.

2. "Two Professors, One Valuable Lesson: How to Respectfully Disagree", Mel Seesholtz and Bryan Polk, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Oct 25, 2009.

For an entertaining account of how far this could go: "Hell's Classroom", Thomas H. Benton, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Apr 17, 2009.

For a useful counterpoint: “Beyond Critical Thinking”, Michael S. Roth, Chronicle of Higher Education, Jan 3, 2010.

### “Developing Learning Experiences through Reflection”

Kimberly Levenhagen, PT, DPT, WCC, Physical Therapy & Athletic Training

As educators we are challenged to create an active classroom experience that enables students to reflect on the meaning and value of what is being learned and then transfer this knowledge to their life experiences. We spend hours crafting innovative teaching strategies that will address the community of learners we have in our classrooms. Ignatian Pedagogy moves us beyond Powerpoints and busywork into a world of context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. Each of these five teaching elements is not just a passive word, but an active teaching strategy to help students develop their critical thinking inside and outside the classroom.

The most difficult Ignatian teaching element for students to appreciate is reflective thinking. Students interpret reflection assignments as busy work instead of using them as tools for further growth. It is important for students to realize that reflection in the classroom is similar to sitting down with a coach watching films of game day performance. Just like athletes, we need our students to move from reflection on action (reviewing the film) to reflection in action (game day decision), always striving for ongoing development. Educators desire from their students the same commitment, competence, and compassion that coaches desire from their athletes.

In the program of Physical Therapy, students are required in their communication courses to write reflections on skills learned in the classroom. Students review “films” of their communication skills with a “patient” in the context of a classroom experience. The students reflect on areas of strength and areas needing future development, and they create plans for growth. With these plans, students apply their classroom knowledge to new experiences in the community during clinicals and service learning. Reflection provides students with opportunities to experience learning in multiple contexts, promoting growth as individuals and practitioners. Ignatian Pedagogy provides a template for educators to assist students in developing their critical thinking skills by creating, acting, and reexamining a plan using

reflection. For students to be successful in their community, life, and profession, educators must provide opportunities for reflection.

### “Two Simple Techniques that Help Build Rapport with Students”

Jay Hammond, Ph.D., Theological Studies

I utilize two rather simple techniques that help me build a more positive rapport with my students, which in turn helps build a classroom environment that spawns discussion. I learned both of these techniques from teachers whom I wanted to emulate because of their positive rapport with students and their ability to craft high levels of discussion in their classes. Although these teachers also use more traditional methods to facilitate class discussions, these two techniques were unique but simple, so I share them in response to the mantra of many a college instructor: how do I get my students to talk?

First, I simply show up to class 10-15 minutes early so I can talk with my students. If the teacher before me is not finished, I talk with my students in the hall. Inevitably, there are some students who routinely show up early, so I have a brief opportunity to chat with them. Even the opportunity to meet with some of my students in a more informal setting enables them to ask me questions like, “how are your two boys?” or for me to ask them questions like, “how was fall break?” While mundane, I have found that those students who talk with me outside of class are often more likely to carry the “invitation for conversation” over into class discussion. Since these conversations enable me to be more than just “the teacher,” they seem to engender a more relaxed rapport where students are more comfortable with class discussions.

Second, an even more successful technique that involves the entire class is my modern rendition of the *quodlibet* (what you please), which was a standard educational device in medieval universities. Usually the disputation would be on a specific topic, but sometimes the professor would allow the students to ask whatever question they wanted. It is in this latter sense that I utilize the *quodlibet*. I let the students ask me *whatever* they want. Sometimes these days are quite serious, other times they are filled with laughter. One day, the class might primarily ask theological questions; another day, they might ask about why I chose to be a teacher, or about my family, or about my college experience, etc. The effect is almost universally the same: the *quodlibet* helps me build a positive rapport with my students. They get

a respite from the academic action and get to know me a little bit better, and I get an opportunity to learn about my students' interests, concerns, and attitudes outside of my "normal" class. Without fail, after a *quodlibet*, my students are a bit more energized, and even more comfortable with class discussions.

"Ignatian Pedagogy in a Diverse University"

Matthew Mancini, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, American Studies

***photo credit: Jay Fram***



– EXCERPT –

Two elements of traditional Jesuit classroom practice that are highly effective and are based on the *Ratio* principle of the dignity of the student include a developmentally graded mastery of a subject and repetition of the material. As to the first, some scholars such as Ronald Modras, professor emeritus of Theological Studies at SLU, credit the *Ratio* with having established the familiar system of educating pupils through a system of grades: first grade, second grade, and so on through high school. I leave it to the specialists to argue that specific point, but the early Jesuits did attend closely to the *developmental* aspect of teaching. The same principle can be applied to a single course, and I have found it valuable in terms of student achievement to establish coursework that builds logically from one set of skills and content to the next. It is a matter of building on what came before, rather than stringing together a series of independent subjects—first topic A, then B, C, and so forth. In this approach, the work students accomplish in the middle of the semester is work they could not have undertaken at the outset of the course.

Secondly, repetition is a key to the mastery of material required in a step-wise or developmental approach to the subject. In a recent seminar, my students demonstrated in one class session a solid grasp of a particular text by Karl Marx. It was surprising (or perhaps not) to then observe those same students the following week when I asked them the title of the work, the date of publication, the dates of Marx, and so on. They could not answer the questions. It was only by returning to the specific

information and having them literally repeat it that their understanding reached a point of adequacy. Later in the course, the students were finally in a position to undertake a discussion of a Marxist interpretation of American culture in the 1930s.

Gradation and repetition are intimately linked. Taken together these facets also aid in the construction of a better syllabus, one that moves through the material in a more logical and developmental manner, rather than as a sequence of topics.

– FULL ARTICLE –

Ignatian Pedagogy is a difficult topic to address as a living, practical guide in a modern university. It is the blend of educational philosophy and teaching techniques contained in or derived from both the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Society of Jesus, and the subsequent *Ratio Studiorum* (1599) or plan of educational theory and practice for the Jesuit order. As such, the subject might be even more controversial in a Jesuit institution, like SLU, than elsewhere. Ignatian pedagogy is intimately bound to the theological and ethical principles of the *Exercises*, yet SLU is a diverse university that vigorously recruits and welcomes students, faculty, and staff of all or no faiths in its pursuit of teaching and research excellence. How can a professor take up such a philosophy and apply such techniques if he/she does not embrace the specific ideas and values out of which the techniques emerged? One might point to a list of classroom strategies that are derived from the *Ratio* but de-historicized and as it were denatured from their original Jesuit context—as several presenters at a CTE-sponsored Ignatian pedagogy workshop I recently attended came close to doing—but such an approach threatens to trivialize Ignatian pedagogy by reducing it to a checklist of handy teaching tips.

I believe a broad area of theory and practice exists between the extremes of a total commitment to the practice of the *Exercises* and the *Ratio* and a watered-down set of bullet-pointed suggestions. In this middle ground, two elements of traditional Jesuit classroom practice that are highly effective and are based on the *Ratio* principle of the dignity of the student include a developmentally graded mastery of a subject and repetition of the material.

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#### “Jesuit Principles We Already Use”

Darcy Scharff, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Public Health

After a recent session on Ignatian pedagogy with Michael Rozier, SJ, one of the School of Public Health (SPH) faculty members, several of my colleagues, and I reflected on our personal teaching philosophies.

We were able to identify which of our teaching methods we believe are Ignatian at their core. Some examples follow:

- We require students to reflect on their practical experiences. We ask students to write guided reflections that help them see how they are developing competencies as they achieve the learning goals set in the beginning of an assignment.
- We provide timely and thorough feedback on course assignments. Our policy (reflected in our common syllabus) indicates our commitment to timely feedback. Additionally, our students leave the SPH with a strong ability to write papers, briefs, and other materials appropriate for their work because most classes require written assignments, AND we provide extensive feedback.
- We are available to students. The SPH is an open and welcoming environment. Most faculty maintain an open door policy with our graduate students; it is not unusual to walk through our halls and see faculty and students discussing a research project or assignment.

An example from my work is demonstrating how racism plays a role in health disparities. I use a film, “A Jewel in Time”, that portrays the political determinants of the closure of Homer G. Philips hospital in St. Louis. It generates interesting and thought-provoking discussions.

Utilizing these methods demonstrates that we take our teaching seriously and respect our students. The outcomes of using these approaches include helping students learn to ask the right questions about the issue, gain a deeper understanding of the content, recognize their contribution to the world’s challenges, and work collaboratively in teams. Each of these is a core precept of Jesuit education.

“Create”

David Vaughn, Rev. (ABD), Public Policy

The workshop “Teaching at a Jesuit Institution” [the Ignatius way] was an invaluable opportunity to re-think how I should organize and structure my classes at SLU as an adjunct professor. As a doctoral student, I have had many good examples of how to best lead students through a learning experience which would either help prepare them to continue their studies or help them gain the knowledge and



wisdom needed to conquer the challenges they face in the context of their world. Before this workshop, I was not familiar with the specifics of Ignatius of Loyola's approach to teaching. The crucifix in each classroom had been my sole reminder of Christ's presence there. The workshop showed me in a very personal way that at the core of the Ignatius pedagogy is the statement, "God loves you." After the various presenters unpacked this truth in the framework of five principles—context, reflection, experience, action, and evaluation—it became clear that the course I was about to teach on leadership theory and practice could be organized and structured around these five tenets of the Ignatius way.

To help the students understand how each aspect of the course followed the Ignatius way, I developed the acronym C.R.E.A.T.E. Each letter of the acronym communicates a principle in Ignatian pedagogy, with the "T" representing the cross. C.R.E.A.T.E. seemed appropriate because the classroom is a rich place for creating new ideas and fresh seeds of knowledge for teacher and student alike, and also as a reference to the only real creator, God. Toward this end, I designed a syllabus that incorporated each aspect of Ignatian pedagogy. The syllabus includes asking each student to share his or her greatest leadership experiences (context), weekly self assessments and corresponding reflection papers (reflection), a personal leadership development plan (experience), weekly case study discussion groups (action), and weekly quizzes on the assigned reading, as well a mid-semester in-class evaluation by CTE of my leadership as the class teacher (evaluation).

A copy of the syllabus can be found on the CTE's Ignatian pedagogy website <INSERT LINK/URL>.

### "Ignatian Pedagogy Workshop Reflection"

Mark Wilson, M.F.A., Fine and Performing Arts

The Ignatian Pedagogy workshop began with a simple personal reflection, "What do you love about teaching?" This should have been an easy task. I only scribbled a few things I "liked" about teaching and turned my attention to my fear of workshops in general and especially my apprehension of the Ignatian Pedagogy title. How could I relate to this concept without a Catholic upbringing? I needed help.

There was hope when we learned about the story of St. Ignatius and his life-changing convalescence in Paris that led to the Jesuit mission of knowledge and education. "We all start from a place of ignorance." I could relate to this message from St. Ignatius and I felt I needed a similar mini-transformation.

We learned about five teaching principles adapted from St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises: context, reflection, experience, action, and evaluation. Many faculty guests shared personal teaching strategies using these principles as guidelines. In essence, they shared their love of teaching, and their specific examples proved to me that I follow a similar conviction and method. I teach theatre design, and our design process utilizes context in the free-brainstorming aspects of creating a design concept for a script. The reflection process involves the application of our research and ideas to the play and performance. And the experience and action components are pivotal in our collaboration, when we produce and present the play for evaluation from a live audience. It was very comforting to learn that St. Ignatius encourages the development of the creative imagination.

After the excellent two-day workshop, I was able to allow myself time for reflection and think of ways to improve my own teaching techniques. I can start the semester able to clearly say that I love teaching and sharing my theatre experience with students at Saint Louis University.