

A brief historical note . . .

INTRODUCTION

We Jesuits are engaged in a great variety of apostolic activities the world over. However, we are best known for our involvement in the field of education. The Formula of the Institute does not mention education as the primary purpose for which the Society of Jesus was founded. However, St. Ignatius and his original companions, all graduates of the University of Paris, had always seen learning as related to the piety that they embodied and wished to inculcate in others (O'Malley, 1993). The early Jesuits based their life and ministry on the fundamental premise of the Spiritual Exercises: The Creator deals directly with the creature (Sp. Ex, Anno. # 15.). They saw themselves as itinerant preachers, confessors, and spiritual counsellors offering their ministry of Spiritual Conversations and Spiritual Exercises to willing individuals.

While the early Jesuits were engaged in their ministry to individuals in Italy and other parts of Europe, Francis Xavier, by now in India, sought the permission of Ignatius, the General of the Society, to teach lay students at St. Paul's College in Goa. He argued that they would make 'good citizens.' Ignatius recognized the importance of forming future leaders. From 1543 a few Jesuits taught reading, grammar, and catechism there to six hundred male students in the age group of 10-20. By 1548 the Jesuits took full responsibility for the institution. In 1546 Jesuits began teaching other students along with Jesuits in Gandia.

The definitive first movement of the Society of Jesus towards establishing a college/school took place in 1548 with Ignatius sending 10 Jesuits (including six scholastics) led by Fr. Jerome Nadal to open Colegio di San Nicolo in Messina. Ignatius made the group as international as he could, choosing some of the best talent available in Rome. Nadal's enthusiastic letters could have helped convince Ignatius to make bold and fast moves in starting colleges in Italy and other parts of Europe (O'Malley).

Part IV of the Constitutions is the best source for the explicit and direct thought of Ignatius on the apostolate of education, even though it was largely completed before he realized the extensive role education was to play in the apostolic work of the Jesuits. A series of principles and norms for the universities, schools, and educational establishments of the Society are given. Without going into many details, he stated his characteristic principle: "adjustment may be introduced according to place, time and persons." (Const. S.J., 455).

Ignatius had three features in his plan for the educational ministry:

- a. *Educate those who will exercise decisive influence in the world of civil and religious affairs;*
- b. *Teach Humanities to develop moral goodness, devotion to truth, and a disposition to act for the civic good; and*
- c. *Teach subjects in a hierarchically ordered manner: starting with languages and humanities, then moving to sciences and philosophy, and finally ending with theology.*

Thus, the early Society plunged into secular culture and civic responsibility. Jesuit education became a tapestry of complex but beautiful texture with the religious motives of the Jesuits, intellectual needs of the common people, and needs of the local civil administration, providing entrepreneurial opportunities for Jesuit communities, in the changing socio-political contexts of the countries.

Instructed by Ignatius, Pedro de Ribadeneira wrote to Philip II of Spain in February 1556: "All the well-being of Christianity and of the whole world depends on the proper education of the youth." (O'Malley). Ignatius personally approved the opening of about 40 schools. 35 of these were in operation when he died in 1556; the number of Jesuits was below 1,000.

IN OUR TIMES

Today we live in an interconnected world in which technology is rapidly and continuously altering our relationship to information. Changing global conditions demand that we rethink how best we can be effective and relevant educators in the 21st century remaining true to our priorities and commitments. The world of learning in future is one where the forces of globalization, pervasive technology, and demands for innovation in the learning environment combine to form a dynamic setting that is both challenging and difficult for those in education. The primary objective of education should be the all-round development of the learner. "By education I mean all round drawing out of the best in the child, body, mind and spirit" (Mahatma Gandhi). As leaders in education in the 21st century, we must play a positive role in creating a learning environment that takes into account the real challenges to the comprehensive development of the child.

Jesuit educators must reflect upon current practices and policies and identify ways to transform education to address new challenges in an increasingly

complex world. Will the education of today prepare our young people for tomorrow? We can no longer rely on traditional models to prepare our pre-primary and primary children for the future. When we make innovation a part of our ongoing improvement process, we allow for changes that support dynamic ways to design and deliver quality teaching and learning. In this we are guided by our Living Tradition (2019) of Jesuit Education as articulated in the Characteristics of Jesuit Education (1986) and Ignatian Pedagogy, a Practical Approach (1993) as an on-going exercise of discernment.

Jesuits in India have made a substantial contribution to this apostolate of the Society ever since Francis Xavier accepted the management of St. Paul's College in Goa. Today the South Asian Jesuit Conference runs 225 Secondary Schools and 173 Primary and Middle Schools. Clearly there is heavy investment in terms of material and human resources. Even today, 475 years after the foundation of the first Jesuit school in Messina, we experience the Jesuit charism animating our schools. Our spirituality, that recognises the hand of God in the whole of creation, has a special commitment to care for every individual (*cura personalis*) in our institutions.

Ours is a pedagogy that demands an in-depth understanding of our context in which education is imparted. In our schools the faculty and administration consider the context of each student's life; foster a broad base of experience, help students reflect upon the subject matter to broaden and deepen their awareness of themselves and the world around them; encourage students to use their own experience and awareness through compassionate action in the service of others; and evaluate the growth of the whole person. In collaboration with our partners in our mission of education we promote faith that seeks the justice of the Gospel, in the spirit of *magis*, in the pursuit of human excellence. This is what assists us to help our students realise the fullest development of all God-given human potentials.

Jesuit education strives to make the young men and women of our day knowledgeable, responsible, and disciplined. At the same time, it should seek to form them as men and women for and with others, and agents of social change. Therefore, in the light of the question by Ignatius of Loyola to Francis Xavier *"what does it profit a man if he wins the whole world and suffers the loss of his soul?"* we can say today *"what does it profit if Jesuits produce young people of knowledge and academic excellence who lack in humaneness for their fellow beings?"* (Fr. Patrick De Mello, SJ, Former Provincial of Goa).

In the pluralistic context of South Asia, recognising that often most of the students in our classrooms are from non-Christian backgrounds, we endeavour to provide faith formation in dialogue with other religions. It is an education that integrates faith, culture, and life, together with rigorous academic programmes. This requires qualified teachers for Religious and Value Education as well as other subjects, who make the Ignatian worldview their own and are willing to help students think clearly, critically, creatively, and act ethically and compassionately. Where Religious and Value Education are emphasised, the practice of peace education and discernment become easier. The Jesuit community and the Province/Region should help the schools with the necessary resources to sustain the school's Jesuit character.

It is imperative that we, as Ignatian educators, read the signs of the times and act accordingly. This implies that we should initiate an important paradigm shift in our ways of administering our educational institutions – in curriculum, recruitment of staff, admission of students, accompaniment of staff and students, assessment programmes, financial management, and so on. We hope that the following recommendations and guidelines will help towards facing the challenges of tomorrow, and finding ways and means to tackle them effectively.