

Ignatian Pedagogy on REFLECTION:

Taken from **Ignatian Pedagogy, A practical approach.**

Throughout his life Ignatius knew himself to be constantly subjected to different stirrings, invitations, alternatives which were often contradictory. His greatest effort was to try to discover what moved him in each situation: the impulse that leads him to good or the one that inclines him to evil; the desire to serve others or the solicitude for his own egotistical affirmation. He became the master of discernment that he continues to be today because he succeeded in distinguishing this difference. For Ignatius to "discern" was to clarify his internal motivation, the reasons behind his judgments, to probe the causes and implications of what he experienced, to weigh possible options and evaluate them in the light of their likely consequences, to discover what best leads to the desired goal: to be a free person who seeks, finds, and carries out the will of God in each situation.

At this level of **REFLECTION**, the memory, the understanding, the imagination and the feelings are used to capture the **meaning and the essential value** of what is being studied, to **discover its relationship** with other aspects of knowledge and human activity, and to **appreciate** its implications in the ongoing search for truth and freedom. This **REFLECTION** is a formative and liberating process. It forms the conscience of learners (their beliefs, values, attitudes and their entire way of thinking) in such a manner that they are led to move beyond knowing, to undertake **action**.

We use the term reflection to mean 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.** For example, "What are the assumptions in this theory of the atom, in this presentation of the history of native peoples, in this statistical analysis? Are they valid; are they fair? Are other assumptions possible? How would the presentation be different if other assumptions were made?"
- **by understanding the sources of the sensations or reactions I experience** in this consideration. For example, "In studying this short story, what particularly interests me? Why?..." "What do I find troubling in this translation? Why?"
- **by deepening my understanding of the implications of what I have grasped for myself and for others.** For example, "What likely effects might environmental efforts to check the greenhouse effect have on my life, on that of my family, and friends... on the lives of people in poorer countries?"
- **by achieving personal insights into events, ideas, truth or the distortion of truth** and the like. For example, "Most people feel that a more equitable sharing of the world's resources is at least desirable, if not a moral imperative. My own life style, the things I take for granted, may contribute to the current imbalance. Am I willing to reconsider what I really need to be happy?"
- **by coming to some understanding of who I am** ("What moves me, and why?") ... **and who I might be in relation to others.** For example, "How does what I have reflected upon make me feel? Why? Am I at peace with that reaction in myself? Why?... If not, why not?"

A major challenge to a teacher at this stage of the learning paradigm is to formulate questions that will broaden students' awareness and impel them to consider viewpoints of others, especially of the poor. The temptation here for a teacher may be to impose such viewpoints. If that occurs, the risk of manipulation or indoctrination (thoroughly non-Ignatian) is high, and a teacher should avoid anything

that will lead to this kind of risk. But the challenge remains to open students' sensitivity to human implications of what they learn in a way that transcends their prior experiences and thus causes them to grow in human excellence.

As educators we insist that all of this be done with total respect for the student's freedom. It is possible that, even after the reflective process, a student may decide to act selfishly. We recognize that it is possible that due to developmental factors, insecurity or other events currently impacting a student's life, he or she may not be able to grow in directions of greater altruism, justice, etc. at this time. Even Jesus faced such reactions in dealing with the rich young man. We must be respectful of the individual's freedom to reject growth. We are sowers of seeds; in God's Providence the seeds may germinate in time.

The reflection envisioned can and should be broadened wherever appropriate to enable students and teachers to share their reflections and thereby have the opportunity to grow together. Shared reflection can reinforce, challenge, encourage reconsideration, and ultimately give greater assurance that the action to be taken (individual or corporate) is more comprehensive and consistent with what it means to be a person for others.

(The terms **EXPERIENCE** and **REFLECTION** may be defined variously according to different schools of pedagogy, and we agree with the tendency to use these and similar terms to express or to promote teaching that is personalized and learner-active and whose aim is not merely the assimilation of subject-matter but the development of the person. In the Ignatian tradition of education, however, these terms are particularly significant as they express a "way of proceeding" that is more effective in achieving "integral formation" of the student, that is, a way of experiencing and reflecting that leads the student not only to delve deeply into the subject itself but to look for meaning in life, and to make personal options (**ACTION**) according to a comprehensive world vision. On the other hand, we know that experience and reflection are not separable phenomena. It is not possible to have an experience without some amount of reflection, and all reflection carries with it some intellectual or affective experiences, insights and enlightenment, a vision of the world, of self, and others.)

ACTION:

For Ignatius the acid test of love is what one does, not what one says. "**Love is shown in deeds, not words.**" The thrust of the *Spiritual Exercises* was precisely to enable the retreatant to know the will of God and to do it freely. So too, Ignatius and the first Jesuits were most concerned with the formation of students' attitudes, values, ideals according to which they would make decisions in a wide variety of situations about what actions were to be done. Ignatius wanted Jesuit schools to form young people who could and would contribute intelligently and effectively to the welfare of society.

Reflection in Ignatian Pedagogy would be a truncated process if it ended with understanding and affective reactions. Ignatian reflection, just as it begins with the reality of experience, necessarily ends with that same reality in order to effect it. Reflection only develops and matures when it fosters decision and commitment.

In his pedagogy, Ignatius highlights the affective/evaluative stage of the learning process because he is conscious that in addition to letting one "sense and taste", i.e., deepen one's experience, affective feelings are motivational forces that move one's understanding to action and commitment. And it must be clear that Ignatius does not seek just any action or commitment. Rather, while respecting human freedom, he strives to encourage decision and commitment for the *magis*, the better service of God and our sisters and brothers.