Designing Online Business Courses Using the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm

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Introduction
The purpose of education is not to amass a store of information but rather the aim needs to be a transformation of the full person. The 33rd General Jesuit Congregation in 1983 suggested that all Jesuit education utilize the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm as a way to educate students. Saint Ignatius’ paradigm emphasizes “experience”; “reflection” and “action” while analyzing and synthesizing content. (Kolvenbach SJ, 1993)

This pedagogical paradigm insists that teachers add reflection between experience and action in the learning process in order to draw meaning from content and to explore implications for oneself and others while seeking truth behind events and ideas. After reflection, action then encourages human growth based upon the reflected experience. This process encourages a transformation to occur in a student. This process is appropriate for distance education as well as face-to-face courses in our Catholic business schools.

St. Ignatius appreciated variety and creativity while teaching and spreading the word of the Gospel. He was quite unorthodox when he took to the streets and to the world in the 16th century spreading the Gospel. In 1556, he even purchased one of the first printing presses for the Society of Jesus because he saw that it could enable him to better communicate with members of the society and to further foster a greater union of minds and hearts throughout the world. Today, true to this Ignatian heritage, Jesuit universities around the globe are making use of technology as a portal for delivering education on a local and global basis.
Adolfo Nicolas, SJ (2010), Superior General of Society of Jesus, commented in his address at the 2010 conference that today we have a great opportunity to use advancements in technology and the positive dimensions of globalization to realize the potential of Jesuit higher education. Ignatius Loyola would have most certainly taken advantage of technology to spread his message.

New internet technologies are providing new tools for classroom based learning, valuable outreach opportunities for Catholic Jesuit education, and a strengthening of bonds with different constituencies around the world. But, no surprise, with these new technologies come challenges. Some challenges for the Jesuit Catholic schools include designing Ignatian-based curriculum, understanding the context and needs of students who are living in a technological world, and understanding the ways in which students think and respond to the today’s society.

Jesuit education is grounded in a 450 year old scholastic tradition. It is important that this tradition be upheld as we move into the 21st century of internet delivered education. This Ignatian model has always emphasized the importance of learning beyond just rote knowledge. This model embraces the development of critical thinking and complex learning skills, so important to any education. This particular pedagogical model includes the steps of context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. These same elements must be carefully included in online education as well as in Face-2-Face (F2F) education.

David Robinson, S.J. (2008) of Nestucca Sanctuary Jesuit Community in California stated, “Jesuit education has a centuries-old tradition of attending to the whole person: intellectually, ethically, spiritually….such values are not left as a sidebar when the learning venue moves to cyberspace.”

**The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm**

![Figure 1. The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (Jesuit Secondary Education Association).](image-url)
Pedagogy, the art and science of teaching, is the way teachers lead students in their growth and development. To be effective, the pedagogy must include a global view as the teacher guides the student toward excellence. Ignatian pedagogy assumes a worldview and its aim is the development of the full person which will lead to being men and women for others. An Ignatian goal is to graduate students who are well-rounded, intellectually competent, open to world views and committed to justice.

This Ignatian pedagogy is based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. The 1993 monograph, *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (Jesuit Secondary Education Association (JSEA)) describes this Ignatian pedagogical vision and provides a process for delivering education in an Ignatian tradition.

Distinguishing features of Jesuit education as described in this document are:
- Cura personalis – individual care and concern for the student
- Values focused
- Pursuit of Excellence in study
- Encouragement of life-long learning
- Inspired by Faith but profoundly human focused
- Eclectic in methodology

This monograph, *A Practical Approach*, emphasizes the importance of how a teacher relates to students, how the teacher conceives of learning, how the teacher engages students in the quest for truth and emphasizes the importance of a teacher’s own integrity and ideas in the formative process of student growth. There are five key components to the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm as illustrated in Figure 1 (JSEA, 1993). The three central components to be emphasized are: *experience, reflection and action*. These three processes are considered integral parts of the paradigm and help develop the critical thinking, understanding, application, synthesis, analysis and finally commitment in regards to the learning process. The teacher needs to help the student see how to involve the whole person, mind and spirit.

The five components in more detail are as follows:

**Context**

In order to teach students well, the teacher must become familiar with each student’s environment, background, community and overall potential. Cura personalis which is the personal care and concern for the individual is the hallmark of Jesuit education. It begins with personal and interpersonal connections, but then extends to the wider community. It requires teachers to become as familiar as possible with the context/life experiences of the student. Learning never occurs in a vacuum so the teacher needs to become aware of the actual context within which the teaching and learning will be taking place. Teachers, through the context of the student’s life can create an environment where the student recollects past experiences and assimilates information from the newly introduced experiences.
Experience

Any activity which would include both the cognitive and affective would be an experience. Experience could be indirect or direct, a vicarious or actual experience, reading or hearing about a topic. Experience involves the whole person as one realizes facts, feelings, intuition, and values. The teacher will help the student assimilate new information in order to further the experience in order to grow and realize the truth.

The JSEA (2000, Sec 42) states, “…Ignatian experience goes beyond a purely intellectual grasp. Ignatius urges that the whole person – mind, heart and will – should enter the learning experience. He encourages the use of the imagination and feelings as well as the mind in experience.” Teachers note how student feelings can help each of them grow and learn. They can challenge students with new material to gain a fuller understanding, analysis, evaluation. Actively engaging the student in mental and psychomotor activities enhances learning. Actively being involved with the learning will lead to the realization and appreciation of the truth.

Reflection

Reflection within the Ignatian Paradigm is considered to be “a thoughtful reconsideration of some subject matter, experience, idea, purpose or spontaneous reaction, in order to grasp its significance more fully” (JSEA, 2000, Sec 49). Students should be guided to understand the truth being studied more clearly, and understand any conflicts within them when learning new material and notice what moves them from a new experience.

Reflection can be a more meaningful experience if shared. Students and teachers should share their reflections in order to broaden their own personal experiences. A shared reflection can provide an opportunity of growth for all those involved.

Action

Action, with guidance, can naturally follow the experience with reflection. It refers to the internal human growth of the student based upon the reflection of the experience from an internal point of view as well as external. This internationalization can drive the students to action in a manner consistent with their beliefs. The hope is that the students will be active in a positive way and become “men and women for others” after careful consideration.

Evaluation

Evaluation involves assessing the students’ growth in mind, heart, and spirit. Ignatian evaluation goes beyond just the tests and quizzes to check on mastery of a subject. It goes beyond just this academic mastery to an evaluation of students’ growth toward the goal of “men and women for others.” This type of evaluation can be done by the teacher observing indications of growth or lack of growth in class discussions, and students’ generosity in response to common needs of others on a frequent basis in class (JSEA, 2000, Sec 64).
Creating an Online Course Experience using the Ignatian Paradigm

Context

Personal care is tantamount to online learning. Teachers, through the context of the student’s life, can create an environment where the student recollects past experiences and assimilates information from the new experiences.

Teachers need to help students feel accepted in the online class. The instructor can do initial introductory exercises that will build a relationship between the teacher and students, which is necessary to establish a caring, safe learning environment since there are no face-to-face meetings. The faculty member needs to encourage a sense of comfort and order in the class by maintaining a positive affective tone in the class, and clarifying classroom rules and procedures; always ensuring a feeling of a safe environment.

Specifically, faculty want to build a feeling of community in the class. This can be done with weekly discussion forum activities, always requiring respectful responses and having either the teacher or other students acknowledging each student’s response in the Discussion forums.

Experience

Human experience provides academic growth. Experience can come from a variety of sources such as vicariously through reading, through lectures, videos or other presentations, conversations, and discussions. Experience can also consist of some sensation of an affective kind. In the initial phases of experience learners perceive facts as well as note their affective responses. The instructor must help the students organize the facts and feelings in order for the experience to be grasped. The students need to respond to questions such as “What is this?” and “How do I react to it?”

In the online environment the instructor needs to focus on providing individual academic and group exercises. They can provide further experiences to the student’s grow in completeness and truth. Students also need to relate what is known in the discussion forums and virtual presentations. By blogging and journaling about experiences students can recollect their past experience and assimilate information from new experiences.

Reflection

Intellectual activities can evoke affective qualities such as pleasure, indignation, insecurity, etc. These personal reactions affect one’s determination to act or to avoid action. A challenge to a teacher is to formulate questions that will broaden the students’ awareness and assist them to appreciate other viewpoints. The instructor must not impose his or her viewpoints but rather draw it from the students and encourage others to share their reflections which can result in having the class to grow together. Shared reflections can reinforce, challenge, encourage reevaluation, and ultimately give greater guarantee that the action to be taken is one that will be “men and women for others.”
Having a weekly reflection blog or private journal for the purpose of exploring class topics encourages the evaluation process.

Questions such as the following help in the journaling process:

- “What does ____________ mean to you?”
- “If you were going to explain ____________ what would you say?”
- “What do you remember from reading and how did it apply to this week’s topic?”
- “How did the past two weeks discussion and topics relate to your work life?”
- What difference will this past week’s lesson make for you?

Action

Action refers to human growth based upon the experiences that the student previously had reflected upon. Internally the action may take the form of an attitude change which could eventually result in altered behavior. It could be a gradual clarification of priorities, or it could be a real commitment to a new thought and attitude. An external manifestation is when the student choses to do something as a result of the reflection process. If the resulting meaning is positive the student will likely seek to enhance those conditions, while if the result is negative the student will seek to adjust or change the conditions of the experience.

In an online course, the instructor can introduce topics in the discussion forums that will increase and encourage decision making, investigation, experimental inquiry, problem solving or invention. The other students continue to build the discussion and ask probing questions of each other to continue to evaluate the topics. Critical thinking skills are an additional benefit of this Action step.

Evaluation

Assessment comes from the Latin, assidere, meaning “to sit beside.” The instructor will “sit beside” the student and provide meaningful feedback in order to improve the overall learning. Evaluation is the final step of the paradigm which encourages growing and discovering areas that need further study.

In the online environment, evaluation can be done by traditional quizzes, tests and papers, but regular, systematic feedback though the private message service encourages future student work. Weekly progress feedback during the class will help the students keep on task and encourage them to support and challenge each other in the class. Feedback from the student also alerts the teachers to obstacles or difficulties the students might be having in the online environment. It is important to encourage and support students through public and personal messages plus help them with goal setting and commitments for the future.
Student Reactions

The following are extracts from MBA students who were required to do the Reflection Assignment:

- In reflecting on my first internet class experience and the ease with which communication occurred, I wonder how many companies are using these same capabilities. Are companies electing to reduce travel expenses by holding meetings online versus in person? While it is still important to be face-to-face for many client meetings I think that companies should look to increase their use of the internet for meetings between their own divisions and different locations. In addition to online meeting resources as a time and money saver I am also going to implement remote access software at my company. For many troubleshooting issues, this option will allow our technical team to service clients more quickly, increasing customer satisfaction and eliminating the expense of travel.

- In terms of the case studies, I think the one I found most interesting was the Harrah's study. Not only was I able to get my individual presentation idea from this, I think this is something that my company could look into a little more in terms of getting more loyalty from customers, especially with the ever-changing market conditions, economical strategies and overall globalization. This is something that could be further leveraged by a lot of companies and hopefully my company will also look into this.

- The current event issues presented each week have been my favorite part of the course the past two weeks. There were many topics discussed that I had little or no knowledge of and I learned a lot from these presentations. Additionally, I liked how it gave each student the opportunity to make a virtual presentation in a way most of us had never done before. I thought that when I made my current event presentation I wouldn't be nervous at all because I wouldn't be able to see anyone. However, when it was my turn to present on the first day of class, I was surprised that I was VERY nervous. I realized everyone might be listening more carefully to what I was saying since they couldn't see me, so I didn't want to make any mistakes. Making a presentation in this way was unlike anything I have ever done before and I'm glad that I was given this opportunity, since I will eventually have to do virtual presentations in my organization.

- Frankly, with my busy lifestyle (kids, wife, work, and school), I don’t have much time to blog so it took me a while to get used to it. This class definitely challenged me and for once in the MBA program, I felt “disadvantaged” since I knew my younger classmates were more comfortable using the technology. Now I know how my older co-workers feel when new BI tools are introduced and they are not comfortable using them at the beginning. I will be more empathetic in the future.
• I wrote my research paper this week. I had not written a paper for quite a long time, so it was fun to do research and look through my topic (which is GPS usage). I had a funny moment when I looked through my old MLA style handbook and there were no guidelines on how to cite an entry for a web page. Younger folks just out of undergrad would laugh, but I really saw how differently research is done today. When I was in undergrad I spent hours going to and from the library looking up sources and discarding them. For this paper, I still spent 4 hours or so doing research, but I did it with ease, browsing articles and websites and doing this in the comfort of my own home rather than the library itself.

• Based on this experience, I learned 3 main things. First, I need to stay more in-touch with new technology to ensure that I keep growing my skill sets and stay current and competitive with my co-workers. Secondly, I learned to be more patient and understanding with my older co-workers who may not be as comfortable using the technology tools as I am and continue to teach them how to use them. Thirdly, I learned more about how IT interacts in our daily work lives to improve our productivity, security, and overall connectivity with our co-workers.

• Wow…me… blogging???. Even if only in a limited setting, this is a surprise! I like to read blogs but am not one to exert effort in responding or posting my own thoughts. "Exerting effort" is an appropriate description. I am not a writer. Writing is not easy for me and I struggle at it. Yet I still daydream sometimes of doing something like blogging or even keeping a journal. This would really help in capturing those special moments I want to remember.

• Since enrolling in this class, I have found myself more proactive in being an early adopter of the e-tools deployed at work. I’ve found many of the class topics interesting enough to discuss with my wife after class, and I’ve enjoyed showing her a few of the videos shared during class; we’ve both enjoyed the discussion, especially the amazing growth of social media and mobile devices.

• At Xavier University, the Jesuit value of community maintains that courses are taken in person and that active participation play a critical role in the classroom. I wondered how an online course would maintain the XU values let alone my thirst for education. As I took a look at the syllabus, I was shocked to see the volume of work required and I instantly thought for a day, “Drop!” But I didn’t. And, academically, it has made all the difference. Reading case after case, and having fun actually participating comments of value where in a real classroom I would have raised a comment just to comment. Here I appreciated the input of others who gave me the feedback to do something that I have been struggling with for quite a long time.
Instructor Reflection

Adding the Blog/Reflection exercise was a beneficial activity for not only students but for the instructor as well. This assignment forced the students to stop and think about the course content, the online experience and how these experiences can relate to business. They reflected on the content of the course and what topics they could take back to their work environment. Students took the exercise very seriously as can be seen from the student reflection excerpts. The instructor grew from the experience by learning what the students valued within the course. Ignatius clearly understood that lasting learning can only happen when one stops and reflects on an experience and where it can take them. This holds true through today….a timeless concept.

Conclusion

The Ignatian pedagogical paradigm is an ongoing, iterative process. The repetition of the paradigm can help students grow since they can learn to discriminate and be more thoughtful in future experiences. Students can also draw fullness and richness from reflections on the experiences and become self-motivated to make conscious, responsible choices. The online process framed within the paradigm will result in life long independent learners who can discriminate and reflect as they move through life. The world of business is moving much of its activities into a virtual framework. Our students need to be comfortable with expressing themselves, thinking critically and working in this virtual world. Experiencing a business course within this online framework will help them become more comfortable and successful in future business and life endeavors.

References


Presenters:
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