

Jesuit Education

A Living Tradition in the 21st Century



Encuentro de la red de orientadores de Centros de EDUCSI (España)

The first Jesuits dreamed of a agile Society of Jesus, totally given to the service of God in the Church and they saw themselves as itinerant missionaries that would go from one place to the next preaching, teaching Catechism and all the while begging for their sustenance. In this article, we take a look at the different documents that have guided the journey since then and that make up the educational tradition of the Society until we arrive at the text “A Living Tradition”, which aims to continue advancing, with creative fidelity, in the responses to the challenges posed by a global education and opportunities for all.



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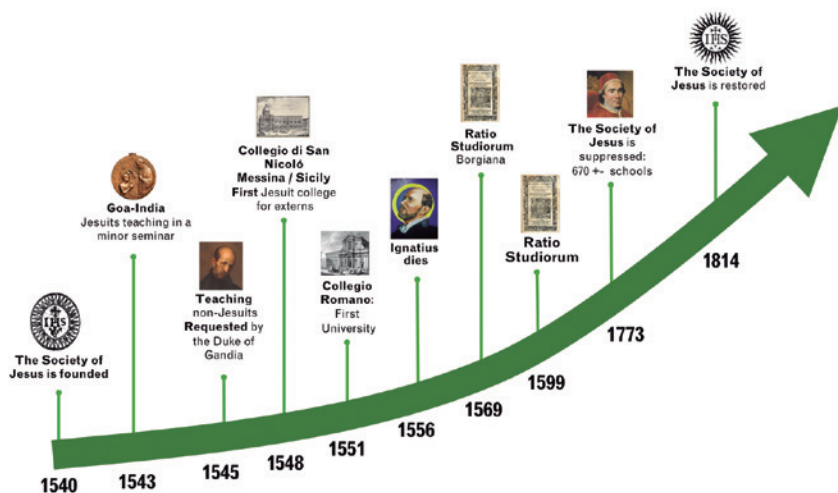
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Spanish version



Jesuit education: The beginnings



The first Jesuits dreamed of an agile Society of Jesus, totally given to the service of God in the Church, and they saw themselves as itinerant missionaries that would go from one place to the next, preaching, teaching Catechesis, and all the while begging for their sustenance. However, as is the custom, God had other plans. Ignatius of Loyola began to receive requests from many parts of the world to share formation with others, the very formation and education that they themselves were offering to those that sought to join the Society. The Duke of Gandia, Francis Borja, asked Ignatius if he would open a school in his territories so that others might be educated. Finally, this happened in 1545 with a great reception on the part of many families who so desired that their children might benefit from the education by the Jesuits. Additionally, Francis Xavier had petitioned, several years earlier (1542), that Ignatius send some Jesuits to work in the diocesan college seminary in Goa, India. In 1548, Ignatius finally made the decision that would change the course of the Society of Jesus's history in responding to the insistent demand of the leaders in Messina, Sicily: there, the first college, destined principally to non-Jesuits, was opened. Those Jesuits that dreamed of being pilgrims now dedicate themselves, for the most part, into being school masters, developing pedagogical skills, drafting curricula, obtaining funds for the running and maintenance of educational institutions

where no tuition was charged. For the first Jesuits, this change, totally unexpected and to a certain extent paradoxical, was, as a matter of fact, quite logical. Jesuits discovered in the field of education a powerful ministry that permitted them to respond to their initial motivation of leading others to the Lord, sharing their spiritual experience, and helping others to progress in their life. (Constitutions n.2)

However, all the while understanding that the field of education was a privileged apostolic area, Jesuits realized that they had to learn and prepare themselves in order to be teachers. On account of this, using a contemporary image, they went to the educational supermarket of their era and chose those pedagogical ingredients that they thought were the most relevant in order to achieve an education of high quality that was also in consonance with their spiritual experience. They implemented the sequential and ordered pedagogical method that they had experienced at the University of Paris; similarly, from the Italian humanists, they learned that the goal of an educational institution ought to be that of preparing the individual for a life of service for the common good, and as such, education should be oriented towards the formation of the solid moral character of the person. From these same humanists, they adopted their curriculum. And finally, from their own spiritual experience, they brought a vision of what a life, in full relationship with God and in service to others, looked like (*La pedagogía ignaciana*, Mensajero – Sal Terrae, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Barcelona, 2019).

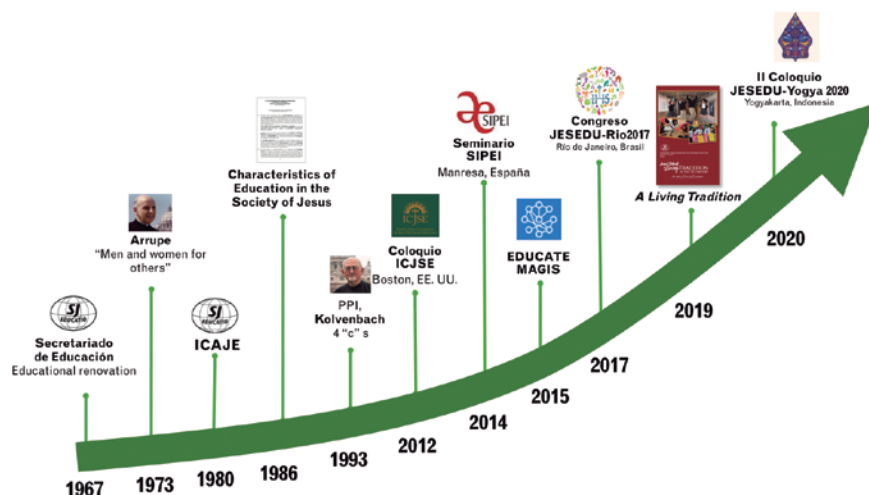
Thus, the first Jesuits had to learn by doing, and all of this through trial and error. When they decided to open the College of Saint Nicholas in Messina, they did not know fully or clearly what they wanted to do. What is more, only until 1599, that is, some fifty years after having begun this educational adventure, Father General Claude Aquaviva promulgated the *Ratio Studiorum*, the first official document on education that oriented all Jesuits colleges. In this way, Jesuits adopted a prag-

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matic methodology for their foray into education in which they were learning as they continued in it. This pragmatic vision was found in the Constitutions written by Ignatius, in which the saint from Loyola insisted in the fact that decisions and policies should be taken and applied according to “persons, places and times”.

The *Ration Studiorum* guided the education of the Society of Jesus up until 1906 when it was judged that it was no longer possible to continue with this pedagogical program due to societal and cultural changes (General Congregation 25, decree 12). There began a large process of discernment that would last up until 1986 when the Society of Jesus published *Characteristics of Jesuit Education*¹. This document proposed 28 distinctive features of Jesuit education. Likewise, this text was responsible for creating unity among the diverse regional and national educational programs of the world-wide Society of Jesus. A few years later, in 1993, another important document was published: *Ignatian pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (popularly known as the IPP – the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm)² whose goal was to present the essential elements of the pedagogical style that are to guide the practice of teaching and learning in the classroom by way of 5 interconnected dimensions: (1) understand the *context* of the student in order to offer (2) a significant *experience* which can be deepened by way of (3) *reflection* and that can be expressed by way of (4) *actions* that transform the student, and which can be (5) *evaluated* both to discover the effects of the educational process as well as to further develop it. These two documents have created the contemporary referential framework for Jesuit Education.

Nevertheless, the Society of Jesus is conscious that we live in an era of rapid changes at every level of life, including education, and that, as a response to this



Fuente: Gráfico elaborado por José Alberto Mesa, SJ.

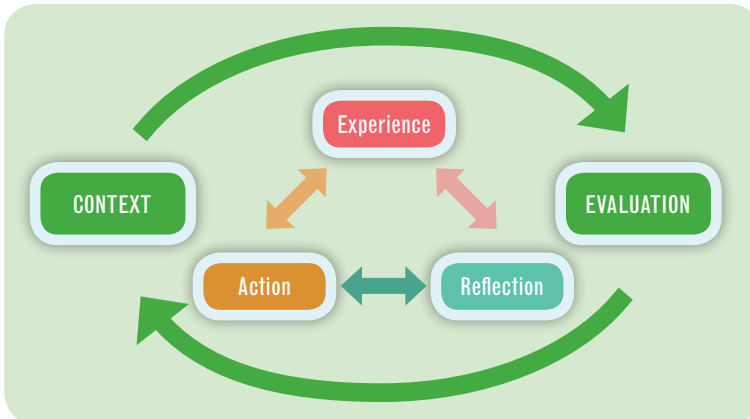
reality, our schools need to maintain a constant process of reflection and discernment in order to recognize the challenges as well as the opportunities that this vertiginous change entails. It is for this reason that, after 8 years of reflection and work, the ICAJE (the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education) presented a new document titled *Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century – An Ongoing Exercise of Discernment* abbreviated, A Living Tradition.

This new document is developed in three interrelated parts. In the first, the document situates itself in relation to and in the context of the foundational documents to which we have alluded, those such as the *Characteristics* of 1986 and the *PPI* of 1993. As such, in his letter in which he promulgated this new text, Father General Arturo Sosa affirmed: *A Living Tradition* “must be seen within the framework of the process of discernment that our educational apostolate has kept alive since *Characteristics* and the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm”. In this way, “*A Living Tradition* does not replace the previous documents; rather, it complements and updates them as an ongoing exercise of discernment. The three should be taken together as the contemporary framework of Jesuit Education”. Additionally, in the first part of this text, the document situ-

1 http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/characteristics_en.pdf
 2 http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/pedagogy_en.pdf



Dimensions of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm



ates itself within the Universal Apostolic Preferences³ of the Society of Jesus that Father General promulgated at the beginning of 2019 and that will orient and guide the apostolic efforts of the Society of Jesus over the next 10 years.

These apostolic preferences are orientations that define our style of working and realizing the mission of the Society of Jesus as service of the faith, justice and reconciliation. These preferences should inspire our schools so that their labor and their pedagogical principles find their orientation in them. In this way, all of our educational works should include in their discernment processes and strategic planning the way in which these preferences orient their work, and respond to them with creativity and commitment in all that they do. Pope Francis has confirmed these preferences as an expression of what the Church desires for the apostolic labor of the Society of Jesus in the years ahead. At the same time, the Pope has indicated: “The first preference is of capital importance because it supposes as a kind of basic condition, the familiarity of the Jesuit with the Lord, a personal and communal life of prayer and discernment... without this prayerful attitude the others do not function” (Letter of Pope Francis, 6 February 2019).

Finally, in the first part of the document, more recent educational documents of the Society of Jesus are presented, texts that form part of the contemporary context (1) *Jesuit Education Aims to Human Excel-*

lence (2015) which defines “excellence” in terms of educating men and women within the four “C’s”: of conscience, competence, compassion, and commitment. These four “C’s” express the fundamental elements of human excellence that is sought at schools of the Society of Jesus. Similarly, the action statement of the Delegates of Education Congress, JESSEDU-Rio 2017 are referenced; these agreements set forth a global agenda so that our schools can “act as a universal body with a universal mission” (GC 35, d.2, n.20). These global commitments can be achieved by way of 13 actions that should be implemented in all schools and educational networks.

It is worth mentioning as well the affinity between the Action Statement of the JESSEDU-Rio and the Universal Apostolic Preferences. The two share the same perspective as well as common themes... this coincidence can only be explained because it is the same Spirit that is working!

The second part of *A Living Tradition*⁴ offers a reflection on some of the more important aspects of the global reality in which we are living. This reflection is made on social-political, educational, and religious realities, and considers how all of this impacts the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus. Also, the document recognizes that much has changed in our world since the publication of the previous documents *Characteristics* and the *IPP*. In addition, the document itself reminds us: “As we reflect on the past, it is important to honor a fundamental principle of Jesuit education outlined in Ignatian pedagogy, that learning begins with a careful reflection on context” (N. 61). In this way, paying close attention to the context in which learning takes place, and discerning the opportunities and challenges inherent in this context, are, for the Jesuit way of proceeding, fundamental. As Father General Sosa expressed in his allocution to the participants of the JESSEDU-Rio Con-

3 <https://jesuits.global/en/documents/send/8-uap-docs/63-universal-apostolic-preferences>

4 http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/LIVING_TRADITION_EN.pdf

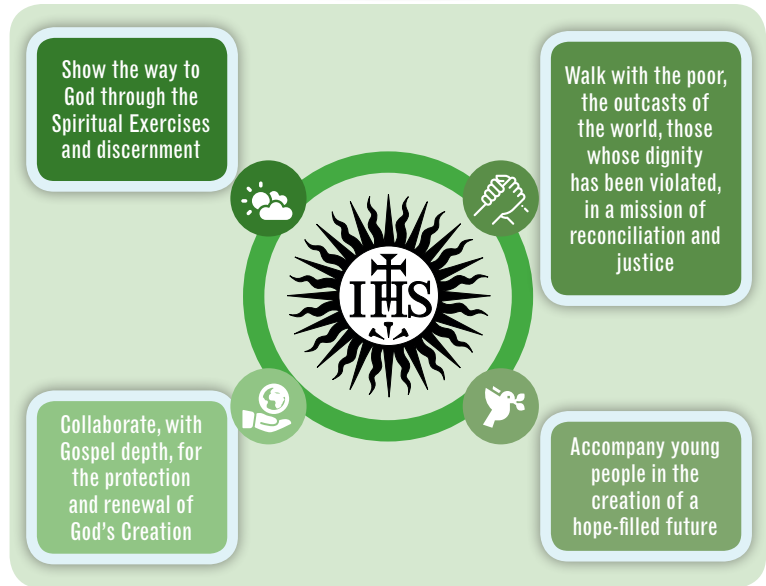
Universal Apostolic Preferences 2019-2029

gress: "This need to profoundly understand our world in order to offer the greatest and best service to the Glory of God is why we see our mission as an intellectual apostolate. We want to understand human beings in all their complexity, so that human beings can configure the world in a way that is more compassionate, and therefore more divine" (N. 21).

In this same address, he alerted us to the fact "our institutions need to be aware of the anthropological and cultural change we are experiencing, and they need to know how to educate and train in a new way for a different future" (N. 49).

Additionally, this second part of *A Living Tradition* seeks to invite educators and educational communities to approach their particular contexts, so that, understanding them better, they might be able to renew and reinvigorate our educational program in order to provide a more relevant education to these new contexts.

In the third part of the document, 10 global identifiers for Jesuit schools are provided: "We see these identifiers as commitments that every Jesuit school can make. They draw upon the resources of The Characteristics of Jesuit Education and the Universal Apostolic Preferences as they address the current reality of the world" (N. 157).



1. Jesuit Schools are committed to being Catholic and to offer in-depth faith formation in dialogue with other religions and worldviews.
2. Committed to creating a Safe and Healthy environment for all.
3. Committed to Global Citizenship.
4. Committed to the Care of all Creation.
5. Committed to Justice.
6. Committed to being Accessible for All.
7. Committed to Interculturality.
8. Committed to being a Global Network at the service of the Mission.
9. Committed to Human Excellence.
10. Committed to Life-long Learning.

MÁSTER EN PEDAGOGÍA IGNACIANA

¿PARA QUIÉN?

Dirigido a docentes de la Compañía de Jesús, responsables de educación y profesorado de instituciones que comparten la inspiración ignaciana.

METODOLOGÍA SEMIPRESENCIAL

Actividad permanente del alumnado y acompañamiento de profesor/a-tutor/a. Sesiones presenciales en Madrid, Loyola y Manresa.

IDENTIDAD IGNACIANA

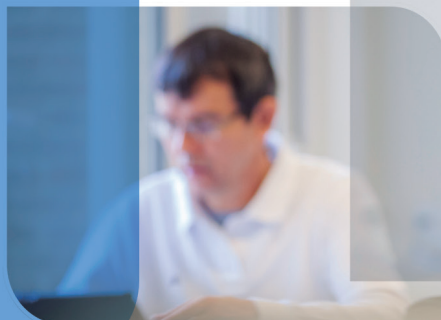
Un máster interdisciplinar de carácter práctico que responde a los retos actuales de la Educación, aunando la innovación y la sabiduría que ofrece la tradición educativa jesuita.



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These identifiers seek to help each school maintain its apostolic identity and, at the same time, remain rooted in the mission for which they have been founded, roots that find their origins in the times of Ignatius of Loyola, and that remind us that the mission is for the greater glory of God and the good of all persons, or, as the Society of Jesus has defined this mission now, for the service of the faith, justice and reconciliation.

Each identifier is explained briefly and afterwards, similar to each section of the document, is accompanied by a series of questions that seek to help educators in their discernment of how to understand and respond to each identifier. These questions aim to stimulate conversation among the various players and agents of Jesuit education so that in fact the tradition remains alive. This is the way that Father General expressed this dynamic in his letter announcing this new document: "The document follows this tradition of assisting our educational apostolate in reflecting and discerning the particular challenges and opportunities of our time. It continues the necessary process of renewal, innovation and reimagination that our education requires during this change of epoch that we experience today". It is here that the name of the document reveals its full force. The educational tradition of the Society of Jesus is a living tradition that impels each school to have an openness to the present and

to the future, that should go beyond the temptation of a complacent view of the past and of understanding the tradition as only that which reproduces what has been done previously. Father General addresses this directly in his same letter: "The best tribute that we can offer to our long tradition in education is to explore new models, creative and imaginative ways to offer our spiritual vision and educational experience to our students and their families. Thus, the title of the document reflects well its purpose: to renew our living tradition in education as an ongoing exercise of discernment".

A Living Tradition is an instrument that can help schools maintain an attitude of discernment and openness to reality. For that reason, "the document itself is an unfinished discernment, a *living text* that invites educators in our schools to enrich it with their reflections, experiences and contributions. In this sense, this is an open-ended document that models the discernment it aims to inspire, and it wants to provide guidelines to continue the *education of men and women for and with others* in the context of the human excellence that distinguishes our educational tradition" (Letter from Fr. General Sosa announcing the document, 5 november 2019). The foreword to the document explains this clearly: "We do not want a static document but rather a text that inspires, moves and encourages our faculties, leaders and school communities to engage proactively our context, our world, our challenges and our opportunities" •



TO LEARN MORE

Mesa, J. A. (2019). *La pedagogía ignaciana. Textos clásicos y contemporáneos sobre la educación de la Compañía de Jesús desde san Ignacio de Loyola hasta nuestros días*. Madrid: Mensajero-Sal Terrae-Universidad Pontificia Comillas.

Gil Coria, E. (1999). *La pedagogía de los jesuitas, ayer y hoy*. Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas.

Pizarro Llorente, H. (2019). La pedagogía de la Compañía de Jesús ante los retos del mundo actual. *Padres y Maestros*, 380, 71-76. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14422/pym.i380.y2019.012>



WE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT

**Ignatian pedagogy; Jesuit education;
global citizenship; Ignatius of Loyola.**

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