

CTE Notebook

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"Conversations"

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Teacher, Researcher, Mentor: The Challenge of Being an Ignatian Educator Today

**Excerpts from a speech at John Carroll University,
February 19, 2005**

Dr. Ronald Modras

Reinert CTE Mission Statement

The mission of the Paul C. Reinert, S.J. Center for Teaching Excellence is to support Saint Louis University faculty and graduate students so that they can better serve the intellectual, spiritual, and social needs of all learners.

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our students has to do with and is dependent upon our attitudes and intention, and that attitudes and intention have to do with vision or perspective, the way we perceive ourselves as Ignatian Educators.

Along with our colleagues in state, secular, and other non-Jesuit universities and colleges, we teach, do research, and mentor students. But, as Ignatian educators, we do it with a peculiar vision born of a particular spirituality and ethos.

We are inheritors and proprietors of a remarkable heritage with roots in the Renaissance. But we are living in a time when pundits speak of a “clash of civilizations.” We live in a nation of red and blue states, where competing values generate culture wars. We live in a global village where gaps between haves and have-nots grow exponentially. I would suggest that conversation about faith, justice, culture, and dialogue is not only relevant but required -- maybe even for survival.

(Continued from page 2)

is related to the Ignatian motto, “*ad majorem Dei gloriam*,” dedication to the “greater glory of God.” That motto and the idea of *magis* are often mistaken to mean that Ignatian spirituality calls for constantly giving more of yourself in a kind of messianic enthusiasm that easily leads to burnout. Nothing is further from the case.

The *magis* has to do with discernment, with discriminating between options and choosing the better of the two. (Burnout is not a reasonable option.) Seeking the *magis* means paying attention to needs and goods, to greater needs and greater goods. It means discerning what in a particular circumstance is *magis*, more conducive toward achieving the greater good.

Research, among all our activities as professional educators, is certainly the most discipline-specific. But even here we can have an eye to needs, greater needs, and the *magis*, the greater good.

3. Teaching

Teaching and mentoring, as I mentioned earlier, are related. Whether inside or outside the classroom, for example, our teaching as Ignatian educators should be student-centered. Our teaching is really about their learning. (Here higher educational accrediting agencies concerned about learning-outcomes and assessment would agree.) But here our Ignatian vision is a little more visionary than that of accrediting agencies.

If there is a motto that should guide Ignatian pedagogy, it is that of teaching the “whole person.” That means an education that is more than cerebral, that communicates ethics as well as information, values as much as vocational skills. There is no such thing as value-neutral education. To take no stand is to take a stand. Our role as professors is to profess. And we cannot be implicit about values and ethical standards. We cannot simply allow the material we teach to speak for itself. We should never forget that leading members

of the Nazi party read Goethe and listened to Beethoven. High culture alone does not guarantee the outcome of a decent person.

Even in the natural sciences we can and, as Ignatian educators, are called upon to profess directly and indirectly -- our values, ethics, and standards. We can and are called upon to speak not only to our students’ minds but their hearts. To appeal to their sense of justice. But there is another dimension of the human person that we also are called upon to address. We are invited not only to promote justice but to serve faith, by which I mean our students’ spirituality.

Now here you may stop me here and say, “hey, that’s for you theology professors and campus ministry. I don’t do spirituality. I’m not even especially religious.” But spirituality is broader than religion. And I would argue that you can do spirituality.

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exchange of ideas among people separated by vast distances of space. At the other end of the spectrum, a degree mill could load a good chunk of curriculum into online courses and satisfy a lot of requirements without any teachers or students actually meeting.

When I got to the third article, by William Evans, I was hopelessly ready for a counter argument. I was moved by his articulation of the power of presence. He writes “In the actual presence of others one feels the blankness of one’s ignorance when one cannot answer well...the dull stares, the nodding or shaking of heads, the looks or murmurs of recognition or surprise, the glance of approval on the face of a friend, none of which is possible online” (Evans, 2005, p. 16). The implications for the teacher are equally immense as Evans relates “By my sense of the mood of the class – and by my sensing the students’ sense of that mood, and their sensing of my sensing of it – I may be able to teach the intellectual and moral virtues in all that I do” (Evans, 2005, p.16).

Teaching and learning is a human-mediated process. It is incarnational and communal. Authentic Ignatian pedagogy recognizes the fundamental dignity and worth of every student and recognizes that God’s grace is alive in every student in a unique and mysterious way. This understanding of education encompasses much more than a “class” in which students discuss in an anonymous chat-room, the readings and online powerpoint presentations downloaded remotely from a professor whom they have never met.

Perhaps I, like many of the authors, am striking a false and stark dichotomy between the two extremes.





"From the Director"

Dr. Mary Stephen
Reinert Center for Teaching Excellence

An Invitation

The staff of the Reinert Center for Teaching Excellence cordially invites you to participate in a campus conversation on teaching and learning. The conversation will occur throughout the 2005-2006 academic year as an underlying theme of Center programs. This current issue of *The Notebook* for the academic year 2005-2006 introduces that theme, *Conversations*.

"Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought." P. 14 This quote is from a delightful little book by Theodore Zeldin titled *Conversation*. Zeldin stresses that an important way to create change within an institution is through meaningful conversation; conversation which is more than simply the exchange of information, but conversation which changes the way we see our world and perhaps even the world itself. It can have the same effect on the way we see our profession of teaching and even the profession itself.

Throughout the coming academic year, the Center will sponsor many occasions for conversations. It is our hope that collectively these conversations will promote a campus-wide conversation on teaching and learning that will not only expand the way we think individually about teaching and learning, but which collectively will impact teaching and learning at Saint Louis University. Please join us.

Zelden, T. (2000). *Conversation*. Hidden Spring Publishing Company.

Keep the Conversation Going
at

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