



II Seminar JESEDU-Jogja2024

Educating for Faith in the 21st Century

From 24 – 28 June 2024, 106 members of the Jesuit Global Network of Schools (JGNS) gathered at Kolese De Britto (De Britto College), in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to explore what *Educating for Faith in the 21st Century* means for contemporary Jesuit schools. They were joined by hundreds of colleagues representing JGNS schools from around the globe via social media networks and live streaming hosted by Educate Magis. A virtual Pre-Seminar experience, sponsored by the JGNS, hosted by Educate Magis, and held 1 April – 6 May 2024, preceded the in-person Seminar and contributed to its preparation and progress with 629 participations.

The aims of the Seminar were to:

- Clarify the meaning of being Catholic/Jesuit Schools at the service of the Gospel and the Church in the contexts of today.
- Promote in-depth faith formation in the context of interreligious and multi-convictional dialogue in the service of our mission of justice and reconciliation.
- Clarify the place of Ignatian Spirituality in the faith formation process for students and educators.
- Identify the challenges and opportunities of educating for faith within the secular/religious fundamentalistic contexts.

As Pope Francis has said many times, we are living in “a change of epoch” characterized by increased levels of secularization, pluralization, and individualism – a context not too dissimilar from the change of epoch that Ignatius of Loyola and the first Companions experienced. The aims of JESEDU-Jogja are a response to the challenges that this change of epoch represents for contemporary Jesuit schools in the area of Catholic identity and faith formation.

In his introductory address to participants assembled in Yogyakarta, Fr. General Arturo Sosa, S.J., acknowledged that “our world and also our schools are becoming more diverse than ever in

Vision Statement

terms of religions and cultures.” In response, Fr. Sosa commended Jesuit schools “to become apostolic bridges between this beautiful and God given diversity and our faith.” As apostolic instruments of the Society of Jesus at the service of the Catholic Church, Jesuit schools are committed to responding faithfully and fully to this call.

Sharing God through Ignatian Spirituality

Jesuit schools are apostolic platforms, charged with becoming “evangelizers” in this change of epoch by leading others to God in an encounter with Jesus Christ through the gift of the Spiritual Exercises and Ignatian Spirituality. This reflects the invitation of the first Universal Apostolic Preference, “Show a way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment.”

Jesuit schools should form adult members of the school community in Ignatian spirituality, particularly in the practice of the Examen, personal discernment, and discernment in common, and make an experience of the Spiritual Exercises available to all. This is done best by “Ignatian formators,” who embody the Ignatian charism, are formed in the Spiritual Exercises, and possess proficiency needed for leading an authentic and effective effort.

In this change of epoch, faith formation efforts among students must also be rooted in the Spiritual Exercises and Ignatian Spirituality and should play a central role in the mission of the school. They should facilitate in students a “transformation” that develops faith and fosters “humanizing effects” within them. Jesuit schools are encouraged to see themselves as “places of encounter where, as Saint Ignatius encourages “God is found in all things”.

Educating for Inter-Religious Dialogue

Jesuit schools serve in multicultural and multi-religious/ multi-convictional contexts that are inter-connected, particularly through the innovations of technology and the proliferation of social media. “Inter-religious dialogue” refers to the “intentional and respectful engagement between individuals or among groups from different religious traditions with the goal of fostering mutual understanding, respect, and peace.”

In order to enter fruitful inter-religious dialogue, students must possess a sense of their own religious identity and build, from the beginning an openness to other religious experiences. In the case, of our Catholic identity, dialogue with other religious and world-views must be presented as part of our own identity. Therefore, Jesuit schools must embrace, share, and

Vision Statement

celebrate their Catholic identity, characterized by a type of inter-religious dialogue patterned on Jesus Christ in whose identity the divine embraces the human. As Saint John Paul II affirmed “interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission (Redemptoris Missio, 55)”. In this way our education recognizes the ways that God is alive in the other and learns from the other’s experience. In addition, inter-religious dialogue broadens student perspectives and enhances critical thinking skills. By engaging diverse religious traditions, students come to appreciate the complexity of religious beliefs and practices and analyze various viewpoints objectively. Finally, inter-religious dialogue promotes social cohesion and peacebuilding.

Educating for inter-religious dialogue requires thoughtful and deliberate preparation within the broader school community. We recognized that our schools operate in very diverse multi-religious and multi-convictional contexts that call for local discernment of how to live, present the Catholic/Jesuit identity of the school and inter-religious dialogue.

Forming a Resilient Faith

In many parts of the world, Jesuit schools are serving within a secularizing or secularized world. This is evidenced in various ways, most significantly by the change in the context of belief that places the human at the center of flourishing, rather than the divine, displacing religion from the public square and sending it to the periphery.

Secularization is neither “a friend nor a foe” of faith, but rather it is the context in which many Jesuit schools serve. Therefore, Jesuit schools must understand secularism, analyze it, value their positive aspects and be critical when it becomes an obstacle to a religious experience that opens human life to God. Our schools must also dialogue with secularism with full confidence that whenever one person encounters another in love, they learn something new about God. Understanding and dialoguing with secularism are key components in forming a resilient faith in our students.

Those who form students in a resilient faith do so best when they accompany students in their deep yearnings and questions and help them to open themselves to a transcendent faith in Jesus Christ rooted in tradition and opened to action. This requires solid formation of teachers and pastoral guides in the Catholic tradition and life of Jesus Christ. Finally, Ignatian spirituality with its world-affirming approach has the potential to break into the secularized world, “find God in all things,” and build a resilient faith. Therefore, teachers and pastoral guides need to be formed in Ignatian spirituality, Ignatian pedagogy, and Ignatian world view in the context of the Catholic Church. It is also important to offer Catholic in-depth faith formation for students coming from Catholic backgrounds or looking for it, so that they can grow in their personal and communal

Vision Statement

relationship to Jesus in the Church. This requires the necessary catechetical, liturgical and pastoral accompaniment so that they can understand and grow in their faith.

As Christians, we believe that “God speaks to us as friends and lives among us.” Therefore, Jesuit schools should be careful to defend against the tendency in secular contexts of removing God from Jesuit practices and values and replacing God with secular values cloaked in Jesuit or Ignatian language. The pursuit of the magis, the practice of the Examen, and the commitment to discernment, for example, are all intended to deepen our relationship to God rather than just promote secular values, however laudatory. A strong understanding of Catholic social teaching and the living personal relationship with Jesus nourished through the life of prayer, sacraments and the Spiritual Exercises will surely embrace the best values of the secular world that promote justice and human flourishing as care of our common home. In addition, it will expand them and provide a Christian ground in which Christ remains always “the way, the truth and the life (Lumen Gentium 17).

Educating for Faith as Catholic Schools in the Ignatian Tradition

Jesuit schools, operating in different contexts, are increasingly challenged by today's concerns: the pluralization of individual options where religious belief is one among others, the viability and relevance of exclusive humanism, and the general distrust of institutions.

Jesuit schools educate for faith with the full confidence that “proclaiming the Gospel is a service rendered to the Christian community and to the whole of humanity” (*Evangelium Nuntiandi*). In this way, Jesuit schools participate in both the “specific” and “general” goals of evangelization, that is, witnessing to God by proclaiming Jesus Christ and bringing the Gospel into all aspects of life. Bridging these two evangelizing goals is a challenge and an opportunity for contemporary Jesuit schools, especially given the pluralistic, polarized, and secular contexts in which they serve.

The evangelizing mission of Jesuit schools exists within a post-Christendom world. As such, they are invited to look at New Testament communities who also evangelized in a non-Christendom world. Depending on the context, the early community evangelized in ways that fit their context – accompanying others in Emmaus, witnessing to Jesus’ way of being human in Jerusalem, inviting others into the transcendent in Athens, or inviting others into a relationship with the risen Lord in Rome.

As Jesuit schools, the Ignatian approach to evangelization should permeate our evangelizing efforts as evangelization of attraction to the Gospel. Facilitating an encounter with Christ will only be “attractive” to our students if we can touch their imaginations and lives. Beginning with the

Vision Statement

“presupposition” of the Spiritual Exercises, evangelization in the Ignatian way listens to the experience of the young people we serve, giving them the chance to discover and to share their doubts and their dreams. With good soil prepared to receive the Word, Jesuit schools can then facilitate a lived encounter with Jesus Christ through prayer, service, and community. Our students need a “home,” a community of faith, and Jesuit schools need to build them.

Jesuit schools should consider how the Ignatian model of evangelization can be used as a resource for “forming the formators,” forming colleagues and Jesuits, teachers and leaders, who “become the Gospel” within our schools.

II Seminar JESEDU-Jogja2024 Conclusion

During the Pre-Seminar sessions and the days of discussion and prayer in Yogyakarta, several common graces emerged from within the JESEDU-Jogja participants who now joyfully share a vision forged in those graces. The participants offer this vision as a guide to ongoing efforts in *Educating for Faith in the 21st Century*, as well as to those efforts that will follow.

*Jesuit schools **intentionally** educate for Catholic faith in the 21st century by **accompanying** their students in discovering and deepening their core **identity** – their resilient faith – that emerges out of an **encounter** with God through an **encounter** with Jesus Christ that is supported by and celebrated within a **community of faith** and guided by **adults formed and adept** in Ignatian spirituality, our Catholic tradition, and the life of Jesus Christ, this identity entails **dialogue** with other religions and secular views, and implemented according to the local **context and culture**.*

Educating for Faith in the 21st Century requires a discernment that must continue at all levels of Jesuit schools and networks. Local, national, regional, and global contexts must be considered when making decisions and proposing plans. Our experience of coming together as *a universal body with a universal mission* has strengthened our resolve to be places of encounter with God and others in our commitment to be at the service of faith and the promotion of justice. We know the immensity of our challenges and the sense of urgency that educating for faith entails, but we also know that if we remain centered in Jesus Christ and trust in his grace, we will be bold and humble enough to meet the challenge.

All of this requires that Ignatian Spirituality, Catholic faith formation, and inter-religious dialogue (as part of our Catholic identity) intentionally remain at the center of our efforts, so that students, teachers, leaders, families, and boards can be invited to experience the transforming power of God’s presence in their lives and our world. We recognize that faith is a grace that comes from God and that happens in the intimate encounter between God and a person. Our work is simply

Vision Statement

to create conditions and communities where this encounter may happen. We also recognized that in some of our schools respect for other religious experiences and convictions requires a discernment in how to present the vitality and inspiration of the Gospel and our Catholic identity while always seeking to be respectful of other religious identities and grateful for the many ways in which they enrich the life of our schools and mission.

May Jesus, our Lord, and Mary, our Mother, who blessed Ignatius of Loyola and the first Companions with audacity in their service of faith, continue bestowing within us the grace to navigate the challenges and opportunities of our time.

(Original: English)