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Jesuit Values, Ignatian Pedagogy, and Service Learning: Catalysts for Transcendence and Transformation via Action Research

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is the transformative and transcendental nature of the service learning experience for Regis University graduate education students, in the Education Research Methods and Critical Reflection course (EDRS600). In an eight-week intensive framework, the course is a unique combination of Jesuit values, Ignatian pedagogy, service learning, and action research. Via the mechanism of reflection, inherent in the Ignatian pedagogy and the process of their work and action research at their service learning sites, students often experience transcendence and transformation that further aligns them with Jesuit values and prepares them to be ethical, connected, proactive members of their professional communities.

Introduction

At Regis University, Jesuit values/principles and Ignatian pedagogy are integral parts of the research methods and critical reflection course that is required in the graduate teacher-licensing program. In the course, as students explore research methodology, they also commit volunteer hours to a Service Learning site and construct action research plans that address issues arising in their service learning sites. At the site, students reflect upon Jesuit principles during service and decision-making. Each term, most students report experiencing transformation as the result of service learning and the course curriculum. In order to more fully comprehend what is transpiring, it is necessary to examine how a reflective curriculum, Jesuit values and pedagogy, and service learning experiences converge as catalysts for transformation. Moreover, what is transformation in this context, and what are its outcomes for the students?

Dencev and Collister define transformation as “a permanent shift of consciousness” either in the individual or in the “collective consciousness.”¹ Tobin Hart asserts “transformation is inherently [a] spiritual endeavor”² and Dencev and Collister claim that this is “because it involves creation and community and individuals and relationships—the fundamental impulses of life in any society or culture.”³ If transformation is a spiritual *shift*, what roles do Ignatian values and pedagogy play

in the process? What constitutes a spiritual shift? Is this what is occurring via service learning in the research methods and critical reflection course? If so, by what mechanism is it occurring?

Jesuit Values

Whether or not Regis University students who matriculate into the Educational Research Methods and Critical Reflection course (EDRS600) consider themselves religious, spiritual or aspiritual, certain Jesuit values underpin the institution and curriculum of the coursework. The philosophy of Regis University, in alignment with other Jesuit institutions, is often articulated through the core principles of:

- *Cura Personalis*
- *Magis*
- Men and Women for and with Others
- Contemplatives in Action
- Unity of Heart and Mind
- Finding God in All Things

Students, staff, and faculty are reminded of these principles via literature, art, speeches, and many other expressions throughout the campus, communications, and coursework. The essences of these values may have originated with Ignatius Loyola, but were given new life, modern articulation, and significance in the Jesuit community’s reassessment of its mission after the

modifications of Vatican II and in light of Pedro Arrupe, S.J.'s address, in 1973.⁴ Afterward, *cura personalis, men and women for and with others, magis, and finding God in all things* were explicitly articulated as Ignatian pedagogical philosophies in the International Commission for Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE) document *Go Forth and Teach: Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, in 1986.⁵ The values have become foundational and resonant throughout Jesuit education across the globe.

These values are *charisms* or *gifts of grace* that one shares altruistically for the benefit of others.⁶ *Cura personalis, care for the person* is the charism by which one demonstrates care for others, respecting the creator's image and work reflected and contained within that person.⁷ *Magis*, meaning *the more* in Latin, originates with St. Ignatius' calling to act in the world and to strive towards excellence by using one's gifts *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam, for the greater glory of God*.⁸ In 1973, Pedro Arrupe, S.J., issued a call for Jesuits to be *men for others*, who act from love of God to serve others, especially in seeking social justice and equity.⁹ The phrase *men for others* was modified to *men and women for and with others*, to reference the modern Jesuit community with its integrated educational institutions. *Contemplatives in action*, a phrase that originates with Jeronimo Nadal,¹⁰ refers to those who discern *how best to proceed* via reflection, prayer, and in light of moral, ethical, and religious considerations.¹¹ The idea of *unity of heart and mind* can be found in the *Constitutions* of St. Ignatius and originally reflected his call to a somewhat fractious Jesuit order to remain oriented towards the core Jesuit philosophies and values while in missions around the globe.¹² Over time, this has come to be interpreted many ways. In the modern context and throughout this paper, it means individuals who act out of love of God, and in light of moral and ethical considerations, and thus, proceed with *unity of heart and mind*. The nexus of all of these values is that of *finding God in all things*, the quintessential Jesuit value, as articulated by St. Ignatius himself, in the *Constitutions*.¹³ All of the other charisms can be seen as actualizations of this ultimate devotion to God.

Throughout the research methods class, students relate their activities to these Jesuit charisms. The values are used as reflective tools by which

students examine their actions at their service learning sites, as well as their roles as researchers and as prospective teachers. Although spirituality may seem superfluous in this context, Nell Ann Roberts argues that:

Spirituality help[s] participants to make meaning from their experiences, transform their meaning perspectives, cope with powerful emotions, and change their behavior based on new perspectives. ...Meaning schemes are part of meaning perspectives and refer to the expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments we use to interpret our experiences.¹⁴

Students' spiritual values or operational philosophies may already be part of the process by which they make meaning, and the inclusion of the Jesuit charisms in the curriculum may augment these by serving as very set focal points of contemplation. Roberts asserts that:

Because spirituality influences cognition, emotions, and behavior, growth will not be limited to the spiritual dimension only. Adult learning is a holistic process that involves cognitive, emotional, somatic, spiritual, and societal dimensions. Incorporating spirituality into the curriculum will not only result in individual growth and development of learners, but will also benefit society as a whole.¹⁵

Students of the research methods course do grow individually, and by their own admittance, reflecting on Jesuit values, can influence their decision-making and behavior with regard to their work at their service learning sites. Even though some students in the research methods class may not be religious or internalize the charisms, the values may still help the students make meaning of their experiences in the class, at their service learning sites, and in the world, as they reflect on their activities there. The charisms are points around which to group ideas and contemplate specifics during the experience of volunteering and conducting research at their sites.

Service Learning and Action Research

Service learning is incorporated into the curriculum in various ways, at Regis University.

In the School of Education, prospective teachers volunteer at sites that serve vulnerable, underserved, minority and/or low income populations. Hours at sites count towards the field hours required for state licensures and certifications in elementary, secondary, and special education disciplines. Regis states its purpose for requiring “Learning Through Service” thus:

Our goal is that the students who participate will not only gain an understanding of their ability to impact their community and make a recognizable difference, but also of their responsibility to use their gifts and talents to contribute to a more just world.¹⁶

So, service learning provides a context in which students can assist populations that need their skills, and put into action the Ignatian pedagogy that incorporates context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. Furthermore, service learning is embedded into the course outcomes and students apply their theoretical learning to the community partner contexts.

The research methodologies and critical reflection class not only requires eight hours of service learning, but also requires that students engage their communities more deeply by constructing a proposal for an action research project in their service learning environments. This requires another eight hours on site. The students must work with the community partner to identify a researchable problem or question at the service learning site. Questions may range from how to address problematic student behavior to how to increase parental involvement in children’s after school literacy activities. Regis students conduct preliminary examinations of factors involved, review relevant literature, and work with the community liaison to determine an action research plan that is feasible, and in which the partner can participate. The plan must have action research elements, such as recursive, reflective stages when data gathered is analyzed and considered by stakeholders before the next phase of research is conducted. There may be multiple recursive/reflective phases before the project is considered finished. As a final project for the research course, research methods students draw up proposals for their plans to present to classmates and possibly the community partner. Some

students go on to implement their plans with their community partners after the eight-week semester has ended. This sort of service learning engagement is thought to “expand the social, cultural and human capital of both local communities and universities” via experiential learning and “community-campus partnership.”¹⁷

The community benefits from the student contributions to the environment, and as a result of the interaction, the student gains skills, confidence, and a new perspective. This bears out what the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has discovered in its sustainable development education programs--that the most successful education programs

... avoid the belief that awareness leads to understanding...skills and action. Instead, the key ingredient of success is to start from the questions, issues and problems that concern...people themselves, and to help them develop ‘action competence’ [that] brings the capacity to envision alternatives, clarify the values and interests that underlie different visions, and make choices between visions. This includes developing the skills to plan, take action and evaluate ...¹⁸

Through service learning, instead of just becoming aware of vulnerable communities, students and their community stakeholders develop *action competence* with regard to how best serve the needs of their communities. This process, constituting a *shift* from passive regard of problems in a community to active stakeholder engagement of issues can be empowering and transformational for all involved.

Ignatian Pedagogy

Part of what makes the service learning action research a powerful transformative experience is that it embodies and is an expression of Ignatian pedagogy. The goal of Jesuit education is “the pursuit of each student’s intellectual development to the full measure of God-given talents...” Ultimately, if the fully realized student’s growth “leads to action . . . based on sound understanding and enlivened by contemplation” the action will also encompass “initiative... integrity and

accuracy.”¹⁹ Central to Ignatian pedagogy that cultivates this student outcome is the recursive process of *experience, reflection, and action*. These dynamics occur within the learner and his/her environment, so the *context* of the student, with regard to disposition and readiness are also taken into consideration. Additionally, after action, the student is expected to be evaluated or *evaluate* the process of experience, reflection and action.²⁰ Repetitions of this cycle transform the student to become a lifelong learner who pays “attention to experience, reflective understanding beyond self-interest, and the criteria for responsible action.”²¹

Via service learning action research, students must consider their own *contexts*, in terms of background and experiences they bring to the service learning site. They are immersed in the site, become familiar with it, and seek ways to engage in and *experience* the site, in responsible and selfless manners that serve their communities. By conducting initial research and working with the partners, the students take *action* by constructing a plan to address an issue at the site. Action research has reflexive elements built into it, and via course discussions, students are also asked to engage in *reflection* at various junctures throughout the term. At the end of our course, students *evaluate* their experiences at their sites. What they learn from the course and the process therein, they take with them, usually continuing on at the same site, and eventually, into their future classrooms. Continuing along their journeys, however, the students often have perspectives that are quite different from the ones with which they began the course.

Lonergan’s Learning Theory

Part of what transforms the student perspectives is that they are specifically working through the stages of learning, as they are described by Bernard Lonergan, S.J., the Canadian philosopher. Lonergan asserts that “all operations of knowing occur by means of a dynamic intermeshing and recurrent pattern of *experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding*.” Information acquired via experience may be *direct*, through sensing, equating with *sense data*, or *indirect* through *conscious* acts of experiencing thoughts and feelings called “data of consciousness.” Experience is data collection, without intentional or deliberate analysis or

parsing. At this level, the individual experiences data *simply as it is*.²²

At the level of *understanding*, however, one makes intellectual sense of the experience, “formulating concepts, definitions, objects of thought, suppositions and considerations.” At this level, one has not achieved knowing anything. Dwight explains that “together, experiencing and understanding, constitute [only] thinking.”²³ At this level, the individual asks about data gleaned from experience, *What is it?* and explores possible answers to this question.²⁴

It is at the next stage, of *judging*, when “understanding is verified” that knowing can occur. According to Lonergan, “knowing is constituted by experience and inquiry, insight and hypothesis, reflection and verification.”²⁵ At this level, the individual asks, *Is it so?* If something is deemed to be so, Lonergan considers the *virtually unconditioned* has been attained, meaning there is no dissonance of fact or logic related to what is known, and all relevant and reasonable questions have been laid to rest. If dissonance is still present, and there are unanswered questions in the individual’s mind regarding the object of scrutiny, then, the information is considered *conditioned*. An example of a *conditioned* state might be a researcher’s suspicion that an observed student circumstance is linked to a variable, such as poverty. Only when direct links can be verified between the circumstance and poverty, and related questions are answered, does the researcher achieve a *virtually conditioned* understanding of the object of study. The only completely *unconditioned* or *formally unconditioned* reality is God²⁶ due to God’s omniscience.

Once something is known, the next level is *deciding* what to do, consciously and conscientiously. At this level, the question asked is *What should I do?* The individual considers the existing reality and the probable realities if action is undertaken. It is at this stage that the individual may act *authentically*, whereby unity of heart and mind are actualized, or *inauthentically* whereby dissonance exists between the individual’s heart and mind. In other words, inauthenticity is a violation of the individual’s sense of morality, in light of the knowledge that has been apprehended.²⁷

Dwight asserts that each cycle through *experiencing*, *understanding*, *judging*, and *deciding* is transformative, having the “effect of expanding our consciousness into new dimensions.”²⁸ Lonergan believes that via the process of acting authentically, (i.e., conscientiously, benevolently, and with awareness and concern for the relationship to all else), that the action is *transcendental*, and universal, instead of being limited to the sphere or discipline associated with the knowledge. This sense of unity is “the very expression of Grace.”²⁹

Students in the research methods and critical reflection class proceed through Lonergan’s process as they volunteer and construct their action research plans in their service learning environments. Initially, students are often completely unfamiliar with the learning service sites, and begin to attend and engage at the sites as ways of *experiencing* them. Through the experience, they arrive at some *understanding* of what the site is and what purpose it serves in its community. At this point, the student identifies a researchable problem and seeks to define what the problem is, expanding this definition and contextualizing it by reviewing the literature. In light of the literature and other data collected about the site problem, the student must *judge* the parameters and depth of-- and dynamics involved in-- the problem. Next, the student works with stakeholders to *decide what to do* about the problem/question at the service learning site. The student comes to see him/herself as a moral and ethical stakeholder in the situation, unified with others by a common sense of purpose and concern for all involved, at the service learning site. Students also experience professional growth. The student’s horizons are shifted outward, to a new level of engagement and perspective about his/her role at the site, his/her relationship to others there, and the realities of the researchable problem at the site. Moreover, the new perspective will be foundational when the student continues on at the site or relocates to a new environment and begins a new learning cycle. Thus, there is a generalizable/universal aspect to what the student has internalized from the experience.

Through the curriculum of the research methods and critical reflection course, students who may not be religious or spiritually inclined are aware of and utilizing the Jesuit values as they process and

construct meaning throughout their service learning research and coursework. The values operate as signposts by which students may identify their own *situatedness* with regard to their operational philosophies, relationships to others, and the moral and ethical gravity of their actions. The values are foundational as the student works through the Ignatian pedagogical cycles of *experience*, *action*, *reflection*, and *evaluation*. The processes of immersion and developing an action research plan for their service learning sites explicitly propel the student through stages of Lonergan’s learning theory, *experiencing*, *understanding*, *judging*, and *deciding*. (See Figure 1.) Taken separately, the Jesuit values, Ignatian pedagogy, and Lonergan’s theory of learning can be seen as transformative, each in its own right. Service learning action research may be extremely potent as a learning process, as a whole, because of the unique convergence and blending of these various elements. Some would argue that service learning, on its own, without the action research component might have the same effect because it is *transformative education*. So, what is transformative education? Is service learning action research transformative because it reflects the transformative model by virtue of being service learning, or are there unique components to it that occur only in the Jesuit cocktail of charisms, Ignatian pedagogy, and Lonergan’s theory?

Transformative Education Theory and Service Learning

Before launching into a discussion of transformation and transcendence, it might be beneficial to distinguish between the terms transformation and transcendence. Altobello differentiates between them, saying that *transcendence* is to rise above the “unsettling content of one’s consciousness” whereas *transformation* is to change the “content of one’s consciousness via reflective immersion and absorption.”³⁰ Transformation may occur on intellectual, perspective, political, moral, cultural, personal, or spiritual levels. It is often one of the goals or by-products of higher education. Transcendence and transformation may both be by-products of service learning action research.

Figure 1: Jesuit Values, Ignatian Pedagogy, Lonergan and Service Learning Alignment as Andragogy in Educational Research Methods and Critical Reflection (EDRS600)

| Jesuit Values | | | | Ignatian Pedagogy | Lonergan's Theory | Service Learning <i>Action</i> Research |
|--|---|---|--|-------------------|---|--|
| Contemplatives in Action | Men & Women for & with Others | Cura Personalis | Magis | | Experiencing <i>It simply is...</i> | Choosing & experiencing the Service Learning site |
| | | | | | Understanding <i>What is it?</i> | Understanding the site Identifying Researchable Problem |
| | | | | | Judging <i>Is it so?</i> | Reviewing Literature to Understand & Evaluate Problem |
| | | | | | Deciding <i>What should I do?</i> | Creating & Implementing <i>Action</i> Research Plan with Stakeholders |
| | | | | | | Service to the Community |
| Finding God in All Things Unity of Heart & Mind | [Transformation] <i>Integration of personal & moral values with actions</i> | Transcendence <i>What is unified as a result of action?</i> | [Transformation] <i>theory & practice integrated, no-self, mindfulness, compassion, insight, connection, action cultivated</i> | | | |

Transformative education is, technically, an andragogy, quite different from the “formative, socializing and acculturating” norming pedagogies of childhood education³¹ because it requires critical analysis, a sophisticated skill that tends to be more highly developed in adults than children. Transformative learning can be individualistic or via group interaction.³² According to Jack Mezirow, transformation learning

is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. Such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action.³³

Bamber and Hankin argue that “the goal of transformative learning is to enable students to develop their own meaning perspectives that guide their action by helping them interpret evidence.”³⁴ In the research methods and critical reflection course, at Regis, service learning is utilized as a process/andragogy that places individuals in contexts where they may be confronted with new, “unfamiliar” experiences and evidence that challenge their usual, set, “familiar” frameworks. Through a process of “critical reflection, the individual relinquishes established frameworks” or becomes “defamiliariz[ed]” with, or somewhat alienated from, them.³⁵ “Perspective transformation takes place when our meaning perspective can no longer assimilate a new experience. Confrontation with information that disrupts an individual’s world-view is the catalyst for change.”³⁶ Bamber and Hankin state that evidence suggests that individuals who do not have the ability to critically analyze, however, may be less likely to have transformative learning experiences. Thus, what seems essential to the transformative process is the ability to reason, analyze, reflect on new information, and reconfigure one’s perspective in light of that new knowledge. What is built into the Jesuit charisms, Ignatian pedagogy, Lonergan’s learning theory, and service learning action research is the necessity for, or even an insistence that, the individual reflect on new information and his/her

role, acting in the world as a conscious and conscientious bearer of that knowledge.

The Role of Reflection in Transcendence and Transformation

Beyond just processing and assimilating or rejecting new information, how does critical reflection and/or contemplation result in transformation? One might argue that it creates a space within the individual where there is the potential for focus and calm that makes clarity possible. Tobin Hart asserts that

Interiority in education is about developing spaciousness within us in order that we may meet and take in the world that is before us. The greater the information, technology, and demands from the world around us, the more essential the interiority; that is, the inner capacities for discernment, imagination, virtue, reflection, balance, and presence.³⁷

Reflection/contemplation not only expands the individual’s capacity to wrangle with information, but also changes the dynamic the learner has with information. Information is no longer an external commodity, foreign to the learner, but becomes incorporated into the learner, in the process of grappling with it in relation to his/her frameworks. Through reflection and grappling, the learner opens himself, more fully, to experience the information and may retain it as an integral framework element. The learner makes meaning of it and may consider and/or utilize it as a lens as he/she navigates in the world.

According to Hart, there are “four general dimensions of consciousness related to learning: *presence, clarity, detachment and resilience.*”³⁸ He describes *presence* as a

non-defensive openness, flexibility of thought, curiosity, questions, a sense of wonder, suspension of disbelief, leading with appreciation over judgment, an emphasis on contact over categorization, accommodating rather than merely assimilating willingness to really meet and, therefore be changed by the object of inquiry....³⁹

This non-defensiveness places the learner at the threshold of a potential new reality, based on new information and new self-understanding. Hart calls this *reciprocal revelation*, and claims that it leads to “an expanded approach to knowing,” closing the distance between the learner and the knowledge, revealing “that *what* we know is bound to *how* we know.”⁴⁰ Hart sees this non-defensiveness as *detachment*, or an “attitude of interest and curiosity” whereby the learner may watch the “thoughts, feelings [and] sensations” that arise, without interrupting or rejecting them.⁴¹ This detachment allows the reflective individual to simultaneously experience contemplation of the question, while being cognizant of raising the question and of the process of arriving at and asking the question.⁴² It is believed that this awareness disrupts conditioned ways of thinking, sensing, and acting,⁴³ and Hart asserts it is a “characteristic of great learners and deep learning.”⁴⁴

Contemplation and the Brain

Hart’s assertion that consciousness has *resilience*, as a result of reflective/contemplation processes, is based on multiple studies of the impact of meditation and/or contemplation on cognitive functions. Slagter et al. found that the ability to experience detachment actually adapts the brain’s processing of the quickly evolving external stimuli in our world.⁴⁵ Deep concentration on a particular idea or task can lead to what Csikszentmihalyi deemed *flow*. *Flow* occurs when an individual is so focused on an activity that awareness and action merge, and sense of self is lost along with sense of time. As the individual deepens his/her ability to focus and sustain concentration on an idea or task, he/she may also be improving his/her ability to more readily achieve *flow* states.⁴⁶ Hart argues that the silence at the bottom of reflection makes for what Shunryu Suzuki called a *soft or flexible mind* that is “smooth and natural,”⁴⁷ ready for learning, and more creative, with greater “awareness of more subtle currents of consciousness.”⁴⁸ In such a mind, insight may arise out of silence, without concrete stimulation.⁴⁹

Neuroscience data reveals that *clarity* may also be a by-product of reflection/ meditation/ contemplation. The synchronicity between brain elements improves in long-term, practiced

meditators⁵⁰ and meditation training improves sustained attention and efficiency of brain processing.⁵¹ Aftanas and Golosheykin found that yoga meditators had better impulse control, were less reactive, and more centered with higher degrees of sustained focus.⁵² Contemplation also aids in individuals’ ability to return to a baseline state after a stressful event and helps mitigate the effects of chronic stress.⁵³ Brain structure, itself, is impacted by contemplative “mindfulness” practice, according to Lazar et al.. The insula, in the cerebral cortex, of meditators showed increased thickness,⁵⁴ which is associated with “integrating thoughts and emotion, especially in areas associated with attention and memory”⁵⁵ and cognitive, sensory, and emotional processing. Meditation may also potentially slow age-related degeneration in cortical structure.⁵⁶ All of this points to the fact that reflection/ contemplation/ meditation is beneficial for health, increases an individual’s centeredness and receptivity to learn, improves focus, and mitigates the compulsion to be reactive in a world that is increasingly about fielding an overload of fragmented information and stimulation.

Reflection/contemplation/meditation may also serve to make the individual feel connected to his/her world. In their research on neuropsychological effects of meditation, Eugene d’Aquili and Andrew Newberg found that via meditation, individuals can achieve deep calm, bliss, and what is termed *unio mystica*—experience of God, or Absolute Unitary Being (AUB), due to neurological dynamics in the brain. This *unio mystica* constitutes a mystical sense of wholeness and unity with all that is.⁵⁷ It may occur instantaneously, and may be achieved *Via Negativa*, just through meditation, or *Via Positiva*, by focus on a mental image or an exterior object.⁵⁸ It may result from the brain mechanisms that define the “boundaries of self” becoming minimized through meditation.⁵⁹ The nature of the mystical perception may be conditioned by the cultural context or beliefs of the experienter.⁶⁰

Loneragan and Consciousness

According to Lonergan, transcendence can occur via three different modes. The first is *intellectual transcendence*. This experience of transcendence involves the non-defensive absorption of

information that shifts outward the individual's horizon regarding reality. The second is that of *moral transcendence*, whereby the individual chooses to act unselfishly for the benefit of another's legitimate claim. The third occurs when the "energy of love" evokes choice for the altruistic benefit of others.⁶¹

Cogent with Hart's theory of dimensions of consciousness regarding *presence*, Lonergan's process of inquiry and self-appropriation, requires that the learner be mentally present to him/herself and as a conscious observer of *experience*. Lonergan calls this *empirical consciousness*. The learner must have *intellectual consciousness*, which tries to *understand* the data with which he/she is confronted. At the level of *rational consciousness*, the learner *judges* the validity of data. Then, the individual determines the correct course of action, based on the new information at the level of *rational self-consciousness*. "Self-transcendence or authenticity" occurs when "the human person goes beyond knowing, to *doing*" [*italics mine*].⁶²

The learner's propulsion through Lonergan's stages of learning is "driven by the *eros* of the human spirit, a wonder that continues to ask the question, a wonder that is the human response to the mystery of the realization of being."⁶³ According to Gaetz, *eros* of the mind is "pure desire to know" and an innate drive that "propels our consciousness forward in its development."⁶⁴ It is ultimately a process of seeking truth, but apprehending truth, the individual must realize his/her relationship to others and the responsibility to act rightly.

Perry asserts that Lonergan's "process of self-appropriation is initially an intellectual process but ultimately leads one through moral deliberation into self-transcendence that results in actions of benevolence." The "questions for reflection intend truth and being, questions of deliberation intend value by asking what is truly good and worthwhile." This propels the individual through the "process of self-appropriation and eventually results in a judgment on a higher level that integrates a value perception of what is truly good. This results in moral self-transcendence or authenticity." The authentic person is one who, via reflection, has come to

discern that one's actions should be consistent with benevolent love. Lonergan sees God as the source of benevolent love in the world. Ethics demands consistency between knowing and doing. Thus, ultimately one's actions should be consistent with the expression of God's love in the world.⁶⁵

From this process of inquiry, the emergent sense of responsibility, and benevolent love, Lonergan arrives at the *transcendental precepts*: "Be attentive; Be intelligent; Be reasonable; Be responsible."⁶⁶ Lonergan assumes that individuals will follow a natural proclivity towards altruistic concern for others once armed with valid information (truth), and do what is good and right in alignment with God's love and work in the world.

Contemplation in Eastern Philosophy

Lonergan suggests "that when we truly know something, what we know is the 'real world.'"⁶⁷ If Lonergan's process is examined in another light, without the idea of God, it may be that the reflective individual experiences a sense of unity with the object of focus and/or all that is—the real world, as the result of a flow state in some endeavor, or from experiencing the silence at the bottom of reflection /contemplation/meditation. This absorptive unity may give the individual a sense of there being no boundaries between him/her and the external world or object of focus. This would occur at Lonergan's *judging* stage, when all dissonance has been quelled and questions are virtually unconditioned. According to Buddhist thought, when a person is of clear mind, "where there is no obscurity and the clouds of confusion have cleared away," he/she will know "real emptiness."⁶⁸ The *void* or *emptiness* is a state that is achieved when the individual experiences no separation between him/herself and all else around him/her. The idea is that there is an illusion of separateness from the world, promulgated by the fact that humans experience their world through the five senses of touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. This illusion is *void* or *empty*, however, not real. Our true natures are that we are connected to all that is, and there is no separation.⁶⁹

People can become entangled in a confusing web of abstractions. Interpreting through

language is transitory and relative; words separate us from the world. Experiencing directly returns us to the true nature of life, reality, and ourselves.⁷⁰

Thus, in the space between *judging* and *deciding*, it is possible that the inquirer experiences a sense of calm unity with the world, at large, and is propelled by this sense of wholeness/unity to take action that is beneficent to others. Accordingly, “in emptiness, there is good but no evil.”⁷¹ If a person is connected to everything, then, harming anything is equivalent to harming oneself.⁷² Thus, “*Voidness* is the *body of essence*, compassion the *body of form*.”⁷³ The Dalai Lama stated it more simply, saying

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.⁷⁴

Correspondingly, in Buddhism, is the term *prajnaparamita*, meaning *perfect insight*. *Pra* equates with the English prefix *pre-*, meaning *before*. Combined with certain nouns, it can mean “*power, intensity, source, completeness, perfection, separation, excellence, purity, and cessation*.” Corresponding to the Greek root *gno* (as in *gnosis*), *jna* means *knowledge*.⁷⁵ The term has also been translated as *perfection of cognition*⁷⁶ or *transcendental wisdom*.⁷⁷ The concept of *prajnaparamita* is tightly bound to the idea of good and right actions that help others dispel darkness.⁷⁸ Tucci explains that “one who achieve[s] *prajnaparamita* may find the path to enlightenment via the ‘performance of good actions’ or transcendent actions that aspire to ‘the dissolution of the void,’”⁷⁹ more easily understood as helping others achieve Nirvana.

Ideally, one who understands that there is no separateness (duality) to existence is said to be enlightened or be a bodhisattva.

So a bodhisattva-mahasattva [enlightened mature person] does not act on the unreal or the non-existent, the erroneous or the untrue. A bodhisattva is one who tells the truth and acts without falsehood. Where there is truth and reality, there is no practice, therefore the practice of the bodhisattva is said to be nonpractice.⁸⁰

Here, is a parallel with Lonergan in that the expectation is that with truth comes the responsibility to act rightly and for the benefit of others, in a way that it is inherent in one’s *authentic*, uncontrived nature.

While no one in service learning action research has claimed to have reached Nirvana or enabled others to do so, students are living their practices, becoming competent actors in their service learning environments, and acquiring and utilizing skills through their volunteer work and action research projects. In essence, like the bodhisattvas, their practice is becoming inherent in their ways of being, as teachers and researchers, in the real world. Throughout their service learning and coursework, the process of reflection provides them the opportunities to resolve inner dissonance with regard to career goals, teaching ability, acquiring appropriate pedagogies, research competence, leadership responsibilities, classroom management, and self-confidence. They are *contemplatives in action*.

Altobello argues that unless the student can concentrate on material and meditate on it or ponder it deeply, he/she cannot reach intellectual maturation with regard to the discourse of what is being studied.⁸¹ In order to gain this competency, Altobello asserts that the individual must achieve the “three stages of mind training” as described by Patanjali in *The Yoga Sutras*. These are concentration (*dhāranā*), contemplation (*dhyāna*), and meditative absorption (*samādhi*).⁸² Patanjali defines concentration as “the fixing of the mind in one place.”⁸³ Contemplation or meditation is defined as “the one-pointedness of mind on one image.”⁸⁴ Meditative absorption constitutes the moment when the object of contemplation “shines forth as the object alone and the mind is devoid of its own reflective nature.”⁸⁵ Meditative absorption, in this case, is what was previously identified as *flow*. The object of meditation can constitute an actual object, the “knower, the instrument of knowledge, or the object of knowledge.”⁸⁶ Patanjali asserts that, in the state of meditative absorption, there is *truth*, which is the “underlying and controlling . . . harmony of the cosmos.”⁸⁷ With knowledge of this truth comes responsibility not to violate the harmony of the cosmos, thus, Patanjali urges “cultivating an attitude of friendship toward those who are

happy, compassion toward those in distress, joy toward those who are virtuous, and equanimity toward those who are nonvirtuous,” so that “lucidity of mind arises.”⁸⁸

Summary and Conclusion

Through service learning action research, Regis students are immersed in the service learning environment and forced to confront internal and external dissonance via the reflective elements of Ignatian pedagogy. As they are seeking a level of clarity about their roles as educators, they are also seeking clarity in identifying a researchable problem and creating a plan for addressing that problem. This constitutes physical, emotional, and mental absorption into the service learning and research context. Also, because the course is only eight weeks long, students are propelled into a state of hyper focus, striving towards understanding, evaluating, and making decisions about an effective course of action at their sites within time constraints. The student is somewhat squeezed through Lonergan’s learning stages in a compressed amount of time, while simultaneously processing his/her own emotional issues and coping with site dynamics. This process may mimic or actualize, in some form, the extreme concentration, contemplation, and meditative absorption described in Eastern philosophy as leading to wisdom. It is hoped that through service learning action research, the student will achieve a sense of centeredness with regard to his/her prospective profession, calling, and skills, enter into discourse of the discipline, realize and become proactive in an expanded community context, and seek to interact with his/her world and students with the compassionate disposition Patanjali advocates. The reflective elements of service learning action research, both in the coursework and through service learning, not only promote growth within the student but also, set him/her up to continue being reflexive beyond the duration of the research methods and critical reflection course. This leads to other iterations of cycling through Lonergan’s learning stages, and other transformations. Thus, Regis is producing prospective teachers who will move through their professional lives with expanded awareness of their roles in learning environments and communities. They are *authentic* people who will act in service, as *men and women for and with others*,

and who will be transformed and transformative by deep connectivity to their worlds.

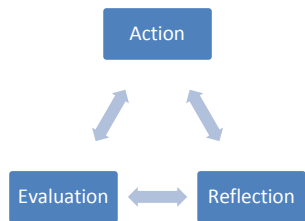
Through service learning action research and Ignatian pedagogy, students come to embody the Jesuit charisms. Via research and teaching, they are in service *for and with others*, giving more, striving towards the *magis*, in service learning, where they exert *cura personalis*, care of the person towards those they encounter. By means of deep reflection, they have found connection to or lack of distance from community (finding God in all things), and a way of proceeding (contemplatives in action) in their professions, with unity of heart and mind, as they gain confidence and resolve dissonance in the various elements with which they are confronted in the course elements and professional growth.


Tobin Hart asserts that “If we are to prepare students and ourselves for this accelerated and challenging world, and aspire to more than merely trying to keep up or catch up, something more than a stockpile of information and scholastic skills sets is required.” He suggests that “developing interiority may be most valuable not simply as an adjunct to knowledge acquisition but as central and essential to the process of deep and lifelong learning.”⁸⁹ Service learning action research distinctly develops the interiority of students who engage whole-heartedly in it. Not all students will be transformed by it, but the process creates fertile ground for transformation to transpire.

Perhaps the reason service learning action research is often effective as a transformative learning strategy is because the “best way to unify theory and practice is to unify them within the individual.”⁹⁰ The research methods and critical reflections course “provides ... (transformative) habits and tools”⁹¹ that students may leverage, re-imagining themselves, and re-envisioning their service learning sites. Hart argues that “when educational practice recognizes that the internal and external are bound to one another and also transformed by one another in a kind of reciprocal revelation, then education moves toward becoming a wisdom tradition itself.”⁹² (See Figure 2.) Service learning action research, guided by Ignatian pedagogy, uniquely sits at that nexus of reciprocal revelation, instilling in students habitual

Figure 2: The Role of Contemplation in Service Learning Action Research

| Service Learning <i>Action</i> Research | | Loneragan's Theory | Questioning makes change | Contemplative Process | Result of Contemplation | Role of Education |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Service to the Community | Choosing & experiencing the Service Learning site | Experiencing <i>It simply is...</i> | Encounter something that causes dissonance Question arises | Dissonance attracts and becomes focus of attention | Discovery of and receptivity to dissonance | Cultivate learner receptivity to new learning experience |
| | Understanding the site Identifying Researchable Problem | Understanding <i>What is it?</i> | Investigate new framework | Absorb new info and potential new boundaries | Focus on and non-defensiveness towards dissonance | Cultivate interiority of learner in connection with new info |
| | Reviewing Literature to Understand & Evaluate Problem | Judging <i>Is it so?</i> | Reduce incongruities between new & old frameworks | Make sense & meaning of new info & absorb it Expand boundaries | Incorporate new framework from understanding resolving internal conflicts | Support learner process, info validation, and incorporation of info |
| | Creating & Implementing <i>Action</i> Research Plan with Stakeholders | Deciding <i>What should I do?</i> | Determine action based on new perspective from unified frameworks | Determine action within new boundaries Develops "action competence" | Action based in centeredness, resilience, connectedness | Encourage responsible use of integrated external and internal knowledge |
| | [Transformation] <i>theory & practice integrated, no-self, mindfulness, compassion, insight, connection, action cultivated</i> | Transcendence <i>What is unified as a result of action?</i> | New framework integrated in self | Individual moves to new horizon | Authenticity—self unity and new info resonates in being | Education becomes wisdom tradition |



self-examination so that as they continue their work in the world, they do so wisely, with self-awareness, and with the best interests of others in their hearts. As lifelong learners who can reflect, they will reiterate the learning cycles in new ways, spiraling upward, gently pushing out boundaries, generating ripples of change towards unity in the world around them and others they meet there. 

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