José Mesa, S.J.


Commissioned by the Secretariat for Education of the Society of Jesus, and edited by José Mesa S.J., this book traces the development of Jesuit education that spans primary, secondary, and higher education, in addition to an array of Jesuit related educational environments, from the mid-sixteenth century to present times. Divided into five sections and arranged in chronological order, the text is a collection of primary sources and foundational writings from the Jesuit order, including contributions from Jesuits that describe how and why they entered into the enterprise of education. It also illustrates the particular spiritual charism, vision, pedagogical method, desired outcomes, and challenges that have faced this educational journey.

Part I provides a description of the Jesuits’ early movements into education as one of their ministries. It also offers, among other interesting aspects, one of the earliest articulations, written by Juan Alfonso de Polanco, of the benefits this ministry would provide Jesuits, its students, and the local area.

Part II centers on the *Ratio studiorum* (or Plan of studies), the official educational document generated by the Society of Jesus. The first official version, published in 1599 was the source where, “everything related to educational life is regulated to the smallest detail: the governance of schools, the selection of the professors, the admission of students, the program of studies, the authors and texts, the methodology…” (116). Another source suggests that the *Ratio* is “essentially a compilation of best practices in school administration and, especially, in pedagogy as developed by Jesuit institutions in previous decades” (128). Serving as the official plan of studies for Jesuit education from 1599 until the Society’s suppression in 1773, Gabriel Codina and John W. O’Malley’s contributions provide a description of the style of education that the Jesuits had chosen, how it was influenced by their own education at the University of Paris (*modus Parisiensis*), the humanist movement, and the influence of the Jesuit spiritual charism.

Part III describes the nearly forty-year suppression (1773–1814) of the Jesuit order and its restoration. A fascinating part of the Jesuits’ history in itself, this period essentially rendered the previous universally accepted *Ratio* impossible due to the many changes the world had experienced during this time. Part III describes how the Jesuits began to rebuild their religious order and educational institutions after the order was restored.

Perhaps the two most significant texts formally centered on Ignatian pedagogy include, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (1986), and its companion document, *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (1993). Taken together, these provide the vision and pedagogical method of Jesuit education, both of which are grounded in the Jesuits' primary document, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.

Part V, Recent Contemporary Texts (1995–2015), provides writings of Jesuit institutions and leaders to various audiences throughout Jesuit education. Many of these highlight particular aspects of the Jesuit/Ignatian charism, such as working for justice, continued reflection on the reality of present times, closer Jesuit/lay collaborations, and increasing global networking.

This reviewer comes away with a deep appreciation for the work of the Society of Jesus in education and for Mesa’s labors in this project. From this collection, one can see that success stems from having a clear understanding about what Jesuit education offers, a vision and world-view grounded not in education, but in the Jesuit’s spiritual foundation, a pedagogical strategy, and desired outcomes that have remained viable throughout the centuries and into present times.

Throughout the documents, readers will recognize that Jesuit education is always a work in progress. Through reflection and prayer, those involved in Jesuit education are called, “to discern the signs of the times and try to discover together what it is that the Lord wants of us” (497). From these discernments, change occurs. One major change can be traced in the slow but eventual collaborative efforts between Jesuits and lay persons. As seen in the creation of the *Characteristics* document and encouraged by Jesuit leadership, lay people have become essential leaders in the growth and sustaining of the ministry of Jesuit education. To recognize better the contributions of lay people to the continued growth of Jesuit education, perhaps a future project commissioned by the Secretariat for Education of the Society of Jesus could highlight the contributions of lay writings on Ignatian pedagogy and Jesuit education.

A second major change can be seen when Jesuits boldly asked their alumni, “Have we educated you for Justice?” (221). Recognizing in all humility that they had not, they shifted the focus of Jesuit education to include working for justice. Readers will appreciate that, grounded in the world-view of Ignatius and Ignatian spirituality, it is this continual individual and communal reflection on where Jesuit education finds itself in light of the current reality, and adapting as needed, that freedom and flexibility is provided for Jesuit education to remain student-centered, and to boldly declare, “the real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become” (487).
From their humble beginning in Messina in 1548, through the opening of many schools—ranging from primary, secondary, and higher education, as well as many other Jesuit inspired educational programs and ministries located across the globe—and having withstood the test of nearly five centuries, Ignatian pedagogy and Jesuit education continues to have much to offer the world. As a resource document, this text accomplishes its intended purpose to help readers trace the development, importance, and meaning of Jesuit education from the foundation of the Society to present times, and to emphasize the living tradition of Jesuit education which is continually evolving to respond to new contexts. It should also become an important resource in the formation of secondary school teachers, university professors, and school administrators.

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