

# The Jesuit approach to education

1. seeks to foster a profound reverence for the created universe in all its dimensions, because a loving God creates the universe as essentially good. Ignatian spirituality (i.e., the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order) is a “worldly” spirituality. God is found not by withdrawing from the world but by living in it, engaging in it, contributing to it, with an attentive, intelligent, rational, responsible and loving spirit. In Jesuit language this process is summed up by the phrase “being contemplative in action.”
2. encourages an incarnational view of life. Christians believe that God creates the universe in order to share God’s life with creatures and that God freely chose out of love to become a creature among creatures by becoming human in Jesus. This doctrine of incarnation underlies the recognition that the universe is a language, a sign language of the Holy Mystery. We are called to develop both a sacramental (i.e., symbol-conscious) imagination and a critically acute intelligence as aids to “finding God in all things.”
3. views the human person as a being gifted with the capacity to imagine creatively, to know perceptively, to feel intensely, to desire authentically, to choose responsibly and to communicate effectively; all of these capacities need to be cultivated to the utmost. Human freedom is not only a matter of (endlessly) choosing among objects but a power of self-determination (I choose the kind of person I want to be) and this power needs to be oriented by well-ordered love of God, neighbor and self. Attention to desires is very important in Ignatian spirituality. The deeper our desires the more trustworthy they are, for they express our yearning for the healthy “more” (*magis*) of truth, love, justice, and compassionate solidarity with our neighbors in need. Special attention—Jesuits call it “discernment”—also needs to be given to feelings of spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation for they can orient us to the true and the good, or disorient us. The adage that sums this up is: “Use your head but learn

from your feelings as well.”

4. believes that the whole person needs to be cared for (*cura personalis*): (1) each person as a unique individual, and (2) each person as a bodily, psychological, moral, and spiritual reality and (3) each person as a member of various communities and social contexts, rooted in various traditions.
5. recognizes that the process of learning always involves (1) consideration of the intra-personal, inter-personal and systemic dimensions of our lives; (2) attention to experience; (3) cultivation of insight and judgement about the truth of the matter; (4) deliberation and choice; (5) implementation of the choice; and then (6) evaluation of the choice made and its implementation. This cyclical, or spiral, dynamic needs to be freed more and more from distorting personal and group bias; well-ordered love is the energy that liberates persons and groups from distorting bias.
6. maintains that we are happiest when we are healthily loving others, particularly the neighbor in need; such healthy self-transcendence includes within itself healthy love of self: “being women and men for others.”
7. supports the view that education is not only a matter of information, but of formation, that is, education is a matter of human beings becoming whole persons in community, persons who exercise leadership in society by practicing justice in the biblical sense of fidelity to authentic relationships, as well as justice in the moral sense of giving each person his or her due. This justice needs to be informed by faith, faith understood as explicitly religious commitment to Holy Mystery, whom believers call God, or faith understood as openness to and acceptance of the mystery of life.