

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND IGNATIAN PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

Jesuit institutions of higher education have addressed the call to interdisciplinary studies through courses, programs, books, and curricula; however, less is understood about how a specific part of these institutions—that is, Ignatian pedagogy—is itself interdisciplinary. Through a historical and textual analysis of foundational Jesuit documents, particularly *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* and *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach*, I argue that Ignatian pedagogy is interdisciplinary in its assumption, perspective, and solution, while at the same time a pedagogical paradigm that enriches the practice of interdisciplinary studies, given the paradigm's experiential focus, contemplative criticality, and action orientation. As such, there arises a relationship of mutual enrichment between Ignatian pedagogy and interdisciplinarity: each possibly contributing to the practice of the other. This article ends with practical challenges and opportunities stemming from this interaction.

KEYWORDS: interdisciplinary studies; Ignatian pedagogical paradigm; Jesuit higher education; Ignatian spirituality; education

In an address to the Jesuit Ministry on Higher Education in 1989, the Society of Jesus's Superior General, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, emphasized how universities have sometimes been portrayed as administrative entities for unconnected fields of studies, or for departments and disciplines that work independent of each other. In this era of disciplinal specialization, he argues that the interdisciplinary approach is the "only significant way to heal the fracture of knowledge."¹ Acknowledging that the approach may risk overloading students, promoting relativism, or violating methodological rigor, he nonetheless focuses on how technical knowledge must be integrated with human values, and how academic excellence demands to be combined with moral responsibility. In a world with more complex problems and more complicated concerns, there is a need for solutions—both comprehensive and holistic, rigorous and integrated.

Given this call towards or this feature of interdisciplinarity in Jesuit education, a number of Jesuit institutions have interdisciplinary studies programs in both graduate and undergraduate levels.² There are also journals that promote interdisciplinary perspectives such as *The Journal of Jesuit Interdisciplinary Studies* by Durham University and *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* by Regis University. Although not focused on interdisciplinary studies, education books that have an interdisciplinary bent have been published like *A Jesuit Education Reader* and *Jesuit Pedagogy, 1540–1616: A Reader*.³ Given this assortment of courses and sources on interdisciplinarity and Jesuit education, it is curious that little work has been done in systematically understanding the connection between these two concepts. It is important, however, to have a fuller understanding of this connection in order to clarify interdisciplinarity's role in Jesuit education and to understand how the Jesuit spirit can influence the practice of interdisciplinarity. This work of clarifying the relationship between interdisciplinarity and Jesuit education is aimed at, firstly, appropriating pedagogical practices in Jesuit institutions

¹Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "What a Marvelous Opportunity for the Magis," in *Assembly 1989: Jesuit Ministry in Higher Education* (Georgetown University: The Jesuit Conference, 1989), 6, <http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/mission/pdf1/ju1.pdf>.

²Jesuit institutions like the Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola University Chicago, Georgetown University, and Seattle University have undergraduate interdisciplinary studies programs, while Creighton University has an interdisciplinary Ed.D. Program on Leadership.

³George W. Traub, ed., *A Jesuit Education Reader* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008); Cristiano Casalini and Claude Pavur, S.J., eds., *Jesuit Pedagogy, 1540–1616: A Reader* (Boston: Institute for Jesuit Sources, 2016).

to the contemporary practice of interdisciplinarity and, secondly, doing interdisciplinary studies in a way that is integrative of the Jesuit tradition.

In this study, I limit it to a particular aspect of Jesuit education: that of the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm (herein referred to as *Ignatian pedagogy*). Briefly, Ignatian pedagogy is a way of teaching and learning inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, and at its core are three elements in the teaching-learning process: experience, reflection, and action.⁴ Seeking to understand the connection between interdisciplinarity and Ignatian pedagogy, I argue a mutual connection in that Ignatian pedagogy is interdisciplinary in its assumption, perspective, and solution, while interdisciplinary studies is enriched by the Ignatian pedagogy's focus on experience, reflection, and action. For the first argument, I analyze sources on Jesuit education and Ignatian pedagogy as they reflect or even challenge interdisciplinarity, while for the second argument, I apply the pedagogical paradigm into the secular conception of interdisciplinarity and the limits that come with this application. The conclusion includes challenges and opportunities in the integration of the two concepts.

BRIEF CONTEXTS

When the Society of Jesus was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540, its founding document, *Regimini militantis Ecclesiae*, clarified its chief purpose as the striving for the progress of souls in Christian life and the spread of the faith through ministration, spiritual exercises, and education of children.⁵ In the context of the advanced Renaissance, the Society's first superior general, Ignatius of Loyola, accepted education as one of the ministries of the Society, starting with Jesuits who found themselves teaching humanities and Christian doctrine to Portuguese and Indian children in Goa, and, more fully, with Jesuits establishing a university in Messina, Sicily in 1549. Two years after, the Society opened the Roman College, open to both Jesuit and lay students.⁶

⁴The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (Rome: International Centre for Jesuit Education, 1993), 6, [http://jesuitinstitute.org/Resources/Ignatian%20Pedagogy%20\(JI%20Edition%202013\).pdf](http://jesuitinstitute.org/Resources/Ignatian%20Pedagogy%20(JI%20Edition%202013).pdf).

⁵Society of Jesus, “*Regimini militantis Ecclesiae*,” 1540, http://jesuitportal.bc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/1540_Formula.pdf.

⁶George E. Ganss, *Saint Ignatius' Idea of a Jesuit University: A Study in the History of Catholic Education, Including Part Four of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1956), 21–23.

These events have contributed to the establishment of Jesuit schools and colleges in Europe and the New World.

Given this rapid development in its education ministry, the Society of Jesus in 1599 issued the *Ratio Studiorum*, a comprehensive guide and plan “for the full Jesuit system of education” from high school to advanced professional studies.⁷ Although not concerned with the pedagogical process, it nonetheless sets rules for rectors, prefects of studies, professors, and students, Jesuits and otherwise. In this document, there is clear emphasis not only on philosophical and theological studies, but also on rhetoric (which non-Jesuits or externs are encouraged to take), humanities, grammar, and mathematics.⁸ This early form of integrating knowledge through liberal education is a product of both the late Renaissance context of rationalistic humanism and the Ignatian tradition of caring for the whole person (*cura personalis*).⁹ It is important to consider, however, that the *Ratio Studiorum* was a set of curricular and administrative plans, and not of pedagogical outlines. Although there is a distinct Ignatian spirituality in the education in Jesuit schools, its contemporary codification comes only some four hundred years after. This is brought about by the fact that the administrative plans from the *Ratio* are now difficult to apply to the twentieth century context, yet there still needs to be a binding element (a set of characteristics unique) to Jesuit educational institutions.

In 1986, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach promulgated *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education (De proprietatibus educationis iesuiticae)*, which in the spirit of the *Ratio* is not a definitive or final goal but an instrument that guides the Society of Jesus’s perspective in the education apostolate.¹⁰ The document itself outlines important features of Jesuit education, such as the focus on “faith that does justice,” becoming “men and women for others,” or forming “leaders in service.”¹¹ Distinct from the *Ratio* that emphasized the curriculum and regulations in Jesuit educational institutes, the *Characteristics* is a descriptive presentation of the “spirit” of Jesuit education. Although not yet comprehensive, its final part on some characteristics of Jesuit pedagogy is instructive of what will come only a decade after.

⁷Society of Jesus, *The Ratio Studiorum: The Official Plan for Jesuit Education*, trans. Claude Nicholas Pavur (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005), vii.

⁸Ibid., 34; 109–110; 155–189.

⁹Ganss, *Idea of a Jesuit University*, 175–76.

¹⁰The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (Rome: Acta Romana Societatis Iesu, 1986), 769.

¹¹Ibid., 789–97.

The 1993 document on *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* starts where the *Characteristics* left off since this new document responds to requests for a practical guide to what the previous document had presented on the purpose of Jesuit education. Although the *Characteristics* ended with a short discussion on Jesuit pedagogy, there has been a marked shift in this new document, especially with its change to *Ignatian* pedagogy. Here the emphasis is less on the Jesuit “brand” than on the Ignatian “spirit,” highlighted in Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*. Thus, taking inspiration from the *Exercises*, this document outlines a pedagogical paradigm in forming men and women for others, mindful of both the realities and ideals of teaching.¹² At its core is the active role of the student who experiences, reflects, and acts, similar to the movements in the *Spiritual Exercises*.¹³ Thus, the Ignatian paradigm is transposed to the education setting, putting particular emphasis on the relationship between teacher and learner. As the spiritual director guides the retreatant in the process of discernment, so too does the teacher guide the student in the process of learning.

As these developments were happening in Jesuit institutions, higher education in general has been pursuing new ways of understanding different phenomena and integrating educational experiences. This was happening, however, in the intellectual climate where, on the one hand, there is greater specialization of thought, professionalization of knowledge, and consolidation of disciplines, while, on the other hand, there are invitations toward more contextualized and integrated bodies of knowledge.¹⁴ Within this context rose fields of studies that are collectively called *interdisciplinary studies*. Among these interdisciplinary fields are cultural and race studies, area studies, environmental and biomedical studies, and other civic and international studies. Integrating different perspectives on the topic, Allen Repko defines interdisciplinary studies as:

a cognitive process by which individuals or groups draw on disciplinary perspectives and integrate their insights and modes of thinking to advance their understanding of a complex problem with the goal of applying the understanding to a real-world problem.¹⁵

¹²The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 5–6.

¹³The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, 808.

¹⁴Allen F. Repko, Rick Szostak, and Michelle Phillips Buchberger, *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2014), 66–71.

¹⁵Ibid., 28.

Given this definition, the emphases are on the understanding of problems, integration of perspectives, and application of insights. It comes from a context of robust disciplines that need to be in conversation with one another in order to more fully comprehend the complex practical problems that are not the exclusive object of any single discipline.

However, this movement to interdisciplinarity is not without its opponents who criticize the concept as "soft" or lacking in rigor and who are careful not to transcend disciplinary boundaries.¹⁶ This opposition arises from false dichotomies between disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies and between integration and specialization. First, people assume that interdisciplinarity is a rejection of the disciplines when it is actually "firmly rooted in [the disciplines] but offers a corrective to the dominance of disciplinary ways of knowing and specialization."¹⁷ In this understanding, disciplines are fundamental to interdisciplinary work, and problems arise when the lack of disciplinary grounding leads to indiscriminate and random conceptual borrowing. Given this grounding, it is important for those who practice interdisciplinary studies to have adequate knowledge of the insights and methods in the disciplines being integrated.¹⁸ This concept of integration separates interdisciplinarity from multidisciplinarity, where the latter is only about the juxtaposition of different disciplines in understanding a problem or phenomenon while the former tries to integrate perspectives.

Another impression that people have is that those who pursue this type of studies are generalists who try to unite all the sciences into one perspective, or more pointedly, who cannot specialize in one specific domain. However, there is a paradox that comes since interdisciplinarity and specialization are actually parallel concepts rather than opposing ones. From a historical perspective, Peter Weingart explains that originally interdisciplinarity had the goal of addressing fragmentation and uniting science into a single concept, but this idea has been replaced with a humbler goal in that it becomes a mode for innovation and progress.¹⁹ In this sense, the integrative aspects of interdisciplinary studies are not so much aimed at the creation of a wholly

¹⁶Peter Weingart and Nico Stehr, "Introduction," in *Practising Interdisciplinarity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), xii.

¹⁷Deborah DeZure, "Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching," *Teaching Excellence* 10, no. 3 (1999): 3.

¹⁸Allen F. Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2008), 39.

¹⁹Peter Weingart, "Interdisciplinarity: The Paradoxical Discourse," in *Practising Interdisciplinarity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 40–41.

comprehensive perspective (if there ever is one) but simply intended at providing a more nuanced understanding of a problem or a phenomenon. Thus, the rise of this integrative concept comes *with*, rather than *against*, further specialization of knowledge since this specialization needs to be appropriated to specific contexts and included with other viewpoints.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN IGNATIAN PEDAGOGY

Having established how Jesuit education, Ignatian pedagogy, and interdisciplinarity are responses to intellectual and social contexts of history, I argue that the close linkage between the latter two is most evident in Ignatian pedagogy's interdisciplinarity in assumption, perspective, and solution. This pedagogy's focus on the personal experience of students assumes openness to concepts coming from different problems and realities. Its focus on the use of a reflective stance in studying these realities creates a perspective of integrative understanding. Lastly, its focus on social action as the aim of formation produces solutions that are creative, unique, and compelling.

Inspired by the *Spiritual Exercises*, the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm focuses not on the individual teacher but on the student whose growth the paradigm fosters. Although the document is directed primarily for educators, its goal is ultimately to facilitate the formation and development of the student in the contemporary world.²⁰ Stemming from this tradition, Jesuit education became a ministry not for love of learning itself but for the “*practical* devotion to a purpose which learning might serve [italics mine].”²¹ It is this practicality responding to contemporary complexity that helps us understand how Ignatian pedagogy is itself interdisciplinary in assumption. Within this pedagogy, there is an attitude or assumption that the world’s problems are complex and multifaceted, and that there should be means of integrating perspectives and disciplinary experiences.

On the one hand, interdisciplinarity assumes the complexities of present problems while, on the other hand, it demands the collaboration needed for fuller answers.²² Similar practical assumptions are made in the way Jesuit

²⁰The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 2–3.

²¹John W. Donohue, *Jesuit Education: An Essay on the Foundations of Its Ideas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1963), 13.

²²Myra H. Strober, *Interdisciplinary Conversations: Challenging Habits of Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 11.

educational institutes teach: there is an initial assumption of the intricate contexts students live in and the need to understand not only their context but also the context of educators:

As teachers, therefore, we need to understand the world of the student, including the ways in which family, friends, peers, youth culture and mores as well as social pressures, school life, politics, economics, religion, media, art, music, and other realities impact that world and affect the student for better or worse. Indeed, from time to time we should work seriously with students to reflect on the contextual realities of both our worlds.²³

Given the multidimensionality of context, Ignatian pedagogy strives for the assimilation of information and experiences, such that there will be both the *incorporation* of different methods of understanding and the *provision* for a worldview that is more complete and comprehensive.²⁴ This interdisciplinary assumption of complexity, therefore, finds its parallel in Ignatian education's assumption of students' complex contexts.

But this assumption does not only encompass the complexity of the system but also the need to open disciplinary dialogue to address such complexity. As mentioned by David Sill, the objective of interdisciplinary studies is not the observation of these complicated systems but the development of the capacity for synthesis and integrative thinking.²⁵ In a similar vein, Ignatian pedagogy not only assumes this complex context but likewise recognizes the need for the integration of experiences both direct and vicarious, those that were experienced firsthand or were learned from someone else. This is particularly evident in the education that comes from conversations, laboratory investigations, service learning projects, or simulations, lectures, and material resources.²⁶ That learning can come from a variety of experiences and realities helps ground Ignatian pedagogy in this interdisciplinary assumption of dialogue and integration.

More than this assumption, however, the Ignatian paradigm opens a space for a perspective uniquely interdisciplinary, crossing different disciplinal boundaries to look at subject matters and the human person from different viewpoints. From the *Ratio Studiorum* until the present, the way of teaching

²³The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 10.

²⁴Ibid., 2–3.

²⁵David J. Sill, "Integrative Thinking, Synthesis, and Creativity in Interdisciplinary Studies," *The Journal of General Education* 45, no. 2 (1996): 129.

²⁶The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 13.

is set up such that the different branches of the curriculum are integrated towards the goal of producing students with a holistic Christian outlook. This is why there has been a set of core curricula in Jesuit tertiary institutions that promote liberal education.²⁷ Given the more diverse religious demographics present in these institutions, this inherently Christian goal can be challenged, but I use this example to point out how diversity of perspectives and disciplines are integrated practicably in Jesuit schools.

This diversity of perspectives is seen primarily with how the document, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, puts prominence to the reflective dimension of students' learning, in opposition to initial models of knowledge flowing from teacher to learner.²⁸ By focusing on reflection, the pedagogy highlights not just the acquisition of knowledge but also the practice of skills that aid holistic learning. Students learn to develop skills of "understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" in order to more fully comprehend realities they face.²⁹ These are similar skills that students of interdisciplinarity hone, particularly since disciplines pose differing epistemologies and ways of thinking that students need to be skilled at while crossing boundaries and synthesizing different modes of thinking.³⁰ It is this emphasis on integration and synthesis that this pedagogy helps students discover.

Ignatian pedagogy itself is a framework for "wrestling with significant issues and complex values of life,"³¹ and these issues need to be wrestled from a variety of perspectives that transform one's limited perception. It encourages the student to think not only of oneself but also of others, a distinct feature of the ideal of being "men and women for others."³² It fosters a deep respect and dialogue for cultures, contexts, and sciences.³³ It challenges students to understand how oppressive social structures and systems operate in the realities of everyday people, and how one can act for social justice.³⁴

²⁷James A. O'Donnell, "The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum," *Philippine Studies* 32, no. 4 (1984): 466.

²⁸The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 9.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Elisabeth J. H. Spelt et al., "Teaching and Learning in Interdisciplinary Higher Education: A Systematic Review," *Educational Psychology Review* 21, no. 4 (2009): 366.

³¹The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 4.

³²The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, 791.

³³Ibid., 780.

³⁴Sondra Cuban and Jeffrey B. Anderson, "Where's the Justice in Service-Learning? Institutionalizing Service-Learning from a Social Justice Perspective at a Jesuit University," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 40, no. 2 (June 2007): 144–55, doi:10.1080/10665680701246609.

In all these, the spirit of openness and creativity stresses a perspective that is inclusive and integrative. Yet the same perspective diverges a little from interdisciplinarity because Ignatian pedagogy uses this assimilated knowledge for the person's development rather than the problem's solution. Although this may seem like a refutation of Ignatian pedagogy's interdisciplinarity, this must be viewed from a difference in goals, where education's *primary* goal is the formation of the person while interdisciplinarity's primary goal is comprehension of the subject or problem. Viewed in this way, both are not necessarily opposed but only different in primary objectives.

To further nuance this, Ignatian pedagogy actually uses such diversity in perspectives as an impetus to action, even as personal growth remains the primary goal. *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* mentions that the ultimate aim is the "full growth of the person which leads to action."³⁵ As such, this pedagogy forms the person for action, whether these actions be one's interiorized choices, or the external manifestations of those choices.³⁶ The education helps students form a set of responses that lead to further action in this complex world. Such responses are understood from the standpoint of the individual helping society, just as how St. Ignatius wanted Jesuit schools to form youth who will contribute meaningfully and effectively to society.³⁷

This goal of contributing to society is the very impetus that drives the practice of interdisciplinary research and teaching. As Anthony van Raan argues, the external motivation for this type of studies is the set of societal problems and questions that are at the same time testable by science and learning.³⁸ Thus, the goal of interdisciplinary studies is to understand comprehensively these problems, and propose actions that can address them. This same interdisciplinary action-orientation is seen in Ignatian pedagogy's way of addressing two contemporary concerns: the tendency to focus less on the human person's growth in favor of fragmented specializations and the desire for simple solutions to complex questions.³⁹

³⁵The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, 810.

³⁶The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 16.

³⁷Ibid., 15.

³⁸Anthony F. J. Van Raan, "The Interdisciplinary Nature of Science: Theoretical Framework and Bibliometric-Empirical Approach," in *Practising Interdisciplinarity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 66–67.

³⁹The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 20–21.

This orientation toward action impels Ignatian pedagogy to focus less on disciplinary boundaries as if certain problems can be exclusively answered by one or another discipline and focus more on the dialogue that can happen when subjects and disciplines are integrated. Although the word interdisciplinary is not mentioned in both *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* and *Ignatian Pedagogy*, both documents manifest the spirit of interdisciplinary teaching and learning in their assumption, perspective, and solution focus. Specifically, Ignatian pedagogy assumes the complexity of problems, equips the student with skills for synthesizing perspectives, and compels the person toward action and solutions.

IGNATIAN INTERDISCIPLINARITY?

From the previous section, I have shown how Ignatian pedagogy is interdisciplinary in nature. However, is it possible for interdisciplinarity to have an Ignatian spirit? If so, how does Ignatian interdisciplinarity look? I argue that the Ignatian paradigm may enrich interdisciplinary practices through its experiential focus, contemplative criticality, and action orientation. In a sense, the same triangulation of experience, reflection, and action can itself guide and focus students with interdisciplinary interests. This section, therefore, focuses on more practical aspects of how teachers and learners of interdisciplinarity may appropriate Ignatian principles for their pedagogy, study, or research.

First, experience and context are two important teachers, and students must be guided in making their personal experiences truly instructive. In the same way that Ignatian pedagogy uses both direct and vicarious experiences, teachers of interdisciplinarity can themselves provide avenues for students to learn from their experiences.⁴⁰ These experiences may be in the form of direct contact with nature or people, the written work of an author, the research of a scientist, or the creative innovation of an entrepreneur. The wealth of experiences—both personal and social, direct and second-hand, performed and written, tangible and intangible—opens the student’s understanding of a world so complex. Yet complexities should not hinder or distress the student; rather, they can be celebrated, given the Ignatian disposition of gratitude. This is where interdisciplinarity can be truly enriched by this perspective:

⁴⁰Ibid., 13.

whereas secular interdisciplinarity comes from the desire to solve problems, this Ignatian type may come from a commitment of service borne out of gratitude.⁴¹ To clarify, it is not a gratitude for problems and injustices but a gratitude for having experiences that open one's mind and heart to further understand how one can act effectively in facing these complex problems.

Thus, Ignatian interdisciplinarity may firstly be characterized by this assumption of gratitude for experiences and the complexities that come with those experiences. Rather than start with problems and questions, it starts from a humanistic core of experience enriching one's understanding. Although it starts from this personal experience of gratitude, it finds its culmination, as St. Ignatius wrote in the *Spiritual Exercises*, not in words but in deeds.⁴²

Second, these experiences can be tested under the crucible of thoughtful reflection and discernment. As previously mentioned, interdisciplinary thinking needs both integrative and synthetic thinking, yet this way of thinking may unwittingly fall into the trap of looking too quickly for solutions and resolutions. When presented with a problem, it is much easier to already consider the answers rather than let the problems sift and stay. But it is actually this *process* of reflecting in tension that interdisciplinary students are encouraged to fathom:

Holding different ways of knowing simultaneously in one's mind, holding different and sometimes contradictory feelings, holding a variety of descriptions for an event, a thing, a social phenomenon, or a process of solving problems—these things are not comfortable as they contain inherent tensions that we instinctively seek to resolve. [...] We must live [however] into those different ways of knowing that our academic disciplines give us, the tensions and confusions of complexity.⁴³

From this understanding, interdisciplinarity may not at times be about resolving the tension, but trying to live in that tension. As Simeon Dreyfuss notes, it is less about systematizing and synthesizing different perspectives, and more about the iterative and non-linear process that holds different insights

⁴¹Wilkie Au, "Ignatian Service Gratitude and Love in Action," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 40, no. 2 (March 13, 2013): 4, <https://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/jesuit/article/view/4014>.

⁴²Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Elder Mullan (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1914), 63, <http://www.companionofjesus.com/se-mullan.pdf>.

⁴³Simeon Dreyfuss, "Something Essential about Interdisciplinary Thinking," *Issues in Integrative Studies* 29 (2011): 74.

and perspectives in relationship with one another.⁴⁴ Within this “debate” are two perspectives on the goals of interdisciplinarity: one being a more practical solution-oriented goal and the other being a more creative procedural goal.

The Ignatian paradigm lends itself to both ends, especially with its emphasis on being *contemplatives in action*. It is a Jesuit value that, when applied to education, focuses on the students’ attentive devotion and their practical work coming together rather than being separate entities.⁴⁵ Through the practice of reflection and discernment, students are able to live in this tension and, possibly in time, respond with a solution. The Ignatian perspective can offer this space for students to be critical about their decisions, question their assumptions, and ultimately discern their options. It is a perspective that acknowledges that there are no easy answers and that even thoughtful answers need to be discerned critically.

Third, the discernment and living-in-tension process of interdisciplinarity should find its way to choosing, addressing, or solving practical realities. That interdisciplinarity concerns itself with practical and solutions-focused research is a phenomenon that can trace its roots to both the historical currents of more complex questions and the economic need for a more practical education. Even the liberal arts are no stranger to pragmatism such that Thomas Bender speaks of a “practical liberal arts education.”⁴⁶ But the concerns of individual students (anywhere from their job prospect to their particular vocation) need to be healthily considered if interdisciplinarity is to continue to become relevant.

Although Jesuit education is not primarily and solely intended for the preparation for a career, its focus is nonetheless on moving students from experience to action.⁴⁷ It seems paradoxical that students are encouraged toward action but are not prepared primarily for a career. In this sense, the Ignatian vision of action is not about personal profit and careerism but about action that is considerably larger than the individual person. Thus, if this vision influences interdisciplinarity, the direction of action is ultimately not toward personal profit but social concern, engagement, and involvement. This is made clear in the Jesuit education’s aim of forming “men and women who

⁴⁴Ibid., 80–81.

⁴⁵Dirk J. Dunfee et al., “Revisiting the Promise and Foundations of a Jesuit Education,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 6, no. 1 (January 2017): 61.

⁴⁶Thomas Bender, “Liberal Arts, Civic Life, and the Practicality Question,” *The Journal of General Education* 62, no. 2–3 (2013): 118, doi:10.5325/jgeneeduc.62.2-3.0112.

⁴⁷The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, 810.

assume responsible positions in society through which they have a positive influence on others."⁴⁸ In a similar sense, interdisciplinary studies can continue their orientation toward actions and solutions relevant to society and, in this way, engage not only disciplines but also peoples.

In this discussion of how the Ignatian paradigm can enrich interdisciplinarity, the highlight has been on the experiential focus that assumes a gratitude for complexities, the contemplative criticality that discerns the tensions inherent in these complexities, and the action orientation that moves the student to engaging and acting in society. It would, however, be foolhardy to think that this application of a Christian, Catholic, and Jesuit worldview will not have its own resistance. Although this resistance is understandable, particular aspects of the Ignatian perspective—while being firmly rooted in faith—can be *shared* by people of different or no faith traditions. The Ignatian perspective that can enrich interdisciplinarity is not about privileging one religion but about applying a perspective that engages the human person. And is this not the very spirit of interdisciplinarity—that it is shared by peoples and disciplines so different and diverse?

CONCLUSION

Given the rising significance of interdisciplinarity and the engagement of this concept in Jesuit schools, this study was initially motivated by the desire to clarify the relationship between the two concepts. I argued that both reinforce each other since Ignatian pedagogy is itself interdisciplinary in assumption, perspective, and solution, while the same Ignatian paradigm enriches the practice of interdisciplinarity through its experiential focus, contemplative criticality, and action orientation.

As both concepts need to be engaged, there will be a few challenges that need to be faced and can be a product of future research. First, there is the difficulty of integrating the faith and secular orientations of the two, and the arising “tension” should be understood more fully. Second, the practical application of interdisciplinary Ignatian pedagogy must also be codified and practiced. Here it is important for schools, teachers, and students to share best practices in engaging interdisciplinarity from an Ignatian paradigm. Third, the challenge of engaging and crossing disciplines will not and should not

⁴⁸Ibid., 797.

only be a challenge for students and teachers of interdisciplinary programs. If anything, the challenge of interdisciplinarity must be engaged by people of different disciplines collaborating with each other and integrating different perspectives, without losing rigor or promoting relativism.

In the same spirit as the *Characteristics* and *Ignatian Pedagogy*, this study focuses on the aims and ideals of Jesuit education and Ignatian learning. However, both documents are never perfect and final, and they need the efforts and practices enriching them from the ground up.⁴⁹ It is in this same spirit that I conclude this study: integrating interdisciplinarity and Ignatian pedagogy does not end with a document that outlines their relationship; rather this document hopefully starts conversations, inspires discernment, and encourages practice.

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⁴⁹The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 22–23; The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, 810–11.

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