

Jesuit education system: creators of credible leaders

Jesuit
education
system

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to propose that a Jesuit education can create leaders who can respond responsibly to modern challenges. It is observed that there remains a lacuna in education due to various reasons that fail to penetrate the hearts and minds of students who come only to earn their degrees. Today's education fails to give students experiences whereby they can understand the poor and the oppressed. Here, the Jesuit education system offers a road map of how a bridge can be built, which can tie up the two ends of rigorous academic and social concern.

Design/methodology/approach – The emic observation was employed to corroborate the claim. The researcher is a Jesuit himself who has personal experience of the culture of Jesuit education and does research in the seminal field. The co-author is a Jesuit-run business school professor who knows Jesuit ethos, tradition and their apostolic thrust.

Findings – Frequently students join the educational institute, with their minds fixed on which school could provide them with a passport for better jobs with better pay and perks. Resentment is seen in their attitude when something is talked about the responsibility of taking care of the people at the margins of society. Social involvement and responsibility are seen as work done only by a social worker and activist. Also, it is witnessed that tokenism is considered as sufficient work done by the privileged classes. Against this backdrop, Jesuit education has various policies and protocols to ensure that those who graduate from their schools become leaders with a blend of human values, academic excellence and social conscience.

Originality/value – The underpinning conclusions are to introduce the unique characteristics of the "Jesuit education system", which gives fresh impetus to renewal, innovation and re-imagination that our academics or industry require during this change of epoch that we experience today, after COVID-19.

Keywords Jesuit education, Credible leaders, Society of Jesus, Jesuits

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

To be just, is not enough to refrain from injustice. Once must go further and refuse to play its game, substituting love for self-interest as the driving force of society. – Pedro Arrupe, SJ.

The members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) have been working in education since the 16th century. Today they run 80 higher educational institutions in India alone, out of which four are the best autonomous colleges of India (St. Xavier's College, Mumbai; St. Joseph's College,



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Bengaluru; St. Xavier's College, Kolkata; Loyola College, Chennai) according to recent *Education World* rankings 2021-21 [1]. There are also some management institutions run by them (Xavier Labour Relations Institute, Xavier Institute of Management, Loyola Institute of Business Administration, Xavier Institute of Social Services and St Joseph's Institute of Management) that have proved themselves as institutions of prominence by dint of their quality-content and value-based pedagogy. "The country has been enriched by the contribution of the Jesuits in the sector of education", said Mr Sashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament, India [2]. The Jesuit education system remains as relevant as ever. It can never be satisfied with the status quo. For example, the characteristics of Jesuit education, Magis, stimulate it to discover innovative modalities to stay impactful continually. The context of Covid-19 unravelled the importance of exploration and research. It also has posed several issues such as apathy toward migrant workers, digital divide, domestic violence, job loss and mental health. Therefore, this paper aims to put together how the Jesuit education system creates credible leaders. The article explains how the Jesuit education system trains its students to have critical analysis, concern for the underprivileged, and be hopeful agents who value justice, dream for an egalitarian, all-inclusive society, and have passion for making this world a better place.

Most of the graduates from universities will soon be in the position of leaders with a lot of specialized knowledge and hope to change the future, which will be in their hands. But, have we equipped our students enough with values in the heart and mind along with intellectual capabilities? Are they prepared adequately to promote democracy with the dignity of all citizens, economic growth with equity, development with ecological sensitivity? Consequently, there remains a gap between expectations and deliveries? However, one thing is evident that the world needs a good leader more than ever before.

When asked what kind of leaders they wish to have, "credible" is the most often repeated adjective uttered by employees. Credible leaders include qualities of discerning heart and mind; they practice examination of conscience (evaluation of days' activities), possess a spiritual and moral compass and got a heart for underprivileged class and wounded environment (Hemby, 2017). The abovementioned slant influences their governance and decisions. Both organizations and employees who get credible leaders vouch what world of difference it makes. Studies support that when employees experience that their leader is credible, it elicits behavior and attitude of respect, commitment, satisfaction, civility and engagement in them for organizations (Campbell, 1993). It takes to another question how and where a credible leader is made?

Undoubtedly, education is one of the ways which forms the mind and character. It works in two ways: first, it provides know-how information. Second, it facilitates reflections and awareness about the role that each has to take up to offer solutions to looming challenges that the world faces with hope and integrity. My exploration unfolds that Jesuit education is one of the education systems in general function as a great modal which imparts learning that shapes both mind and heart of the students (Currie, 2010). This paves the way to become a credible leader. As one said if you want to have leaders who are responsible, ethical and sensitive to their organizations' impact on the environment and communities while also growing financial prosperity: hire a Jesuit-trained graduate. The heart of Jesuit education lies in transforming a student who will transform society via being responsible and conscientious human. The arguments of this article will help focus this consideration. Personal-level transformation occurs when students get the experience of rigorous academic application and spiritual and emotional reflections. In other words, transformative education includes a pedagogy that combines mind, heart and soul. The works of mind, heart and soul are to navigate truth about oneself and ones' vocation, calling and meaning in life, which

enables and encourages to work for the common good. In sum, Jesuit education allows every student to go through the experiential learning that encourages to become a citizen of a particular aptitude who recognizes the presence of heart, mind and soul. Accordingly, Jesuit education provides formation which entails context, perspective, purpose and relevance (Kainulainen, 2018).

How does Jesuit education emphasize credibility and character formation while paying equal importance to solid academic rigor and skill development? For Jesuit education, their students must become persons for others. While students get education in their institutions, they give personal attention to their students (*cura personalis*), and their growth is supervised. There is the accompaniment and specific practices and policies to ensure that students are ingrained with the quality of persons for others at the end of their academic years. For example, the Jesuit education system has made the “social involvement program” compulsory coursework (Plante *et al.*, 2009). Wherein students are taught and given experience on giving back to society. It is taught through village exposure and lived experience. Students are taught how their decision affects those who are in the margin of the society. They are given experience how villagers are deprived of their development, policy and work. Students realize the gap between theory and practice, social structure and culture of people, their responsibility and privilege class. After the visit, students share how rich and fruitful experiences have been of theirs, which has made an indelible impact on their personalities. In the same vein, Jesuit firmly believes that education can’t be reduced with skill training and providing deems fit employees for the industry. Instruction also includes wonder and reflections. Human beings are not workers alone; instead, they are living being for the greater good.

How Jesuit education system ensured credibility among their students

Jesuit education is holistic. Individuals who have received Jesuit education find ingrained aspects of compassion, gentleness and a deep loving concern for fellow beings. They teach their students that knowledge is not neutral. It includes values and specific paradigm to understand the human person. Through teaching and research, they encourage students to dialogue with culture, economics, politics, theology, technology, ethics and society. There is the opportunity for reflection on critical conscience. Reflection helps their students evaluate the process and progress, responsibility and accountability; in the end, it merges heart and mind to approach any decision. Jesuit education has various policies and protocols to ensure students who graduate from their school become leaders’ blend of having human values, academic excellence and social conscience. Following are the Jesuit characteristics enshrined into educational paradigm to make sure they have their impact:

- (1) *Examination of conscience*: it is a time of prayer wherein students are asked to express their gratitude, take stock of life and give assent to respond to ones’ inner voice. Here students grow their insight into reality to become what they are meant for. This exercise is found as an essential tool to experience equilibrium harmony and integration in one’s life. It entails awareness and sensitivity to the inner voice, which dictates one’s ethical life.

Examination of conscience refers to mindfulness in laymen language, which allows one to be aware of oneself for living a life more intentionally and responsibly. As “Sharpening the saw” is considered an important tool to enhance ones’ effectiveness similarly, intentional living is essential to realigning and refocusing our lives. While taking stalk of one’s life, one is not supposed to feel guilty of one’s omission of responsibilities but be in touch with a deeper understanding of consciousness. This exercise helps to fathom how God is

laboring with oneself, followed by responsible resolution (Prosperi, 2015). This exercise got *five steps*:

- *I thank Divine for all the blessings received*: gratitude is an attitude of taking life as a gift, freely given, being grateful to one who has created and sustained me.
 - *I seek the grace, for light*: light to see the limitations and omissions from to carry out one's responsibilities. Here one asks for divine light to see subtle self-seeking, deception, prejudice, lack of freedom and resistance to doing good.
 - *Review of the day*: I look at my day and see where Divine power has been active when I was guided and invited that supreme energy. I see the shadows in my thought–word–deed with the light from Divine in my entire interior movement. "Where was Divine energy during my day? Was I a victim of my limitations? Was I refusing the invention of Divine?"
 - *Reconcile*: I accept and own up to my limitations and omissions. I take responsibility for my action. I ask sorry from the Divine for my inadequacies, my reluctance and my lack of obligations.
 - *Hopeful future*: I complete the examination of conscience with the firm resolution. I make my mind to be open to respond to Divine call better. I look toward the future with hope. "For all that has been, Thanks! For all that shall be, Yes!"
- (2) *Value-based pedagogy*: it includes a worldview and a vision of the ideal human person to be educated. In this teaching model, there are five elements: context, experience, reflection, action and evaluation. The methodology is meant to enable the student to be guided by the teacher to appropriate learning actively. And active learning is because of the vision of a student who wishes to be one of competence, conscience, compassion and commitment to the formation of a better society. It seeks to teach our students the right attitudes and values based on the premise that "becoming" is more important than simply knowing. According to Jesuit tradition, it is known as Ignatian Pedagogy (IP). The underpinning intention of IP is to form students into an integrated person, "head, heart and soul". The experiences suggest that this method informs students who can express their thoughts precisely, speak eloquently and exhibit moral excellence and environmental and social concern (Gallagher, 2018). Former Superior General late Fr. Adolfo Nicolás reported that where technological tools and social media both improve and confuse learning, IP comes as alternative tools of learning which awaken the students from their slumber of conscience and superficiality. IP facilitates dialogue in the search for truth and understanding. With the help of IP, teachers, while seeking to influence their students, also form credible leaders who will influence the universe for the good of all. IP affects and transforms the senses the way they habitually function. Therefore, IP is not only a method of learning and means of acquisition of information but rather a toolbox that enables to give birth to credible leaders.
- (3) *Magis*: it refers to the inexhaustible capacity of human will. It is the opposite of mediocrity. Students in Jesuit-run institutions are encouraged to venture their purpose of life with an attitude of *Magis*. It is an invitation to be generous with one's gifts and make progress in their life endlessly vis-a-vis hear one's inner voice using one's discretion. *Magis* word comes from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, which can be translated as greater, going beyond, more or excellent. In the Jesuit education system, *Magis* is applicable in every sphere. The goal of *Magis* is to focus on continuous growth of students and institutions that cater to the need

to the fullest possible development linked to the personal, academic and administrative domain. Magis is a drive that challenges oneself rather than others to excel one's probable (Mescher, 2018). Thus, it can be said that Magis includes habitually taking new endeavors to become what one is supposed to be. The situation related to place and person determined the application of Magis such as Geo-Politico-Socio scenario of the students and institutions. Therefore, magis means to do best according to ones' ability in given needs to circumstances.

- (4) *Discernment*: according to Jesuit spirituality, it includes the art of making the right decision using both heart and mind. Students are given rigorous training about the art of discernment while they earn their degree in the Jesuit institution. They are taught that their decision should achieve their vision and mission without compromising their values and the common good. Self-awareness, introspection, openness and honesty ascertain the discernment process. The decision born of discernment makes individuals experience peace, faith, hope, love and courage to carry out the decision (Trinidad, 2021). In the same vein, the Jesuit Education system makes a clear choice to form their students into "men and women for others" in a peaceful world. Students are made aware that "giving back to society" is their prime responsibility. The learning that they receive and become a gifted and skilled person is for others. To make this work, Jesuit education focuses on themes for deliberation such as social responsibility, justice, equity and dignity of the human person. Also, the Jesuit education system makes deliberated choices in admitting economically disadvantaged and backwards students. Financial support and special considerations (tuition, counselling) are ascertained to those deserving students from backwards [3] and underprivileged [4] classes during academic sessions. In addition, justice and peace subjects are made as part of the co-curricular activities. It entails critical social analysis on these topics and introspection to become torchbearers of these values. It facilitates promoting policies and practices that can ensure human rights and dignity for every person, particularly women, children and pupils from backwards classes and different political ideologies. It fosters respect for other cultural and religious traditions (Cosacchi, 2019). Students are trained how the masses at times are misled and divided to serve narrow political agenda. Ongoing discernment regarding matching the demands of the society at large and job-market and availing them in the curriculum has been the hallmark of the Jesuit education.
- (5) *Finding God in all things*: students studying at Jesuit institutions undertake training in spirituality. They go through sessions to see reality with inner eyes. They are given the experience to see a butterfly in a caterpillar, a flower in the bud and a saint is a sinner. Students are taught central them of *Ignatian spirituality*, and that is finding God in all things. It is an invitation to go beyond superficiality and descent into the depths. One belongs to nature, humanity and God. The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius both challenge and encourage facilitators to accompany students to experience divine presence in all things via recognizing divine presence in oneself (*Aham Brahmasmi*) [5] and others. In doing so, students discover their true calling and desire to serve humankind (*Brahmans*) [6] in the world. Jesuit education help students to reflect the value of upholding the dignity of others and work for a humane world. The "way of proceeding" in Jesuit education gives tools to admire the differences and appreciate different stories. Such experience enables students to see the world through the eyes of Brahman and have concern for the world (common home). Jesuit education believes that more profound truth is discovered when serious reflection has gone

underway. It is a reflection on experience that gives us learning. Thus, Jesuit education leaves no stone unturned to conduct spiritual practices like recollection, retreat and prayer services for students of every faith, which help them be more effective at interpersonal relationships and face challenges of their world. In the end, seeking God in all things builds an attitude and art to experience God – in every circumstance of life, be it relationships, celebrations, occasions of low and high. This understanding encourages students and facilitators to recognize that everything in the world that comes from God can be accepted, appreciated and admired as God's loving desire (Welie, 2015).

Concluding remark

COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered for us the truth of pervasive abject poverty and disruption of the environment in the face of seemingly economic growth. The world witnessed people lack basic amenities for their well-being, say its food, medical, employment and education. Further, it was found that especially migrants, indigenous communities, children and women were excluded from the benefits of countries' economies. In addition, we observe the undesirable impact of economic globalization in and day out; corroding ethics, democracy and human rights; the gap between having and have-nots; environmental degradation; exploitation of minorities; manipulation of media; and rise of dictatorship. Not to mention artificial intelligence and automation are replacing the human workforce these days. This has resulted in disruption too, where unemployment is rising. Cases of mental health are on the increase.

When the survival and safety of billions are hanging in the balance, where are the leaders of the world? Who gives creative responses to these changing times? The work of world leaders is to pronounce and propose through a deep study and the search for solutions to these burning issues. Thus, the underpinning message of this article is to introduce the unique characteristics of the "Jesuit education system," which gives fresh impetus to renewal, innovation and re-imagination that our academics require during this change of epoch that we experience today, after COVID-19.

Notes

1. www.educationworld.in/government-autonomous-colleges-rankings/ (accessed 18 October 2021).
2. http://shashitharoor.in/interviews_details/12/ (accessed October 18, 2021).
3. Backward refers to caste analysis which begets economic poverty.
4. Underprivileged refers to economic analysis which is result of obvious reasons.
5. It is typically translated as "I am Brahman" or less literally as "I am divine".
6. Brahman means the impersonal supreme being, the primal source and ultimate goal of all beings, with which Atman, when enlightened, knows itself to be identical.

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