



Practical Lessons in a Jesuit University: An Opportunity to 'Practice' Ignatian Pedagogy

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Abstract

The *Practicum* in Educational Degrees in Universidad Pontificia Comillas has been the perfect setting to fulfill the main principles of Ignatian Pedagogy in order to educate our students as “whole persons” and “persons for others”. This approach invites the students to connect theory with practice, to understand the importance of personal skills in the professional field and to develop self-knowledge so they can become better professionals.

The structure and design of the tasks and activities in the *Practicum* have been elaborated following the path established by the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) and integrating the Ledesma-Kolvenbach dimensions, which should be transversal in any field of education of the Society of Jesus.

This way, it has been observed a global growth in personal and professional abilities in the students applying the methodology of accompaniment, sharing experiences in reduced groups and carrying out individualized monitoring, especially in their emotional progress.

Description

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.

Confucius

In every Degree the Practical lessons are vital to achieve the main goal of the learning process. It is said that Confucius, in the sixth Century BC already knew about this, but it is not always taken into account in education environments.

Even in Universities of the Society of Jesus, professors sometimes focus on exposing contents in which they feel safe and they seem to be experts, but they forget basic pedagogical guidelines such as Edgar Dale’s cone of experience, in which he tried to summarize and classify different type of learning experiences (Dale, 1969). In Figure 1, the author indicates the importance of the methods and activities used in teaching lessons that imply ‘doing’, so the students can learn the content in a meaningful way.

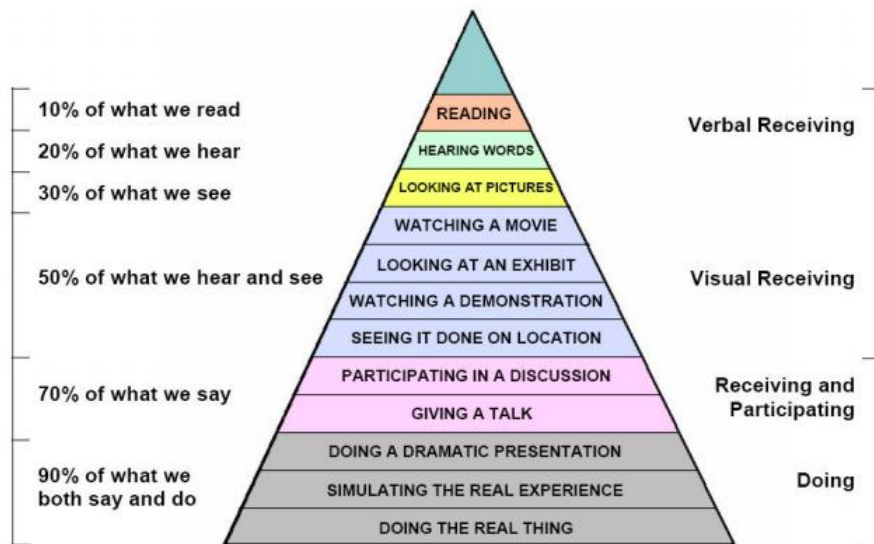


Figure 1: Edgar Dale's Cone of Experience (Dale, 1969)

Experiential learning is today well known as one of the “active pedagogies” inspired in the idea of “learning by doing”. This way of learning answers to diversity and supports growth and personal development (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), because in this process the individual is going to approach not just cognitive abilities, but also emotional and psychological capabilities that the subject can use to solve complex problems.

In this pedagogical way of planning our lessons, there is something that it must be remarked and it is usually forgotten: the value of the connection between practice and theory. Prieto and Torre (2015), insisted on the importance of reflection, before and after the practice as a “fundamental tool to give sense to the practice, to improve from

the analysis of what was experienced in the classroom” (p. 82). This way, the process of learning does not stop when the class ends and does not start when the practice begins. In this sense, there are some studies that imply this reflection as a cycle (Lane, *et al.*, 2014):

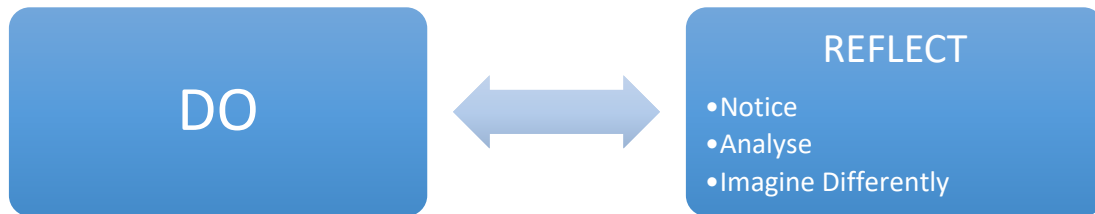


Figure 2: Lecturer's shared conceptions of the process of reflection (Lane *et al.*, 2014, p. 488)

The pedagogical approach reflected in Figure 2 implies guidance from the professor and their own space in the lesson plans because it becomes part of the learning process as the student interacts with himself to improve his self-knowledge and, therefore, his personal and professional actions. Santerini (2012) support this idea of reflection connected to practice as a way of developing knowledge through reading, analysis and interpretation of situations and experiences in a certain context.

Moreover, the educational practice evaluation model developed by García, Loredo and Carranza (2008), established three dimensions according to three different situations or moments of reflection: before, after, but also even during the practice.

Learning through this interaction between practice and reflection makes this process a deeper structure of acquiring knowledge because the students are told to make an extra effort, thinking beyond the simple acts of what they are watching and doing and transcend to become better professionals. This approach is purely ignatian, confirmed in the description made by Father General Kolvenbach (ICAJE, 1993) of the main goal of the Society of Jesus education: “The ultimate goal of Jesuit education is the overall growth of the person so it leads to action” (p.6).

This pedagogical paradigm was also one of the meaningful topics in Kolvenbach's speeches (2008), insisting several times in the concept of "creating habits of reflection" (p.82) and these habits, he explained, "could only develop with consistent and planned practice" (p.82). It is obvious that in Ignatian Pedagogy, the terms of Experience and Reflection have a more nuclear meaning than in other pedagogical schools. In fact, these are two of the five steps in the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP). These steps lead to Action, and they are provided by the Context and finally evaluated to provide evidence of personal growth. In Figure 3 we can observe the relationship among the five steps of the IPP adapted by Mauri, Neiva de Figueiredo and Rashford sj (2015) from the work of the Jesuit Harold Naylor in 2006:

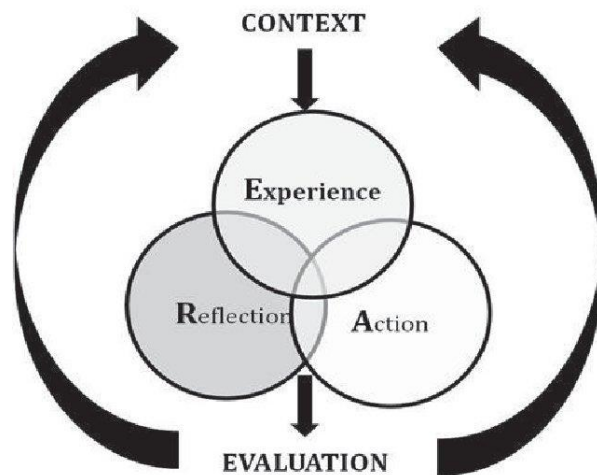


Figure 3: Components of Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (Mauri et al., 2015)

The IPP tries to encourage cooperation and communication between experiences through reflective dialogue among students (ICAJE, 1993). This way, the students

not only can learn from their own experiences, but also from their peers. As they listen or read the experiences of their colleagues, the students will develop unconsciously the four "Cs" pointed out by Father General Kolvenbach (ICAJE, 1993): becoming more conscious of the reality they are living in; more competent, because they receive different cases to analyze; committed to become better professionals so they can help each other, which makes them also more compassionate.

The "Cs" will also serve to integrate and describe each step of the IPP: place ourselves in context and be affected by our experience (being a compassionate person); the recovery of our experiences (being a conscious person); action (being a committed and competent person) and evaluation in a fifth C: become a contemplative person in action (AUSJAL, 2019). This idea connects with Kolvenbach's insistence in Diego de Ledesma's "four motives" (*utilitas, iustitia, humanitas* and *fides*) as a way of proclaiming a new dialogue between faith and science (Villa Sánchez & Lemke, 2016) or what Agúndez sj

(2008) called the “Ledesma-Kolvenbach Paradigm”. It is necessary to specify that this four-dimensional paradigm was created as a valid artifice for analysis, as Agúndez sj points out, but we should not lose perspective of the true understanding of the whole, which is dynamic unity (2008). This implies that the four dimensions are in constant relationship and they are connected, influencing and modifying each other.

This is how we structure the subject “*Practicum*” in every Education Degree in Universidad Pontificia Comillas, following the steps of the IPP and taking in consideration the Ledesma-Kolvenbach Paradigm.

Type of Experience

It is well known that many of the aims of Jesuit Education, such as the pursuing of excellence, the development of moral values or commitment to social justice, are also shared in other pedagogical institutions. That is why there is a need to go further, in the words of Father General Pedro Arrupe, we must educate “men for others” (Arrupe, 1973). As educators in, not only Catholic organizations, but Jesuit institutions, we should try to accomplish the main professional goal of Ignatian pedagogy: link the intellectual side of the person and the expertise to the spiritual and ethical dimension (Mountin & Nowacek, 2012).

Therefore, our mission is to figure out how the idea transmitted by Ignacio in the sixteenth century can be adapted for use in contemporary education. To deal with this issue we have programmed the “*Practicum*” under the “motives” of the Ledesma-Kolvenbach Paradigm and the activities follow the path set by the IPP. Figure 4 shows graphically this relationship between the five steps and the development of the different tasks proposed to the students.

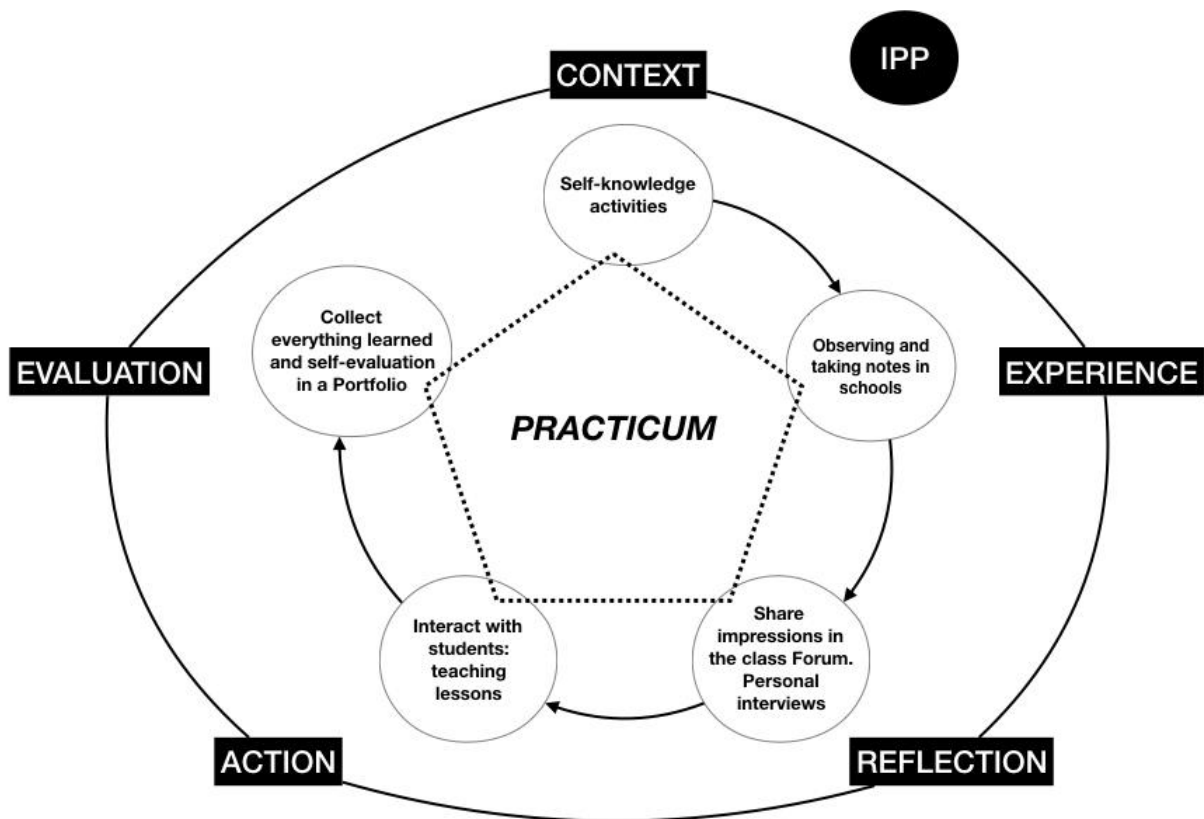


Figure 4: Relationship between IPP and Practicum in Universidad Pontificia Comillas (Source: self made)

We understand the Context as the student’s own life situation, who is he or she and all the background that surrounds the person that enters the classroom in our University, but also to schools where they are taking their Practical lessons. That is why we propose activities and dynamics to get to know themselves such as *Insights Discovery*¹, which is based on two axis developed by Jung (1921). This way, they can recognize their own strengths and weaknesses and analyze their personal preferences so they can become better professionals. This kind of approach in the Context, is connected with the *Humanitas* dimension of the Ledesma-Kolvebach Paradigm, because it is part of the construction of personal identity and part of an integral development of the person.

¹ To learn more about this tool, you can visit: <https://www.insights.com/products/insights-discovery/>

The Experience, according to Saint Ignatius is “not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul” [SE 2]; implies, in addition to a cognitive experience, a feeling that carries an affective nature (ICAJE, 1993). Thus, the guidance in this step in the subject is that they have to observe the practice of professionals with critical view paying special attention to the emotions that arise when they are watching these practices. The students need to be aware of the relationship between feelings and cognition. This connection makes people react to situations one way or another, as Greenberg points out: “emotion mobilizes and reason guides” (2014, p. 21). The Experience is also involved in the *Humanitas* motive, because it is part of the personal development, it implies self-knowledge and trains the student to act according to his or her moral principles.

The term Reflection in latin (*reflecto*) means literally “to bend back”. This process demands our students to look back on their experiences so they can understand and learn from them. As guides, we can help them analyze their experiences asking questions that make them think about what they have observed and done (Mountin & Nowacek, 2012), creating a personal dialogue based in mutual respect and trust. That is basically what we called “personal interviews” with the supervisor. In these encounters, the conversation is not only about professional affairs, but also reflecting about personal matters. The professor’s interviewing guide has issues to reflect such as: “People you look at or have as a reference in life”, “If we talk about you, what would you like us to say about you?” or “In which aspects do you feel safe, do you trust yourself, do you see yourself capable?”. These kind of topics in the conversation can generate routines in the students and make them realize the learning process as a global issue.

Meanwhile, as a nuclear part of the Reflection process, the students write their impressions in a Forum guided by the supervisor with a question that will make them go deep into their implication in the Practical Lessons. Statements such as “Try to identify the main emotions that you have experienced at school these first days and think about its possible causes”, or “Surely in these last days of internship you have had some

satisfaction that reaffirms you as a person or teacher. Share an experience in which you have reaffirmed yourself as a person or teacher”. They are usually very honest writing down their impressions and, with this tool, they can read each other, comment on their peers’ experiences and emotions, and experiment empathy because they feel the same or in a similar way.

The Reflection step is clearly in line with the *Humanitas* dimension, but also with the *Fides* motive, the religious dimension. The guidance of the supervisor, selecting the appropriate questions both in the Forum and in the interview is essential in order to make students think about inner issues and encourage them an openness to the discovery of a deep meaning as one’s own existence: “The caring educator may be the one who knows how to grasp a question and delve into it with a calm gesture” (Van Manen, 2004).

The Reflection of Ignatian pedagogy would be a truncated process if it ended in understanding and affective reactions (ICAJE, 1993), that is why we need Action as the next step: “More in action than in words”. Based on experience that has been reflected on, Action takes place an inner human growth as an external performance. Here, the students carry out activities, lesson plans and use tools they have learned in college and in previous days at school in their practical lessons.

This is part of the practical dimension or *Utilitas*, that is an open disposition to knowledge and research of an adequate understanding or reality based on truth (Villa Sánchez & Lemke, 2016). In this case the learning process is linked deeply with their experiences as “teachers in practice”, carrying out the process previously mentioned as “learning by doing”.

Finally, a University must promote justice, *Iustitia*, in the activities and tasks it offers, revealing itself as a center of creativity and knowledge acquisition for the common benefit of humanity. Lozano *et al.* (2020), point out that students not only need awareness, but also academic rigor, to focus adequately social issues throughout their professional life. This dimension appears in our *Practicum* subject in the Evaluation

process, in which they must collect every learning they have carried out or observed during the school year and fill out a self-assessment tool in which they will capture their own perceptions about their self-development. Again, in this section we open the possibility of offering peer feedback, creating a communication situation between students putting students as subjects of their own reflection (Morales, 1998) in their oral presentations.

Therefore, the IPP steps set the tone for the activities proposed in the subject and are under the influence of the Ledesma-Kolvenbachian motives, which integrate and support the learning carried out, connecting them into a whole, like the particles of water of a cloud, as it can be seen in Figure 5.

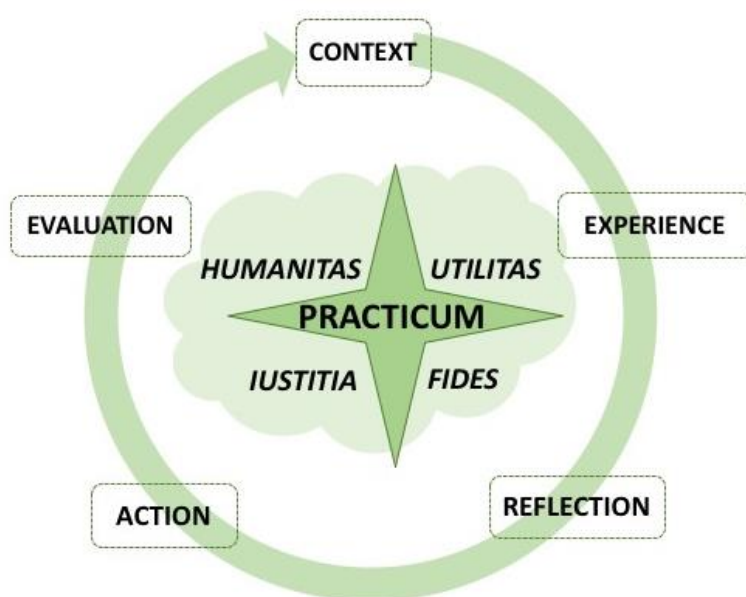


Figure 5: Relationship between IPP, Ledesma-Kolvenbach Paradigm and Practicum in Educational Degrees (Source: Self made)

Context in which it was carried out

This proposal has been launched in the subject *Practicum* in every Educational Degree at Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid: Elementary and Early Childhood Education and the Double Degree in Sports and physical activity Sciences and Elementary Education.

It is true that the personal experience of the student is variable, because the impact of the practice center (school) in which they are carrying out their practical lessons is significant. In Spain there are public, private and subsidized² schools, and students can

² These semi-private schools are called “centros concertados”. They are usually privately own religious centers (they are a few non-religious ones), but the salary of the people working in these schools come from the Government.

be assigned (after a pre-demand questionnaire) to any kind of institution. The internal functioning of these centers tends to have particular differences which, as indicated above, may have an impact on the practices of the students.

The tutor assigned to them at school is also significant in this process because it is going to be the professional reference which the students are going to observe, learning not just teaching skills, but also interpersonal abilities: how they interact with the pupils, with their partners and with the student himself. They will also depend on this person to carry out tasks and assignments that would perform the teacher, which is critical in this approach.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objectives that arise with this practice are:

- Innovate in the practice of tutoring in the subject of Practicum.
- Implement Ignatian pedagogy in the curriculum and the student's trajectory through practical lessons.
- Set a methodology to integrate Ignatian pedagogy in the Practicum of future teachers.
- Generate a program based on personal accompaniment in the teaching-learning process.
- Favor critical and reflective dialogue to improve educational practice.

The fulfillment of these objectives is established on a methodology based on the process of accompaniment. The professor needs to create a suitable climate in the group of students that are being supervised so they can feel safe to share the experiences in class they have been living at school. Therefore, we divide this subject into two subgroups, so the supervisor has to manage a class of, usually no more than 20 students. The atmosphere that is generated in those subgroups is incomparably better than a monitoring that implies 35 to 40 students.

During this accompaniment process, there are also moments when the class at University is just with half of the subgroups, managing only 8 to 10 students. In these sessions they can even share deeper impressions and express their feelings with greater freedom.

Then, to trace the individual development in this approach, the supervisor needs to lead, at least, two individual interviews with each student in the school year, so they can communicate directly the situations they are experimenting and express their feelings in this process, as described in the Reflection step.

Another type of accompaniment the supervisor has to carry out is the process of the tutor in charge of the student in each school. Nowadays, because of the global pandemic situation, this follow-up must be done via email, but, in another situation, it could be accomplished in a more personalized way, going to the different schools and creating moments of dialogue with these teachers, so they feel they are not alone in this process and they can express also their doubts and concerns.

Results obtained

This experience connects inner parts of the person with their professional skills, training self-knowledge skills in order to be able to transmit this kind of abilities to their future students. We believe, as well as Goleman (2013) emphasize, that Emotional Intelligence capabilities (rather than IQ or technical skills) are the best predictors of which individuals are capable of become the best leaders. It is precisely what Lowney (2014) described as of one of the main reasons that people need to train to lead the waves of change, the ability to learn in every stage of life, or what it is usually called as 'lifelong learning' and reflect on themselves to be able to "ride the waves of change" (p. 113).

So, to check if the students had developed these abilities, we would like to show and comment some reflections that they have made in their final reports, after finishing the subject:

“I keep so many things from this wonderful experience, not only professionally, but also personally. Now I realize how important it is to enjoy your work. For this reason, I am going to define it with a Greek word which I consider it as a pillar for our precious profession and in which I see myself reflected: *Meraki* (doing something with love and creativity, putting your soul into it)”.

The learning process has involved tools to develop professional skills, but as this student points out, even more important have been the abilities in the intra and interpersonal dimensions. It seems that she had realized that learning to love the professional field implies learning to manage your own emotions and believing in oneself. Or, as the next student suggests, developing this type of personal skills has been even more important in her particular growth:

“Living these experiences have helped me to improve in the academic and professional field but, above all, to mature as a person and know how to face problems that I did not normally associate with my life”.

In the process of compiling everything lived throughout the course they have the opportunity to realize things that, at first, they considered unfair or made them feel bad, and now they can look back at them and see them with another perspective:

“The first review that one of my tutors gave me stated that “as a student I had little autonomy because I limited myself to doing what she asked me to do”. Honestly, this feedback was quite painful for me. [...] However, that comment made me change the way I was acting and made me understand what my tutors were really asking me for. Therefore, during the second semester, I adopted a completely different attitude. To which from the first day they congratulated me, saying out loud that my change was exactly what they were expecting”.

This kind of reflection in the evaluation process is exactly what we were looking for with this approach. The student is not perfect, no one is. But she was able to transform her previous ideas, strongly rooted in previous experiences, to respond adequately to what the situation was demanding of her on this occasion. This procedure is not easy, because it means that the person needs to admit its own limitations and a recognition of their own mistakes. It was a hard road to travel, because when she received this feedback from her tutor, the student was shocked, and, at first, she didn't want to recognize that she was doing anything wrong. Sadness and anger were blinding her because she felt mistreated and underappreciated and, as Frazzetto (2014) explains, this works as a defense reaction, because anger is also armored fear. But she had the courage to confront her fears, and after a few days she wanted to turn the situation around, and she did it.

This process of confronting their fears is a natural procedure for every person starting a new job or even a new stage in personal life (starting a relationship or moving to another country), so it is very important to introduce first, and then accompany the students in this kind of processes. As this next student explains, the most important thing is to know their own fears to fight them and become the best version of themselves:

“On the other hand, I have proposed to continue working on my fear of speaking in English out loud. Also I will try to maintain the educational perspective my tutor and my students had helped me to achieve at school and I hope in the future I can accomplish my goal of becoming the teacher I really want to be, with insecurities and strengths, but wanting to learn from both”.

In addition, they have to adjust to situations that, at first, can make them feel uncomfortable. However, this process of accompaniment and emotional opening, sharing what they are feeling in different situations, helps them a lot to find their place, as this student shares in her final reflections:

“During the internship it was difficult for me to find my place in the classroom, since the teacher did not give me the role that I was hoping for, I would have liked a fully active role. I have to recognize that it was difficult for me to adapt to their methodology and his way of teaching because that made me feel like an “assistant”, and not a real teacher. Sometimes making material and just ‘watching’ can be boring. But to be realistic, my tutor and my students gave me a very important and beautiful role, which at first I had a hard time learning and which I did not like at all, but which has really been rewarding”.

As it has been insisted before, this approach focus in a full development of the person, connecting professional and personal competences and improving actions by the exercise of reflection. That is why some students realize in their reports that they had experimented an evolution in the moral dimension of the professional field:

“I am aware of the improvement of my ethical competence when facing the duties and dilemmas of being a teacher”.

Competences usually forgotten in the training of future teachers, or at least, not included as skills to develop in an explicit way, because they are considered as implied or tacit own personal developmental learnings.

Lessons learned

Father Kolvenbach (2000) expressed the enormous pressure that every University has to acquire success, and how Jesuit Universities should transcend this “worldly success” (p.10) based on marketable skills and focus on the measure of who our students become. The Society of Jesus has always opted for an education based on the integral development of the person: “For 450 years, Jesuit education has sought to educate “the whole person” intellectually and professionally, psychologically, morally and spiritually” (Kolvenbach P. H., 2000, p. 10).

This approach of the *Practicum* in the Education Degrees was searching precisely what Kolvenbach explained with these words. The supervisors in charge of scheduling the activities, tasks and concepts of this subject have been pleasantly surprised by the implication of the students in the sharing process, getting involved deeply not just in their own processes of learning, but also in their peers.

The connection previously described with the IPP and the Ledesma-Kolvenbach Paradigm gives the *Practicum* a whole new perspective, based on this description of educating “the whole person”. Both student’s personal and professional development has been significant at the end of their internship and after the evaluation of this subject and the level of satisfaction of the students when they are asked in the personal interviews is almost always very high³.

Educating in a Jesuit University means we are also a Catholic Institution, and it becomes an important ministry of the Catholic Church integrating Ignatian mission and identity, embodied in the *Magis*. This concept is understood as the maximum development of the gifts and capacities with which each person is endowed, to the best possible service of others and *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*. Every task we schedule, each subject and program should be targeted to the greater glory of God, educating citizens to make the world a better place. This way we can transmit this passion to our students so they can see the hand of God in all things and “engage the world through a careful analysis of context, in dialogue with experience evaluated through reflection, for the sake of action, and with openness, always, to evaluation (GC35, d. 6, n. 9).

³ The satisfaction variable is related to a large extent, both with the school to which they have been assigned and with the tutor with whom they are doing the internships.

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