An Introduction to *Praxis* in an Ignatian Context

**What is Praxis?**

Praxis is the process of putting theory, values, or beliefs into action through practical application. According to educator, philosopher, and leading critical pedagogy theorist, Paulo Freire, praxis refers to the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, saying that praxis is “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed.” It involves dialogue and action that is informed (and linked to certain values), wherein dialogue is not just about deepening one’s understanding – but functions as part of making a difference in the world. Dialogue and action (the dialectical relationship of praxis) are co-operative activities involving respect and the centering of humanity. Praxis suggests that meaningful and transformative change in society can only occur when individuals or groups actively engage with and reflect upon their actions in light of their theoretical understanding, forging the path of discernment from our ideas toward our concrete actions.

**Why is it important in education?**

In education, praxis refers to the idea that learning is most effective when it involves a cycle of action and reflection. Educators who promote praxis encourage students to not only acquire knowledge but also apply it in practical settings and then critically reflect on the outcomes. In educational activism and justice work, praxis is about actively applying one’s beliefs and theories to work towards social change. It involves not just theoretical discussions but also direct involvement in activities and movements that aim to address and rectify social injustices. Praxis, as a holistic concept emphasizing the integration of theory, practice, and critical reflection, involves the preparation of our learners to meet the ever-changing needs of their societies with rigor, value, respect, and humanity.

**What does praxis mean in the context of Jesuit and Ignatian values?**

The Ignatian social responsibility to praxis is grounded in the commitment to education, justice, magis, and the preparation of our learners to promote the common good and be true contemplatives in action. Recognizing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization on individuals, communities, and societies, the Ignatian tradition calls for active engagement in addressing these injustices and working towards equitable environments that call for justice and decolonization. Praxis is the actionable and lived-in realization of that recognition, of the Jesuit Catholic mission towards finding God (or goodness) in all things.

1. **Praxis integrates** spirituality and learning through an ethic of care:
   a. Praxis involves a dynamic interaction between academic knowledge and religious or spiritual insights. Learners are encouraged to reflect on how their academic studies relate to their values, ethics, and beliefs, and how to search for God (or “goodness”) in all things. To employ praxis is to practice *cura personalis* through steady reflection. *Cura personalis*, meaning “care for the whole person,” emphasizes the holistic development of individuals, recognizing their intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. It involves fostering a supportive and
inclusive environment that respects the dignity and uniqueness of each person, considering how learning environments properly prepare, care for, and promote equity for our learners.

2. **Praxis diversifies and creates** a more inclusive curriculum:
   a. To employ praxis is to strive for excellence. The Ignatian value of *magis* (Latin for "more" or "greater") calls individuals to constantly push toward excellence and to go beyond the ordinary (the traditional, the status quo) in their pursuits and to seek the greater good, striving for excellence. Praxis in Jesuit education encourages students to not only acquire knowledge but to use that knowledge to make a positive impact on the world, whether through social justice initiatives, research, community engagement, or professional excellence. A magis-oriented praxis emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement, personal growth, rigor, and making a positive impact in the world.

3. **Praxis promotes** service and social justice:
   a. Social justice and a commitment to service are fundamental aspects of Jesuit education. Praxis in this context often involves service-learning experiences, where students apply their academic knowledge to address real-world social issues. This hands-on engagement encourages students to reflect on the social implications of their studies.

4. **Praxis investigates and deconstructs** negative or harmful traditions and biases:
   a. To employ praxis is to lead with the Ignatian value of *agere contra*, meaning to “go against” those practices of tradition that would disallow our growth, prevent our aspirations toward equity, and lead us away from the active presence of goodness (or what some may call, God) in the world and toward desolation (doubt, fear, misplaced anger). This deconstruction involves reflecting upon, questioning, and challenging the negative traditions in existing educational materials as well as questioning and challenging the veracity of these materials, to strive for truth and clarity of purpose.

5. **Praxis mandates** reflection and discernment:
   a. To employ praxis is to continually practice the Ignatian values of *reflection and discernment*. Discernment is the process of seeking and listening to the will of goodness (or what some may call, “God's will”) in decision-making and life choices. It involves reflection, deep thought, and careful consideration of one’s values and beliefs to make choices aligned with personal and ethical integrity. The function of praxis is naturally enveloped into the process of decolonization, which like the Ignatian value of being *contemplatives in action*, encourages individuals to reflect deeply, seek spiritual discernment, and develop a sense of purpose and meaning, while also engaging actively in social justice, the global community, and the pursuit of the common good. This process helps learners make meaning of their experiences and integrate their learning into every aspect of their lives.

6. **Praxis provides** learners with equitable access and opportunities:
   a. Praxis emphasizes the necessity of global and interdisciplinary perspectives. Jesuit institutions naturally promote the practice of practice the Ignatian directive of being people for others. This value underscores the importance of being individuals who are committed to serving others and working for the betterment of society. Praxis involves collaborative efforts that cross academic disciplines and cultural boundaries, reflecting the interconnected nature of modern global challenges. It emphasizes social justice, solidarity with marginalized and oppressed communities, and promotes a more just and equitable world. By being people for others, we employ praxis in striving to address systemic barriers that limit access to quality education for marginalized communities, moving our hearts toward a global solidarity. Praxis.

7. **Praxis prepares** for our learners to “go forth and set the world on fire”:
   a. A pedagogy centered around praxis provides our learners with the proper tools, preparation, leadership, and energy to go out into the world and reflect the heart of this time-old adage. Through its emphasis on reflection, contemplation, discernment, and service, praxis leads us toward the search for goodness, beauty, truth or harmony (or what some may call, “God”) in all things, encouraging individuals to cultivate a sense of openness and awareness of the divine
and theoretical in all aspects of life. Encouraging praxis prepares us and our learners to recognize good in everyday experiences, in relationships, in nature, and in intellectual pursuits, opening ourselves and our worlds to more empathy and action on behalf of the marginalized.

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