



2-2016

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Recommended Citation

Schuck, Michael. The Jesuit Difference in International Education: Two Projects That Teach a Lot. *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, 49, : 23-24, 2016. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Theology: Faculty Publications and Other Works,

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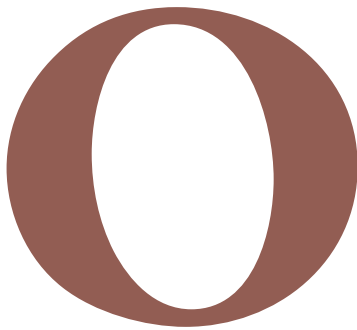


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The Jesuit Difference in International Education

Two Projects That Teach a Lot

By Michael J. Schuck



Over the past five years, I have had the extraordinary pleasure of working on two educational projects that were unique collaborations between scholars and students from Jesuit institutions of higher education and secondary schools world-

wide. The first project was the *Democracy, Culture and Catholicism International Research Project* (DCCIRP) and the second is the *International Jesuit Ecology Project* (IJEP). I will briefly describe both projects, identify some of their practical impacts, and then suggest features of the Jesuit difference that ventures such as these bring to the field of international education.

The Democracy, Culture and Catholicism International Research Project

The Democracy Project began in 2010 with the goal of producing scholarly research in Catholic Studies that would explore the relationship between democracy, culture, and Catholicism. The impetus for this topic came from the growing global attention to democracy incited by the international Occupy Movement and the rising Arab Spring.

The Democracy Project home base was Loyola University Chicago's Joan and Bill Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage. From there, relationships were forged with scholars at various Jesuit-sponsored universities: the Universitas Sanata Dharma in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, the Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya in Lima, Peru, and the formerly-Jesuit Vilnius University in Vilnius, Lithuania. Project participants from

these diverse cultures provided rich comparisons and contrasts on the shared question of how democracy, culture, and Catholicism relate in the modern world.

The principal outcome of this three-year collaborative research project is an edited volume of DCCIRP research papers entitled *Democracy, Culture, Catholicism: Voices from Four Continents* (Fordham University Press, 2015).

The International Jesuit Ecology Project

The Ecology Project (IJEP) originated in 2012 out of a desire to produce a 'living' electronic textbook in environmental science that would integrate ethical analysis, spiritual reflection, and a call to action. Titled *Healing Earth*, this interactive electronic textbook is designed for beginning college students, upper level secondary school students, and adult learners.

Like the Democracy project, IJEP began with a small group of Loyola Chicago science and humanities faculty dedicated to developing an integral approach to environmental science – an approach that would emphasize not only the connection between environmental science, ethics, spirituality, and action but also the intimate link between natural and human ecology. Since its inception, the Ecology Project has grown to a production team of over 95 people from more than 35 Jesuit institutions of

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higher education, secondary schools, and social apostolates around the world.

Now in its final stages of completion, the *Healing Earth* textbook is being piloted in select universities and secondary schools before its public launch in. Anyone can visit the HE drafting site at www.healingearth.ijep.net (and join the Healing Earth team!). A more detailed description of the project is at the IJEP website www.luc.edu/ijep. Current project news can be found at the IJEP Facebook page www.facebook.com/IJEPHealingEarth?ref=profile.

DCCIRP and IJEP Impacts

It is too soon to judge the teaching and research impact of the published Democracy Project volume. Likewise, any evaluation of IJEP's *Healing Earth* textbook lies months ahead.

Yet, the processes that created these projects have already registered positive effects. Both undertakings have formed new relationships between scholars at Jesuit institutions around the world and have prompted fresh international research. Today, several former scholars of the original Democracy and Catholicism project are exploring research topics (and career paths) that earlier they would never have imagined undertaking. Similarly, many of the natural scientists and humanities scholars working on the Ecology Project are trading interdisciplinary perspectives on the environment that would have otherwise never been shared.

Undergraduate and graduate student workers on both projects have likewise benefitted. Many of today's university students find the academy's traditional disciplinary boundaries – and too-often monocultural discussions – uninspiring. Both of these ventures have modeled the kind of multicultural, interdisciplinary, and interfaith conversations that engage and excite students.

The Jesuit Difference in International Education

There are several characteristics of these initiatives that suggest a “Jesuit difference” in the field of international education. I will briefly discuss three: global presence, vertical connection, and mission habitus.

As is well-known, no organization in the world supports more educational institutions at both the university and secondary school levels than the Society of Jesus. The global presence of Jesuit education is astonishing. Schools of varying types operate in nearly all of the 195 nation states that constitute our geo-political world. No one knows how many distinct human cultures exist within and between these political borders. Some anthropologists esti-

mate that the number is in the thousands. If any organization is capable of creating educational dialogue between these human cultures on a global scale, it is the Society of Jesus. Both the Democracy Project and IJEP are examples of how the unmatched global presence of the Society of Jesus puts multicultural contacts and resources at the fingertips of scholars working at Jesuit institutions around the world. This is a “Jesuit difference” – and one that begs for greater realization.

In the process of creating *Healing Earth*, university-level scientists have often been humbled by the scientific knowledge and teaching skills of Jesuit secondary school science faculty with whom they are collaborating. At the same time, both groups of educators have been enlightened by HE participants who are not working in schools but are pursuing social apostolates that put them in direct contact with people suffering most acutely from today's environmental crises. These experiences demonstrate another Jesuit difference: vertical connection. Other than the Catholic Church as a whole, no organization in the world can match the Society of Jesus in the number of such vertical links between people working in the direct service for social justice, in the educational formation of youth, and in scholarly research. These links draw together community organizing, data collection, theoretical analysis, and social communication. As with the Jesuits' global presence, the vertical connection between people working in Jesuit-sponsored organizations is a resource still waiting to be adequately coordinated and utilized.

It is a profound joy to work on collaborative projects with people from different cultures. This experience is brought to an even greater depth of satisfaction when participants share a mission habitus. By this I mean, diverse people from around the world sharing life goals framed in the Ignatian language of *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam, cura personalis*, finding God in all things, the *magis*, being men and women for others, pursuing the service of faith and the promotion of justice, and educating the whole person. The driving energy of these initiatives has been people with a disposition, a demeanor – or, as Aristotle put it, a habitus – formed by life lived in communities and educational institutions animated by these guiding insights. Happily, this is not a Jesuit difference waiting for realization. People can be found in every Jesuit institution who share this mission habitus.

Global presence, vertical connection, and mission habitus are three features of the Jesuit difference in international education that were evident in these two international projects. Not all of these characteristics have reached their full potential for international education. Were they to do so, Jesuit schools would take a leadership position in global education, not unlike the position they once held in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The possibility is there. ■