

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 46

Article 20

September 2014

Inside-Out

Kathleen Shull

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Shull, Kathleen (2014) "Inside-Out," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 46, Article 20.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol46/iss1/20>

Magis Catholic Teacher Corps at Red Cloud Indian School

Transformed and Strengthened in Faith

By John Roselle, S.J.

Over a century ago, Chief Red Cloud requested aid from the “Black Robes” to teach his people, the Oglala Lakota, on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. Jesuits have worked there ever since. Lakota youth continue to study at a school that bears the great chief’s name. Though many on the reservation struggle with substance abuse and other difficulties, Red Cloud Indian School is committed to bringing hope to its students in a Lakota-Catholic environment.

Creighton University has formed several ties with Red Cloud Indian School. The Jesuits’ Wisconsin Province includes both apostolates, though over 300 miles separate them. Creighton is the alma mater of some of the many Gates Millennium Scholars that Red Cloud has produced. Creighton is also the home of the Magis Catholic Teacher Corps, which forms recent college graduates into skilled teachers. They spend two years living in community while teaching full-time and earning a master’s degree in education.

During the school year, they take online education courses; in the summer, their intensive courses are on campus.

In 2007 Magis sent two teachers to live and work with the already existing Red Cloud Volunteer Corps. Sixteen more have followed, including eight there now. Besides teaching, they drive school busses, coach, and fill multiple other roles. Volunteers labor alongside Jesuits and lay collaborators as they seek the holistic development of Lakota youth.

Colleen (Keller) Chiacchere taught at Red Cloud years before Magis arrived there; she now serves as the assistant director of Magis. Colleen describes how “the Magis-Red Cloud partnership has strengthened the professionalism of the Red Cloud volunteer program and provided Red Cloud Indian School with new, talented, mission-oriented, trained, certified teachers” at varied grade levels on two campuses. The experience benefits the volunteers deeply; Colleen believes that “our Magis teachers leave Red Cloud transformed and strengthened in their faith and

part of the loving and welcoming community of Red Cloud.”

The Magis experience at Red Cloud is a privileged opportunity to befriend the Lakota people and encounter the beauty of their living tradition by attending pow-wows, sweat lodges, and other events. Jeff Dorr, a former Magis teacher and now a Jesuit scholastic, expresses that those who participate in Magis at Red Cloud “encounter a new culture and in many ways a new world. Amidst this encounter they are offered a unique opportunity to explore their own identities particularly in terms of what it means to be Catholic educators.”

Although Magis has a minimum commitment of two years at Red Cloud, volunteers’ generosity has extended farther. Some have continued there or have come back later to teach. Anne Grass, who completed Magis there in 2009, now coordinates over 20 teachers through the Red Cloud Volunteer Program. Besides Jeff Dorr, another Magis teacher (your author) has also joined the Jesuits. Since 2010, Magis has also sent seven teachers to work

with students from the Omaha and Winnebago tribes on the St. Augustine Indian Mission in northeastern Nebraska.

Colleen explains that “Magis Catholic Teacher Corps is one of the only University Consortium for Catholic Education programs [service through teaching] that serve on American Indian reservations, so many of our applicants seek out Magis Catholic Teacher Corps for that reason.” Magis teachers at Red Cloud do face certain daunting prospects. Students often bring immense family and social pain to the classroom, and dysfunctions (usually related to alcohol) can distract students from academics.

Chief Red Cloud remains buried alongside his Black Robes atop a hill that overlooks the residences of the Magis teachers and other volunteers. The Magis Catholic Teacher Corps at Red Cloud Indian School is an important chapter in the partnership between the Oglala Lakota and the Wisconsin Province Jesuits via Creighton University. Chief Red Cloud would be pleased.

(For more on the Magis Catholic Teacher Corps at Creighton University, visit creighton.edu/magis)

John Roselle, S.J., from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, attended Creighton University as an undergraduate and returned there for the Magis Catholic Teacher Corps program. He now teaches at Marquette University High School in Milwaukee.

Inside-Out

By Kathleen Shull

Most students of the Inside-Out courses at Saint Joseph’s University have anecdotes of revelation of heart-felt thoughts about their time in the class. If lucky enough to make it through the applications and interview process just to be able to register for the course, they are even luckier by the time they end their 14-week experience. Eyes have been

opened, prejudices demolished, and empathy nourished.

There are two different Inside-Out courses taught at Saint Joseph’s: “Exploring Crime and Justice Behind the Walls” with Susan Clampet-Lundquist, Ph. D., a sociology professor, and “Dimensions of Freedom” with Thomas J. Brennan, S.J., and Elizabeth A. Linehan, R.S.M., Ph.D., English and philosophy professors,

respectively. For each course, 15 students from the university, the “outside” students, travel to a jail or a prison in the Philadelphia area for a three-hour class once a week with 15 incarcerated students, the “inside” students. One benefit of these classes is the relationship formed between inside and outside students. While communication is prohibited except during class, the topics

discussed, the required course material, and handing in written reflections are emotional and usually bring up personal experiences.

As a former student of Clampet-Lundquist's, I remember how classes were taught in circle, with the concepts of "peace-making circles" at the center of the class proceedings, which include a talking stick to ensure respect and turn-taking. Students sit in alternating seats allowing them to easily interact with those who are different from them. In reality, as all the students soon realize, the people sitting side by side have a

great deal in common. Outside students see how easily they could have in the past or could in the future end up in the inside students' seats.

Universities tend to be places of privilege, including race, socio-economic status, education, gender, age, and any number of other factors. Inside-Out classes give university students the unique opportunity to assess their own privilege and the impact of that privilege on the course of their lives. This ongoing assessment throughout the 14-week course and presumably through the rest of their lives allows stu-

dents to become self-aware and understanding of those who seem different.

One day of class is dedicated to a facility tour for the outside students. That day, the students do not meet together but separately. The inner tension and anxiety experienced by the students as they walk through the facility is palpable. In later reflections, students explain their disgust and sadness as they walked through the various "blocks" as if on tour at a zoo. Even the heavy doors closing and opening, enclosing the students in various spaces, created bodily reac-

tions and the feeling of being closed in. Nobody could imagine living in such a place.

Once the fear, skepticism, and awkwardness are defeated, empathy flows through the circle. By the time closing ceremonies arrive, all the students are fighting back tears and wishing they could hug each other tight without breaking prison regulations.

Kathleen Shull is a 2014 graduate of Saint Joseph's University; while a student there she worked in the office of media technology and was a peer educator and a resident assistant.

Animating the Mission in the First-Year Incentive Program

By John Kerrigan

Each fall, Rockhurst University provisionally admits 25 to 35 students into its First-Year Incentive Program (FIP). At a tuition-driven institution like ours, in which enrollment is crucial, this small set of students is invited to participate in FIP based on substantive evidence of their ability to succeed, even if they do not meet the university's full admissions criteria. Once accepted, the students are offered additional support to assist them in succeeding at the university. Selected faculty and staff work together to offer a comprehensive support network that integrates advising, teaching, and tutoring. Though I strive to reflect on the Jesuit mission in each course I offer, teaching composition has afforded particularly rich opportunities to engage with our Jesuit mission.

My initial decision to teach FIP courses stirred some anxi-

eties about the possibly "remedial" nature of such teaching and about the ethics and efficacy of offering a separate section of a course populated exclusively with provisionally admitted students. Having taught in FIP now for four consecutive fall semesters, I still occasionally find myself wrestling with such concerns, but I now see a bigger picture: the First-Year Incentive Program opens access to Jesuit education for many students – first generation college students from a diverse array of backgrounds – who would not otherwise be able to participate, much less to thrive, in it.

In my writing courses, I seek to help students reflect on values that have roots in Ignatian pedagogy and spirituality yet are vital to their success as college students in a Jesuit context. In a writing course framed by various readings on the theme of "success,"

students are introduced to and prompted to think about past experiences with learned helplessness. Developing self-awareness about how to combat affective challenges (in writing and in other situations) may help them succeed in college. Thinking about implications of learned helplessness as a challenge of contemporary culture subsequently helps them (as it would help anyone) to reframe how they think about success, to open them to a wider world in which empathy and possibility-seeking are vital.

My English colleagues and I have come to understand that reflection is the cornerstone of effective Ignatian pedagogy. Students learn most when teachers construct conditions which prompt reflection on one's life and its intersection with concerns of the wider world. In a Jesuit context, such reflection is a habit best nurtured by academic hospitality:

an environment characterized by radical openness – in the classroom, a willingness to listen, to learn, to make mistakes (See Bennett/Dreyer in *The Jesuit Education Reader*).

Indeed, a hallmark of Rockhurst's First-Year Incentive Program has been its capacity to allow us to aspire so significantly toward the ideal of *cura personalis*: with class sizes of 12-16 students and with linked, upper-class, trained writing tutors who attend every class with the students, faculty are able to offer a personalized pedagogy and maintain rigorous expectations within an academic environment of significant and interconnected supportiveness.

As we seek to animate the mission in those we teach, let us not overlook the local and mundane: how we perceive our students and our work with them, as the gifts they are, and how they perceive themselves as writers and people is subtly, crucially mission work.

John Kerrigan, associate professor of English and chair of the humanities division at Rockhurst University, participated in Cohort Five of the Ignatian Colleagues Program from 2012 to 2014.