

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 15

Article 10

4-1-1999

Taproots: The Ratio Studium at 400

Paul Shore

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

Recommended Citation

Shore, Paul (1999) "Taproots: The Ratio Studium at 400," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 15, Article 10.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol15/iss1/10>

2. Prelection of a Poet.

a) After giving a clear and somewhat full theme of the poem, take a verse and, preserving and of syntax, state its meaning in different words. It will be necessary to do this twice in order to render the student able to trace in verse the fortunes of war.

The Ratio Studiorum at 400

PAUL SHORE

This year marks the four hundredth anniversary of the *Ratio Studiorum*, the foundational document of Jesuit education. Developed in the Renaissance, and derived from the experience of Ignatius and his closest followers, the *Ratio* outlined a curriculum that began with a "school of languages" and progressed to the higher levels of philosophy, literature, and theology. It was so widely admired that even Protestant opponents of the Jesuits imitated it freely, and elements of its curriculum influenced schools throughout the world for centuries.

Yet the *Ratio* was far more than a curriculum guide or managerial handbook. Its tremendous influence on the development of education can be attributed to both the organization it provided to the hundreds of schools that the Jesuits established worldwide, and to the vision of the teacher embedded in the document. In an era when the typical schoolmaster was often a feared tyrant or an untrained novice, the Jesuit instructor described in the *Ratio* was committed to motivating students in positive ways, and appreciating their individual characteristics. He was to be informative, articulate, and flexible, encouraging classroom competition while emphasizing social courtesy. There was even a provision, unheard of in its day, for students to provide "feedback" to their teachers after their lectures!

Some elements of the *Ratio* remind us of the distance between ourselves and an age long past. Students were enjoined not to attend public executions. Swords were banned from class. Mastery of the classical languages and of Hebrew—a goal many of us still strive for and admire—was central to the educational scheme. But many of the core values outlined in the *Ratio* are still directly relevant to the concerns of today's educators. There is, of course, a great value placed on the development of the "whole student," especially on his spiritual growth. The document's emphasis on unity of procedure was intended to ensure standards of educational quality adaptable to widely differing locations and greatly varying circumstances. The *Ratio*, moreover, required great skill from the instructor, who had to go beyond merely lecturing on topics, and offer deeper analysis. Jesuit schools operating under the *Ratio* placed an emphasis on critical reading and on understanding and wielding the persuasive power of language. The notion of a conceptually unified

Paul Shore is associate professor of educational studies at Saint Louis University. He is co-author, with Paul Reinert, S.J., of *Seasons of Change: Reflections on Half a Century at Saint Louis University*.

T A P R O O T S

curriculum, central to the *Ratio*, is likewise echoed in our present day debates about the unity of the undergraduate core curriculum. One element that seems especially foreign to those of us steeped in late twentieth-century ideas of academic freedom was the censorship imposed on teachers and students alike. Yet this censorship must be balanced against the basically optimistic and positive view of human experience which the Jesuits who implemented the *Ratio* sought to impart to their students.

Saint Louis University is planning to mark the anniversary of the *Ratio* with a series of events designed to speak to all segments of the university community and other interested parties. In the coming months

seminars, conversations, and brown-bag lunches will be held where members of the community can come and participate in discussions on various aspects of the heritage of the *Ratio*. The University is also inviting internationally recognized authorities on Jesuit education to speak at celebrations concluding the anniversary year.

The *Ratio Studiorum* may be considered a product of its time, a response to the educational needs which the first few generations of Jesuits saw around them. But it is much more than that. It is a point of departure for an examination of our identity as teachers and educational leaders in the next millennium. The celebration of its anniversary provides a valuable opportunity to continue that examination.

Jesuit Education 21

Conference on The Future of Jesuit Higher Education

WHAT IS THIS?

Jesuit Education 21 (JE21) is a five-day, dynamically interactive conference to address a variety of issues critical to the vitality of the Jesuit tradition and vision for education in the coming decades.



WHO ARE INVITED?

All persons, Jesuit and lay, involved in Jesuit higher education.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

JE21 hopes to spark a series of detailed conversations first broached by Loyola Press' new book, *Promise Renewed: Jesuit Higher Education for a New Millennium*. The conversation will include everyone from more than 70 leading experts and discussants on a wide array of topics, to people grappling daily with these issues in America's Jesuit colleges and universities.

SAINT JOSEPH'S

PHILADELPHIA'S
JESUIT UNIVERSITY

WHAT ARE THE TOPICS?

Too many to list here, JE21 will examine broad topics such as Jesuit education and social justice, secularization, popular culture, spirituality and campus life, as well as more detailed subjects including Jesuit higher education and the role of business and economics, administration, theology and philosophy.

WHEN AND WHERE IS IT?

Friday, June 25TH through Tuesday, June 29TH, 1999
Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Registration by April 30TH \$50
Registration by May 21ST \$65
REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS MAY 21ST 1999
Campus accommodations \$25 per night

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

To receive a full brochure and registration packet, visit the conference website at www.sju.edu/JHE21 or leave your full name, mailing address, e-mail address and phone number in the conference voice mail box at 610-660-3381.



