

The meaning of the 'Fighting Spirit' and 'Competitiveness' at Wah Yan

Summary

We recognize the undeniable need to prepare our students to work in a competitive world. But what does it mean to be 'competitive' with a 'fighting spirit' that stems from the core values of Jesuit education? We need to bring forth and celebrate our God-given potentials in the spirit of generosity (*Magis*). Therefore, winning is not the prime nor only concern. The attitude that should be upheld in competition is that of 'honour' so as to cultivate our character. We are to be formed into good team players in a competitive world. Our opponents are not our enemies but partners propelling us to greater excellence. Hence, confidence, courage, generosity and a healthy sense of humility are to be nurtured in us. In order to foster these desirable qualities of attitude in us, we must reflect on our experience both individually and collectively, whether it is a success or failure. For no growth is possible without reflection. Finally, we must learn to address a balance between diversity and focus, especially for our senior students, which is a necessity for their life after graduation.

Jesuit Education upholds the spirit of Men for and with Others; to serve others, Wahyanites have to first develop their character and capabilities. That is why we aim to help our students become intellectually competent, loving as a personal orientation, open to life-long growth, religious and moral, and committed to acting on justice. While these are our overarching goals, our education sector as well as the world as a whole have become ever more competitive. This paper is an attempt to conceptualize 'competition' and the 'fighting spirit' in the context of Jesuit Education at Wah Yan.

Bringing forth and celebrating our God-given potentials

The essence is "Magis". We hope that our Ignatian educators and our students can learn to be generous to God and others, cultivate a passion to always do more and/or do better. To be generous means to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for reward.

In the spirit of generosity, we strive for excellence and better ourselves continuously through challenges and competitions. We must learn to give our one hundred per cent and keep improving with our 'fighting spirit'. If we win, we celebrate without being arrogant; if we lose, we won't lose heart. Instead, we reflect on our success as well as defeat, train harder with greater stamina, learn more effectively and come back stronger. We are not afraid of failure; overwhelmed or overindulged by victory, as we know no matter whether we win or lose, the most important objective is that we can learn by reflecting on the process, identify,

celebrate and excel with our God-given potentials. As what T.S. Eliot has said: *“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.”* As long as we have given our best, kept improving, even if we lose, we are still the winners of life. Live life with passion, live life with Magis and our life will be bountiful.

The bigger picture – Honour

While it is important that we put in our best efforts to win, we should never forget that there is actually a higher and grander “game” – how we conduct ourselves (in particular in relation to others) as we strive to win. This is a reflection of our very character. In other words, competitions are more than winning; we should focus on self-improvement instead of treading on our opponents. We also uphold fair play both in terms of the rules and the spirit behind. Winning in a game in a dishonorable manner is worse than defeat.

“Bring me my chariot of fire,” as said by William Blake. We compete for the glory of God. God has made us for a purpose. If we live life with a purpose, we can feel His pleasure. We should feel divinely inspired when we compete, and we use our God-given potentials to honour God.

Our opponents are our partners

While we try to defeat our opponents in a competition, we do not treat them as our enemies. This does not mean we should fight less hard in a competition. In fact, trying our best to win in a competition is a sign of respect towards our opponents. What is more, by challenging them and pushing them to perform their best, we are actually working as partners to bring out each other’s God-given potentials. We not only improve ourselves, but also help our peers improve. This is especially true with team sports. We learn to cultivate trust, respect, self-sacrifice, collaboration, support and unite in our relationships with teammates. The ‘fighting spirit’ unites us, cultivates comradeship and brotherhood, and forms us into a community, supporting one another and leading to a higher game with no losers. For example, it should be most encouraging seeing the Ignatian educators and students of both Wah Yan Hong Kong and Kowloon compete, co-operate and collaborate in teams so that they can learn from one another and get to a higher level together. We want our students to see and believe themselves are generous, passionate, reflective, and competitive based on the core values of Jesuit education.

True humility and courage

Sometimes, we are lacking self-confidence. We may be too humble. However, we should know that humility is not thinking less of ourselves; it is thinking of ourselves less. As Ignatian educators, we need to give back our colleagues and students the confidence they deserve. Help each other believe we can! In particular, we help nurture high-flyers and heroes so that our younger brothers can have someone to look up to. The heroes are there not for their vainglory but to serve as models to inspire the others and start the snowball rolling.

Another reason for insufficient self-confidence may be the lack of courage to face the intensity of competition as well the consequences of defeat. Here we could show the ones who are struggling that we care about, support and love them unconditionally so they need not feel scared in the face of competition. We recognize their achievement, no matter how small it is, and celebrate with them. We also remind them that the unpleasant experience associated with the intensity of competition or of defeat is valuable both as a deep personal feeling that enriches our lives as well as an excellent preparation for many more (and much greater) competitions to come.

In this way, we get each other ready for bigger challenges through empowerment. Through our passion and reflective process, we will be ready for the next level of excellence. And through empowerment, our students will have the courage to take educated risks so as to celebrate their God-given gifts at a higher level.

At the same time, there is also a lesson of humility for the strong, the high-flyers and the “heroes” as well. As a start, they should learn to be grateful for all who have contributed generously to their successes. In fact, the innate talents they possess are God-given and are not due to them themselves. The implication of this appreciation is that any success that they enjoy would also entail the responsibility of contributing to the success of others, such as helping the weak or those who come behind them. If we can share our experience with others, we can enrich their lives as they can enrich ours, helping one another to live a more beautiful life.

Experience and Reflection

“There is no growth without reflection” and experience is one important

source of substance upon which one could reflect. In this regard, competitions provide rich experiences to support students' growth through reflections. To make this possible, it is very important that students avoid the narrow focus on winning and instead be given the chance and guidance to stand back and reflect after competitions.

There are different levels of reflections as regards competitions through Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm. They could certainly reflect on their failures as well as successes and consider how they might improve and further develop their potentials. As they encounter different approaches to competitions among peers within and outside of their schools, they could also learn to discern among conflicting values/spirits for what is the most desirable. They could even reflect on the systems, the popular beliefs and attitudes, as well as the values and limitations of competitions in the world around them. Starting with their actual and personal experiences of competition, there is arguably boundless room for ongoing reflections as students grow and mature through life.

Diversity vs. focus – practical concerns

Sometimes, our students, especially the senior form students, have to face many choices, and they end up losing focus. We have to accept the ultimate limitations of our students' physical and mental strengths so we may need to guide them to concentrate on their study and on one or two activities at maximum so that they can have better focus and sense of commitment. It may be fine for lower form students to be exposed to a greater variety of sports, music and ECA as they explore their potentials. However, there comes a time in their six years at Wah Yan when we need to encourage our students to stay focused, aim for the challenging but reachable goals, be 'competitive' and strive for excellence.

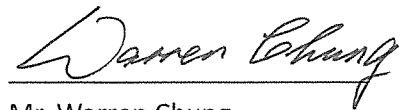
With higher 'fighting spirit', a better sense of achievement with an enhanced spirit of Magis and generosity, thus 'competitiveness', sufficient freedom and more supportive teacher-student relationship, our students will have a stronger sense of belonging. Our students will love their school more, they will stay behind at school longer afterschool, they will learn better, train harder, and most importantly, they will be proud of being Wahyanites and learn to live out the spirit of Men for and with Others.

Prayer for Generosity (St. Ignatius of Loyola)

*Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing that I do your will.*



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