


Rodolfo Abello Rosas and Javier Omar Sánchez Soledad
presidencia@acodesi.org.co | *a.pedagogico@jesuitas.org.co*

THE PRACTICE OF SYNODALITY IN JESUIT EDUCATION
LESSONS FROM COLOMBIA

Pax Lumina 7(6)/2026/58-62



Through synodal dialogue, schools were able to recognise both their diversity and their shared aspirations. **Educational institutions openly shared their strengths, challenges and concerns without fear of judgement. Truth emerged not as the triumph of one perspective over another, but as a collective recognition of reality.**

Reconciliation lies at the heart of the apostolic mission of the Society of Jesus, while synodality is intrinsic to its way of proceeding. Although these concepts are often discussed in ecclesial contexts, they also provide a valuable framework for understanding processes of institutional renewal within Jesuit educational networks. The recent experience of the Association of Jesuit Schools of Colombia (ACODESI) illustrates how a synodal process can become a concrete path towards reconciliation, fostering a renewed experience of mission, communion and shared purpose.

Synodality is understood as 'walking together'. The International Theological Commission (2018) defines it as a constitutive dimension of the Church, expressed through participation, communion and shared discernment. For Pope Francis (2021), synodality represents the path that God expects the Church to follow in the third millennium, grounded in listening, encounter and co-responsibility. Guided by these same principles, educational communities seek to embrace diversity without losing sight of their fidelity to a common mission.

For nearly three decades, ACODESI's educational proposal provided a shared framework centred on the integral development of the person through eight dimensions: ethical, spiritual, cognitive, affective, communicative, aesthetic, physical and socio-political (ACODESI, 2016). This vision inspired generations of educators and students, contributing significantly to the identity of Jesuit schools in Colombia. Yet educational realities continued to evolve. New pedagogical models, innovative methodologies



and context-specific responses emerged within individual institutions, gradually leading to diverse approaches to embodying the educational mission.

This diversity became both a strength and a challenge. While innovation enriched educational practice, it also gave rise to fundamental questions about cohesion and shared identity. How could institutional creativity be preserved while strengthening a common vision? How could schools move beyond their particular realities to discern a collective future? The answer emerged through a profoundly synodal process, inspired by recent cycles of discernment on Jesuit secondary and pre-secondary education, the intentions of the provincials, and the call for renewal expressed in Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century (ICAJE, 2020).



Over the course of nearly three years, educators, school leaders, pastoral teams, students, and families participated in an extensive process of consultation and discernment inspired by Ignatian spirituality. This process drew on methodologies such as spiritual conversation, communal discernment, participatory dialogue, and active listening. The goal was not merely to produce a new educational document, but to build together a renewed understanding of the mission entrusted to Jesuit education.

From an Ignatian perspective, this way of proceeding reflects the conviction that truth emerges through attentive listening to experience and through discernment of the Spirit's action within the community (San Ignacio, 2014). Synodality thus became more than an organisational consultation; it became a way of proceeding.

Three dimensions of synodality became particularly evident. The first was shared mission. Despite differences in pedagogical approaches, all schools remained committed to the Jesuit ideal of forming persons who are conscious, competent, compassionate, and committed (Secretariado de Educación Compañía de Jesús, 2015). This shared horizon provided the foundation upon which dialogue could flourish.

The second was participation. Synodality demanded much more than representation; it required active listening and recognition that every voice contributes to the construction of collective discernment. Teachers, administrators, students, and families ceased to be passive recipients of institutional decisions and became protagonists in the process.

The third was communion. Communion did not simply exist as a starting point; rather, it emerged progressively as the fruit of encounter and dialogue. As participants learned to listen deeply to one another, mutual trust grew and relationships were strengthened.

It is precisely here that the connection between synodality and reconciliation becomes most visible. Reconciliation is often understood as conflict resolution, yet within the Jesuit educational tradition, it carries a much deeper and more communal meaning (Abello Rosas & Sánchez Soledad, 2025). The 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus described Jesuits and their collaborators as companions in a mission of reconciliation with God, with one another and with creation (Society of Jesus, 2016). Reconciliation is, therefore, not merely an outcome; it is a transformative process that restores relationships and creates new possibilities for life together.

The ACODESI experience confirms that reconciliation is one of the deepest fruits of synodality. **Walking together creates the conditions through which truth can be spoken, forgiveness can be offered and healing can take place.**



The ACODESI experience suggests that reconciliation unfolds through three interconnected movements: truth, forgiveness and healing. The first movement is truth. Through synodal dialogue, schools were able to recognise both their diversity and their shared aspirations. Educational institutions openly shared their strengths, challenges and concerns without fear of judgement. Truth emerged not as the triumph of one perspective over another, but as a collective recognition of reality.

The second movement is forgiveness. In institutional life, forgiveness is often expressed as the capacity to overcome mistrust, competition or excessive attachment to particular interests. As participants listened to one another, they became increasingly willing to let go of rigid positions and embrace a broader horizon. Forgiveness generated the freedom necessary for collaboration.

The third movement is healing. Healing occurred when the network rediscovered its identity as a genuine educational community. Schools maintained their distinctive characteristics while recognising that they belonged to a reality greater than themselves. The process strengthened both the sense of belonging and the shared responsibility for the mission of reconciliation and justice.

One of the most significant fruits of this journey was the development of a framework of Ignatian capacities that reimagines integral formation around the flourishing of persons-in-relationship (ACODESI, 2026). This perspective resonates with contemporary capability approaches, which understand human development as the result of relational, social and cultural conditions rather than solely individual achievement (Nussbaum, 2012). It also echoes the vision articulated in Fratelli Tutti, in which Pope Francis reminds us that authentic human development emerges from encounter, fraternity and the construction of a 'we' capable of integrating differences (Papa Francisco, 2020).

The ACODESI experience confirms that reconciliation is one of the deepest fruits of synodality. Walking together creates the conditions through which truth can be spoken, forgiveness can be offered and healing can take place. In educational institutions, as in the Church, synodality makes it possible to move from fragmentation (Abello Rosas & Sánchez Soledad, 2025) towards a renewed experience of communion. Reconciliation is ultimately the discovery that our future depends not on isolated achievements but on our ability to become a community united by a shared mission, sustained by hope and committed to the common good.

Rodolfo Abello Rosas, SJ, is the President of the Association of Jesuit Schools of Colombia (ACODESI) and the Education Assistant of the Jesuit Province of Colombia. His work focuses on Jesuit education, leadership, and institutional development.

Javier Omar Sánchez Soledad is a doctoral candidate in Philosophy at the Pontifical Javeriana University and serves as a Pedagogical Assistant of the Jesuit Province of Colombia. His areas of research include Ignatian pedagogy, educational innovation, synodality, and reconciliation.

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