

# Beyond the Spoon-Feeding Classroom

## A Jesuit Priest's Use of Outings as Holistic Education

By Michael Tsang and Daniel Fung

*What was it about Fr. Naylor's teaching that made him so well loved by thousands of alumni?*



Fr. Harold Naylor in his classroom.  
Source: Illustration from a screen capture of the YouTube video *Hong Kong Connection: Forever 14* (1993) at <https://tinyurl.com/yy9eufnl>.

When Reverend Father Harold Naylor (1931–2018), of the Society of Jesus, passed away in October 2018, his funeral mass attracted an attendance of 1,000 at Wah Yan College, Kowloon, in Hong Kong, where he had devoted more than four decades of his life. Many alumni, as well as friends, in the nearby parish took time off from work to bid him farewell. At least three local daily newspapers published coverage on the funeral mass, clearly an exceedingly rare phenomenon.

In 1993, Fr. Naylor had an earlier taste of “fame” when he was featured on a television program on local affairs called *Hong Kong Connection*, a very rare occurrence in Hong Kong television.<sup>1</sup> The episode introduced some of the main features of his pedagogy to the general public.

What was it about Fr. Naylor's teaching that made him so well loved by thousands of alumni? As former students of Fr. Naylor in 2001–2002, we wish to share some of his exemplary teaching practices in this article, particularly the use of outings, and wish to indicate how they are applicable to other educational settings in Asia and beyond.

Harold Naylor was born in Damascus in 1931 to Irish parents and, in 1951, at age twenty, became a Jesuit in Ireland. He moved to Asia in the 1960s and was ordained in 1965 as a priest at St. Ignatius Chapel in Wah Yan College, Kowloon—a boys' school founded in 1924, which came under Jesuit administration in the 1930s. In 1967, Fr. Naylor became a teacher of the school, teaching English and religious knowledge to Form Three students (equivalent to ninth-grade US students, aged fourteen to fifteen years old).

### **Outings as a Fusion of English and Ethics Education**

If asked, “What was the most memorable aspect of Fr. Naylor's teaching?” most of his students would name the weekly outing trips. For every group of Form Three students he taught each year, usually English and ethics, he requested three consecutive English lessons on an entire weekday afternoon so that he could usually take the whole class away from campus on an outing. These outings included, but were not limited to, hiking on nature trails or in parks, sitting in court rulings, visiting other schools, volunteering at elderly homes, attending public talks on current issues, touring government buildings in Hong Kong, and watching topical films. These being English lessons, students were to converse in English. Often on these outings, Fr. Naylor would invite guests, who might be fellow

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teachers or personal friends, and several students would be assigned to accompany them and interview them in English. On the aforementioned episode of *Hong Kong Connection*, for example, Fr. Naylor took his students on a hiking trip to the Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve in the New Territories of Hong Kong (a trip we also experienced when taught by Fr. Naylor, and which we remember fondly) and on an overnight stay on an outlying island of Hong Kong called Cheung Chau. He asked several students to interview the filming crew from the television station.

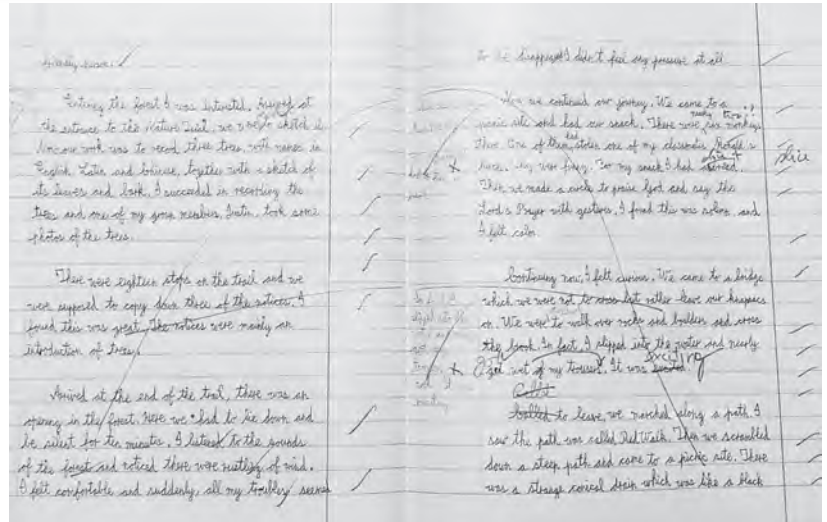


Figure 1. A student essay corrected by Fr. Naylor.  
Source: Photo courtesy of the authors.

On the day following an outing, each student was required to hand in a piece of English composition of 1,000 words—which was considered a daunting task for a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old Hong Kong student—and was asked to peer-mark another classmate's composition in class. Fr. Naylor would then collect the compositions and mark them himself, correcting mistakes that had not been picked up or places that were incorrectly marked wrong. As students, we felt delighted and encouraged to receive a big “A” drawn across a page of good writing (see Figure 1).

In his autobiography, Fr. Naylor states, “The outings are very important in [my] teaching,” chiefly because of two reasons.<sup>2</sup> The first has to do with his philosophy of teaching English. Fr. Naylor believed that the secret of teaching students to write mistake-free English was to have them speak about what they wrote. He also believed the topic must be broad enough to allow for students’ creativity and individual effort. Reflecting on his own school experience, he said, “I could never write at school, as I had nothing to write about,” so this innovative teacher came up with the idea of outings that would “give [the students] an experience, which they share in English with each other and then write about.”<sup>3</sup> In this sense, Fr. Naylor can be seen as a pioneer of teaching outside the classroom, and his outings enhanced both his students’ speaking and writing skills. Hoping that his students would learn from the mistakes of others, he also promoted student learning through peer-marking, instead of a top-down model relying on the teacher’s authority.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that the outings and the ensuing composition only complemented regular English classes.<sup>5</sup> For fourteen- or fifteen-year-olds, the outings were both exciting and daunting because of the challenge of composing a 1,000-word account



Fr. Harold Naylor's students contemplating the outdoors in the Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve. Source: Illustration from a screen capture of the YouTube video *Hong Kong Connection: Forever 14* (1993) at <https://tinyurl.com/yy9eufnl>.

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Fr. Harold Naylor and his students waving at and thanking the bus driver. Source: Illustration from a screen capture of the YouTube video *Hong Kong Connection: Forever 14* (1993) at <https://tinyurl.com/yy9eufnl>.

overnight. At that age, most Hong Kong students had never written as many as 1,000 words, even in their native Chinese language, let alone English, which was a second language. Even the English-composition paper in the now-discontinued Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination—a standardized public exam we used to take as seventeen-year-old Form Five (grade eleven) students, equivalent to Britain’s GCSE—only required 400 words. For sure, Fr. Naylor did not really make a word count of every piece of composition. The spirit of setting a 1,000-word limit was to stretch our writing abilities. Indeed, while most students, including us, struggled to produce a composition of that length at the start of the year, we were quite used to it by the end, having had to churn out one every week. Subsequently, in our remaining secondary school years, many of us breezed through English-writing exams, at least in terms of time management.

The outings were important to Fr. Naylor’s pedagogy for one other reason: they combined English learning with a holistic education on ethics. He was candid about this in his autobiography: “The outings are somewhat related to the environment, social issues, and situations which require reflection. Ethics then is felt as part of life.”<sup>6</sup> To do this, he first required students to be active observers, and one task he would have us do was make sketches in our exercise books on meaningful things we spotted on our way (see Figure 2 for an example). Though seemingly trivial, the sketches were meant to make students more aware and appreciative of their surroundings.

Environmental concerns were at the heart of Fr. Naylor’s personal philosophy, as well as his teaching. A graduate of biology and zoology, he was one of the first teachers in Hong Kong to set up environmental conservancy clubs in secondary schools. In 1973, he also decided he would never again ride in a privately owned automobile.<sup>7</sup> Hence, for all outings, he took students on Hong Kong’s various public transport, ranging from buses and metros to ferries and trams instead of the luxury of private coaches. At parks or beaches, he would instruct us to pick up garbage left behind by other users. For the rest of his teaching career, he would also come to be known for forbidding the use of electric lights and air-conditioning in classrooms that had large French windows.

Many of his outings were aimed at teaching Wah Yan students, most of whom grew up in urban environments, to appreciate Hong Kong’s own natural reserve. The aforementioned hike at Tai Po Kau is a good example. The nature trail intersects with an estuary, and both of us distinctly remember our amazement at discovering a beautiful mini-waterfall and pool, where we took a break. Some of us enjoyed playing with water so much that

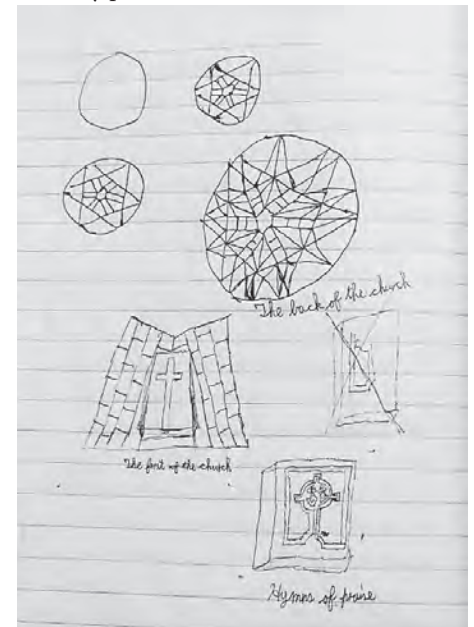


Figure 2. Example students sketches from Fr. Naylor’s class. Source: Photo courtesy of the authors.



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we almost missed Fr. Naylor’s signal to continue the journey. The same waterfall was captured on that *Hong Kong Connection* episode, with the 1993 students showing the same excitement at the stream as we later did. At another spot on the trail, Fr. Naylor was seen asking students to lie on the forest ground and listen to sounds of insects and the rustling of leaves for five minutes. The ability to contemplate and appreciate, he told the program producer, was vital to environmental conservation.<sup>8</sup>

Ethics also meant respecting other people and developing an altruistic awareness. This was why after every bus ride (also captured on tape in the TV episode), he would insist the entire class say thanks to the driver and stand on the sidewalk to wave goodbye to the bus. On screen, he also stressed how important it was to “humble ourselves” and to “overcome” the tendency to be selfish.<sup>9</sup> This tallies with one of Wah Yan College’s mottos: be “men for others.”

In a broader sense, then, the goal of Fr. Naylor’s ethics teaching was to “[get] students to reflect on society and their behavior.”<sup>10</sup> Such reflection is often lacking in typical Hong Kong, and even Asian, classrooms, generally known for their spoon-feeding nature. These outings provided a break from the rigid classroom environment, which not only freed students physically but also mentally, and we learned to actively listen to and observe other people, surroundings, and nature—ethics “as part of life,” indeed. The importance he ascribed to ethics education is vividly described in Fr. Naylor’s own words:

*I esteem ethics teaching, as I consider it the root of all education—to bring the best out of what is within and nurture the good in each person to make them relate deeply with others, and develop social concerns and humanistic living.<sup>11</sup>*



Figure 3. The learning cycle of Ignatian philosophy. Source: Illustration based on a photo supplied by the authors.



Fr. Harold Naylor talks about his desire to nurture a “feeling of gratitude” in his students. Source: Illustration from a screen capture of the YouTube video *Hong Kong Connection: Forever 14* (1993) at <https://tinyurl.com/yy9eufnl>.

### Ignatian Pedagogy

Fr. Naylor seldom talked about the relationship between his pedagogical style and his theological training, but in fact, his pedagogy is the embodiment of what is known as the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, whose origin can be traced back to St. Ignatius Loyola, the sixteenth-century founder of the Jesuit Order. The paradigm was not mentioned at all in the *Hong Kong Connection* documentary, and we as his students never heard him speak about it explicitly. Significantly, in Fr. Naylor’s autobiography, he devoted an entire chapter to it.

In Ignatian pedagogy, a learning cycle consists of five interconnected components: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation (see Figure 3).<sup>12</sup> Fr. Naylor conceptualizes them in his own way:

*There is experience, reflection, and [action], but it is in a context and it is always evaluated. In the class room [sic], the context of the student has to be known, which means the syllabus, examinations, but also the spirit of the school, the family and cultural background of the student. The experience is the teaching and activities of the student (which includes homework), and it has to be followed by reflection of its value*

*Being an ethics rather than a religious studies class, he would play recorded TV programs about Chinese proverbs instead of talking about the Bible.*



Students and teachers at Wah Yan College, Kowloon celebrating Fr. Harold Naylor's eighty-fifth birthday in 2016. Source: Photo courtesy of Matthew Chu.

*and its meaning. Finally, the application, which should be expressed by the homework and other decisions. This is rounded up by evaluation . . . to see what could be done better and what is lacking.<sup>13</sup>*

His take on context is especially insightful. On a macro level, since most Hong Kong students grew up primarily in a Chinese culture, he made sure to align the values he taught with Confucian thought, claiming that traditional Chinese virtues had much in common with teachings in the Bible and the way he was brought up in Ireland.<sup>14</sup> This explains why, being an ethics rather than a religious studies class,<sup>15</sup> he would play recorded TV programs about Chinese proverbs instead of talking about the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from cultural background, Fr. Naylor also strived to understand every student's family background on a micro level. He was famous for making family visits to every student's home. With this insight into the familial context of Hong Kong students, he realized, with regard to his outings, that:

*As I take the class to different places, I often feel that their parents would also have liked to take them there. Parents do not have the time or the connections to do so. Besides, the students prefer to be with their friends than with their family, as they can talk more freely and happily.<sup>17</sup>*

In this sense, Fr. Naylor had identified a crucial gap in family education through contextualization and used outings to create a unique experience that could not be replicated even by parenting time.

The rest of the paradigm corresponds to different learning elements in the outings. The outing experience itself overlapped with both reflection and action, given that students were asked to lie down to catch the sounds of the forest and to say thanks to bus drivers. Equally, the 1,000-word essay would be placed in the intersection between the three circles in Figure 3, since it was as much an action that allowed students to think through the outing as it was an experience of composition in the context of English-language learning. Last but not least, peer-marking provided an opportunity for evaluation through reflecting on another classmate's account.

These multiple overlaps are possible because the outings were such an organic activity that fused language-learning with holistic ethics education. Such flexibility also tallies with how Jesuits conceive their pedagogy: experience and reflection are to be used "to promote teaching that is personalized and learner-active, and whose aim is not merely the assimilation of subject-matter but the development of the person."<sup>18</sup>

### Conclusion

Although Fr. Naylor is no longer with us, his teaching lives on in the thousands of students he taught in his four decades at Wah Yan College, Kowloon. The effectiveness of his pedagogy can be attributed to the successful adaptation of Ignatian pedagogy in a Chinese context, followed by the regular use of outings as a "teaching outside the classroom" experience where linguistic training is fused with ethical development. Learning is then consolidated through action in real life (e.g., being thankful and respectful to bus drivers) and reflection and evaluation in the 1,000-word composition.

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Fr. Naylor's pedagogical success proves that "Western" religious principles can be compatible with existent "Eastern" philosophies. In his autobiography, he curiously commented that Wah Yan College is a place "where Jesuit presence is shadowy but [I]gnatian pedagogy thrives."<sup>19</sup> The Jesuits, in fact, realize it is no longer possible to design a universal curriculum for Jesuit schools.<sup>20</sup> Instead, they seek to reshape their pedagogical principles in light of the context in which their schools are based. In this vein, Fr. Naylor showed that a religiously informed pedagogy could live on and echo in secular societies, thanks to a common goal for ethical development.

When the episode of *Hong Kong Connection* aired, he wrote, "Even the teachers in Wah Yan shook their heads in disbelief. They did not feel it possible to do the like during class time. But the fact is that I did do what was seen on the screen, and what is more, I continue to do it."<sup>21</sup> This was, indeed, what he did until he could no longer go on. However, we believe his pedagogy can inspire other educators in Asia and elsewhere to integrate reflection, action, and evaluation in "beyond the classroom" learning experiences in their own contexts. ■

## NOTES

1. Radio Television Hong Kong "Forever 14," (RTHK), *Hong Kong Connection*, 1993, <https://tinyurl.com/yy9eufnl>.
2. Harold Naylor, "Chapter 10," *Father Naylor: Forty Years in Wah Yan College, Kowloon*, accessed April 4, 2019, <http://tinyurl.com/ck9ens>.
3. Ibid.
4. Admittedly, there were also personal motives to this peer-marking practice. Fr. Naylor made it clear in his autobiography that, since he was never trained to be an English teacher (being a biology graduate), his grammar could be faulty, and that correcting so much writing (1,000 words each from two classes of forty students every week) "would make it impractical for the teacher." Peer-marking was thus a method that killed two birds with one stone, both promoting peer-learning and lessening the burden of marking. His honesty also shows how he constantly reflected on himself and was humble yet authentic as a teacher.
5. Even in these classes, he had his own way of conducting lessons. By the 2000s, Fr. Naylor was using the textbook chosen by the English panel in his regular English periods, perhaps to ensure fairness of teaching quality with other Form Three classes. However, he used them sparingly and mostly for grammatical drills. Once a week, he would also insist that students reading English books quietly in class and producing book reports, which would again be peer-marked.
6. "Chapter 10," *Father Naylor*.
7. "Chapter 9," *Father Naylor*.
8. "Forever 14," *Hong Kong Connection*, 18:22–19:40.
9. "Forever 14," *Hong Kong Connection*, 3:23–3:48.
10. "Chapter 12," *Father Naylor*.
11. "Chapter 12," *Father Naylor*.
12. "Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach," *Jesuit Institute*, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y5eg37w4>.
13. "Chapter 18," *Father Naylor*.
14. "Forever 14," *Hong Kong Connection*, 11:06–11:22.
15. In chapter 12 of his autobiography, Fr. Naylor recalled that, following the Second Vatican Council's (1962–1965) decision on religious freedom and respect of people's conscience and convictions, the Jesuits decided in 1969 to replace the subject previously known as religious knowledge with ethics. See "Chapter 12," *Father Naylor*.
16. See, for example, "Forever 14," *Hong Kong Connection*, 10:36–11:36 regarding these videos. The use of proverbs videos is also mentioned in Naylor, Chapter 12, *Father Naylor*.
17. "Chapter 10," *Father Naylor*.
18. Jesuit Institute, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 15.
19. "Chapter 18," *Father Naylor*.
20. Jesuit Institute, *Ignatian Pedagogy*, 1.
21. "Chapter 11," *Father Naylor*.

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