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An Inquiry into Hope and Imagination in Jesuit Education: Ignatian Design Thinking as a Lens for Exploration

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Abstract

Hope and imagination are foundational to a Jesuit education and, as central tenets, inform teaching and learning through Ignatian pedagogy. The authors explore hope and imagination in the Jesuit context through the lens of scholar-practitioner inquiry, drawing from the local context and practice of an Ignatian Design Thinking course as a source of knowledge. This inquiry approach is rooted in practice-based research, and it situates scholarly exploration through lines of inquiry and problems of practice, specifically exploring how design thinking fosters curiosity and creates space for teaching imagination and hope. The authors draw on their teaching experiences, course design, and professional experience as educators at Loyola University Chicago, providing practical pedagogical strategies offered in the Ignatian Design Thinking course. As they explore how hope and imagination intersect with design thinking, they scaffold hope and imagination as essential pedagogical strategies for teaching and learning in the Jesuit tradition, providing a foundation for numerous praxis and scholarship articles that comprise this special issue. Through this inquiry, the authors propose a framework linking curiosity, imagination, and hope, which all play a distinct role in Jesuit education, leading to practical strategies and the potential for further exploration around this topic.

Introduction: Exploring the Role of Hope and Imagination

Current research on the science of hope indicates that hope may be learned and requires imagination.¹ A Jesuit education, however, has connected imagination and hope for centuries. In the past decade, for example, Fr. Nicolas reaffirmed depth of thought and imagination as instrumental in the life of the University,² and Fr. Sosa invited us to utilize the Universal Apostolic Preferences as guideposts to accompany students toward a more hope-filled future.³ In the foundational principle of consolation within Ignatian approaches, hope is at the core as “a person dwells in a state of consolation when she or he is moving toward God’s active presence in the world. We know we are moving this way when we sense the growth of love or faith or mercy or hope....”⁴ Yet, is hope as centered in Jesuit

education as it could be? To what degree should hope be at the center of teaching and learning in the Jesuit context? These questions and many more surround this exploration focused on hope and imagination in the Jesuit context.

At the heart of Ignatian Pedagogy, imagination promotes hope as a hallmark of a Jesuit education that unapologetically situates reality and community next to learning and experience. Central to a Jesuit education is experiential learning and especially community-engaged learning, in which students, “let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering, and engage it constructively.”⁵ Our inquiry explores and celebrates the tensions of creative teaching and learning that emerge from imagination and hope in the Jesuit context,

especially related to community-engaged teaching, learning and research.

We approach this exploration through the lens of scholar-practitioner inquiry, drawing from our local context and practice as a source of knowledge. This approach, rooted in practice-based research, situates scholarly exploration through lines of inquiry and problems of practice, and seeks to fill the gap between theory and practice.⁶ We draw on our teaching experiences, course design, and professional experience as educators at Loyola University Chicago, which establishes our local inquiry and sources of knowledge. As we explore how hope and imagination intersect, we also explore teaching and learning in the Jesuit tradition, as do the articles in this special issue dedicated to hope and imagination. In summary, through this inquiry, we propose that hope plays a distinct role in Jesuit education through an emphasis on imagination and curiosity.

Connecting Hope and Imagination to Education

Hope has been defined in many ways, and yet Gwinn and Hellman define hope as a way of thinking which can be learned, in which belief is rooted in a better future and an individual has an active role to make it better.⁷ Drawing from the Engagement of Hope framework, hope is believing “in what one does not know or see.”⁸ The concept of hope is complex, rather than superfluous or aspirational, and recognizes the difficulty and tension required to exercise hope. The research on hope indicates there are significant outcomes, including increased physical, psychological, and social well-being, as well as improvement in student learning.⁹ Yet, how do you teach hope, or more importantly, teach to foster hope? What building blocks are necessary to foster the teaching and learning of hope, and what role does Jesuit education play? This is where imagination plays a role, and the Ignatian approach is distinctly unique. Gwinn and Hellman explain that imagination is the critical instrument of hope, the tool to foster and restore hope.¹⁰ Drawing from the work of educational philosopher and educator, Maxine Greene, “the role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to

disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected.”¹¹ Greene’s emphasis is on awakening to the reality and context of the world around us, as she calls for educators to move:

... toward an idea of imagination that brings an ethical concern to the fore, a concern that, again, has to do with the community that ought to be in the making and the values that give it color and significance. My attention turns back to the importance of wide-awakeness, of awareness of what it is to be in the world.¹²

As this emphasis on wide-awakeness resonates with Kolvenbach’s emphasis on connecting the “gritty reality of the world” to students’ lives, the role of imagination becomes essential.¹³ Gwinn and Hellman explain first recognizing the reality of our situation allows us to imagine a different way forward, hoping for a better future.¹⁴ Building on the work of Greene and the Ignatian approach of imaginative contemplation, Green establishes an imagination for justice framework “as a guide for planning to incorporate justice education into experiential learning and teaching by recognizing the dimensions related to content, delivery, structure, and format.”¹⁵ The imagination for justice framework challenges educators to address issues of justice in their programs, policies, pedagogy, practices, and purposes through the lens of teaching and learning. The imagination for justice framework allows educators to explore potential ways to address issues of equity and access, foster democratic education, create community and connect to the community context – essentially fostering hope for a better future.

In the context of Jesuit education, how do we teach toward the goal of fostering hope? In addition, how do we practice imagination in the classroom so students learn to foster hope? The poet Victoria Safford frames it well in her poem, “The Gates of Hope,” as she states “our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope,” and she begins to conceptualize an education of hope:

The place of truth-telling,
About your own soul first of all and its
condition.

The place of resistance and defiance,
The piece of ground from which you see the
world

Both as it is and as it could be
As it will be;

The place from which you glimpse not only
struggle,

But the joy of the struggle.¹⁶

Building on Safford's poem, our exploration and inquiry led us to human-centered design thinking, which has the potential to foster a pedagogy of hope and imagination. Through collaboration on the development of a course focused on the intersection of Ignatian pedagogy and design thinking, we explored the inherent scaffolding of imagination and hope. Human-centered design thinking has the potential to create teaching and learning spaces through imagination that foster hope. To animate this approach, we provide a detailed case study of the Ignatian Design Thinking course taught in the Quinlan School of Business at Loyola University Chicago.

Case Study: Ignatian Design Thinking Course Fostering a Pedagogy of Hope and Imagination

Where we see imaginative teaching and learning in the Jesuit tradition, we also find thinking full of hope. Yet not just any kind of hopeful thinking, but rather Ignatian Design Thinking, as a teaching method and learning mindset. This pedagogical approach guides learners to see, explore, and act on authentic challenges from expansive perspectives, building on the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm. St. Ignatius holds a five-hundred year head start on what it takes to inspire an interdisciplinary design thinking course. We can follow his lead in pursuit of transformative experiences rooted in *cura personalis*, care for the whole person, that encourage a holistic educational approach. When the fields of Jesuit education and design thinking unite, we discover hyper-relevant context from which to celebrate and interrogate current experiences, framed as cannonball moments, or transformational learning moments built upon contemplation, reflection, and discernment, leading to human-centered

bursts of hope and imagination.¹⁷ These cannonball moments, or learning experiences in which individuals see new frames of reference, are key transformational experiences in the course.

What Is Design Thinking?

Jesuit educated learners and leaders are called to make a difference in the world, to be change-makers. We all see the global polycrisis stack up, dovetailing one unsustainable problem with the next. How might we redesign "business as usual" to imagine our planet's hopeful future, as called to act in the University Apostolic Preferences?

Design thinking at its core is an iterative problem-solving practice that seeks to authentically impact humanity and the planet. Essentially, design thinking is a problem-solving approach that may be defined as "the discipline of developing solutions in the service of people."¹⁸ The truth is, however, many design thinking definitions exist. IDEO, the global consultancy largely credited for putting design thinking on the map, has suggested that "there's no one definition of design thinking."¹⁹ Others have suggested design thinking is the scientific method with better branding.²⁰ Georgetown's Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship sees design thinking as "a continuous cycle of design, starting with empathize, moving to define, ideate, prototype, and test, and then back to empathize to begin the cycle again."²¹ PinPoint Collective, a female-founded design consultancy, sees this process as equity-centered innovation, or "incorporating underrepresented voices into the design process, allowing their voices, context, and needs to directly influence goals and outcomes."²²

No matter what definition strikes a chord, design thinking depends on a deep connection to *who* motivates *how* we solve problems. People's basic needs remain fundamental. For example, people universally need connection, self-expression, and security. Yet the breadth of problems that interfere with satisfying or fulfilling

those needs grows increasingly complex. Design thinking was made to take on such *wicked* problems, or complex, multi-dimensional social problems, such as environmental sustainability, poverty, and racism. Wicked problems are ill-structured.²³ Characterized by excessive ambiguity, these problems intertwine as multidimensional systems.²⁴ They challenge all of us as whole humans.

As scholar-practitioners, we do not have to imagine wicked problems; these problems are ubiquitous in our student-centered learning environments. When we deliberately shape the conditions of our surroundings to incorporate problems that call for diverse, inclusive perspectives, we become Design thinkers. Whether or not we formally name design thinking, elements of its impact already influence our teaching practices. Design thinking welcomes the ‘non-designers’ among us to teach, learn, think, and take action as problem-solving citizen designers. In our separate disciplines and programs, we use vocabularies punctuated by buzzwords and acronyms. Inherent within design thinking is the language of problem solving, which is relevant to Jesuit education. When we seek to solve wicked problems with our students and communities, we demonstrate the power and potential of design thinking to transform society’s most vexing challenges.

By Design, You Are an Ignatian Design Thinker

Drawing from Beran’s *TBD: Think by Design*, Ignatian Design Thinking contributes a model of hopeful problem solving to Jesuit Higher Education.²⁵ It uses the Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm to emphasize how reflection relates to action. Ignatian Design thinkers trust that hands-first actions will eventually reach our hearts and heads. First, we act, and then we reflect. This iterative pattern fosters imagination as we unstick entrenched assumptions. It fosters hope as we normalize the uneasy tensions inherent to wicked problems. *Act, reflect, and repeat.*

We can imagine a diamond’s perimeter to see how

Ignatian Design Thinking blends action and reflection (see Figure 1). The left side of a diamond represents our actions to diverge. When we diverge, we imagine many possibilities. We generate wide and wild aspirations, as the outward-pointing diamond edge points. The right side of a diamond represents our actions to discern. When we discern, we hone in on hope. We transform “the what” of our imagination into the “how and why” of hopeful solutions. We evaluate fewer, hopeful options for future actions. *Diverge, discern, and iterate.*

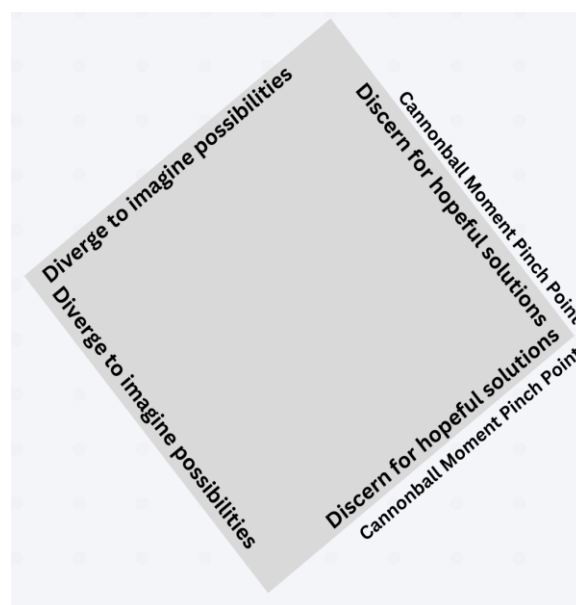


Figure 1. Ignatian Design Thinking as Divergence and Discernment

Each encounter with Ignatian Design Thinking strings together multiple diverge and discern diamonds. Where one discern diamond ends, another diverge diamond begins. While our imagination and hope materialize inside the diamond edges, it is the ‘pinch points’ connections between diamonds that excites our Ignatian hungers. At the in-between points, we can experience cannonball moments in modern-day problem-solving. We feel the powerful pinch of perspective taking that motivates us to take action again with rediscovered imagination. This pinch may be subtle, like a whisper of reluctant confidence. Or, it may be loud, like a powerful call to change an entire strategic plan. The continuous transformations from pain point to pinch point make hope for cannonball moments possible.

Cannonball moments represent end goals, yet we can't dismiss why we start by diverging. Inserting deliberate time to diverge turbocharges our hope and imagination with curiosity. Our society's time famine often leads us to hurried, misdiagnoses of the problems we seek to solve.²⁶ By diverging first, we buy ourselves time to work with – not against – our temporary unknowns. Through curiosity, we pursue eclectic ideas and unexpected connections. We experience the upside of not knowing yet. Such curiosity stretches our relationship with uncertainty. It permits us to evolve problematic contexts into desirable futures. We reimagine status quo in favor of justice and equity.

Project Cannonball

In Project Cannonball, students conceptualize needs-based outcomes that drive just, inclusive, and sustainable transformations for whole humans. Currently in its third iteration, student-designers commit to problem-seeking based on needs-finding that leads to problem-solving. Project Cannonball's core problem seeks to reimagine how we value learning through the lens of immersive experiences. An overview of the student enrollment for Project Cannonball is featured in table 1, revealing the design challenge approach of seventy-four interdisciplinary undergraduate students at Loyola University Chicago who experienced Ignatian Design Thinking.

Table 1. Student Enrollment in Ignatian Design Thinking Course at Loyola University Chicago

Semester	Enrollment	Majors /Concentrations	Design Challenge
Spring 2022	30 students	Business: International Business, Marketing, Finance, Entrepreneurship, Accounting, Economics, Information Systems, Management, Sport Management Arts & Sciences: Dance, Spanish Language & Literature, Advertising, Film and Digital Media	How might we design a sustainable business targeting non-traditional educators that inspire learning through every day activities to further understand the importance and operations of immersive STEAM experiences?
Spring 2023	30 students	Business: International Business, Marketing, Finance, Entrepreneurship, Accounting, Economics, Information Systems, Management, Analytics, Human Resources, Supply Chain Management Arts & Sciences: Global & International Studies, Political Science, Studio Art, Photography, Psychology	How might we effectively combine entertainment and STEAM learning for students and educators in order to create a unique, intentional, and interactive experience?

Fall 2023	14 students	Business: International Business, Marketing, Finance, Entrepreneurship, Accounting, Economics, Information Systems Arts & Sciences: Psychology Communications: Advertising, Public Relations	How might we adopt a modern experience that promotes Chicago Fair Trade’s role in the global labor rights movement? How might we personalize third space inspiration with the needs of the communities who activate modern university life?
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Interdisciplinary ‘design squads’ co-design with community partners, including architects & developers, urban planners, and museum education curators. Our clients generally believe immersive experiences lead to authentic learning. As decision-makers, they look to viability and feasibility as budget and infrastructure constraints. Student-designers reimagine the challenge in terms of desirability, or what whole humans actually need. Their actions to diverge and discern guide them to generate concepts, synthesize research, and validate equitable solutions for diverse audiences’ needs. Ethnographic empathy observations, field trips in adjacent contexts, stakeholder interviews, alumni critiques, and prototype workshops reflect hope in action: students know a better solution exists. Squads reimagine their clients’ pain points – that education will not mix with recreation – and design hopeful breakthroughs. How do those breakthroughs feel? They feel like the pinch of a cannonball moment.

Whether designing waterparks, museums, or third-space learning environments, students diverge and discern with problems described by questions like:

- How might we imagine a space that combines fun and education?
- In what ways might an immersive entertainment space also be a desirable educational experience?
- Why might this innovation be desirable, sustainable, and equitable for the needs of diverse groups of Chicago residents?

Project Cannonball is not about solutions that encourage building *one more thing*. Instead, Project Cannonball reminds us about the legitimate role co-design plays in Ignatian Design Thinking. No one is the expert. Not the faculty member. Not community partners who serve as client sponsors. Everyone unlearns the power dynamic that keeps one ‘teacher’ in control. Intentionally acknowledging this reality positions Ignatian Design Thinking as our shared language to seek and solve problems as a community. Fr. Nicolas appreciated co-design and encouraged us to “...overcome the barriers that divide us and to work together for the common good.”²⁷ Ignatian Design Thinking celebrates our capacity to build with – not for – whole humans. Co-design intersects with compassion, competence, commitment, conscience in our pursuit of human excellence.

Teaching Strategies to Foster Curiosity, Imagination, and Hope

As a teaching strategy, Ignatian Design Thinking helps students foster curiosity, imagination, and hope. Its principles benefit everyday classroom interactions, without needing a dedicated Project Cannonball. The following pedagogical strategies provide practical activities based on imagination, hope, and curiosity.

Diverge with Imagination: Thirty Cannonballs Challenge

Sketching is an effective, imaginative way for students to reveal their own capacity to diverge.

Give each student a “Thirty Cannonballs Challenge” worksheet.²⁸ Set a timer for three minutes while the students transform the empty ‘Cannonballs’ into sketches of familiar things. Encourage students to complete as many sketches as possible. After three minutes, have students compare their worksheets for imaginative sketches. Who finished thirty sketches? Who sketched a wide variety? Who kept everything in the same ‘circle family’ (circle-shaped food, sports equipment, or emojis)? Who diverged beyond the Cannonball boundary, combining circles by connecting the in-between spaces? Celebrate the cannonball moments that simple sketching can inspire.

Discern with Hope: I Like, I Wish, I Wonder...I Worry

To discern, we need to synthesize the many possibilities our divergent actions generate. This is a simple way to structure how to take diverse perspectives and hone for hope. Have students select an idea or concept they generated during previous diverge activities. Give students three to five minutes to share perspectives about what they like about the idea or concept. Then, take three to five minutes to consider aspirations about what they wish to achieve with the idea. Wonders follow wishes: spend three to five minutes to express wonders about opportunities or future scenarios. Finally, allocate three to five minutes for students to scan for worries, or the unintended, negative consequences that might occur with further action. These prompts can be used individually or with groups; they can be written or shared in conversation.²⁹

Reflect with Curiosity: How Might We Questions

To engage curiosity about wicked problems, encourage students to frame How Might We (HMW) questions. HMWs represent the scope of the problem. They structure opportunities to create solutions people actually need. As we diverge and discern, we can track our progress by asking HMWs. Invite students to create lists of HMWs that follow this outline:

How evokes variety; how confirms that we can imagine multiple solutions.

Might reads with hope, a signal for a more vibrant way forward.

We signal a commitment to collaboration and co-design.

Examples of HMW questions are also available in table 1.

Student Reflections Framed as Course Feedback

Human-centeredness is to Ignatian Design Thinking as *cura personalis* is to Jesuit education. Collected as course feedback, this sample of reflections about Ignatian Design Thinking demonstrate human-centeredness from student-centered perspectives.

- Challenge your assumptions while being mindful of others’ assumptions.
- Sometimes you will have a good idea then will need to back it up with data. Other times you will have the research first before coming up with the solution.
- Dig deep & find life in your research.
- I have never done a project like this, and it has challenged me to think in new ways I never have before.
- Cannonball moments are moments in which you dive into a creative process and embrace the uncertainty that process might bring.
- Every suggestion, idea, or creation might not quite work out the way you thought, but that only enhances the creative process.
- To investigate “cannonball moments,” or experiences in which pre-conceived notions and limitations are shed in favor of fearless exploration for new understandings.

Across this sample of student reflections, notice the embers of hope and imagination, not for what *should* be but for what *will* be.

Implications for Teaching and Learning in the Jesuit Context

Design thinking is an effective learning approach to intentionally encourage hope and imagination

in the classroom, especially in community-engaged teaching and learning courses or programs. The human-centered approach also underscores the concept of *cura personalis* in Jesuit education, providing structured and fluid approaches for holistic learning. Although the case study discussed above offers a model that is replicable in other Jesuit educational settings, more importantly, it generates a framework to tangibly deliver a hope-filled and imagination-centered learning process.

Curiosity challenges students to understand the context while developing lines of inquiry (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?). Imagination invites students to form a passion for the possible, to ideate about possibilities and develop new approaches. Hope demands students articulate and share the possibilities of a better future. As poet Victoria Safford concludes in *The Gates of Hope*:

And we stand there, beckoning and calling,
Telling people what we are seeing
Asking people what they see.³⁰

Given the case of Ignatian Design Thinking, we recommend the following framework (see Figure 2) to scaffold this approach in the classroom, building opportunities for curiosity, experiences

to exercise imagination, and reflections to foster hope:

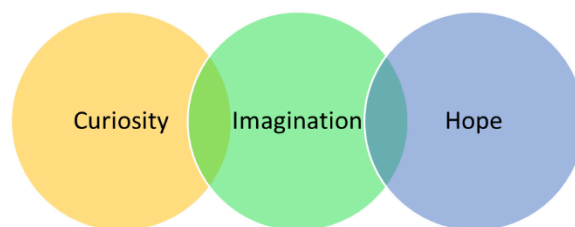


Figure 2. Framework for Scaffolding Imagination and Hope in Courses and Programs

The design thinking process inherently provides a structure for co-design and co-creation with all involved, students, community partners, and faculty instructors. Oftentimes, the emphasis on co-education is an aspiration in community-based learning, but design thinking legitimizes and encourages the collaborative development process. It offers a lens to further explore how to exercise hope and imagination through pedagogical approaches. Essentially, the design thinking approach provides a space for curiosity and creative thinking, followed by exercises in imagination, leading to a hopeful outcome. HJE

Endnotes

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³ Arturo Sosa, S.J., “Welcome & Opening Reflections,” (presentation, International Association of Jesuit Universities Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education Conference, June 8-25, 2021), <https://iaju.org/conferences/commitment-justice-jesuit-higher-education>; see also Fr. Sosa’s letter to the Society of Jesus: “Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019-2029” (Rome, February 19, 2019), https://www.jesuits.global/sj_files/2020/05/2019-06_19feb19_eng.pdf.

⁴ Vinita Hampton Wright, “Consolation and Desolation,” accessed October 3, 2023, <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/consolation-and-desolation-2/>.

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⁶ Patrick M. Green, “The Scholar-Administrator Imperative: Developing Scholarship and Research through Practice to Build the Community Engagement Field,” *Metropolitan Universities* 34, no. 4 (2023): 89-101.

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⁸ Patrick M. Green, Daniel J. Bergen, Cynthia P. Stewart, & Christopher Nayve, “An Engagement of Hope: A Framework and Equity-Centered Theory of Action for Community Engagement,” *Metropolitan Universities* 32, no. 2 (2021): 131.

⁹ Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope Rising*.

¹⁰ Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope Rising*.

¹¹ Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995), 28.

¹² Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 35.

¹³ Kolvenbach, "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice."

¹⁴ Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope Rising*.

¹⁵ Patrick M. Green, "Making Explicit Connections between Experiential Learning and Justice: New Approaches to Teaching and Learning through an Imagination for Justice," *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education* 4, no. 2 (2021): 4.

¹⁶ Victoria Safford, "The Gates of Hope," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2015), <https://doi.org/10.48558/W3BM-KW23>.

¹⁷ We can trace the concept of a cannonball moment to May 20, 1521. On that day, a cannonball struck and injured Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish soldier fighting the French at the Battle of Pamplona. Ignatius used his bedrest to reflect, paying attention to how God communicated with him. Through his "cannonball moment," Ignatius began his spiritual journey of conversion. Today, cannonball moments take on parallel meaning. When we encourage our students to reflect on events that inspired them to see something with new perspective, we promote the power of a cannonball moment.

¹⁸ LUMA Institute. "Innovating for People: Handbook of Human-Centered Design Methods," LUMA Institute, LLC.

¹⁹ "How Do People Define Design Thinking," IDEO Design Thinking, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://designthinking.ideo.com/faq/how-do-people-define-design-thinking>.

²⁰ Karen Faith, "Design Thinking's Missing Piece," *Medium* (April 15, 2019), <https://karenfaith.medium.com/design-thinkings-missing-piece-99062069403f>.

²¹ "Ignatian by Design," Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://cndls.georgetown.edu/ignatian-pedagogy/>.

²² "Our Purpose," PinPoint Collective, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://pinpointcollective.com/>.

²³ Judith A. Ramalay, "The Changing Role of Higher Education: Learning to Deal with Wicked Problems," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 18, no. 3 (2014): 7-21.

²⁴ Ana Carolina de Almeida Kumlien and Paul Coughlan, "Wicked Problems and How to Solve Them," *The Conversation* (October 18, 2018), <https://theconversation.com/wicked-problems-and-how-to-solve-them-100047>.

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²⁸ Worksheet may be found at: https://www.canva.com/design/DAFcCzQgdko/xD-Hp5MudsMu-IQe1Qr7Sw/view?utm_content=DAFcCzQgdko&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publis-hsharelink.

²⁹ This activity was co-designed with audience engagement at the Academics Ignatian Colleagues Gathering 2022, <https://jesuitschoolsnetwork.org/icg-academics/>. Together, audience members added "I worry" as the fourth category, one that resonated with their student interactions.

³⁰ Safford, "The Gates of Hope."