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Imagination Grasping Reality: An Ignatian Foundation for Critical Hope in Jesuit Education

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'Imagination Grasping Reality': An Ignatian Foundation for Critical Hope in Jesuit Education

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Abstract

Jesuit education, at its best, is rooted in expressions of critical hope—rooted in a world-affirming commitment to depth of thought and imagination in service to all of God's creation—while also balancing a commitment to action against oppression. Ignatian pedagogy embraces imagination as a tool to bridge concepts learned in class with the reality of the broader world in a way that embodies the hopeful move from critique to possibility. Instructors can infuse their teaching with practices of critical hope that are also rooted in the Ignatian way of proceeding. This article theorizes how the Spiritual Exercises' themes and paradigms offer a starting point from which to foster an attitude critical hope by walking through the four major movements and make connections between their major themes, the cycle of the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm, and what it can illuminate for us about the nature of critical hope in practice. It also extends to identifying *critically hopeful practices*—examples of teaching and learning praxis that recognizes the larger structural reality of the world and the ways in which the broader reality of systems of oppression impact the way we engage with students and teach.

Introduction

Over the past eight years, faith in higher education has dropped precipitously. Gallup released the result of a poll on July 11th, 2023 that showed that only 36% of those polled had a significant amount of faith in higher education. That is down from 57% in 2015, and the drop was reported across all major groups.[1] The average student borrows $30,000 to pay for a bachelor's degree and, as of the writing of this article, the Supreme Court gutted affirmative action in *SFFA v. Harvard* and has blocked student loan forgiveness. Is it any wonder that college students are reporting decreasing mental health at alarming rates and increasing levels of depression and despair?[2] In the face of this reality, the need for hope to both infuse and be a product of our institutions of higher learning is paramount.

Critical Hope: Understanding Transformation Is Both Necessary AND Possible

Educational theorists and reformers have pointed to the necessity of hope in the education process since Socrates.[3] Paulo Freire's works of critical pedagogy have featured the indispensability of hope since *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He calls hope an essential concept, rooted in a refusal to find satisfaction in current broken realities and a corresponding drive to imagine and pursue other visions for society. Hope drives frames of critique towards frames of possibility.[4] According to educational philosopher Henry Giroux, hope is what animates struggle against unjust structures because hope is necessary for critically engaged agency. He says, "Hope expands the space of the possible, and becomes a way of recognizing and naming the incomplete nature of the present while providing the foundation for informed action."[5]

However, both Freire and Giroux agree that hope can easily become an empty abstraction if not rooted in reality. For Freire, this reality was that of the political struggle of the oppressed and that reality would keep hope from descending into either naivety or despair.[6] As a postmodernist, Giroux agrees with Freire and sees hope as anti-foundational, with a meaning that is defined through historical memory and action against oppression, and not based on a fundamental belief or totalizing principles.[7] For him, this "filling in" of hope is the purpose of education.[8] Critical pedagogy, then, is an expression of an educated hope that will form students capable and willing to view themselves and the world through

a critical lens and then imagine new ways of proceeding that serve the public good and honor human dignity.[9] This produces critical hope.

Extensive work has been done on the concept of critical hope in a variety of disciplines.[10] Bozalek, Carolissen, Liebowitz, and Boler claim that critical hope is a unified concept in which hopefulness cannot be separate from criticality. They also believe that as an analytic concept it is expansive, able to theorize using elements of the affective, political, spiritual, and intellectual.[11] Educational scholar Kari Grain describes a critical person as one who "is involved in a critical analysis of power relations and how they constitute one's emotional ways of being in the world, while attempting to construct, imaginatively and materially, a different lifeworld."[12] Significantly, while scholarship around critical hope continues to grow and flourish, the majority of modern educational philosophy and theory on critical hope comes from the anti-foundationalist view of Freire and Giroux, with little touching upon a view of hope that connects back to a faith-based frame such as that expressed by Jürgen Moltmann, Johann Baptist Metz, and others. Does this lack of dialogue indicate a lack of applicability of a faith-based understanding of critical hope to pedagogy and education?

Jesuit education, at its best, is rooted in expressions of critical hope. And, unlike Giroux, Ignatian pedagogy's conception of hope is foundational—it is rooted in a world-affirming commitment to depth of thought and imagination in service to all of God's creation—while also balancing a commitment to action against oppression.[13] Ignatian pedagogy embraces imagination as a tool to bridge concepts learned in class with the reality of the broader world in a way that embodies Giroux's hopeful move from critique to possibility. Adolfo Nicholas, S.J., former Superior General of the Jesuits described it as "the depth of learning and imagination encompasses and integrates intellectual rigor with reflection on the experience of reality together with the creative imagination to work toward constructing a more humane, just, sustainable, and faith-filled world."[14] This bedrock beneath critical hope in Jesuit education is rooted in the Christian tradition, but it is expansive enough to allow for the participation and engagement of non-theists and non-Christians. Matthew Ashley believes that Jesuit education excels at offering what theologian David Tracy called a "suggestive possibility." Tracy framed this as a way of presenting one's beliefs authentically and generously, while also inviting others to consider if there might be room for them to exist in that worldview, and vice versa.[15] Tracy says it is "[t]o recognize the other as other, the different as different is also to acknowledge that other world of meaning as, in some manner, a possible option for myself."[16] Clarifying the uniquely Ignatian lens that can lead to expressions of critical hope will allow us to reconnect to the mission as we create teaching and learning environments needed to face the threats of hopelessness and despair that so many of our students—and the larger world—struggles with.

An Ignatian Foundation for Critical Hope in Jesuit Education

This article will endeavor to articulate the ways in which instructors can infuse their teaching with practices of critical hope that are also rooted in the Ignatian way of proceeding. These recommendations are meant to be understood as praxis—practices richly rooted in theory and engaged in an ongoing reflective process alongside their implementation. This praxis is fed by the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm, which in turn finds its hermeneutical roots in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Although it may seem puzzling that 500-year-old codified prayers and contemplative exercises are the backbone of an instructional approach, the Spiritual Exercises' dynamic movements and framework for the world and humanity are the building blocks of Ignatian pedagogy. The Exercises (as they are commonly referred to) are a structured set of Christian meditations written by St. Ignatius of Loyola, with the intention of helping participants discern the will of God in their lives and more freely make personal commitments to follow Jesus. It prioritizes forming a direct and imaginative connection with the divine through an understanding of prayer that attends to the affective and personal experience.

The Exercises are not a spiritual guidebook that an individual peruses. Rather, the Exercises are an intensive and lengthy experience of prayer that an

individual commit to undertaking. They are individually guided through the experience by a spiritual director—an individual who has made the Exercises before and has an intimate knowledge of their structure. The director provides spiritual conversation that is intended to help the retreatant better understand their experiences of prayer and deepen their relationship with God. In *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach,* a seminal document on Ignatian pedagogy written by the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, the relationship between student and teacher was explicitly compared to that of a spiritual director and retreatant.[17] Additionally, the Spiritual Exercises are deeply concerned with encouraging future action in retreatants on behalf of the larger world. Paul Begheyn, S.J. says this is part of what makes them so impactful, saying, "The exercises were always a starting point for an experience in a reality in the future, otherwise they would not deserve our attention."[18]

This article seeks to be faithful to that spirit of action by embodying praxis—the fusion of theory and action. It will first offer a deeper theorization of how the Spiritual Exercises' themes and paradigms offer a starting point from which to foster an attitude critical hope of which Friere, Giroux, and countless other educational theorists have written. This theorization is rooted in the author's background in educational philosophy, theology, and the practice of spiritual direction in the Ignatian tradition. This article will walk through the four major movements (or Weeks, as they are known within the Exercises) and make connections between their major themes, the cycle of the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm (see figure 1), and what it can illuminate for us about the nature of critical hope in educational practice.

This theorization will also extend to identifying specific examples of teaching and learning approaches which exemplify these practices. I call these *critically hopeful practices*. They are examples of teaching and learning praxis that recognizes the larger structural reality of the world and the ways in which the broader reality of systems of oppression impact the way we engage with students and teach. These practices do not stop at critique and instead offer different approaches and ways of proceeding. Critically hopeful practices embody what scholars have called "an action-oriented response to contemporary despair."[19]

Most of these practices are unapologetically student-centered, faithful to the personalist and relational nature of *cura personalis.* Author of *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto,* Kevin Gannon echoes the importance of centering students in the practice of critically hopeful teaching, saying instructors must stay "committed to a vision of higher education that sees students as allies, not our adversaries and supports them in the efforts to take risks and overcome adversity."[20]

These practices are also not unique to Ignatian pedagogy. Most are evidence-based teaching and learning methodologies that have their own rich theorizing and many have arisen from other educational and philosophical theories such as disability and critical race studies and epistemology. Nor is it the intention of this article to conflate Ignatian pedagogy solely with these practices or oversimplify the depth, breadth, and explicitly faith-based core of Ignatian pedagogy. Instead, this article seeks to draw connections between the touchstone of our Ignatian identity that is the Spiritual Exercises*,* current theories of Ignatian pedagogy, *and* educational practices that reflect that ethos. The Jesuits have long practiced a tradition of adaptation and acculturation, in which they recognized the ways in which some "local" practices (not associated with or created by the Jesuits) were still able to convey the truths they hoped to evangelize.[21] Critical hope asks that we as educators look upon the reality of a broken world, take seriously the threats and crises present, and imagine new ways forward. The Spiritual Exercises and Ignatian pedagogy invite us to do the same.

The First Week: Seeking to Understand Our Broken World with Compassion for Self and Others

One of the primary themes of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises is coming to grips with brokenness in our own lives and the broader world and God's response of love in the face of this reality. The exercises use the theological language of sin, and retreatants are encouraged to contemplate the ways in which their own choices have been marked by a rejection of God's love.

Rather than inspire shame or guilt, the exercises frame this as coming to understand oneself as a loved sinner.[22] This moral anthropology holds that God sees and knows the ways in which people fall short, harm others, and reject goodness and still chooses to love them unconditionally. It is meant to inspire a sense of conversion and desire to return God's love through one's action. God is aware of the full reality of the brokenness in the world (including structural oppression) and chooses to engage it with love and generosity. A retreatant needs to come to grips with the impact of sin in their own life and world before they can move forward in the exercises. This includes a recognition that sin occurs both through personal choice *and* through systems of oppression. The reality of the brokenness of the world impacts us all and cannot be ignored—but it is not a cause for despair.

This emphasis on the importance of seeing and embracing the reality of the world through a lens of compassion is seen in the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm's focus on context. The context and experience of students should impact the approach that Ignatian educators take towards them. The IPP states

> Since human experience, always the starting point in an Ignatian pedagogy, never occurs in a vacuum, we must know as much as we can about the actual context within which teaching and learning take place. As teachers, therefore, we need to understand the world of the student… and other realities impact that world and affect the student for better or worse.[23]

Students are understood as full human beings—not just their educational identity—whose lives are impacted by outside forces that influence how they are able to engage in teaching and learning environments. Rather than ignore this reality, it becomes an essential element in informing our instruction. In *Characteristics of Jesuit Education,* it is clearly stated that all members of an education community are meant to care for and learn from one another.[24] An Ignatian educator cannot be disengaged from the humanity of their students.

The context of students includes their socio-economic, political, and cultural frames and sees these not as a deficit, but as part of the constellation that must be considered with engaging them. In 2019 the Jesuits released their Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs)—carefully discerned priorities for mission and ministries for the next ten years. They highlighted the importance of supporting youth, using the language of "[a]ccompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future." Within this preference, the Jesuits explicitly articulate that youth perspective is necessary in discerning future calls for change and use language of accompaniment and walking alongside young people, not of instructing them or shaping them into a particular desired form. It highlights the importance of not only understanding our students (most of whom would be identified as youth) as in the process of becoming, but also as gifted with essential perspectives.

Like the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatian pedagogy's worldview is one that pays attention to the brokenness of the world (and our role in it), understands its impact, and takes a realistic rather than deficit-based frame.[25] Through this we come to understand critical hope as inviting us to regard the reality we are in honestly, but without despair. Educator Duncan Andrade contrasts this to what he calls "hokey hope", which reflects a sort of shallow optimism that claims things will always get better while ignoring evidence in reality to the contrary. Andrade says that hokey hope is especially guilty of ignoring the impact that power and privilege have in society and "largely delegitimizes the pain that urban youth experience as a result of a persistently unequal society."[26]

Critically Hopeful Practice—Seeking to Know Our Students' Context and Understand Them in the Process of Becoming

Seeking to know our students, understand their context, and allow it to impact our teaching is a critically hopefully practice. Keeping students' context at the forefront of class design and instruction also helps prevent taking a deficit-based view of them. Gannon cautions instructors to be aware of the ways in which centering their own expertise as a content expert in their classes can lead to this. Students continually come up short compared to his level of skills as a trained

historian. Gannon says, "It's too easy to critique novices for not being experts even though when put in those dark terms it's an absurd proposition."[27] He proposes that we understand students as in the process of what Friere called becoming.[28] Students are in college *to learn,* and mistakes and struggle are often hallmarks of this learning, not of laziness or a lack of capacity. Gannon advocates for taking a generous and curious view of students, asking what they bring to the broader learning environment and how it is impacting them. This resists what he sees as a dehumanizing narrative about students that see complexity and diversity in our students as a barrier to instruction, rather than an incredible educational asset.[29]

A focus on the context of our students also encourages us to value the epistemic gifts and strengths they bring with them to the classroom from other parts of their lives.[30] As a resistance to a deficit-based model that is often foisted onto students from marginalized communities, Tara Yosso articulates the importance of valuing the different forms of cultural capital that these students bring to the classroom, which she calls cultural wealth.[31] That same desire to recognize the value of the unique context and view of students appears in the comments of Arturo Sosa, S.J., current Superior General of the Jesuits, in his own reflection on the UAP. He says,

> Young people continue opening up to the future with the hope of building a life of dignity in a reconciled world that is in harmony with the environment. It is the young who, from their perspective, can help us to understand better the epochal change that we are living and its hope-filled newness.[32]

The Second Week: Imaginative Immersion in the Experience of the Gospel and Call to Mission

The Second Week of the Exercises focuses on the formation of the retreatant through the personal encounter with Jesus' life and example. The week is marked with an extensive amount of contemplations that focus on imaging oneself alongside Jesus during his ministry. Retreatants are encouraged to undergo 'compositions of place' in which they use their imagination to place themselves within the Gospel narratives of Jesus' life. This is meant to facilitate a space in which a person can more directly experience an encounter with God to build and deepen their relationship to the Divine. Imagination allows retreatants to engage Jesus through their full selves (emotions, senses, etc.) as he taught and encountered people. These experiences are also undergirded by Jesus' persistent call for others to join him in this work. That focus on call and mission is also central to the Second Week. As retreatants listen to Jesus' call to follow him, their own lives become refracted through the lens of missional call to love as Christ loved. As a result, daily life becomes filled with opportunities to serve God and others.[33]

Within the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm, this evokes the priority of the educative nature of experience. The IPP interprets experience broadly as any "activity in which in addition to a cognitive grasp of the matter being considered, some sensation of an affective nature is registered by the student."[34] Our students' *experience* of the concepts they learn—whether it is through direct engagement in active or community-based learning or through encouraging them to be attentive to their emotional response to new content and challenges—is an essential part of the learning process. Just as compositions of place allow a retreatant to more fully encounter Jesus in hopes of deepening their connection, a student's full embodied experience in Jesuit education is seen as a place to leverage learning.

The Second Week illuminates critical hope when we reorient to the importance of teaching and understand it as a place of mission. Gannon says that "[t]o teach and to care about doing it well enough and in a way that's just, equitable, and humane for our students and our communities as a radical stance."[35] Gannon emphasizes that the daily interactions we have with students in class and the learning environment we create are opportunities for expressions of critical hope.[36] In this way, critical hope is a deeply quotidian striving. It can be expressed in the simple and mundane and, as a result, invites us to see the practice of critical hope as a daily one. It echoes the Jesuit understanding of "God in All Things" that invites us to view all aspects of our lives and

the world as places to encounter grace and live in a missional way.

Gannon also uses a phrase from Danish educational reformer N. F. S. Grundtvig to discuss the ways in which our own attitudes towards teaching, our students, and education itself can create "classrooms of death"—environments that poison students to the joy of learning and focus on an elite status quo.[37] He contrasts this Grundtvig's conception of "classrooms of life," in which people learned both concepts *and* practical skills, with an emphasis on the need to utilize both to better their community. This mirrors language in *Characteristics of Jesuit Education* which describes Jesuit education as providing realistic knowledge, encouraging lifelong learning, and oriented to a concern for the others, especially the poor and oppressed.[38]

Critically Hopeful Practices—Universal Design for Learning

When rich learning experiences become a site in which students can holistically experience critical hope, accessibility to those learning experiences becomes essential. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a critically hopeful practice. UDL is a framework for creating learning experiences that are accessible to all learners, based on the idea that all learners have different strengths, needs, and preferences, and that learning environments should be designed to accommodate this diversity.[39] UDL is a critically hopeful practice because it challenges the traditional view of learning as a one-size-fits-all proposition. It recognizes that all learners are capable of learning, but that they may need different support and resources in order to do so. UDL provides a framework for creating learning environments that are inclusive and equitable, and that allow all learners to reach their full potential. It invites us to reimagine the classroom and our instruction in a way that is more equitable.

UDL features the perceptual, cognitive, and affective supports for learners.[40] Perceptual supports help learners with different sensory needs access the learning material through media such as audio recordings of text or visual representations of concepts. Cognitive supports providing multiple ways to solve problems or learn new information, which can be essential for learners who struggle with things like rote memorization or attention for extended periods of time.[41] Affective support allows students to engage more easily in the emotional aspects of the learning process. Collaborative assignments and numerous graded assessments over a semester in lieu of a single high stakes exam can often make a difference for students who experience anxiety.

Significantly, much of UDL is practiced in the daily reality of teaching—how students access content or how we chose to design assessments. A student may not say that a specifications or contract-grading framework in their organic chemistry class was the transformative moment in their academic career, but it may provide them the space to believe that they could succeed academically in the face of major challenges. When so many first-generation college students still struggle with feeling that they belong in universities, these support learning environments are essential to both retention and affirming potential.[42] Additionally, providing these supports in classes improves outcomes and engagement for *all* students in classes. UDL embodies the tripartite dynamics of reparative, active, and transformative action that Anke Schwittay attributes to critical hope.[43] UDL is reparative in addressing past injustices, active as it concretely seeks to resolve challenges and barriers facing students in the moment, and future-oriented as it seeks to transform what we understand as "standard" teaching.

The Third Week—Empathy for and Fidelity to The Oppressed and Suffering

The focus of the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises puts the retreatant at the foot of the cross and asks them to contemplate the suffering of the crucified Christ. The focus of the week is to develop or deepen empathy and compassion in the face of suffering.[44] Staying present in prayer to Jesus as he moves through the agony of the Passion encourages the retreatant to understand the ways in which love is expressed in the willingness to be present to someone *in* their suffering. This spirit of accompaniment encourages fidelity to care and concern even when it feels we can do nothing. It also highlights the needs for solidarity in the face of the wider

experiences of pain and suffering we share with our neighbors and the wider world. Things like climate change, racism, and wealth inequality cause suffering in everyone (albeit in different ways). The Third Week pushes us to understand that acknowledging and working to heal the suffering of others is a way to express love and commitment.[45]

The Third Week's push for us to stay present to what is important out of a desire for deeper relationship echoes the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm's emphasis on reflection. The IPP defines reflection as "a thoughtful reconsideration of some subject matter, experience, idea, purpose or spontaneous reaction, in order to grasp its significance more fully."[46] Students are encouraged to reflect on what they are learning, the affect emerging from those experiences, and what this may mean for the broader world. A student can master a factual understanding of the causes of the 2008 housing market collapse, but reflection helps a student integrate it and make meaning. Going the step further to reflect on this concept through the lens of their own deeply held values and the broader context will dramatically expand the learning's impact and help personalize its significance for students. Just as the Third Week reminds us it is one thing to pray abstractly on the Passion of Christ and another thing entirely to feel love and compassion at the thought of someone we care about suffering needlessly, reflection allows students to engage their education with their full selves in a more profound way. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach alluded to this when he said that a Jesuit education should leave students with a "well-educated solidarity."[47]

In the face of overwhelming injustice, it can be tempting to shift our focus away from what feels insurmountable. Turning away from systems of oppression and questions of power and privilege when we become overwhelmed is much like turning away from Christ on the cross. It is paramount for Ignatian educators to help their students stay present to this discomfort, even as much of modern society is structured so that we do not have to see or negotiate this tension. In this way, Ignatian pedagogy is a pedagogy of discomfort, encouraging students not to be satisfied with the status quo. Paulo Friere spoke of the ways in which traditional education can serve to conform students to particular models of behavior that reject discomfort. He said,

> The educated individual is the adapted person, because he or she is a better fit for the world. Translated into practice this concept is as well suited to the purpose of oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit into the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it.[48]

The Third Week echoes that critical hopes necessitates a persistent engagement with what we care about and for, even as the odds look grim or the desire to conform to an easier way of proceeding tempts us. Andrade cautioned that hope which refused to engage with discomfort was not hope at all. He said, "It is a false hope informed by privilege and rooted in the optimism of the spectator who needs not suffer—a 'let them eat cake' utterance that reveals a fundamental incomprehension of suffering."[49]

Critically Hopeful Practice—Centering Issues of Inclusions, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Both In and Outside the Classroom

The same spirit of fidelity and accompaniment that marks the Third Week must mark how we approach systems of inequity at our institutions as well. The struggle to address issues of Inclusions, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) within our curriculums and in our teaching practices is perennial. For many institutions, George Floyd's murder and the ensuing racial reckoning saw an increase in the amount of time, energy, and resources put towards including anti-racist approaches in our pedagogy, but it must be understood as the beginning of an unending reflection and engagement with oppression in the world, not something that can be solved with a few book groups or faculty development seminars.[50]

This dialogue around IDEA needs to occur outside of the classroom as well. We must ask important questions of our own institutions as to whether or not they are committed to supporting IDEA in the teaching and learning environments they build. Grain says that while social justice dialogues are gaining traction in some disciplines, it does not mean that institutions are changing—

and a commitment to working for institutional change is a hallmark of critical hope.[51] Especially in the wake of the Supreme Court's overturning of affirmative action in *SFFA v. Harvard,* how we admit students, what financial aid we offer, and what support we give to students when they arrive are things that all employees of Jesuit schools should be curious about. Especially for tenured faculty, whose status often allows them more breathing space to ask hard questions publicly, asking whether or not our own institutions are run in ways that show an awareness and compassion for the suffering of marginalized groups can become a missional act.

When we recognize how education has failed students, we begin to open up a space for hope to speak. Pedro Arrupe's 1973 address "Men for Others," from which the ubiquitous Jesuit phrase "person for others" originated, is a prime example of this. Arrupe was addressing the 10th International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe and an audience of alumni of Jesuit schools known for their prestige. He was unflinchingly honest of his appraisal of the ways in which their education had failed to form them for justice. He said,

> First, let me ask this question: Have we Jesuits educated you for justice? You and I know what many of your Jesuit teachers will answer to that question. They will answer, in all sincerity and humility: No, we have not. If the terms 'justice' and 'education for justice' carry all the depth of meaning which the Church gives them today, we have not educated you for justice.[52]

He then continues to lay out a vision of what Jesuit education could look like if it committed itself to forming graduates "who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors."[53] This clear sighted, honest reflection on the ways in which Jesuit education had fallen short led to a powerful revival and redirection that is now a hallmark of our education approach today. Honest, critical appraisal allowed for space for an imaginative engagement with the current reality that led to transformation and a new way forward.

The Fourth Week—Transformation through Active, Relational Love

The Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises focuses on Jesus' resurrection and the retreatant's response. It is meant to be a time to rejoice in the victory of life over death and to be inspired by the example of Jesus' love and compassion. Because the resurrection is understood as a manifestation of God's love, meditations in the Fourth Week invite the retreatant to consider how to respond to that love through their own loving action toward the world. This is the summative focus of the Exercises and Paul Begheyn, S.J. warns that "Those who as a result of the Exercises ignore the world, have been wasting their time for thirty days."[54]

It is in this week that Ignatius' famous quote "Love ought to be put more in deeds than in words" is found. However, this is one of two qualifiers that Ignatius attributes to love in the Contemplation to Attain Love. The first is that love leads to action, and the second is that love is inherently relational. Ignatius says, "Love consists in interchange between the two parties; that is to say in the lover's giving and communicating to the beloved what he has or out of what he has or can."[55] There is an intimacy and connection when love is expressed—there is an intentional proximity (physically, emotionally, or spiritually) inherent to the act of love.

This emphasis on action as the goal of transformation is the root of the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm's step of action. The IPP says that this action is the necessary fruit of reflection. "Ignatian reflection, just as it begins with the reality of experience, necessarily ends with that same reality in order to effect it. Reflection only develops and matures when it fosters decision and commitment."[56] The IPP also highlights that action can be understood as consisting of both interior and exterior choices. The student may find that their will is moved by what they learn and they come to gradually clarify their priorities or have a sudden insight that changes their world view. Ideally this will lead to external choices that reflect these new priorities and both impact the world and help the students experience a more unified sense of self,

as their exterior behavior comes to mirror their interior values.

The ongoing cycle of reflection, change, and action rooted in a desire to express love and care for the wider world found in the Fourth Week and the IPP's understanding of action points to an aspect of critical hope that Kari Grain calls relentless incrementalism. It is the strategy of focusing on making small, continuous improvements over time and a refusal to devalue these small victories as insignificant compared to larger shifts and changes.[57] While it is often marked by a slow pace, Grain says that relentless incrementalism also allows for a better acceptance of failure and mistakes because it does not focus on a single victory as summative. Each shift and change opens up more possibilities and lines for flight as slow progress.

Critically Hopeful Practice: Working for Epistemic Justice through Community-Based Learning & Understanding Students as Co-creators of Knowledge

The Fourth Week is clear that transformation should result in an active and relational response. The critically hopeful practices of community-based learning and understanding students as co-creators of knowledge ask us as instructors to share power with others in the process of education. Both decenter the instructor as the sole expert and authority in the classroom and simultaneously put them in more proximate relationship to others. In the process, these practices also invite a hopeful reimagining of what is considered valued knowledge. Community-based learning (CBL) is a pedagogical approach that connects students in-classroom learning with the wider community to help contextualize and enrich their learning. This can involve volunteering with community organizations, project-based work, or conducting research.[58] Community-based learning is also motivated by the belief that all communities have intrinsic educational assets and resources that educators can use to enhance learning experiences for students.[59] A best practice in CBL centers on mutual partnership with community members, focusing student efforts on addressing a community-identified problem rather than having the students or instructors assume that they know what the community needs or wants.[60]

When done well, CBL helps nuance the concepts students are learning in the classroom by putting that knowledge in dialogue with the reality of the community and their own understandings and experiences of these concepts. A student in a psychology class learning about addiction may find that the stories of the people she encounters at her service-learning site challenge the prevailing theories around recovery she is learning about. Or a student volunteering at an assisted living facility may hear a resident share a direct account of an experience they are learning about in history class. CBL helps democratize knowledge by giving students the opportunity to learn from people and perspectives that are often marginalized in traditional educational settings. When students work with community members, they have the opportunity to learn about their experiences, perspectives, and knowledge. This can help to challenge students' assumptions about the world and to develop a more critical understanding of knowledge. Additionally, CBL requires a level of relationality. To learn from the process, students must practice vulnerability both in getting proximate to the individuals in the community they are learning from and by reflecting authentically and honestly on how these experiences challenge or confirm their deeply held values.[61]

The same approach that CBL's relational pedagogy takes to reconceptualize whose knowledge is valuable can be extended to our students as well. The discussion of the insights of First Week of the Spiritual Exercises highlighted the importance of allowing our students' context to impact the way we teach them. Going a step farther, when we conceptualize our students as co-creators of knowledge and not passive recipients, we reimagine what engagement of the course material can be. When students are allowed to bring their full selves into the classroom and share their interpretations of or challenges to the curriculum, they are more likely to conceptualize themselves as agents, capable of making change in their spheres of influence.

Doing this also requires a relational approach of care for our students. Instructors need to ask students what they think of what they are learning, but they must also establish a classroom environment that feels safe and respectful enough

for students to risk sharing their personal views in the first place. Instructors have to first see their students as complex human beings and then show that they are curious about their student's unique perspectives.

Both of these critically hopeful practices serve to widen our understanding of whose knowledge is worth learning—an essential question of epistemic justice. Issues of epistemic justice center on questions of whose knowledge is considered valuable, what groups are seen as capable of creating knowledge, and how systems of power discredit or undercut groups' epistemic claims.[62] When doing critical hope's essential work of imagining new ways forward to address current challenges, a commitment to working for epistemic justice allows us to open up to perspectives and approaches in a spirit of intellectual humility.

Conclusion

Higher education is at an existential inflection point. The move towards pedagogies rooted in critical hope is inherently life and world-affirming in the face of previously mentioned doubts around the worth of a college education and increasing levels of student despair at the state of the world. James Hanvey, S.J. spoke to the desideratum of hope as he described the importance of hope when working for the UAPs. Hanvey said,

> Without hope, freedom becomes diminished, the imagination grows stale, the ever more crowded 'now' ceases to be a refuge and becomes a form of emptiness which consumes in a parody of living. The more difficult we find it to believe in a positive future, the more difficult it becomes to change the present.[63]

For Jesuit education to transform in this day and age, it must contain the seeds of a hope rooted in the imagination that Ignatius centered at the core of the Spiritual Exercises. These critically hopeful approaches to learning utilize that same imagination. It is an imagination in service to the world and rooted in a deep understanding of reality that looks to larger systems and structures in need of reform. But it also understands that death, in all its forms, is never the final word and seeks to cultivate the freedom within us to see new possibility and ways forward where others only see obstacles and defeat. Critical hope is a deep expression of our Ignatian charism. Let us be brave enough to let that hope transform our teaching. HJE

Figure 1. Themes of the Spiritual Exercises by Week and corresponding aspects of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm and Critically Hopeful Practices.

Weeks of the Exercises and Themes	**Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm**	**Critically Hopeful Practices**
1st Week—Seeking to Understand Our Broken World with Compassion for Self and Others	Context	Seeking to Know Our Students' Context and Understand Them In the Process of Becoming
2nd Week—Imaginative Immersion in the Experience of the Gospel and Call to Mission	Experience	Universal Design for Learning
3rd Week—Empathy for and Fidelity to the Oppressed and Suffering	Reflection	Centering Issues of Inclusions, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Both In and Outside the Classroom
Fourth Week—Transformation through Active, Relational Love	Action	Working for Epistemic Justice through Community-Based Learning & Understanding Students as Co-creators of Knowledge

Figure 2. Contrasting Frameworks Between "Classrooms of Death" and "Classrooms of Critical Hope"
Attitudes Toward Students

Classrooms of Death	**Classrooms of Critical Hope**
Students are Defined	Students are Becoming
Students are Passive	Students are Active Agents
Students are Recipients of knowledge	Students are Co-creators of knowledge
Students must meet requirements to merit education	Student must have access to education

Attitudes Toward the Education

Classrooms of Death	**Classrooms of Critical Hope**
Schooling is basically fair and all effort is rewarded equally	Injustice impacts all majors systems and structures in life, including education
Education's purpose is to transmit knowledge	Education's purpose is to transform
Knowledge is created solely through academic work and transmitted by faculty	The broader world is full of epistemic opportunities

Attitudes Toward Teaching

Classrooms of Death	**Classrooms of Critical Hope**
Teaching is meant to regulate the discipline and ensure quality	Teaching is meant to liberate students
Good teaching is transcendental and often cannot be explained	Good teaching is a quotidian practice that demands daily focus and care
Focused on Maintaining Rigor	Focused on Learning

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Endnotes

[1] Megyn Brenan, "Americans' Confidence in Higher Education Down Sharply," *Gallup*, July 11, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/poll/508352/americans-confidence-higher-education-down-sharply.aspx.

[2] Melissa Ezarik, " Student Mental Health Status Report: Struggles, Stressors and Supports," *Inside Higher Ed,* April 18, 2022, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/04/19/survey-college-students-reflect-mental-health-and-campus-help.

[3] Shigeru Yonezawa, Shigeru, "Socrates on Educational Success," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2016): 4.

[4] Hideyuki Ichikawa, "A Theory of Hope in Critical Pedagogy: An Interpretation of Henry Giroux," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 54*,* no. 4 (2022): 384.

[5] Henry Giroux, *Dangerous Thinking in the Age of the New Authoritarianism* (Place: Routledge, 2015), 80.

[6] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Place: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 3.

[7] Henry Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy,* (Place: Paradigm, 2004), 73.

[8] Ichikawa, "A Theory of Hope," 384.

[9] Henry Giroux, "Toward a Pedagogy of Educated Hope Under Casino Capitalism," *Pedagogia y Saberes* 50 (2019): 150.

[10] Vivienne Bozalek, et al., eds., *Discerning Critical Hope in Educational Practices* (Routledge, 2014) is an exceptional edited volume of work on critical hope.

[11] Vivienne Bozalek, Ronelle Carolissen, and Brenda Leibowitz, "A Pedagogy of Critical Hope in South African Higher Education," *Discerning Critical Hope in Educational Practices* (2013), 41.

[12] Kari Grain, *Critical Hope: How to Grapple with Complexity, Lead with Purpose, and Cultivate Transformative Social Change* (North Atlantic Books, 2022).

[13] Susan Mossman Riva, "Translating Ignatian Principles into Artful Pedagogies of Hope," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journa*l 9, no. 1 (2020): 106-121, https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol9/iss1/11/.

[14] Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., "Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges and Issues in Jesuit Education," Remarks for "Networking Jesuit Higher Education: Shaping the Future for a Humane, Just, Sustainable Globe" Mexico City – April 23, 2010, https://unijes.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NicolasSJ.JHE_.April23.20102.pdf.

[15] J. Matthew Ashley, "The Jesuit University as an Instrument of Mercy," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*: Vol. 7: No. 1, (2018): 5-16, https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol7/iss1/3/.

[16] David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 40-44.

[17] International Commission on the Apostolates of Jesuit Education (ICAJE), *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (Rome: International Center for Jesuit Education, 1993), 23. "A distinctive feature of the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm is that, understood in the light of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, it becomes not only a fitting description of the continual interplay of experience, reflection and action in the teaching-learning process, but also an ideal portrayal of the dynamic interrelationship of teacher and learner in the latter's journey of growth in knowledge and freedom."

[18] Paul Beghyn, S.J., "Soul Friend: The Director in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola," in *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance,* ed. Lavina Byrne (London: Liturgical Press, 1991), 156.

[19] Bozalek et al., *Discerning Critical Hope*, 1.

[20] Kevin Gannon, *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto* (West Virginia Press, 2020).

[21] Andrés Prieto, "The Perils of Accommodation: Jesuit Missionary Strategies in the Early Modern World", *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 4, 3 (2017): 395-414, doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/22141332-00403002.

[22] William A. Barry S.J., and Ignatius, *Finding God in All Things : A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Notre Dame, Ind: Ave Maria Press, 1991). Ignatius' original language around sin was far more evocative of the 16th century Counter-reformation view of sin and moral failings, and I acknowledge that this description of the First Week and sin is strongly colored by modern interpretations of the Exercises. It can be argued that the strength of the language around sin comes primarily from a place of urgency for conversion rather than disgust at sinfulness (especially when one is familiar with Ignatius' own later in life conversion). I would argue that the need for a sense of compassion towards brokenness within self, others, and the world can still convey that powerful sense of urgency and necessity that Ignatius brought to the First Week and does not represent a "watering down" of the focus.

[23] ICAJE, *Ignatian Pedagogy,* 35.

[24] International Commission on the Apostolates of Jesuit Education (ICAJE), *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (Rome: International Center for Jesuit Education, 1986), 44.

[25] ICAJE, *Ignatian Pedagogy,* 37.

[26] Jeffery Duncan-Andrade, "Note to Educators: Hope Required When Growing Roses in Concrete," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 2 (2009): 184.

[27] Gannon, *Radical Hope,* 41-42.

[28] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 84. He regards human beings as 'beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with likewise unfinished reality" (italics in original).

[29] Gannon, *Radical Hope,* 131.

[30] Epistemic justice will be discussed in more length in the Fourth Week.

[31] Tara J. Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005): 69-91. Yosso describes this broader framework of cultural capital as including aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital.

[32] Arturo Sosa, S.J., "Assimilating and Implementing the Universal Apostolic Preferences 2019-2029," Letter (February 6, 2019), 4, https://www.jesuits.global/uap/.

[33] Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary: A Handbook for Retreat Directors* (Leominster: Gracewing Publishing, 1998), 28.

[34] ICAJE, *Ignatian Pedagogy,* 43.

[35] Gannon, *Radical Hope,* 50.

[36] Gannon, *Radical Hope,* 49.

[37] Gannon, *Radical Hope,* 10.

[38] Gannon's frame of classrooms of death and classrooms of life is a helpful way to conceptualize the core hermeneutics and attitudes that instructors may hold in their daily interactions with their students. I have synthesized some of Gannon's arguments and added some of my own in Figure 2 that contrasts a classroom of death with what I will call a classroom of critical hope. While there is not sufficient space or time to explore these further in this article, they do present some concise and clear examples of ways in which critical hope often requires a radically different worldview than traditional classroom pedagogy.

[39] Dave Edyburn, "Universal Design for Learning," *Special Education Technology Practice* 7, no. 5 (2005): 16.

[40] Don Glass, Anne Meyer, and David Rose, "Universal Design for Learning and the Arts," *Harvard Educational Review* 83, no. 1 (2013): 99.

[41] Mairead Seymour, "Enhancing the Online Student Experience through the Application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to Research Methods Learning and Teaching," *Education and Information Technologies* (2023): 5. A gentle reminder for all instructors who lecture—the average neurotypical adult's attention span is 15 minutes.

[42] Catherine Schelly, Patricia L. Davies, and Craig L. Spooner, "Student Perceptions of Faculty Implementation of Universal Design for Learning," *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability* 24, no. 1 (2011): 20.

[43] Anke Schwittay, "Teaching Critical Hope with Creative Pedagogies of Possibilities," *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* (2023): 12.

[44] Kevin O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 216.

[45] Katherine Marie Dyckman, Mary Garvin, and Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women* (Paulist Press, 2001), 219.

[46] ICAJE, *Ignatian Pedagogy,* 49.

[47] Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education" (Santa Clara University, October 6, 2000), https://www.scu.edu/ic/programs/ignatian-worldview/kolvenbach/.

[48] Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 166.

[49] Jeffery Duncan-Andrade, "Note to Educators: Hope Required When Growing Roses in Concrete," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 2 (2009): 183.

[50] To that point, the depth, importance, and complexity of this topic can not be adequately addressed in this article. The following resources may be very helpful for those seeking to incorporate more DEI work into their pedagogy, but is by no means an exhaustive list:
1) https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/resources/anti-racist-pedagogy/
2) https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/29/books/review/antiracist-reading-list-ibram-x-kendi.html
3) https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2020/06/06/871023438/this-list-of-books-films-and-podcasts-about-racism-is-a-start-not-a-panacea;
The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities also has a page dedicated to racial justice that may be helpful as well. https://www.ajcunet.edu/racial-justice;

[51] Grain, *Critical Hope,* 55.

[52] Pedro Arrupe, "Men for Others,"(Valencia, Spain: 1973), https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1973_arrupemenforothers/#:~:text=Today%20our%20prime%20educational%20objective,their%20neighbors%3B%20men%20completely%20convinced.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Begheyn, S.J., "Soul Friend," 159.

[55] St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises,* Contemplation to Attain Love.

[56] ICAJE, *Ignatian Pedagogy,* 62.

[57] Grain, *Critical Hope*, 49.

[58] Patrick M. Green, et al., "Advocating for Experiential Learning Programs as Change Agents in Higher Education: Imagining a Justice Orientation that Centers Students and Partners while Enriching Practice," *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education* 5, no. 1 (2022): 11.

[59] Susan Haarman and Patrick Green, "Does Place Actually Matter? Searching For Place-based Pedagogy Amongst Impact and Intentionality," *Metropolitan Universities* 34, vol. 2 (2023): 8-9.

[60] Merna Meyer and Lesley Wood, "A Critical Reflection on the Multiple Roles Required to Facilitate Mutual Learning During Service-Learning in Creative Arts Education," *Teaching in Higher Education* 22, no. 2 (2017): 160.

[61] A quick note around proximity—it does not necessarily focus on physical distance. While remote or virtual service opportunities were available before, practicing CBL during the COVID 19 pandemic necessitated creative utilizations of this form of encounter with communities. The author found that students who engaged in this virtual service with a level of openness of vulnerability reported nearly the same level of impact as students doing in person service had before.

[62] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24.

[63] James Hanvey, S.J., "The Kairos of an Unexpected Hope. A Theological Reading of the UAPs," Letter, 2019, https://www.jesuits.global/uap/introduction/.