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DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND HOPE

STEPHEN MCCLOSKEY

Introduction

Recent issues of *Policy and Practice* have debated the converging crises that are enveloping the world. Issue 38 addressed the question of migration which has been weaponised by the far-right to incite hatred and violence toward asylum-seekers who have been targeted by protestors feeding off myths, stereotypes and disinformation (Stacey, 2025). A trend across Europe has seen centre-right political parties steal the clothes of far-right parties which is bringing extreme anti-migrant positions into the political mainstream (Henley, 2025). In heated debates inflamed by social media and the right-wing press, migration has deflected public attention away from the economic causes of poverty and inequality at home by focusing on immigration. What is rarely discussed by the media is that the overwhelming majority of refugees and those in need of international protection, some 73 percent, were hosted by low- and middle-income countries in 2024 and just 23 percent hosted by countries in the global North (UNHCR, 2024: 2). Rather than introduce safe and legal routes as a more humane and orderly means of tackling the question of migration, the global North continues to force migrants to make treacherous journeys across land and sea to seek sanctuary and protection. And, of course, rarely are the issues that drive people in the global South to seek asylum discussed rationally in the Euro-Atlantic countries because many of these push factors emanate from the global North such as arms sales fuelling conflict, global heating and economic sanctions. It is estimated, for example, that economic sanctions imposed by the United States and European Union since 1970 have killed 38 million people in the global South and forced many more to emigrate (Hickel, Sullivan and Tayeb, 2025).

Issue 39 of *Policy and Practice* on the theme 'Development Education Silences' considered the studied omissions in current development education policy and practice, most notably the sector's non-response to the ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip (Murphy, 2024), a recurring theme in Issue 42 too. By sitting out the genocide, development educators have not only failed to stand in solidarity with the oppressed in Gaza as Freire (1996: 31) would have urged us to but have ignored the colonial roots of Israel's war crimes and the threat posed to international humanitarian law by Western indifference to and complicity in the suffering of Palestinians (Massad, 2024). And, Issue 41 of the journal discussed 'Development Education and Class', an issue that has long been dormant within sectoral discourse despite social class being an important determinant of poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, for example, has reported that: 'social class and processes of class reproduction remain important, particularly for the continuity of poverty over time and across generations' (Shildrick and Rucell, 2015: 1). Freire radically rejected a class-based society and regarded class consciousness as conditional to the 'the disappearance of the oppressors as a dominant class' (Freire, 1996: 38).

Issues 38 to 40 of *Policy and Practice* have, therefore, mapped many of the key global battlegrounds for social justice and equality, which are systemically linked by neoliberal economics and the clear intent by the world's richest states that 'the gilded bubbles of relative safety and luxury that are dotted across our cruelly divided and fast-warming world will be protected at all costs. Up to and including with genocidal violence' (Klein, 2024). In this context, it may seem 'naïve or irresponsibly utopian', as suggested by Abdellatif Atif in the current issue of *Policy and Practice*, to invoke hope as a meaningful pedagogical response to the meta crisis set out in Issues 38-40. And yet that is one of the aims of Issue 41 of the journal which is on the theme 'Development Education and Hope' and carries several reflective and hopeful contributions that offer optimism, solidarities and futures rather than nihilism and despair. Hope means not succumbing to the inevitability of neoliberalism, poverty and a class-based society but rather, as Henry Giroux suggests, 'providing the pedagogical conditions for raising new wants, needs and ambitions, and real hope... in a context that makes such hope realizable' (Giroux, 1997: 109).

A pedagogy of hope

As a journal inspired by the pedagogy of Paulo Freire and committed to his values of social justice, solidarity and transformation, Issue 41 considers the importance of hope to authentic struggle in solidarity with the oppressed wherever they may be in the global North and South. In his *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire recognised that without hope 'we succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world' (2014: 2). Just as he recognised that hope without struggle 'is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism and fatalism', Freire acknowledged that struggle without hope could be reduced to 'calculated acts alone'; a 'frivolous illusion' (Ibid.). 'Without a minimum of hope', argued Freire, 'we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness' (Ibid.: 3). Freire's friend and collaborator for fifteen years, Henry Giroux, considered education pivotal to the struggle for a 'radical, democratic society' (Giroux, 2019). Hope, argued Giroux, 'is the precondition for imagining a future that does not replicate the nightmares of the present, for not making the present the future' (Ibid.).

In tandem with hope is the need for psychic and emotional literacy to enable learners to understand their role in, and vulnerability to, the complex issues that are impacting us personally and the world around us. In reflecting on the complex emotional responses that citizens have to navigate in processing the climate emergency including ecological grief and anxiety, Audrey Bryan emphasised 'the mutual interaction between psychic and social processes' as part of 'a broader and sustained public response to the climate crisis' (Bryan, 2020: 8). Hope is a starting position for unpacking our emotional engagement with the climate emergency and the other crises that are closing down spaces for resistance, critical pedagogy and individual and collective agency. Hope can fire our collective imagination and critical consciousness as a mainspring to activism and intervention in the world. In 2014, the international non-governmental development organisation, Children in Crossfire, developed a Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT) that aimed to develop within learners 'emotional literacy which can be applied to critical development education to bring about active citizens who have capacity to take compassionate action for global justice' (Murphy et al., 2014: 52). Emotional literacy, driven by hope, can build self-

confidence, resilience, skill in emotional regulation and the capacity for social change. As Tarozzi argues in the introduction to *Pedagogy of Hope for Global Social Justice*, 'hope can unveil contradictions, injustices, mystifications that a hopeless pragmatic fatalism tends to generate' (Bourn and Tarozzi, 2023: 2).

An obvious deficit in contemporary development education practice is a lack of strategic thinking and the capacity to connect issues that are clearly intertwined such as migration, racism, the rise of the far-right and growing inequality. As Fricke's research found, the development education and international development sectors give little attention to structural-systemic economic processes and ideologies which limits their capacity to address the root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice (Fricke, 2022: 42). Hope can mobilise citizens toward action but this needs to be aligned with systems thinking that strategically identifies how problems connect and how they can be addressed. As Giroux (2021: 280) writes: we need 'a radical and educated sense of hope which can revitalise critical human agency to operate strategically and responsibly to intervene in and contribute to collectively changing the course of history'. The articles published in Issue 41 of *Policy and Practice* are clear-eyed, strategic and offer practical proposals on how hope can be effectively integrated into our practice.

Opportunities for hope

Freire wrote that 'one of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be' (2014: 3). The contributors to Issue 41 reflect on the practical opportunities for hope in different educational contexts. In her Focus article, Elizabeth Meade considers how the 'culture of individualism' has become 'magnified under neoliberalism' which has resulted in 'the prevalent phenomenon of reducing social movements to a focus on notable individual actors alone, often removed from the wider context from which they were immersed'. One of the examples cited by Meade of challenging this 'culture of individualism' is Rosa Parks' commendable and courageous refusal to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955. This 'singular decision' was a reflection of the crucial role played by the Highlander Folk School in both the labour and civil rights movements in building the capacity of activists like Parks

to fight racism. Just as neoliberalism atomises society into autonomous individuals, activist movements are often reduced to the actions of an individual which underplays the role of grassroots organisations and communities in building social change. Meade quotes Picower (2012: 9) who writes that:

> "by exposing learners to people they can relate to within social movements, teachers provide not only a sense of hope but also tangible models of what it looks like to stand up on the side of justice".

Meade concludes that 'Hope can be better sustained, and is more sustaining, when we hope together with others'.

The second Focus article in Issue 41 by Benedict Arko is a critical discourse analysis of the annual Oxfam inequality reports that have been published between 2016-2025 to coincide with the gathering of political and business elites at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Arko's article poses the question whether the reports are purveyors of hope or entrench gloom? The answer based on a discourse analysis of the reports detects an evolution in their positioning from one of crisis and elite blame to later highlighting collective action and alternatives to neoliberalism. Arko finds in the later reports greater evidence of systemic thinking and an emphasis on 'feminist economics, grassroots organising, and fairer wealth distribution as real solutions' to global injustices. The article argues that reports can be used by development educators as 'pedagogical tools, naming injustice while building the emotional and political conditions for democratic renewal and resistance'. It urges 'Oxfam and other INGOs to go beyond dissemination and integrate the reports into education programmes'. By doing so they would 'link advocacy with pedagogy, ensuring their emotionally powerful and structurally critical messages shape classrooms, teacher training, and student learning' imbued by hope and solidarity.

The third Focus article is written by Douglas Bourn, who with Massimiliano Tarozzi, co-edited the 2023 volume, *Pedagogy of Hope for Global Social Justice: Sustainable Futures for People and the Planet* (Bourn and Tarozzi, 2023). His article provides valuable examples of how a pedagogy of hope 'can become a key element of teaching and learning within both formal and higher

education'. Framing his article in the context of 'young people's sense of concern about their future', particularly the climate crisis, Bourn argues that a pedagogy of hope can enable learners 'to have positive views about their own future'. The practical examples of pedagogy of hope profiled by Bourn include an animation created by young people and researchers in England and Vietnam called 'Rivers of Hope'. The animation shows a community response to flooding in Vietnam that included education programmes on mitigation measures that can help to address the impact of the climate crisis. The article also profiles projects led by development education centres in Tower Hamlets in London and Cumbria in North-West England. The Tower Hamlets' project, 'Communities of Hope', supported a series of creative in-school workshops that focused on how climate change is impacting young people's mental well-being and guidance on how to manage climate anxiety. The Cumbria project, 'Discovered Stories Shared Communities', focused on community resilience by creating 'a new vision of the future through listening, talking, telling stories' and using 'visual arts and written work to inspire people'. Both projects are community-led and 'cultivate optimism and action for a more just and sustainable world'. Bourn concludes that the projects succeeded by creating a sense of hope 'grounded in an educational process that is empowering and forward thinking'.

Perspectives on hope

The five Perspectives articles in Issue 41 of *Policy and Practice* capture practice and discourse on the pedagogy of hope in a range of sectors and settings. Gerard McCann provides what will be an excellent teaching aid for third level practitioners by drilling down into the philosophical influences on Freire's pedagogy of hope, focusing specifically on three pillars of his praxis: critical consciousness, human agency and ethics-based liberation. The philosophical influences on Freire discussed in the article include the German-American psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, the martyred Bishop Hélder Câmara and the liberation theology movement, the French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the German-Marxist scholar Ernst Bloch, and the early writings of Karl Marx. McCann weaves these formative influences into Freire's pedagogy and discerns 'a distinct contextualisation of his epistemology'. He argues that the 'genius' of Freire's work 'can be recognised in his marshalling of critical theory, liberation theology and phenomenology (European existentialism) to the service

of pedagogy'. McCann's commendable literature review of Freire's seminal philosophical influences will greatly support scholarly research and teaching about the pedagogy of hope.

The second Perspectives article by Anne M. Dolan on the polycrisis recalls that 2025 marks the eightieth anniversary of the dropping of an atomic bomb by the United States military at the end of the Second World War on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the world pledged that 'never again' would we see such atrocities carried out on civilian populations. And yet the ongoing genocide in Gaza 'highlights the failure of the United Nations and the limitations of global citizenship in promoting peace, justice, global solidarity and compassion'. Dolan argues that global citizenship education 'needs to return to its radical roots in order to address the polycrisis in all its complexity'. This requires adopting a more 'transformative approach underpinned by radical, political and active forms of hope to inspire action and agency and to overturn widespread levels of individual, societal and political complacency'. GCE aligned with hope, argues Dolan, can play 'a crucial role in fostering agency, action and solidarity for a better future'. Conversely hopelessness can 'generate feelings of powerlessness, low self-esteem, depression and anxiety'. Dolan concludes with the positive assessment that teachers and learners using a renewed GCE, premised upon Freirean hope, can 'transform despair into action, reclaim our futures and co-create a more equitable, peaceful and sustainable world'.

The third Perspectives article by Chriszine Backhouse, Aoife Dare and Angela Veale draws upon an inspiring and innovative youth arts project called 'Elevate Youth Arts' led by the Irish Refugee Council in partnership with Creativity and Change. The project enabled sixteen international protection applicants to adopt the role of educator through their involvement in an interactive stage performance inspired by Augusto Boal's (2008) Theatre of the Oppressed methodology:

> "which uses physical sculptures or 'frozen images' created by participants to explore social issues and power dynamics, and in which they use their bodies to represent experiences and emotional states as a form of social commentary".

The performance provoked both critical thinking and empathy from audiences by making visible 'the structural conditions that constrain the lives of young international protection applicants' and challenging 'Eurocentric notions of victimhood as an internal, decontextualised attribute'. The young actors, therefore, became educators through a performance that revealed inequalities by 'promoting conscientisation'. As the authors correctly indicate in their piece, no previously published article in *Policy and Practice* has explored the role that international protection applicants can play in educating audiences about international development issues such as war and displacement, the theme of their performance in the 'Elevate Youth Arts' project. The authors and young people are to be commended for their ground-breaking project and article.

The fourth Perspectives article by Abdellatif Atif challenges two extreme ideas: 'the absolutism that claims knowledge relies on fixed, universal truths, and the despair of anti-foundationalist cynicism, which denies stable grounds for knowledge and often concludes that meaning, progress, or shared values are impossible'. Drawing upon the post-foundational political theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Atif argues 'that political and pedagogical transformation is not only possible but also necessary, as it involves legitimate forms of knowledge and action'. Atif recognises that in the midst of the genocide in Gaza there is a serious crisis of hope but refuses to accept 'the present as unchangeable'. Education is critical to creating a new political imaginary because 'to teach with hope is to commit to pedagogical relations that are dialogical, relational, and open-ended'. Atif argues that 'education can still be a space to imagine new social forms even amid fragmentation and crisis'. However, if education is not to recreate the 'very systems of despair it seeks to challenge', it must not 'retreat into naïvety or a denial of political complexity'. Atif's article serves as an effective warning to the development education sector arguing that a pedagogy of hope is dependent on educators directly addressing 'the most urgent injustices of our time'.

In the fifth Perspectives article by Julie Sarmah, she draws upon thirty years of primary teaching and extensive practice in initial teacher education to explore how global citizenship education can support a child's 'inner

transformation' by 'engaging each student's higher or spiritual self to foster critical awareness and a sense of responsibility'. Sarmah argues that this 'inner dimension' has been 'largely unexplored within the current global learning conversation'. Through the 'teaching of virtues as building blocks for inner growth and ethical development', Sarmah argues that formal education 'can share spiritual values that unite diverse cultural and religious groups'. For Sarmah, global learning must be 'rooted in the cultivation of virtues if it is to inspire meaningful, sustained social action'. This involves 'embedding virtues' within the school culture, classroom practice and at senior management level to 'create the conditions for service-oriented action'. She concludes that 'within learning spaces grounded in both reflection and action, children can begin to imagine what it is possible to achieve together for collective betterment'.

As political systems slide toward the far-right, not least in the United States, Henry Giroux remains a vital voice of rationality, humanism, social democracy and radical hope. It is always a privilege to publish his work in *Policy and Practice* and his Viewpoint contribution to Issue 41 invokes Edward Said's 'pedagogy of wakefulness' as 'a crucial pedagogical framework' for 'resisting authoritarianism' and 'reclaiming higher education as a site of resistance'. Giroux's article is a must read for development educators concerned at the inertia and intellectual drift impacting our sector. Development educators should avail themselves of Said's 'pedagogy of wakefulness' which 'emphasises the need for intellectuals to remain vigilant, awake to the realities of power, work with an array of social movements, and actively engage in resisting systems of oppression'. This quotation expertly captures the role of development educators in today's dangerous times in which 'the state has weaponised ignorance and repression, seeking to silence dissent and erase marginalised histories'. Of course, we always associate Said with his tireless advocacy for Palestine and Giroux argues that his pedagogy of wakefulness has 'long offered a framework for resisting colonial violence and challenging the narratives that justify oppression'. Giroux argues that Said's pedagogy 'invites us to imagine a world where education is not only a means of intellectual liberation but a force to defend and strengthen democracy'. A laudatory invocation in these troubled times.

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Stephen McCloskey is Director of the Centre for Global Education and Editor of *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*.

Focus

CULTIVATING COLLECTIVE HOPE AGAINST A CULTURE OF INDIVIDUALISM

ELIZABETH MEADE

Abstract: Dominant education systems in the global North have long fed into a culture of individualism. Since the enlightenment, educational theory has been dominated by the idea of education as the production of autonomous subjects, and has contributed to the development of an instrumentalist and individualistic view of education (Biesta, 2007). This legacy has become further magnified under neoliberalism. The influence of a culture of individualism is also evident in various ways in global citizenship education (GCE). Specifically, for this article, I suggest that one example of this cultural climate is the prevalent phenomenon of reducing social movements to a focus on notable individual actors alone, often removed from the wider context from which they were immersed. I propose that such narratives can inadvertently feed a sense of hopelessness in learners who cannot see themselves in such lone figures (Woodson, 2016).

This tendency also overlooks the fact that no person is an island, and that surrounding each of these remarkable people was often a committed and organised community, as well as connected legacies of nameless others stretching back through history. One way that a critical approach to GCE can support informed collective action and in turn aid the cultivation of critical hope, is by foregrounding collective grassroots struggles. I briefly point to some examples that highlight the hopeful possibilities that can emerge when ordinary people come together in communities to resist oppression and struggle for justice. In the final section of the article I will turn to the concept of 'collective hope' (Stockdale, 2021; Fife, 2024) to show that in addition to challenging the culture of

individualism, foregrounding and supporting collective action has the added benefit of enabling the growth of collective hope.

Key words: Collective Hope; Critical GCE; Collective Activism; Social Justice Education.

Introduction

The conceptualisation of the subject as a separate, sovereign, autonomous agent is a legacy of a modern/colonial understanding of the human person that has long influenced education and continues to permeate unexpected places in education today, such as global citizenship education (GCE) (Machado de Oliveira Andreotti, 2021). In this article I suggest that one way in which we can see traces of this legacy that shapes a dominant understanding of what it means to be a human person is in a common approach to learning about the history of social justice movements. Specifically, the foregrounding of notable individual actors who engaged in admirable actions for social justice, often removed from the wider context from which they were immersed. Although the motivation can be to offer role models for action, in emphasising the heroic deeds of the exceptional few frequently only part of the story is told, and the reality of the collective organising that gave rise to and supported such actions is suppressed. In doing so, such an approach can inadvertently contribute to a culture of individualism. It may also feed a sense of hopelessness and impotence to act as learners may find it difficult to easily see themselves in such examples.

GCE has a lot to offer by way of critiquing this culture of individualism and encouraging the growth of alternative imaginaries that germinate belief in, and actions to instantiate, more just ways of being together with others. One small way that GCE can contribute towards cultivating collective hope is through a sustained engagement with examples of grassroots collective action. In this article I argue that a serious focus on collective struggles in social justice education, and not individual actors in isolation, not only paints a more realistic picture of what sustained engagement in social activism involves, but it also shows that everyone can potentially participate in actions for social change in a meaningful way, even if those actions may be small in scale. In the final section of the article I will turn to the concept of 'collective hope' (Stockdale, 2021; Fife, 2024) to show

that in addition to challenging the culture of individualism, foregrounding and supporting collective action has the added benefit of enabling the growth of collective hope.

The modern story of the subject

Prevailing education systems in the global North have long fed into a culture of individualism. The dominant view of the subject presented in Western modern philosophy was that of an ahistoric, sovereign, free agent who was the 'source of truth, rationality and of its own identity', capable of knowing and acting in isolation (Biesta, 2006: 33). Since the enlightenment, educational theory was shaped by the idea of education as the production of independent subjects. In explaining the intimate connection between the education 'project' and the Enlightenment, Biesta (Ibid.: 34) quotes Usher and Edwards (1994) who argued that the very rationale of the educational process 'is founded on the humanistic idea of a certain kind of subject who has the inherent potential to become self-motivated and self-directing, a rational subject capable of exercising individual agency' (Ibid.: 24). On such an account, education was primarily concerned with the development of a subject with particular qualities, most notably the quality of rational autonomy. Although the liberal humanist view of the subject was generally presented as universal and transhistoric, the work of important postcolonial thinkers such as Sylvia Wynter and Walter Mignolo have shown how the development of such conceptualisations of Man were crucially shaped by historic, political and economic processes deeply rooted in the colonial project and the continuing legacies of slavery, racism and capitalism (Wynter, 2003; Mignolo, 2011). As Wynter argued, the Western bourgeois conception of Man, far from being universal, privileged an implicit whiteness, eurocentrism and masculinity (Wynter, 2003). This tradition has influenced educational practices up to the present day and, in addition to many positive inheritances, has contributed to an instrumentalist and individualistic understanding of education (Biesta, 2006; 2007).

The Western modern conception of the subject as an ahistoric foundation of knowledge, independent of any social structures, and removed from all connections to others, has been critiqued by post-structuralist, post-modernist, feminist, decoloniality, and more recently posthumanist scholars. Certainly in

academic research the modern conception of the subject has long been left behind (Peters and Tesar, 2015). However, as Machado de Oliveira Andreotti rightly reminds us, its lasting legacies continue to shape our world in countless inescapable ways, including shaping educational discourses, policies and practices (Machado de Oliveira Andreotti, 2021). Continuing in that tradition, in more recent times, neoliberalism has had a pervasive influence in amplifying an individualistic rendering of education, with an overtly economic reconfiguration. As Wendy Brown explains, neoliberalism is a peculiar form of reason that configures all aspects of existence in economic terms and under such logics education is viewed as a key means of ensuring people become more competitive, entrepreneurial and individualistic (Brown, 2015). The spirit of strong individualism that pervades neoliberalism is perhaps best epitomised in Margaret Thatcher's famous declaration that there is no such thing as society (Thatcher, 1987).

The ongoing impact of neoliberalism on education is complex and impacts all aspects of education from policy, to curriculum, to pedagogy and assessment, remaking what it means to be an educational subject (Jones and Ball, 2023). Under neoliberalism education is framed as a personal investment for personal gain. Costa and Pais (2020) made the important point that there is fatalism inherent in how education under neoliberalism engages with the world, 'underlying the neoliberal agenda is the idea that education should prepare people for an already given world' (Ibid.: 6). The world is to be accepted for what it is and learners need only to find their place in a fixed order, and attempt to maximise their own personal gain in a competitive system. Misiaszek (2021) connects this type of fatalism to Freire's description of the banking model of education. Freire argued that through the banking approach the teacher falsely presents reality as motionless, static, fixed and unchanging, rather than dynamic (Freire, 2017). Learners are similarly reduced to objects, receiving information, and slotting into a pregiven world; not critically conscious people capable of interpreting and changing the world (Ibid.). This objectification consequently stunts learners' capacity to rightly see themselves as part of the evolving human story, and as worthy co-authors of that story.

GCE as part of the problem and the solution

This is where GCE has much to offer. Coming from the radical tradition of development education (DE), with a focus and commitment to explore 'the root causes of local and global injustices and inequalities in our interdependent world' (IDEA, 2020: 13), GCE can help learners to understand that things do not have to be how they are. Learners can be assisted to see that through working together ordinary people have pushed for change and that they too can be part of that change with others. However, GCE in a global North context has not escaped the influence of a culture of strong individualism.

Critics of non-critical GCE from a postcolonial perspective have criticised GCE for its often liberal humanistic discursive tendencies that point to a deep Eurocentrism, with a problematic undercurrent of white supremacy and a saviour mentality (Stein, 2015). The tendency to focus on individual actions rather than structural causes (da Costa et al., 2024; Stein, 2015) also speaks to a modernity/coloniality Eurocentric conceptualisation of the human person as separate and isolated (Stein et al., 2020). A focus on apolitical individual action can also curtail the emerging activist imagination of learners, limiting their potential to imagine collective resistance and detract from a crucial systemic and structural analysis of injustice and oppression. As Donnelly and Golden note 'with its emphasis on individualism, neoliberalism favours feel-good narratives about the impact that "just one person" can have on issues as complex as poverty or climate change' (2024: 192).

Bryan (2020) has shown that in the context of GCE in Ireland the alignment of citizenship education with well-being, in the post-primary education junior cycle reform, illustrates the apolitical reconfiguration of GCE and the displacement of responsibility for social and global problems away from the state, international agencies and corporations and towards the individual. Adding to this critique, Bryan (2024) argued that an increasing focus on social-emotional learning (SEL) foregrounds the cultivation of specific personal qualities, skills and dispositions, majorly depoliticising GCE and undermining the practice of solidarity. Bryan rightly stresses that such a reconfiguration removes a focus on collective political action which is a pivotal element of the radical emancipatory

roots of DE, which sought to understand and address the structural causes of global poverty and injustice (Bryan, 2024).

One small yet prominent way in which we can see the influence of a culture of individualism in an education context is the tendency to spotlight lone actors and inadvertently mark them out as the sole person responsible for an idea, a discovery, an invention, or an important historic action. This tendency is spread across subject areas with examples from scientists, mathematicians, musicians or notable historical figures removed from the wider context of their scientific communities, or the countless invisible others and historical legacies that shaped their actions, thinking and ideas. The history of social justice movements does not escape this trend.

Spotlighting the lone hero in social justice education
Stories of social justice movements can often focus on particular individuals alone, celebrating their extraordinariness, removing them from the wider context of communities of others who aided, inspired, and supported the struggle. Aside from such a narrative being a misrepresentation of a more complex account that ought to speak to multiple interconnections that generally epitomise social struggles, involving collective action and solidarity with others, the narrative of the lone individual who takes action can also reinforce neoliberal discourses that prioritise individual agency and self-reliance over collectivism. Although the motivation for spotlighting exceptional individuals can be to provide inspirational examples, it may be difficult for many people to imagine themselves as such a heroic figure. I suggest that perhaps when it comes to hope it might be more helpful to present a more realistic picture that shows the multiple ways, and degrees, that people can contribute to a movement.

A useful example to illustrate my point is from the American civil rights movement, as it a well-known and important movement in the history of social justice. The majority of people recognise the names of prominent civil rights activists, such as Rosa Parks, but far fewer have heard of the Highlander Folk School. The Highlander Folk School played a crucial role in both the labour and civil rights movements, serving as an incubator for ground breaking ideas and strategies (Slate, 2022). By the time Rosa Parks took her courageous and

honourable decision to refuse to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, she already had over ten years' activist experience fighting racism (Ibid.). Just four months before her activism on that bus Parks attended a two-week workshop at the Highlander Folk School. Of course the workshop was just one small part of her activist formation, and does not account for her singular decision that day in 1955, but it is important to show that Parks was not an isolated individual who decided one day to stand up to oppression alone. There is a longer story behind her bold and heroic action, one that an often shallow and unsubstantial 'heroes and holidays' depiction overlooks (Lee, Menkart and Okazawa-Ray, 2006; Menkart, Murray and View, 2004).

Prominent figures such as Parks are rightly spotlighted when learning about the American civil rights movement, but also of importance is the wider context that generally receives much less attention. The reality behind successful social movements is sustained work and long term commitment. Highlander is an example of an important element that was part of a wider movement that provided 'a place where activists grappled with ideas, strategies, and tactics' (Slate, 2022: 192-3). Paying attention to the history of the Highlander Folk School is also useful in illustrating participatory and community centred approaches, that highlight the important connection between grassroots community education and social change, challenging the notion that knowledge and solutions need to come from specialists outside communities (Ibid.).

In her research with Black youths Woodson (2016) shows how so called 'master narratives' (Alridge, 2006), which focus on one-dimensional heroic figures and large-scale events, can create unrealistic expectations and discourage participation in more ordinary civic engagement. Woodson's research supports the claim that such approaches can lead learners to believe that significant action is only possible for a special few, and rather than offering a role model it can diminish a student's belief in their own capacity (Woodson, 2016). Picower similarly argued that social justice education ought to focus on examples of movements of people standing together and highlight how such movements provided the base upon which notable figures stood. Picower believes that such an approach provides realistic models that learners can relate more easily to:

"by exposing learners to people they can relate to within social movements, teachers provide not only a sense of hope but also tangible models of what it looks like to stand up on the side of justice" (2012: 9).

Focusing on collective action taken by communities, centring the wider context surrounding notable figures, and supporting learners to take collective action may in turn offer more hope than inadvertently reinforcing 'master narratives' (Alridge, 2006).

Foregrounding examples

There are many other contemporary and closer to home examples that illustrate grassroots community organising and can be easily connected to current struggles and the lived experiences of learners. For example, the successful rent strikes of the 1970s in Ireland coordinated by the National Association of Tenants Organisations (NATO) and involved over 350,000 tenants across the island withholding rent to protest against rent increases, poor housing conditions, and a lack of facilities (Tubridy, 2023). It serves as a powerful example of working-class collective struggle and community organising that is sorely needed in the current housing crisis and was the subject of an important 2024 documentary (O'Connor, Tubridy, and Mallon, 2024).

The Dunnes Stores women's workers anti-apartheid strike in the mid to late 1980's (Durnin, 2024) is another example that is extremely timely given the ongoing genocide in Gaza (Amnesty International, 2024) at the hands of the state of Israel and the fact that human rights organisations including B'tselem and Amnesty International have formed the view that Israel is an apartheid state (Amnesty International, 2022; B'tselem, 2021). The 'Shell to Sea' campaign in County Mayo (Cox and Darcy, 2019) is a powerful example to point to when looking at the ecological crisis. Outside of an Irish context, the Chipko movement (Guha, 1990; Rangan, 2000) is an important example of a grassroots struggle that withstands the dominant cultural drive to represent such movements through a single story focusing on one prominent figure. An example that illustrates further how complex histories of social movements are often reduced to singular events, or notable actors, is the leading portrayal of the Stonewall Inn raid and the

subsequent uprising as a spontaneous lone event that single-handedly started the international LGBTQ+ rights movement. Although it was a crucial event in the gay rights movement, in popular culture it stands alone and overshadows other important pre- and post-Stonewall collective activism (Hobbes and Marshall, 2019).

Work for a better world can be long, often tedious, and multifaceted, but this also means that there is space for diverse levels and varying degrees of contribution, even if that contribution may be seemingly mundane. There is a spectrum of participation in social justice, and not everyone needs to be a leading figure. I am not suggesting that educators should discourage people from believing that they could devout themselves entirely to a just cause, but in reality very few who did started off with that mind set. They more commonly began by joining a community of people who worked together and supported one another over a prolonged period of time, and their commitment and resolve deepened over time. A more realistic depiction may in fact be more inspirational as it shows that even exceptional people came from a wider community of grassroots activism. Social justice movements are also more likely to be sustained when communities come together to work for a shared purpose over long periods of time and benefit from traditional long-term strategy, decision-making, and building a sense of collective identity and purpose beyond singular events (Tufekci, 2017).

An overly positive presentation of heroic single actors removed from the wider historical context can also support an unhelpful toxic positivity and unfounded optimism that ought to be avoided. Sustained action for social change is difficult. The hope that educators ought to seek to cultivate is a critical hope. Critical hope avoids any naïve understanding of hope as a panacea that is removed from harsh reality. It sees hope as a struggle, involving complex tensions and possibilities, whilst challenging the fatalistic acceptance of current social conditions (Giroux, 1997). Freire was right in his acknowledgement that hope is not enough. But he also said that it is an important catalyst that can fuel necessary action, struggle, and sustained commitment, even in the face of apparent relentless defeat. It involves a commitment to the belief that things can be better. But transformation must be struggled for (Freire, 2017). Continuing in this tradition, Giroux reminds us, 'it is not enough to connect education with the defence of

reason, informed judgment, and critical consciousness; it must also be aligned with the power and potential of collective resistance' (Giroux, 2025: 146).

My intention is not to diminish the importance of singular action. There are times when we are called to stand apart and to act alone. Nor am I saying that we ought not to spotlight exceptional people or crucial moments. However, even then, a person's values have often been foraged with others and their motivations for action are fuelled by a sense of responsibility or love for others. A dominant approach to learning about important examples from the history of social justice movements tend to ignore the important networks, environments, and communities from which such actors emerged from and were sustained by. In educational settings less attention is generally given to collective grassroots struggles, and perhaps when it comes to hope there are multiple benefits in doing so. Collective resistance may have something unique to offer the cultivation of hope. It is to the concept of collective hope that I will briefly turn to next.

Cultivating collective hope

In her important work, 'Hope, Solidarity and Justice', Stockdale (2021: 1) presents an account of collective hope as something that emerges alongside the collective intention of a solidarity group who take action together in the pursuit of social justice. Stockdale explains that collective hope can sustain a motivation for solidarity action and that the collective action can, in turn, contribute to an emotional atmosphere of hope extending across the group. Collective action is an important component of Stockdale's description of the concept. Extending on Stockdale's work, noting how structural problems need to be met with 'varied, persistent, and sustained collective action', Fife (2024: 4) argues that 'collective hope', as opposed to individual hope, is particularly valuable for activist movements.

An important point to note, Fife (2024) argued, is that an individual can be a member of a movement that possesses collective hope even if they themselves might not possess individual hope. Given the stark reality of social injustice and the seemingly unsurmountable task of eliminating any of the many forms of structural and systematic injustice in the world, it is understandable and indeed

sensible for individuals to experience hopelessness. Fife (Ibid.) introduces the concept of *holding hope*, describing how some members of an activist group can facilitate the emergence of, and sustain, collective hope within the collective by cultivating their own individual hope and holding hope for others. When we work together with others through collective solidarity actions we can also share the sometimes burdensome load of daring to hope. At different moments in time some members of the group can hold the hope for the collective. As Fife says 'we may rely on one another within an activist movement to hope when we cannot' (Ibid.: 17). Perhaps in the context of GCE one role of the facilitator could be to 'hold hope' for others, by sharing their own critical hope and nurturing the development of collective hope across the group who work together to take action for justice.

Fife's analysis is supported by the work of Nairn and colleagues (2024) whose empirical research on youth activist movements in New Zealand demonstrated the empowering and sustaining nature of collective critical hope. Many of the research participants reported that they had a greater belief in the achievability of their vision for change precisely because it was a vision shared within their collective and inspired their collective struggle. This is captured in the words of one of their research participants quoted in the article, Te Raukura, 'Some of the most hopeful people that I know are the people that are most active ... I get hope through action' (Nairn et al., 2024: 432). Hope may not be necessary for one to become motivated to get involved in action for change. For some, anger, a sense of justice or the desire for change may be enough. However, a shared vision for a better future helps to inform the decisions that are made today, and collective hope stimulates the 'activity of shared imagination' that goes beyond the epistemic limits of an individual (Fife, 2024). I think that focusing on examples of grassroots collective struggle can assist people in imagining themselves as being some small part of collective resistance and show hopeful possibilities that can come from working together with others for a better world.

Concluding thoughts
How can we as educators and practitioners help to support collective hope in an educational context? GCE is in an important sense ahead of the game, as a core feature of GCE is that it is action orientated and taking action together with others

strengthens a sense of hope. Stemming from DE's radical roots in Freire's critical pedagogy, collective action is a vital component that is already well established, even if through the mainstreaming of GCE an explicitly political focus has slipped from view (Gillborn, 2006). In this sense GCE has become a victim of its own success. But there are many ways for educators to bring in a much needed radical political focus, and many critical GCE practitioners do just that already.

In this article I have suggested that one small way to support that is by celebrating and learning about the many times that very ordinary people stood together, and by connecting those struggles with learners own lived experience today. It is important to show that such movements were not isolated singular events, but that they are part of an ongoing and unfinished story that learners can also be part of, motivated by similar values and struggling to realise a comparable vision. Perhaps they may be able to more easily see themselves in such stories, and see that social justice action is not reducible to a false binary of all or nothing. It takes many hands and every little helps.

It matters what stories we tell, whose stories we recount, and what we focus on and spotlight in the retelling of those stories. The dominant neoliberal story of what it means to be a human person ought not to go unchallenged. It is important to avoid the 'heroes and holidays' approach to the history of social justice movements as this can inadvertently support individualistic narratives by covering over and concealing the collective efforts that sustained and often built the bedrock upon which notable actors found the courage to take a stand. Not only is the story of the lone hero who took on the world more often than not a gross oversimplification of the complex reality behind the story, but such a skewed focus on individual actors and actions can also place an undue burden on individuals who may rightly think they cannot do this alone. Thankfully, they do not have to. One important way that activist communities support one another, as argued by Fife (2024), is to hold hope for one another at times when belief in a better world just seems too impossible to maintain. We need not all be hopeful all of the time.

Hope can be better sustained, and is more sustaining, when we hope together with others. When the stark reality of the gross scale of the intentional

pain and violence in this world becomes just too much to bear alone, we ought to remember that we journey together. Being part of a community that has collective hope allows us at times to hold that hope for others, and, at other times, to rely on others to carry that hope for us (Fife, 2024). By focusing on grassroots collective struggles, and supporting groups to take informed reflective action together, social justice education and educators can help to cultivate and hold collective hope within a pervasive culture of individualism.

I will leave the final word to the more hopeful Howard Zinn (2004):

"We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world. Even when we don't 'win', there is fun and fulfilment in the fact that we have been involved, with other good people, in something worthwhile. We need hope".

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Elizabeth Meade lectures in Global Citizenship Education, Social Justice and Philosophy of Education in the Department of Education in Maynooth University. She is also a member of the Centre for Public Education and Pedagogy in Maynooth University. Her main research interests are in critical GCE, democracy and education, and the community of philosophical inquiry as public pedagogy.

Espousing Hope or Entrenching Gloom? A Critical Discourse Analysis of Oxfam's Global Inequality Reports Through the Lens of Freire's Pedagogy of Hope

Benedict Arko

Abstract: As inequality, climate crisis, and threats to democracy grow, debates on poverty and justice have become urgent. This article applies critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Paulo Freire's 'pedagogy of hope' to examine how Oxfam's global inequality reports (2016–2025) have evolved. It asks whether these reports only dramatise crisis or also foster hope and action. A comparison of ten reports shows a shift: earlier texts stressed crisis and elite blame, while later ones highlight collective action and alternatives. Using CDA's three levels, text, discourse, and social practice, the study finds Oxfam increasingly challenges the view that neoliberalism is inevitable. Later reports emphasise feminist economics, grassroots organising, and fairer wealth distribution as real solutions. Guided by Freire's idea that hope arises through struggle, the study shows that while early reports risked hopelessness, later ones invite readers to see themselves as agents of change. The article argues that advocacy texts can be pedagogical tools, naming injustice while building the emotional and political conditions for democratic renewal and resistance.

Key words: Critical Discourse Analysis; Pedagogy of Hope; Global Inequality; Development Education; Neoliberalism.

Introduction
Amidst today's overlapping crises of climate change, growing inequality, democratic decline, and social division, discussions about poverty, wealth, and justice have become more urgent (Piketty, 2020; Stiglitz, 2019; IPCC, 2023). As wealth keeps concentrating in the hands of a few, and the unfair treatment of

women and racial groups becomes clearer, more reports and campaigns have appeared to challenge inequality (Oxfam, 2020; UN Women, 2020; World Bank, 2023). One of the most important examples is Oxfam's global inequality reports (2016–2025), which are widely quoted and emotionally powerful in development debates.

Each year, Oxfam releases its inequality reports to coincide with the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Since *An Economy for the 1%* (Oxfam, 2016), they have combined World Bank and Credit Suisse data with stories from care workers, climate activists, and grassroots organisers. They frame inequality as the result of political choices and decades of neoliberal policy, not a natural outcome. Their power lies in mixing analysis with personal stories, showing inequality as both an economic and moral-political injustice. These reports matter as evidence-based studies and persuasive tools for change.

However, the reports raise important questions: do they only dramatise inequality and stir anger, or do they also build the hope and momentum for change? Giroux (2011) warns that while crisis language is vital, it can also overwhelm and disempower. Can Oxfam's reports avoid hopelessness and instead build the 'critical hope' people need to imagine and pursue alternatives? This article addresses these questions through Freire's 'pedagogy of hope' and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA). Freire (1994) defines hope not as blind optimism but as a political commitment to struggle and change. Fairclough's CDA examines how language frames issues, assigns roles, and uses moral and emotional appeals (Fairclough, 1992; 2013). Combining these, the article compares ten Oxfam reports (2016–2025) to show how they depict inequality, agency, and shifts between crisis, emotion, and hope. It argues that early reports focused on outrage and critique, while later ones stressed hope in action through grassroots change and collective effort.

Across the ten reports, three distinct stages can be identified. The first stage (2016–2018) is marked by strong crisis language and a discourse of outrage. The second stage (2019–2021) represents a transitional phase: while crisis narratives remain, the reports begin to highlight what can be done to change the situation, introducing proposals around care work, public services, and

progressive taxation. The third stage (2022–2025) shows a clearer shift, with inequality described as 'economic violence' and greater focus placed on structural alternatives such as wealth redistribution, grassroots mobilisation, and challenges to corporate and monopoly power.

This study contributes to debates on development education and advocacy by highlighting stories that connect emotionally while empowering politically. It shows that effective language can both describe problems and inspire fairer futures. The article proceeds as follows: section one outlines the theory, combining Freire's pedagogy of hope with Fairclough's CDA. Section two covers the method; report selection, coding, and Fairclough's three-part model. Section three presents findings on Oxfam's shift from crisis talk to agency, moral appeals, and structural critique, and why these matter in practice. The conclusion reflects on the responsibility of communicators to use language that builds critical hope in times of crisis.

Theoretical framework

This study uses Paulo Freire's pedagogy of hope and Norman Fairclough's CDA, set within the broader field of development education and critical pedagogy. Together, these approaches help us see how Oxfam's inequality reports use language to shape how people understand reality, view their ability to act, and imagine change. Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994) builds on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), shifting from dialogue in learning to the emotional and political role of hope in creating change. For Freire, hope is not private optimism but a collective, historically grounded practice rooted in the fight for justice. As he explains, 'without at least some hope, we cannot even begin the struggle. But without struggle, hope... becomes hopelessness' (Freire, 1994: 3). This view has shaped development educators resisting the despair and depoliticisation of neoliberalism (Andreotti, 2011; Bourn and Tarozzi, 2023). Freire links hope to praxis, the cycle of reflection and action to change unjust systems (Freire, 1970). This aligns with development education's goal to build not only awareness but also critical thinking and agency (Bourn, 2016). Tackling global inequality thus requires challenging narratives that naturalise poverty and instead promote visions of possibility and shared responsibility.

Fairclough's CDA offers a way to study how language both shapes and is shaped by power (Fairclough, 1992; 2013). CDA sees discourse as a social practice and a site where ideas compete, reinforcing or challenging dominant norms. His three-part model; text, discursive practice, and social practice, helps analyse how Oxfam's reports present inequality, agency, and moral appeals. This matters in development debates, often criticised for reproducing power imbalances (Escobar, 1995; Cornwall, 2007). Cornwall (2007) notes that buzzwords like 'empowerment' or 'inclusive growth' often mask structural causes of inequality. Even well-meaning debates can depoliticise injustice by stressing technical fixes over systemic change (Ferguson, 2017; Green, 2022; Kapoor, 2020). In global crises, communication must move beyond problem description. Freire stresses the need to raise critical awareness and build collective action (Bourn and Tarozzi, 2023). Together, CDA and Freire's pedagogy of hope ask: do these texts provide the emotional, ethical, and political basis for real change?

This framework situates Oxfam's inequality reports (2016–2025) within wider debates on language, power, and hope. Using Fairclough's CDA, the study examines how the reports present inequality through data, moral appeals, and personal stories. Through Freire's lens, it asks: do these narratives spark outrage without stifling imagination? Do they model a pedagogy of hope that supports action and collective struggle, or risk becoming a pedagogy of gloom that breeds despair?

Methodology

This study applies Fairclough's (1992, 2013) three-part CDA model to analyse how Oxfam's inequality reports (2016–2025) shifted in language and focus. Over a decade marked by rising inequality, COVID-19, ecological crises, and populism, the reports grew more critical of neoliberal capitalism and extreme wealth. The analysis tracks how Oxfam's narratives of injustice and possibility evolved in response to global events. Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994) is used to assess whether the reports inspire collective action or reinforce despair. Following Freire's history-based critique, the study situates Oxfam's changing discourse within broader shifts in economic restructuring, climate crisis, and debates on civil society's role in governance.

Corpus and inclusion criteria

The study is based on ten Oxfam global inequality reports published between 2016 and 2025. Together, these reports provide a useful way to track changes in language over a decade shaped by multiple global crises. The selection was clear: only the main inequality reports released during the World Economic Forum in Davos were used, since these are Oxfam's most visible contributions to global debates on inequality. Shorter briefings or topic-specific papers were left out to keep the sample consistent and comparable.

Analytical framework

The analysis draws on Fairclough's three-part CDA framework:

- Textual analysis: The analysis coded individual words, phrases, metaphors, evaluative language, and narrative structures. Examples include words describing inequality ('dangerous', 'unprecedented', 'explosive'), common phrases like 'an economy for the 1%', and emotions such as fear, anger, and hope. The study also looked at how inequality, power, and agency were presented, and how moral and emotional appeals were built.
- Discursive practice: The study also examined how the reports are produced, shared, and used in the development field, looking at their timing during the World Economic Forum in Davos and their dual role as advocacy tools and teaching resources. It also looked at how the reports addressed different audiences (policymakers, media, civil society) and how they positioned themselves in relation to global elites. For example, showing billionaire wealth figures alongside the personal stories of women workers was coded as a 'contrapuntal framing' strategy.
- Social practice: The reports' language was interpreted in relation to wider political and ideological contexts like neoliberalism, global governance, and grassroots resistance. This included situating reports within austerity debates (2016–2019), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), and the corporate power turn (2024 onwards).

To bring in Freire's pedagogy of hope, the study asks whether the reports use what Bourn and Tarozzi (2023) call a discourse of critical hope. This meant

checking if the reports (a) describe systemic injustice in ways that make people think critically, (b) present clear visions for change based on solidarity, and (c) build emotional awareness that supports civic action and resistance.

Coding Process

The coding framework was developed iteratively: open coding identified recurring phrases, rhetorical devices, and emotions, which were then grouped into themes such as crisis framing, moral outrage, policy solutions, and hope-focused narratives. Each theme was defined in a codebook with inclusion/exclusion rules—for example, 'hope-oriented narratives' required explicit references to transformation or collective agency but excluded vague optimism without action. Changes over time were tracked by noting how often themes appeared and how they were used in context. Early reports were dominated by crisis language; from *Time to Care* (Oxfam, 2020) onward, hopeful framings strengthened, focusing on feminist and care-based solutions.

Comparative and Longitudinal Analysis

Because the reports cover a long period, a comparative approach was used to track how Oxfam's language and strategies changed over time. This involved identifying:

- **Discursive shifts:** how the way inequality, agency, and hope were framed changed in response to global events like the pandemic or the rise of economic populism.
- **Discursive consistencies:** repeated patterns such as metaphors ('an economy for the 1%'), familiar value-based messages, and stable ways of framing issues.
- **Authentic struggle:** how the reports show grassroots resistance and movement-building in ways that connect with Freire's idea of praxis.

Illustrative Coding Table

An illustrative extract is shown in the table below, demonstrating how specific excerpts were coded into themes and linked to interpretive insights. For example:

Excerpt (Report/Year)	Phrase coded	Theme	Interpretation
Reward Work, Not Wealth (Oxfam, 2018): '82% of all wealth created last year went to the top 1%, while the bottom half saw no increase at all'.	'82% … top 1%'	Crisis framing	Inequality dramatised through stark statistics; fosters indignation.
Time to Care (Oxfam, 2020): 'Governments around the world must act now to build a human economy that is feminist and values what truly matters to society, rather than fuelling an endless pursuit of profit and wealth'.	'building a human economy.	Hope-oriented narrative.	Moves beyond outrage to propose feminist alternatives and collective action.
Inequality Inc. (2024): 'Corporations are driving inequality … but a more equal world is possible if governments regulate and reimagine the private sector'.	'a more equal world is possible.	Hope-oriented narrative.	Explicit articulation of alternatives; aligns with Freirean 'critical hope'.

By combining theme-based coding with long-term comparison, this approach provided both depth and reliability. Using a codebook, clear selection rules, and examples makes the study more transparent and offers a framework that others can adapt in development education and discourse analysis.

Validity and reflexivity
Because discourse analysis is interpretive, coding was flexible and repeated, cross-checking report sections, summaries, recommendations, personal stories, and

related literature (Cornwall, 2007; Escobar, 1995). The study focuses only on the texts themselves, not on how audiences received them or how they were produced. This limitation points to future research, such as interviews, audience studies, or institutional ethnography. Researcher perspective shaped coding choices, but making the process transparent strengthens credibility. Ultimately, the study aims not only to analyse Oxfam's language but to assess how it reflects Freire's vision of discourse as a tool for change, building solidarity, emotional strength, and imagination in the face of injustice.

Findings

The CDA of Oxfam's inequality reports (2016–2025) shows a mix of crisis stories, moral appeals, and rhetorical strategies that move between despair and hope. Over the decade, the reports focus on the structural causes of inequality while also trying to keep readers engaged as agents of change and encourage collective action.

Crisis and gloom: naming catastrophe

A key feature of Oxfam's inequality reports is their strong crisis language to show the scale and structure of global inequality. *An Economy for the 1%* (Oxfam, 2016) used striking statistics, 'In 2015, just 62 individuals had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people' (Oxfam, 2016: 1) to spark outrage and present inequality as structural violence rather than a natural outcome of growth. Later reports intensified this. The 2017 and 2018 editions used terms such as 'billionaire bonanza' (2018: 19), 'inequality crises' (2017: 5), and 'crony capitalism' (2017: 4) to highlight deliberate injustice. By 2020-2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, inequality was labelled 'deadly', 'exploitative', and a 'compounding risk' (Oxfam, 2021). The 2023 and 2024 reports went further, framing a 'polycrisis' caused by pandemic aftershocks, climate breakdown, and corporate profiteering.

This discourse operates at the textual level of Fairclough's (1992) CDA, where vocabulary, metaphor, and narrative structure carry ideological weight. As Cornwall (2007) and Escobar (1995) note, development discourse shapes both problems and responses. Oxfam's crisis framing exposes inequality as constructed but also echoes Swilling's (2019) 'catastrophe narrative', which generates urgency yet risks fatalism without solutions. This is the core tension. Freire (1994) stresses that naming oppression is necessary but insufficient.

Language steeped in despair can foster what Giroux (2011: 73) calls 'corrosive cynicism', the belief that injustice is permanent and resistance futile. While the reports denaturalise neoliberal inequality, early editions often cast people only as victims. Their strong denunciations had emotional impact but left readers stalled in critique without clear pathways for action.

The reports challenge dominant stories that justify inequality through meritocracy or effort. They embody what Fairclough (2013) calls a critical semiotics of resistance, reframing economic crisis as moral and political injustice. The 2016-2018 reports depict inequality as a global emergency, using contrasts, exaggeration, and moral condemnation. This made inequality visible and urgent but risked leaving readers passive. Later reports introduced hopeful alternatives, yet crisis language still dominated. The next section shows how hope was layered onto this despair, making the discourse more complex.

Hope and agency: constructing possibility

From 2019 onward, Oxfam's language shifted from crisis to emphasising agency, alternatives, and political imagination. Instead of only describing a broken system, the reports argued that 'another world is possible', stressing that inequality is 'the result of political and economic choices' (Oxfam, 2022: 24). *Time to Care* (Oxfam, 2020) showed how unpaid care work, especially by women, drives inequality and proposed solutions: more public investment, fairer sharing of work, and valuing care. This marked a move toward what Freire (1994) calls a pedagogy of hope, sustaining anger at injustice without sliding into despair. Later reports reinforced this framing. *The Inequality Virus* (Oxfam, 2021: 16) argued COVID-19 reshaped what is possible, citing expanded healthcare and fairer tax reforms. *Survival of the Richest* (Oxfam, 2023) and *Inequality Inc.* (Oxfam, 2024) highlighted grassroots resistance, community ownership, and wealth redistribution as real alternatives. This reflects Giroux's (2011: 108) 'educated hope,' where critique is tied to practical, action-oriented change.

From a CDA perspective, this marks an important shift. Fairclough (1992) argues that texts shape ideological struggles by defining roles. Earlier reports cast readers as observers, while later ones present them as agents of change. Phrases like 'clawback democracy' (Oxfam, 2024: 32), 'collectively

bargain' (Oxfam, 2022: 46), and 'fund just transitions' (Oxfam, 2023: 14) show a move from moral appeals to calls for action. This aligns with debates in development education, where Bourn and Tarozzi (2023) and Andreotti (2011) urge moving beyond critique to building capacity for change and resilience. Oxfam's later reports reflect this by pairing moral language with real cases, from Argentinian co-operatives and Indian farmer movements to feminist budgeting and global tax justice campaigns. These examples go beyond proposals, demonstrating resistance and new ways of imagining change.

The reports show that emotional engagement is central to political understanding and collective action. After 2019, Oxfam's message shifts from diagnosing problems to action, from fatalism to future possibilities. They reflect critical pedagogy's goals: exposing power and building people's capacity to act. This change is both stylistic and ideological, rejecting the normalisation of inequality and amplifying the voices and strategies of those driving systemic change.

Comparative discursive features

Oxfam's 2016–2025 reports shift from focusing on catastrophe to highlighting possibilities for change, reshaping both how inequality is framed and how readers see themselves. This reflects changes in Oxfam's language and wider debates in development communication. The early reports (2016–2018) describe inequality as 'a rigged system' (Oxfam, 2018: 27), 'unjust' (Oxfam, 2016: 18), and a 'major threat' (Oxfam, 2017: 2). While morally powerful, this framing presents inequality as structural, external, and overwhelming. These narratives offered little guidance on dismantling or reimagining systems. As Fairclough (1992) warns, critical discourse can reinforce the very power structures it critiques if it lacks real alternative narratives.

Although *Reward Work, Not Wealth* (Oxfam, 2018) relies mainly on crisis language, it quietly introduces alternative terms. Phrases like 'a human economy' (Oxfam, 2018: 13) and references to collective bargaining and democratic business models show early experiments with ideas beyond neoliberalism. These were overshadowed by strong moral framing but foreshadowed the more action-focused language of later reports. The 2019-2021

reports mark a transition: crisis language remained but was increasingly paired with policy proposals and accountability demands. *Time to Care* (Oxfam, 2020) highlighted care work as central to feminist and economic justice, while *The Inequality Virus* (Oxfam, 2021) pointed to wealth taxes and universal healthcare as responses to pandemic-driven inequality.

In the later reports (2022–2025), the language becomes more confident and hopeful. Inequality is framed as 'a political choice' (Oxfam, 2022: 24), with solutions centred on reclaiming public wealth, democratic control, and community power. From 2022, Oxfam adopts a pedagogy of hope, stressing feminist economics, collective action, and movement-led change. This hopeful tone coexists with crisis language, reflecting tension between catastrophe and transformation. *Inequality Kills* (Oxfam, 2022) goes further, portraying inequality as not just immoral but deadly, a form of permitted harm. It calls for wealth redistribution, billionaire taxes, and ending monopoly power, breaking from narrow technocratic reforms. This reflects Meade's (2023) idea of epistemic repair: reclaiming discourse from managerialism to expose inequality as policy-driven violence. *Inequality Inc.* (Oxfam, 2024) continues this Freirean approach, demanding movement-led change and reclaiming the commons. The 2025 report, *Takers, Not Makers* (Oxfam, 2025), marks the peak of this shift. Although stark, predicting five trillionaires amid mass poverty, it signals structural possibility rather than despair. By branding billionaires 'takers,' it challenges the legitimacy of elite wealth. The report calls for reparations, decolonising the economy, and democratising finance, rooted in grassroots power and historical justice. In Freire's terms, this is not only denunciation but also annunciation: a call to collective action grounded in critical hope.

Early reports portray the poor as passive victims, while later ones present them as organised political actors. This shift is educationally significant. As Bourn and Tarozzi (2021: 219) note, development education must go beyond awareness to building agency for action against injustice. The emotional tone also shifts: early texts stress outrage, while later ones highlight solidarity, pride, and hope. This mix of crisis and hope reflects global events and advocacy strategies. From a CDA perspective, it shows Oxfam's effort to resist neoliberalism not only through critique but by imagining alternatives based on justice and care. In short,

the reports move from describing injustice to imagining possibility, from despair to determination. This reflects Freire's praxis: naming the world not just to describe it, but to change it.

Discursive practices: mobilising moral and emotional appeals

Beyond the text, Oxfam's inequality reports act as interventions, designed to spark moral concern and emotional response. From Fairclough's (1992) second level of CDA, discursive practice, they are more than research findings; they are deliberate messages to shape perception, stir emotion, and invite judgment. A key strategy is Oxfam's strong moral language, describing inequality as 'obscene' (Oxfam, 2024: 5), 'violent' (Oxfam, 2022: 15), 'deadly' (Ibid.: 4), and 'deliberate' (Oxfam, 2016: 6). This framing turns inequality from a statistic into an ethical and political crisis, presenting economic disparity as a violation of shared values. It reflects van Dijk's (1998: 63) notion of 'norm violation', pushing readers to see inequality as both illegitimate and urgent.

These moral messages are reinforced by emotional appeals that build solidarity. *Time to Care* (Oxfam, 2020) combines data on wealth hoarding with stories of women burdened by unpaid care, creating empathy and exposing systemic neglect. *The Inequality Virus* (Oxfam, 2021) deepens this by showing shared vulnerabilities during COVID-19, blending grief with connection. The reports also use storytelling, sharing testimonies from farmers, care workers, and activists, blending personal voices with structural critique. This reflects Fraser's (2017) call for a politics of recognition and redistribution, where lived experience complements systemic analysis. It also echoes Freire's vision of education as dialogue, amplifying rather than speaking for the oppressed.

A key part of Oxfam's strategy is timing. Each report is launched during the World Economic Forum in Davos, the symbolic centre of the neoliberal order it critiques. This counter-positioning challenges the dominant story of 'inclusive capitalism' with one of exclusion and elite capture. As Fairclough (2013) notes, discourse derives power not only from content but also from timing and context. Over time, Oxfam's language shifts from accusation to invitation. Early reports cast readers as witnesses, while later ones, like *Inequality Inc.* (Oxfam, 2024), call on civil society, unions, and educators to act. This reflects Andreotti's (2011: 8)

shift from 'charity to solidarity', moving from seeing the poor as victims to recognising all as agents of change within oppressive systems. This change in audience engagement aligns with Freire's praxis. The reports aim not just to inform but to spark reflection and action, shaping conscience and collective will as liberating communication. Oxfam's language is part of a wider network of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) such as ActionAid and Christian Aid, which also frame issues around structural injustice, solidarity, and hope.

ActionAid's *Who Cares for the Future?* (2020) highlights unpaid care as gender-based exploitation, echoing Oxfam's critique of patriarchal economies. Christian Aid's *The Big Shift* (2017) likewise calls for fossil fuel divestment and climate finance justice. These suggest more evidence of critical and systemic thinking in the INGO sector. However, Fricke (2022) found that this is not being translated into development education practice with most INGOs in Ireland ignoring neoliberalism as the main driver of poverty and inequality. Alldred (2022) argues that hope must be radical and structural, not just motivational. His focus on participatory learning and systemic critique mirrors Oxfam's move from outrage to agency. Like Oxfam, Fricke (2022) links climate breakdown, colonial legacies, and economic injustice, urging learners to act on these connections. This reflects the growing overlap between activist communication and radical pedagogy, where hope is seen not as illusion but as praxis.

McCloskey (2019) critiques the technocratic framing of development and the limits of the Sustainable Development Goals, arguing that many INGOs operate within a managerial aid model that obscures structural injustice. He calls for transformative, politicised narratives. Oxfam's later reports reflect this by framing inequality through extractive capitalism, women's unpaid care, and racial injustice. In short, Oxfam's reports are more than advocacy tools; they are emotional and moral texts that challenge dominant ideas, provide ethical clarity, and build political hope. They embody what Giroux (2011) calls public pedagogy: education beyond classrooms that shapes how people see the world and their role in it.

While this article has focused on the textual content of Oxfam's reports, they are also received and used through specific channels. Released during the World Economic Forum in Davos, the reports gain wide media attention. For example, Oxfam's 2016 headline that 'the richest 1% own more wealth than the rest of the world' (Oxfam, 2016) was reported by *The Guardian* (Elliott, 2016), BBC News (2016) and Al Jazeera (2016). The reports have influenced civil society debates, supported Oxfam's *Even It Up campaign* (Oxfam, 2014), and shaped policy in national parliaments. For example, journalist Kelvin Chan notes that Portugal introduced a windfall tax on energy companies and major food retailers in 2023 after the release of *Survival of the Richest* (Oxfam, 2023) (Associated Press, 2023). In universities, they are valued in development studies for clarity, data, and moral framing. By combining personal stories with feminist and decolonial critique, they also serve as teaching tools in justice-focused classrooms. As advocacy texts, they act as public education, showing inequality as both economic fact and moral-political crisis demanding action. Their wide reach and strong language make them central to today's development debates.

Social practices and neoliberal contexts

To understand the impact of Oxfam's inequality reports, they must be placed within the wider social practices they reflect and challenge. Fairclough's (1992) third level of CDA shows how texts link to broader structures of power, ideas, and material conditions, in this case, the global neoliberal order and its crisis. The reports emerged amid rising wealth concentration, weakened public services, climate breakdown, and political disillusionment, signs of what Brown (2015) calls neoliberalism's stealth revolution, which reshapes society around market rules. As a dominant project, neoliberalism redefines citizenship and value, sidelining solidarity, the public good, and collective resistance.

The early Oxfam reports (2016–2018) frame inequality as a scandal of elite excess, exposing billionaire wealth and policy complicity. Though powerful, these critiques remain reformist, urging elites to act more responsibly. As Kapoor (2020: 49) notes, mainstream development debates often reflect 'reformist' neoliberalism, criticising excess without questioning the system itself. The 2019-2021 reports shift focus to public services, care work, and progressive taxation. Yet they still emphasise policy fixes, reflecting a technocratic optimism akin to

Ferguson's (2017) anti-politics machine, which treats structural crises as technical rather than political problems.

The later reports (2022–2025) show a clear break in language. Inequality is framed as systemic, intentional, and historically rooted. The focus shifts to structural change, breaking up concentrated wealth, and movement-led transformation. *Survival of the Richest* (Oxfam, 2023) and *Inequality Inc.* (Oxfam, 2024) criticise monopoly power and democratic decline, calling for reclaiming public wealth and political agency. This marks a move from appealing to elites toward aligning with global movements for justice, reparations, and sustainability. From a Freirean view, this is a shift from denunciation to annunciation, from naming oppression to affirming collective liberation (Freire, 1970; 1994). The later reports embody praxis, combining critique with actionable hope. They resist fatalism by highlighting resistance, centring oppressed voices, and proposing a new social contract instead of small reforms. This change is also pedagogical. Rather than treating readers as consumers or donors, Oxfam increasingly frames them as actors in a wider historical struggle. They echo Fraser's (2017: 29) 'triple movement', resisting market fundamentalism and authoritarianism while building solidarity rooted in redistribution, recognition, and representation.

Seen this way, the reports act as public counter-narratives, challenging dominant ideas and fostering alternative visions. They reflect what Andreotti (2011) calls a postcolonial turn in development education, which views the global South not in deficit terms but as a source of knowledge and political power. The changes in Oxfam's language also echo what Meade (2023) identifies as a core problem in development, the invisibility of neoliberalism. Drawing on Fricker's concept of hermeneutical injustice, Meade warns that without clear critiques of neoliberalism, communities lack the tools to understand it and risk capture by far-right narratives. By naming inequality as a political choice and promoting collective action, Oxfam's recent reports reclaim discourse as a tool for radical hope, epistemic repair, and transformative imagination in line with Freire's vision.

At the social level, Oxfam's reports shift from limited critique to a more liberating kind of discourse. They challenge neoliberal beliefs that inequality is

unavoidable, charity is enough, or elites must lead change. In the later reports, they adopt a Freirean vision where naming the world goes hand in hand with transforming it, and critical hope becomes a shared practice of liberation. The mix of catastrophic language and hopeful alternatives shows the reports trying to balance between rejecting neoliberal fatalism and avoiding naïve optimism.

Implications for development education: pedagogy as praxis

These findings have key lessons for development education and advocacy. As Bourn (2016) notes, development education must go beyond awareness to build agency. Oxfam's shift in language, from moral condemnation to grassroots resistance, mirrors this approach, offering a model for more active, transformative learning. The later reports combine structural critique with community-led solutions, reflecting Freire's view that hope is inseparable from struggle.

While Oxfam's inequality reports have strong potential as advocacy and public education tools, there remains a gap between their messages and regular use in development education. McCloskey (2019) warns that their transformative potential is often underused by both development education and international development sectors. This article therefore urges Oxfam and other INGOs to go beyond dissemination and integrate the reports into education programmes. Doing so would link advocacy with pedagogy, ensuring their emotionally powerful and structurally critical messages shape classrooms, teacher training, and student learning. Embedding the reports in curricula can build critical awareness, solidarity, and agency, turning advocacy into lived educational practice.

Finally, this study adds to research that views development discourse as a site of struggle, not only over facts but also over the very possibility of hope (Bourn and Tarozzi, 2023; Swilling, 2019). In today's context of ecological crisis, authoritarianism, and rising inequality, naming injustice is insufficient without fostering collective action and solidarity. As Freire (1994) reminds us, hope is both emotional and political, it rejects fatalism. At their best, Oxfam's inequality reports show how development discourse can serve as a tool for hope, linking anger to imagination, diagnosis to possibility, and critique to collective action.

Conclusion

This article examined Oxfam's inequality reports (2016–2025) through Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and Freire's pedagogy of hope. The analysis shows a discourse moving between exposing systemic inequality and encouraging collective action. While the reports document the 'rigged systems' behind inequality, their crisis-heavy framing risks despair unless balanced with possibility. Over the decade, however, they shifted from moral outrage to grassroots mobilisation and systemic alternatives, reflecting Freire's view of hope as central to social change. By releasing these reports to coincide with the World Economic Forum in Davos, Oxfam inserted a counter-narrative into a space dominated by neoliberal ideas of growth and prosperity. This underscores the educational and political stakes of framing inequality, it shapes not only how we see injustice but also our capacity to imagine and pursue alternatives.

For development educators, civil society actors, and policy practitioners, the challenge is not just to analyse these reports but to act on them. Oxfam's reports are valuable tools for embedding critical awareness of inequality in teaching and civic education, helping students and communities question injustice while building agency. They also give civil society organisations a base for turning global analysis into local advocacy, on fair taxation, public services, or regulating monopoly power. At the same time, they promote alliances across feminist, climate, labour, and racial justice movements by linking issues such as unpaid care, extractive capitalism, and climate breakdown into a shared agenda. Most importantly, they show advocacy need not rely only on catastrophe: the reports can model what Freire called a pedagogy of hope, combining structural critique with stories of resistance and transformation.

In this way, the reports are more than advocacy tools; they are also educational resources. When used by practitioners and educators, they can build critical awareness, resilience, and collective imagination to confront inequality. Development education has a key role in ensuring these analyses become not just awareness-raising moments but catalysts for policy change and civic action. By linking anger with hope and words with action, Oxfam's reports can inspire strategies for economic justice and democratic renewal.

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Benedict Arko is a lecturer at the Department of Geography Education, University of Education, Winneba in Ghana. His research interests are in critical development discourse analysis, regional economic development, regional development planning, decentralised governance and mining, environment and livelihoods.

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE PEDAGOGY OF HOPE

DOUGLAS BOURN

Abstract: Building on the author's earlier work on pedagogy of hope (Bourn, 2021; 2022), this article looks at ways in which a distinctive optimistic pedagogy for global social justice can become a key element of teaching and learning within both formal and higher education. A pedagogy of hope for global social justice can build on the educational traditions within development education and related fields. Reference will be made to the challenges many educators have in promoting an optimistic and hopeful approach to teaching today with the range of current global crises that are existing. The article will also refer to recent evidence on young people's sense of concern about their future. The article outlines the debates on hope including the work by Freire (2004) and demonstrates how a distinctive pedagogical approach can become an important framework for addressing issues such as climate change and war in Gaza. The article summarises an example of an educational project promoting hope in Vietnam through puppetry and storytelling. It then discusses projects that have a hope theme from two local development education centres (DECs) in England.

Introduction
The breakdown of the global consensus concerning climate change, peaceful co-existence and goals to reduce global poverty through international aid has resulted in major challenges for educationalists in encouraging learners to have positive views about their own future. The second presidency of Donald Trump is creating a more unstable and insecure world. The sense of fear about what tomorrow might bring has led to many young people beginning to question not only what they should learn but whether it is worthwhile at all. This article, whilst recognising these fears and concerns, aims to address them through the

development of the author's own work on pedagogy of hope, and summarises some examples of practice that demonstrate ways in which his and the ideas of Paulo Freire (2004) have relevance for today's global challenges. The article further develops the debates on pedagogy of hope and shows how they can be key to the discourses in and around development education, global learning and education for sustainable development. Central to the themes of the article is that a pedagogy of hope needs to include reference to global social justice and active global citizenship.

Changing global context

In recent years a growing body of evidence has emerged on young people's concerns about their own future and the future of the planet. Whilst much of this has been focused around climate change and the promotion of the term 'eco-anxiety', the concerns reflect a wider and deeper concern many young people have about their role and relationship to the world around them. For example, a quotation from a young person:

> "I don't want to die, but I don't want to live in a world that doesn't care for children and animals...It's different for young people - for us, the destruction of the planet is personal" (Harrabin, 2021).

Research with 10,000 children and young people (aged 16–25 years) in ten countries identified that 59 per cent were very or extremely worried and 84 per cent were at least moderately worried about climate change. More than 45 per cent of respondents said their feelings about climate change affected their daily life and functioning, and many reported a high number of negative thoughts about climate change (Schechter et al., 2023). What this research also showed was that their views often reflected strong emotions about a sense of anger, being powerless and helpless (Hickmann, et al., 2021). As Layla Chaaraoui (2023: 1) states in reviewing these trends that 'young people are rightfully angry' and that young people 'are developing eco-anxiety' as they realize they will have to deal with the 'damage that is yet to come'.

A similar sense of concern and anxiety can be seen in many young people's responses to the war in Gaza. Childline, a free telephone service for

young people in the United Kingdom (UK), has developed a special hotline to respond to young peoples 'worries about the world' and 'how to cope with anxious feelings' (Childline, n.d.). In the United States (US), the National Association for School Psychologists developed a special programme of support for families and young people affected by the war (NASP, n.d.). Many schools in the UK felt so nervous about the war that they banned it as a topic of conversation because it could divide communities (Foster and Pearce, 2023). In the United States, the election of Trump again in 2024 resulted in very divided views amongst young people, often related to their own family background, where they lived, their race and gender. Some felt powerless, others thought he was the best thing the country needed. Views also reflected young people's sense of their own identity with those who are gay or trans feeling particularly threatened (Learning Network, 2025). What this evidence tells us is that educationalists – be they in schools, colleges or universities – are now having to deal with concerns about the future at a level last seen in the 1960s with the Cuban Missile crisis. This presents major challenges for all educators. Many of them will be concerned and feel challenged about their own views about the state of the world let alone their role in supporting learners.

A suggested response to these challenges could be to emphasise the importance of hope and building a sense of agency. This for example has been suggested in discussions on the climate crisis. Corbin et al. (2023) have posed the suggestion of hopeful alarm which means communicating the seriousness of the situation, whilst offering at the same time models of engagement. They quote the Canadian novelist Margaret Attwood (2010: 295) who suggests: 'We must be a beacon of hope, because if you tell people there's nothing they can do, they will do worse than nothing'. Linking hope to a sense of agency and engagement provides a clear link to the value of the fields of global citizenship and global learning and education for sustainable development. These fields, moreover, also emphasise a pedagogical approach of education for social change. This approach of linking hope to agency to change can be seen in the Global Education Network Europe (GENE)'s 'Declaration of Global Education to 2050':

> "Global education is education that enables people to reflect critically on the world and their place in it; to open their eyes, hearts and minds to

the reality of the world at local and global level. It empowers people to understand, imagine, hope and act to bring a world of social and climate justice, peace, solidarity, equity and equality, planetary sustainability and international understanding" (GENE, 2022: 3).

Similar themes can be found in UNESCO's (2023: 6) recommendation which includes the following aims:

> "….ensuring all people, throughout their life, are equipped and empowered with the knowledge, skills, including socio-emotional skills, values, attitudes and behaviours needed for effective participation in democratic decision-making processes, economic empowerment, awareness-raising and individual and collective actions at community, local, national, regional and global levels that advance peace and promote international understanding, cooperation, poverty eradication and tolerance, in order to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship and sustainable development through education".

Reference is also made to the development of skills to:

> "act as agents of change and the capacity to evaluate and understand emerging and future opportunities and threats and to adapt to new possibilities with a view to promoting a peaceful, just, equal, equitable, inclusive, healthy and sustainable future for all" (Ibid).

To locate these policies and connections to global citizenship and sustainable development, there is a need to provide a clear theoretical basis to this pedagogical approach and the most obvious person to turn to is Paulo Freire.

Influence of Paulo Freire
The term pedagogy of hope is most associated with Freire. In his seminal book, *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire states:

"One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope there is little we can do" (Freire, 2004: 9).

Throughout his writings, Freire emphasises that all education is political and that it needs to challenge the dominant orthodoxies of teaching. An educationalist he states, has above all to be an optimist and hope as an ontological necessity:

"We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world. I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential concrete imperative" (Freire, 2004: 8).

Whilst there have been justifiable criticisms for some of the literature around hope for being too abstract and idealistic, to Freire hope needs to be rooted in concrete practice (Ibid.: 9).

One of Freire's disciples, Henry Giroux (2011), has developed this concept of hope into what he calls educated hope within which education plays a central role in understanding the limits of the present and seeing the possibilities for the future and social change (Ibid.: 122). The writings of bell hooks (2013) suggest similar things where she sees a successful pedagogy of hope built on students' *and* teachers' interactions in a form that is anti-oppressive and encourages reflexivity, dialogue and criticality (Carolissen et al., 2011). To Freire, Giroux and hooks, hope must have a pedagogical grounding in practice and this is where education for sustainable development and global citizenship comes in. Both fields are grounded in a pedagogical approach that emphasises the relationship of learning to social change (Bourn, 2022).

UNESCO in its promotion of education for sustainable development demonstrates this:

"It teaches individuals to make informed decisions and take action, both individually and collectively, to change society and protect the planet. It

equips people of all ages with the knowledge, skills, values, and ability to tackle issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, overuse of resources, and inequality that impact the well-being of people and the planet (UNESCO, 2024: 1).

Global citizenship as expressed in the work of Gaudelli (2016), Goren and Yemini (2017) and Pashby et al. (2020) is seen as linked to social justice, challenging dominant orthodoxies and outlining links between learning and social action. Sharma (2024) in her recent work has brought the two areas of education for sustainable development and global citizenship together by emphasising a justice and values-based approach that also includes reference to the human/personal dimension and intercultural approaches. She sees the Earth Charter as an important mechanism for bringing these themes together which can influence policy-makers and practitioners.

Tarozzi (2024) in reflecting upon the importance of global citizenship and sustainability argues that bringing in hope with a critical perspective can also be a way of challenging neoliberal thinking. He suggests:

"Critical hope is what is currently needed, not only to encourage younger generations to overcome the effects of health, economic and environmental crises, but also to avoid succumbing to fatalism in imagining global social justice. This ambitious, humanistic and progressive programme requires overcoming and combatting the conservative and neoliberal pessimism and hopelessness of TINA (There Is No Alternative) underpinning neoliberal, economic or entrepreneurial models of global education and learning" (Ibid.: 5).

Hope has, therefore, to be located within the discourses around critical approaches to learning that moves beyond idealistic notions to being grounded within the global challenges of today. To engage with climate change, renewal of war in Europe and Gaza, and the impact of the Trump presidency in the United States means providing an approach to learning that recognises and directly addresses today's global challenges and the sense of hopelessness many people may have. It means promoting a pedagogical approach that:

- Locates challenges in real world experiences;
- Goes beyond superficial and quick fix solutions to understanding the complexities of global problems;
- Recognises and directly addresses the relationship between hope and hopelessness and looks beyond emotional responses to issues;
- Promoting a sense that change is possible - to imagine future scenarios;
- Engaging in an active process to seek change towards a more just and sustainable future (Bourn, 2024).

In practical terms this means demonstrating the complexities of issues, outlining different approaches to addressing the challenges and remaining positive and outward looking throughout the learning process. An educated hope means promoting active engagement to secure a more just and sustainable world, going beyond idealistic notions of change to demonstrating ways in which change is possible.

Example of 'River of Hope' project

It is within this theoretical approach that one should look at educational practice that could be considered as models of pedagogy of hope. This means developing approaches that engage learners in a participative educational process, that is forward thinking and empowering and above all seeks social change. A useful example of this methodological approach can be seen in the 'Rivers of Hope' project in Vietnam. An animation was created by young people and researchers at Loughborough, Hull, Newcastle, and Vietnam National University. The film titled 'River of Hope', uses a kingfisher as a storyteller to show how the impact of climate change through flooding is having a devasting impact upon communities alongside Vietnam's Red River (Youunity4action, 2023). The story shows how through collective effort communities can come together to raise awareness of the impact of the flooding and how they can educate young people and communities on what action they can take.

It begins by using the kingfisher as the narrator to ask are you feeling powerless and helpless and then introduces the story of how young people have created stories of life by the river. A feature of the stories is the impact of extreme weather. The narrator then notes that telling a story can be like a seed, stories

grow inside the young people leading them to ask questions, to discuss and explore what led them to see there was hope. The film then shows how by working together, villages could grow bamboo, for example, which could help to stop the banks of the river eroding. The young people wanted other communities to know about these stories of hope. It led them to turn the stories into a comic strip, using their phones to create small films and a play for a water puppetry troupe. These stories became much stronger and had a much wider impact because of the different forms of communication. The process showed that by making the stories come to life they could learn how to adapt to the changing climate, to connect with wider society and show how by working together change was possible. The film is one of several initiatives undertaken by the 'Advancing Policy and Practice on Climate Action in South East Asia' (APPOCA, 2023) project and supported by the British Academy's Maximising Impact scheme. This animation provides a valuable pedagogical approach because in addition to having a vision of hope, it recognises the power of emotion and how it can be used. A pedagogy of hope is meaningless unless it engages the affective dimension in learners, that it engenders an emotional response as well as engaging in a process of learning.

Case studies of practice

The article now looks at two examples of local practice in England, led by development education centres (DECs) who are part of the Global Learning Network. This is a network to support the work of these DECs, to promote their activities and collaborate on joint projects. The material discussed is based on the materials produced by the DECs related to the project and general observations from their Directors. The first is Global Learning London whose work is based in, and primarily funded by Tower Hamlets local authority, based in East London. One of its major projects since 2023 has been 'Communities of Hope' which began following dialogue with faith organisations on how to address young people's concerns about their future including the impact of the climate emergency. The project began with a pilot year in 2023-2024 with a series of creative in-school workshops. This pilot year focused on how climate change is affecting their localities and addressing young people's mental well-being and how to manage climate anxiety. The pilot year aimed that young people in Tower Hamlets would develop the agency, tools, and space to lead on discussions about

climate change and the role of faith and global values. It also aimed to support young people to connect to environmental organisations and faith groups leading on climate change projects.

This pilot phase found that over 60 per cent of students involved in the project said that their knowledge of the impact of the climate emergency on their locality had increased due to the project. This pilot phase recommended that creativity provide an important 'safe and brave space' to explore topics around sustainability and the climate emergency. The pilot phase also found that leaders within the schools need to make sure they listen to the concerns of young people. The other main finding was that schools need to make sure in the development of their work in this area that connections are developed between young people and local community organisations. The activities also need to recognise changing global contexts and how real-world events can be related to the learning of young people (Global Learning London, 2024a).

Evidence from drawings produced by students showed that many of them saw a linkage between hope and community engagement and how by working collectively change was possible. There was also evidence from the evaluation of the pilot phase that young people did feel they had a sense of agency and an important part of this were the opportunities to connect with local groups, particularly environmental ones (Ibid.). Following this successful pilot, the project has secured funding for four years, working with five schools over a two-year cycle and then another five schools. The two-year cycles will embed change and provide a greater opportunity for enduring community impact. The hopes are that young people will be inspired to work with their local communities to address the challenges of climate change (Global Learning London, 2024b). The project works with educators in the first year and students in the second. In the first year the focus has been on supporting teachers and leaders within schools to look at ways in which the impact of the climate emergency could be addressed. This includes producing a climate friendly schools audit and training for senior leaders and governors. The project is also developing a network of educators in Tower Hamlets to support them in embedding climate justice in the curriculum.

The second phase will be to involve students more directly through workshops and classroom activities using creative and art-based approaches to 'empower and enable young people to make positive choices to fight the climate emergency and climate injustice by building awareness, knowledge and skills of this locally, nationally and internationally' (Ibid.). Conscious of the concerns that many young people have about their future and the future of the planet, the project has a strong emphasis on wellbeing. Involving a community artist, the project provides in-school workshops to help the young people produce a creative output that addresses the impact of climate change on their locality in East London. Underpinning the project is an approach to enable young people to know and feel they have the power to create change. Learning is seen by the Centre as having hope.

This project compliments other initiatives developed by the Centre around using stories, poetry and rap to enable young people in the local schools to build confidence and develop a shared sense of belonging and identity (Global Learning London, n.d.a). Another example from a development education centre is in Cumbria in England with their 'Discovered Stories Shared Communities' (DSSC) project (Cumbria DEC, 2022) which has brought together people from diverse communities across Cumbria to share, explore and work with ideas and stories. Cumbria DEC (CDEC) see the aim of the project as developing ways of understanding an activity which leads to what it means to be a resilient and welcoming community. A feature of the project is to encourage members of the community to create a new vision of the future through listening, talking, telling stories and to use visual arts and written work to inspire people. The aim has been to identify what is a welcoming community? (Ibid.). The project developed a training toolkit using the concept of Art of Hosting (AoH) which is based on encouraging conversations that matter between and within communities. The toolkit states that it is often from meaningful conversations that action materialises:

> "When we are involved and invited to take ownership and responsibility, ideas and solutions are more easily put into action. Conversations that reveal shared clarity create actions that are wise and sustainable" (Cumbria DEC, 2022: 7).

Conscious of the global context within which we are all living, Cumbria DEC have seen the Art of Hosting as an important response to today's global challenges:

> "AoH is a response to a time in which institutions and democracies are failing to address the problems in our world. It is a practice ground for all who aspire to bring out the best in others. It is based on the assumption and experience that every human being has enormous, untapped creativity and resilience" (Ibid.: 5).

The Art of Hosting, reflecting themes from Freire and others, is the sense of a vision with a purpose. This means as the document states: 'When you create a vision, you articulate the dreams and hopes of the... community. It reminds everyone of what they are trying to build' (Ibid.). The document further states that whilst groups may have different purposes what is often missing is attempts to bring them together and identify commonalities. The resource concludes by suggesting that a need for the groups to identify 'what is our collective purpose?' (Ibid.: 11).

The ideas in the resource are influenced by U Theory which is a process of learning that moves from sensing the current realities to reflecting upon them and then realising what forms of action are needed (Scharmer, 2018). In building on their engagement with Art of Hosting approaches, CDEC have sought ways to connect with and create the ways they can support young people to have hope: meeting young people where they are in terms of passions and vision, and enabling them through mentoring, skills development and in connecting them with others so that these young people believe in their agency, see the impact their actions have and as a result, have hope for their and the planet's future. Another project run by CDEC has been on climate change and encouraging young people to think of themselves as climate leaders. The approach of the Centre has been to co-create new projects with partner organisations including community groups and schools. They see this process of dialogue and interaction as part of building positive relationships, developing trust and an empathetic way of working. The Centre sees that to work with other organisations may well require different approaches but what must be key is a common value base around compassion

and social justice and that through the development of critical thinking skills, it was possible to develop active global citizens.

Both Centres are rooted in their local communities, and both have a strong social ethos that helps to drive forward the themes identified in these case studies. Global Learning London for example states that its approach is to 'work with children, young people and their wider communities, to cultivate optimism and action for a more just and sustainable world'. They also see their role as to 'open up spaces for learning and enquiry' (Global Learning London, n.d.b). CDEC in their rationale for their work state that they believe in 'fairness and social justice, sustainability and living in harmony with the environment, integrity; that individuals and organisations are responsible for their choices, the universality of our agenda and the possibility of change and the power of individuals and communities to effect it' (Cumbria DEC, n.d.). It is this connection between the organisation's value base and ethos and their projects which is key to putting into practice a pedagogy of hope. A sense of hope and change has to be built-in to the organisation and there needs to be an underlying commitment to seek a more just and sustainable world.

Main observations
These two examples and the River of Hope story demonstrate that a pedagogy of hope to be effective should be grounded in real-world experiences. The educational approach that appears to be most effective is one that is positive, empowering and forward thinking. The examples given also show that the wider social context is very important in identifying both approaches and realistic objectives to any educational project that seeks social change. This can often mean understanding the factors that are both drivers and obstacles to change, for example, where does power lie? The examples also show the value of creative approaches to learning, whether it is telling stories, making puppets or just drawing. It is when people feel they have the agency and confidence to not only express their views but have a belief that their views will be listened too. What the examples also showed is the importance of a vision for positive social change. In all three examples some sense of not only what was possible but what could be the motivating forces to encourage change was evident.

These examples also put into practice many of the ideas developed by Freire and later Giroux. A sense of hope should be grounded in an educational process that is empowering and forward thinking. It also means an approach that is learner centred, encourages a dialogic approach and has a values base rooted in social justice. Both the River of Hope example and the two from the DECs also demonstrate the importance of support and access to expertise and guidance to implement the visions of the projects. Schools and young people often need help to address complex problems, and this can include providing resources or training or just acting as mentors to the teachers and learners. The themes expressed in the examples also reflect recent international initiatives such as those developed by GENE and UNESCO. The challenge is to ensure that such international policy statements have an impact and can inspire practitioners. At a time of increasing global uncertainty educationalists have a responsibility to provide the tools with which learners can not only make sense of the world around them but know where to go to for inspiration, guidance and practical examples.

Conclusion

This article began by reminding us of the anxieties and concerns many young people around the world are feeling because of fears about the future of the planet, the renewal of war in several regions of the world and now the instabilities around global economic policy changes. The second presidency of Donald Trump, and the wars in Gaza and Ukraine have heightened the concerns many young people have about what sort of world they are growing up into. Reference has been made to the importance of international initiatives by UNESCO and GENE that could be seen as a direct educational response to these anxieties. The ideas of Freire and Giroux and, particularly, the concept of pedagogy of hope has been suggested as a potential theoretical educational basis to providing policymakers and practitioners with a vision for the future.

The examples given from the River of Hope and the two case studies from development education centres in England show that the combination of a powerful vision for change with a strong value base and a pedagogical approach that is empowering and engaging can become the basis for a way forward for educationalists. To address the concerns that many young people might have for their own future and the state of the world, educationalists have a responsibility

to provide the learners with the skills and a value base that equip and encourage them to make a positive contribution to society. Organisations and researchers who are supportive of the main themes behind development education, global citizenship and education for sustainable development have the tools to provide support to learners. Through projects such as those outlined in this article, educationalists and learners of all ages can see the impact of their learning, how through working with and through communities, change is possible.

There is evidence, as shown in this article, that civil society organisations are recognising these challenges and using a sense of hope as a way of engaging communities in their projects. What the examples from the two development education centres show is the value of relating these educational objectives to engaging communities and to emphasise the importance of collective engagement. International policy-makers such as UNESCO can and do play an important role in promoting a positive narrative for change. UNESCO's *Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights* document (UNESCO, 2023) and GENE's *Global Education to 2050* (GENE, 2022) provide valuable rationales and signposts on how to engage education practitioners. Educationalists need to engage with the aims of these documents and use them as a way of demonstrating that there is an international education consensus that has a different vision to the future needs of the world to that of Donald Trump.

A pedagogy of hope if it is grounded in an understanding of the complex global world we are living in can provide a vision for positive change and ensure there are the skills, knowledge base and above all the values to secure a more just and sustainable world. Civil society organisations whether local or national, can be important resources to enable educationalists to make this happen.

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Douglas Bourn is Professor of Development Education at University College London and author and editor of numerous books and articles related to global citizenship, global social justice and development education. One of his most recent volumes has been *Education for Social Change* (2022) published by Bloomsbury.

Perspectives

PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES OF THE PEDAGOGY OF HOPE

GERARD MCCANN

Abstract: Hope is central to our understanding of pedagogy and the process of teaching and learning. It reflects a philosophy that has energised society and humanity's lived experience in a manner that is essentially about building and forming human potential. In this sense education is hope and hope is at the very core of a community of learning. This article will explore the backdrop to this philosophy of education through the lens of one of its most important advocates, Paulo Freire, highlighting some of the key facets of his pedagogy. It will point to *conscientização* (critical consciousness), human agency and ethics-based liberation as the three pillars of his life's work and look at thinkers and movements that have helped to shape Freire's understanding of the importance of education for society and democracy.

Key words: Education; Agency; Freire; Hope; Pedagogy.

Introduction
The philosophy of hope has had a strong influence on the development of education in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. From various contexts around the world, the idea that education is essentially the inculcation of hope is a widespread pedagogical opinion. Arguably the most influential educationalist drawing from this philosophy has been Paulo Freire, who emerged out of the liberation struggles of Southern America with a dedication to the belief that education can empower people, particularly those who are oppressed, and engender social justice (Irwin, 2012: 17-45; Bailey et al., 2010). His philosophy, however, is but part of a wider movement that sought to bring a sense of openness to society where praxis and development can carry forward new understandings

of humanity, social development and participatory democracy. This article will look at the philosophical context from which this idea of hope emerges, drawing from a range of thinkers and positions to look at the converging approaches which helped form a definitive and sociological pedagogy of hope. It will highlight three aspects of Freire's philosophy: *conscientização*, human agency and ethics-based liberation.

Formative positions

In the philosophy of education there are concepts that are encompassing and highly impactful for human development. In the practice of education there are influences that shape the applied aspects of the profession which, under guidance from educators, can take learners from a point of need to a place of socio-economic, emotional and personal fulfilment. Even a cursory knowledge of this philosophy will reveal the understanding that education informs and enriches life experience and, in effect, enlightens the world around us. On surveying recent interpretations of the role of education for individuals and society, Randell Curren came up with a useful definition that carries forward into other more critically astute interpretations: 'The most worthwhile life, or life most objectively and subjectively fulfilling for a human being or community, would be the defining or (alternatively) most ethically appropriate purpose of education' (Curren, 2025). In the lexicon of this philosophy, themes of well-being, productivity, futures, community, personal autonomy, self-actualisation, life accomplishment, mutual benefit and indeed joy, come up continually as purposes and outcomes (Barry, 2005; Smith, 2015; Meyer, 2014; Harel Ben Shahar, 2016; Levison et al., 2024; Rorty, 1998). Education, at its core, and as read generally by philosophers working in this field, concentrates on the human state of becoming, a process in life, moving towards/creating what could be an individual's most fruitful lived experience.

From this, the phenomenon of hope is implicit to the process of learning, where it informs the environment and inspires learners to open up to new worlds of possibility. Curiosity, enquiry, the journey to know things are implicit. In St Lawrence's School in the Zambian compound of Misisi, the day begins with the children chanting 'education is power, education is freedom'. In one of the most impoverished regions on earth, education has exigency enough

to bring hope and aspiration to children's natural instinct to want the best for their future. Generally, in the education systems in most countries, education is about the empowerment of young people, giving them agency and helping them map their futures.   This aspirational focus highlights the vocational and directional role of the educator, teacher or tutor. Hope in education is conative, it is about the process of harnessing expectations and layering the skills and conscience that can facilitate possibility. A pedagogy of hope is both cognitive and affective and has the potential to bring forward a hoped-for reality. To draw from a wonderful concept from Aristotle that informs this philosophy of hope, and to reemphasise the point - education in essence is about movement towards entelechy (the realisation of potential). Hope, comprehended through the lens of education, matches expectations with anticipated outcomes, and is intrinsically optimistic - or as some philosophers of the phenomena label it 'utopian' (Bloch, 1995). Learning in the genuine sense of the word, together with human agency, coalesces into a process of building hope, actualising meaningful change by creating human value. Ernst Bloch's epigraph is the starting point of this whole field of thought: 'What really matters, is to learn how to hope'.

The introduction of *conscientização* or critical consciousness into the discourse on the philosophy of education by Paulo Freire brought this process of realisation that bit closer in that his interjection views 'theory into practice' as a liberating act, particularly for those within society who are struggling against marginalisation and alienation. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1995) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Freire, 1973), Freire draws from a range of philosophical traditions to highlight the urgent need for a learning culture and methodology that engenders self-perception among learners and challenges social, economic and political contradictions. What Freire brings to the philosophy of hope is a dialectical tradition which accepts that the act of change is the fulfilment of an aspiration for change - freedom from poverty and oppression being the most pressing issues his community was confronting in the Latin America of the 1960s and 1970s. In a report he wrote for the World Council of Churches in 1974, *Ação cultural para a liberdade e outros escritos*, Freire links a tradition in philosophy within which he is absolutely absorbed:

"Just as the gnoseological [the study of knowledge] circle does not end with the step of the acquisition of existing knowledge, but proceeds to the phase of the creation of new knowledge, so neither may consciousness-raising come to a halt at the stage of the revelation of reality. Its authenticity is at hand only when the practice of the revelation of reality constitutes a dynamic and dialectical unity with the practice of transformation of reality" (Freire, 2013: 88).

The recurrent theme that runs right through this process of knowledge and Freire's application of it is *praxis*, in a manner that would have been totally appreciated by that generation of philosophers who informed education and society in the years after the Second World War, and who pioneered critical theory, existentialism, phenomenology, Marxist humanism and a seminal pillar of his work, liberation theology. These influences were registered in *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 2013: 11) where he felt obliged to list the thinkers who 'formed' his philosophy: 'Marx, Lukács, Fromm, Gramsci, Fanon, Memmi, Sartre, Kosik, Agnes Heller, Merleau-Ponty, Simon Weil [the English translation spelling "Simone" incorrectly], Arendt, Marcuse, and so many others' (See also: Mayo, 2004; Valenzano, 2021: 68-82; Roberts, 2000). Given the confines, this article will select a few of these thinkers and point to further research on the context within which Freire and his colleagues were operating.

Sources of conscientização

It is interesting that Freire begins his list with Karl Marx. The Marx that he read would have been – believe it or not – relatively new on the world stage, in that work to do with consciousness, Hegelianism and alienation (themes that Freire's theories were derived from), were only published in the 1920s and 1930s. The *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* from 1927 and the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in 1932 were only later worked through to translations and general circulation (Marx, 1984). While the Soviets dismissed this humanist Marx, others, such as the Frankfurt School (critical theory), found the contemporary insights to be resolutely appropriate to an undetermined praxis and a reflective acknowledgement of the subject in history. This Marx was about people and their agency, and not dialectical materialism. Consciousness and agency come alive in these 'early writings' of Marx and were enthusiastically

adapted by the New Left in the West and global South in all its various manifestations. What follows is a sample of what Marx was writing about in 1843-4 that is comparable to Freire's work in thought, language and tone over one hundred years later (apologies for the gender-biased terms):

> "The *human* essence of nature exists only for *social* man; for only here does nature exist for him as a *bond* with other *men*, as his existence for others and their existence for him, as the vital element of human reality; only here does it exist as the *basis* of his own *human* existence. Only here has his *natural* existence become his *human* existence and nature become man for him. *Society* is therefore the perfected unity in essence of man with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the realized naturalism of man and the realized humanism of nature" (Marx, 1984: 349-50).

From Marx's early writings, we get the core thesis of a whole generation of radical thinkers in the mid-twentieth century. The concept of society comes through strongly in these works, the need for human interdependence, as does self-realisation and self-consciousness. Freire was keen to revisit the concept of praxis with the intention of moving beyond the economism that is often associated with a Marxist position on societal transformation. That is to emphasise agency as a means of enhancing individual consciences to act in the interests of others and build social justice. Read as existentialist by many (Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010) the philosophical context of the 1950s and 1960s – where existentialism was highly influential – certainly was a reference point. This is particularly the case with the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the French phenomenologist who marries Marxist dialectics to this individual agency. A staple of post-war philosophy, his *Phenomenology of Perception* (*Phénoménologie de la perception*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) highlights the importance of consciousness and the 'primacy of perception' in the process of humanity 'becoming'. We see humanism very much at the fore of this understanding of society, anticipating the criticality of individual agency and its role shaping human development.

Within the various schools of critical thought that traversed the globe in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a recurrent conversation around lived experience and activism peculiar to that period in history. The discourse on the links between consciousness and ontology ran through diverse and often culturally different contexts, such as Marxism and theology, pedagogy and psychoanalysis. The German-American psychoanalyst, Erich Fromm, for example, significantly reformed psychoanalysis by integrating social and cultural facets into what had been ostensively a clinical field. He developed social psychoanalysis which emphasised how society and culture influence individual personality development and psychological well-being. The implications of his work were significant and can be read into many aspects of the philosophy of education from the late 1950s onwards. Fromm's intervention into social science also included humanistic psychoanalysis, which focuses on the patient-analyst relationship as a shared human experience, exploring the broader human condition beyond individual neuroses. His *The Sane Society* (Fromm, 1955) and *The Art of Loving* (Fromm, 1956) were globally received as the reimagining of human relationships beyond reification and alienation, whereas his *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology* (Fromm, 1968) and *To Have or To Be?* (Fromm, 1976) anticipated instinctual change within human communities through a prism of respect for the person and others (later useful in confronting 'othering' and 'stereotyping'). For Fromm, human liberation is summed up in acts of solidarity in harmony with others and could be interpreted as collective kindness (Kolakowski, 1985: 380-387). The importance of Fromm's socialist humanism for education and particularly for Freire is that his approach to psychoanalysis can be read into the application of *conscientização*. While Fromm was a personal friend and confidant of Freire, who collaborated together throughout the 1960s and 1970s and for whom there is a direct overlap across their respective professional careers, there were also others from the aforementioned schools of thought that Freire drew from and acknowledged as having been influences on his work.

Freire's context
Another stream of thought that is very evident in much of Freire's work is taken from his involvement with a social justice movement in Brazil called Acción Católica and his work with Juventude Universitária Católica (JUC). The former

was inspired by the pastoral work of community clergy and religious lay people working with rural impoverished communities, the politically oppressed and the marginalised of the city favelas. Freire was familiar with the ideological motivations of these community leaders and engaged with the various generic activities that eventually was defined as liberation theology. Essentially, it was a belief system that Christianity as a faith system was beatitudinal, about the freedom of the poor from poverty and oppression. In this belief system, praxis is a central theory in empowering individuals and communities to act together for freedom. The non-determined, non-structural formation of this praxis grounded its activism in primary ethical considerations and the responsibility to shape history in a manner that would challenge and serve to eradicate the poverty of mind, spirit and circumstance (Valenzano, 2021: 75).

Freire was particularly inspired by the life and work of the martyred Bishop Hélder Câmara and knew key figures in the liberationist movement across Latin America – Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff and Juan Luis Segundo. The names may not be, or have been, familiar in Europe but in Latin America they represented the voice of a generation of radicals and revolutionaries and reflected critical theory through the arch of religiosity. This approach was prevalent across that continent. In *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (1990) Freire spoke to this background and his parallel humanism:

> "I have always spoken to both [Marx and Christ] in a very loving way. See, I feel comfortable in this position. Sometimes people tell me that I am contradictory. My answer is that I have a right to be contradictory, and secondly, I don't consider myself contradictory in this" (Horton and Freire, 1990: 247).

What aligns these positions is a steadfast belief in the potential goodness of humans and the creative power of humanity given a supportive environment and entelechy. Indeed, the liberationists had a term for this that Freire would be very familiar with, *orthopraxis*, the living of one's life and through one's faith (if it is there) in a manner that contributes to creating relationships and contexts that are morally right and good.

Freire was of course very attentive to and connected with the 'base communities' in rural Brazil which were inspired by liberation theology and organised by local parishes in the form of cooperatives. These base ecclesial communities (CEBs), to give them their technical term, were (and are) small, grassroots initiatives which are characterised by their democratic organisation, voluntary participation, and focus on integrating faith with social and political realities. These communities played a significant role in fostering social awareness and action, particularly among marginalised populations, emphasising dialogue, critical reflection, and collective decision-making, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among participants. Freire would have been instrumental in designing an educational component to these initiatives with his methodology of integrated learning being applied to both the school context and adult education. Linking education to liberation is instrumental in changing the conventional understanding of the role of pedagogy in society. Indeed, the first two chapters of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are about exactly this, the elevation of education to being the glue with which transitional humanisation can bring forward relationships to *ser mais*, 'to be more' (Valenzano, 2021: 73; also see Copp, 2016: 149-167).

The timing of Freire's educational activities and extension of his theory coincided with the discourse on the role of the religious in social justice movements, the influential Latin American Bishop's conference in Medellín in August 1968 (which called for human 'liberation') and the publication of the defining text on liberation theology in 1971, Gustavo Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation* (Gutiérrez, 1988). Gutiérrez opens the book with this statement from the Medellín conference:

> "we are on the threshold of a new epoch in this history of Latin America. It appears to be a time of zeal for full emancipation, of liberation from every form of servitude, or personal maturity and of collective integration" (Gutiérrez, 1988: xvii).

A colleague of Gutiérrez, Freire would not only have gained inspiration from this popular cooperative movement but would have informed the debates and framed the educational aspects of a distinctly Latin American culture of social justice. The

exchange was reciprocal with Gutiérrez mentioning Freire and his 'movement' throughout the book: 'Freire's ideas and methods continue to be developed. All the potentialities of conscientization are slowly unfolding, as well as its limitations. It is a process which can be deepened, modified, reorientated, and extended' (Gutiérrez, 1988: 57)

Conclusion

With three philosophical themes coalescing in Freire's work, *conscientização*, human agency and ethics-based liberation, we can see a distinct contextualisation of his epistemology. Humanism is an overarching principle, with intertheoretical influences bringing forward a view of human development that, while being universal, are soundly grounded in the political and cultural environment of Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. The genius of his work can be recognised in his marshalling of critical theory, liberation theology and phenomenology (European existentialism) to the service of pedagogy. Whereas conventional pedagogy has been a culture of 'adopting educational methods and ways of acting that reduce man [learners] to the condition of an object' (Freire, 1972: 49), a reflective pedagogy places the learner at the centre of a process of conscious human endeavour and equips individuals and their community in the formation of a socially aware and actively democratic environment. The dialogue charting his philosophy can be seen at every point of Freire's long career, forcefully introduced in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* - originally in Spanish in 1968, reviewed and reasserted in the *Pedagogy of Hope* in 2013. A final comment will be left to Henry A. Giroux – another long-standing friend and collaborator – from his introductory analysis of Freire's life-enhancing philosophy:

> "[Freire] not only makes visible the power of the possible in forms of self-reflection, self-examination, and a historical rendering of the world, but also displays the courage that comes with refusing to give up the dream of a just and equitable society, one in which matters of literacy, education, and pedagogy informed each other in the fight for justice, economic equality, and democracy itself" (Giroux cited in Freire, 2021: 13-14).

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Gerard McCann is Professor of International Studies and Principal Lecturer at St Mary's University College, a College of Queen's University Belfast. He is Head of International Programmes and coordinates several education projects in Europe and Africa. Recent books include *Global Education in Ireland: Critical Histories and Future Directions*, (co-edited with E Dillon, N Gaynor and S McCloskey) (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), *COVID-19, the Global South and the Pandemic's Development Impact* (co-edited with Nita Mishra and Pádraig Carmody) (Bristol University Press, 2022), and *International Human Rights, Social Policy and Global Development* (co-edited with Féilim Ó hAdhmaill) (Policy Press, 2020).

HOPE AND HOPELESSNESS IN THE FACE OF A POLYCRISIS

ANNE M. DOLAN

Abstract: In light of ever increasing global challenges, the need for hope has never been greater, the need for action has never been more acute and the need for critical, transformative education is now absolutely essential (Dolan, 2024). The concept of 'polycrisis' can be debilitating and disempowering. The idea of multiple, interconnected crises can be overwhelming and lead to feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and a sense of being unable to cope with the challenges facing the world. This article argues that global citizenship education (GCE) should acknowledge the challenges of polycrisis while also emphasising agency, collaboration, and positive action, thus helping learners to navigate this complex era without succumbing to debilitating feelings of despair.

Key words: Polycrisis; Hope; Transformative Global Citizenship Education.

Introduction

2025 marks the eightieth anniversary since the United States (US) dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945, and the second on Nagasaki three days later. About 214,000 people were killed in the blasts and Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945 (Selden and Selden, 1990). The phrase 'never again' after the Second World War and the establishment of the United Nations (UN) signified a global commitment to prevent future atrocities such as the Holocaust. The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were created to enshrine principles of sovereignty, political independence, and equal dignity, aiming to protect future generations from the scourge of war. Specifically, the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UN, 1948) was created to classify and prevent genocide. Deplorably and to our shame, the ongoing genocide in Gaza (Amnesty International, 2024), including the dire humanitarian situation and the impact

on civilians, highlights the failure of the United Nations and the limitations of global citizenship in promoting peace, justice, global solidarity and compassion. In Gaza, starvation is being used as a weapon of war and genocide as the health system, run by hungry and exhausted health workers, cannot cope. Genocide in Gaza is an international crisis occurring in the context of multiple crises collectively referred to as a polycrisis. The situation in Gaza serves as a stark reminder of the limitations of global citizenship education (GCE) in its current form. It highlights the need to strengthen educational approaches that foster critical thinking, empathy, a commitment to human rights, and a willingness to take meaningful action to address injustice and conflict.

In this article, I explore the polycrisis as a context in which GCE operates. I argue that GCE needs to return to its radical roots in order to address the polycrisis in all its complexity. I also suggest that GCE needs to adopt a more transformative approach underpinned by radical, political and active forms of hope to inspire action and agency and to overturn widespread levels of individual, societal and political complacency. GCE (or global education) is essentially a hopeful endeavour. The Dublin Declaration, also known as the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050, is a strategy framework designed to strengthen and improve GCE across Europe. According to the Dublin Declaration, global education 'empowers people to understand, imagine, hope and act to bring about a world of social and climate justice, peace, solidarity, equity and equality, planetary sustainability, and international understanding' (GENE, 2022: 3). GCE encourages learners to critically analyse global issues while maintaining a sense of hope for a more just and equitable world. Hope plays a crucial role in fostering agency, action and solidarity for a better future. Hopelessness on the other hand can generate feelings of powerlessness, low self-esteem, depression and anxiety. We are living in uncertain times whereby various crises – economic, environmental and geopolitical – interact and amplify each other creating what is known as a polycrisis. The confluence of destabilising planetary pressures with growing inequalities, together with the devastating genocide in Gaza and the silent complicity which accompanies it, present new, complex, interacting sources of uncertainty for the world and everyone in it. This can further exacerbate feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness, sadness, anger, fear and instability.

This article argues that GCE should acknowledge the challenges of the polycrisis while also emphasising agency, collaboration, and positive action, thus helping learners to navigate this complex era without succumbing to debilitating feelings of despair. I explore pedagogies of hope in the context of a global polycrisis. Pedagogies of hope have been developed by critical educational theorists such as Freire (2004) and hooks (2003), who connect hope with individual and collective transformation. As hooks suggests: 'to successfully do the work of unlearning domination, a democratic educator has to cultivate a spirit of hopefulness about the capacity of individuals to change (hooks, 2003: 73). As an initial step, GCE needs to recognise and address the complexity of the polycrisis.

The polycrisis

The interaction of complex geopolitical threats has led to the emergence of a 'polycrisis', a complex situation where multiple interconnected crises converge and amplify each other resulting in a scenario which is difficult to manage or resolve. The concept of 'polycrisis' can be debilitating and disempowering. The idea of multiple, interconnected crises can be overwhelming and lead to feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and a sense of being unable to cope with the challenges facing the world. The term itself has been conceptualised in various ways in the literature. For instance, Roubini (2022) uses the term 'megathreats' where multiple crises are interlinked, intensify each other and resist simple solutions. Today, the polycrisis constitutes numerous challenges including conflict, genocide, migration, inflation and authoritarianism. Energy and food prices are spiking, accelerated by the current and longer-term threats of climate extremes, biodiversity loss and rising inequality. These are further exacerbated by the economic and existential threat of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the chilling rise of far-right populism, and heightening geopolitical tensions. Chasing endless growth on a finite planet is having multiple and interconnected consequences. Indeed, our current rates of consumption can only be sustained if we have a minimum of 1.5 planets (Kitzes et al., 2008), which means we are rapidly eating into our natural capital and depleting the Earth's resources. Cracks in existing economic and social systems are ever apparent while 'the different axes of crisis

are interacting and reinforcing one another so the whole is worse than the sum of the parts' (Norton and Greenfield, 2023: 7).

The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (2023) states that the world's temperature will exceed 1.5°C in the course of this century, with serious implications for human societies and natural systems everywhere. Climate injustice ensures that those least responsible bear the greatest impact. Meanwhile, the global inequality gap continues to grow. Oxfam's 2025 report, *Takers Not Makers: The Unjust Poverty and Unearned Wealth of Colonialism*, highlights the accelerating concentration of wealth among the global elite, revealing systemic inequalities rooted in historical and contemporary exploitation (Taneja et al., 2025). While the number of billionaires continue to grow, the number of people living in poverty has barely changed since 1990 due to the intersecting impacts of economics, climate and conflict. The *World Inequality Report 2022* found that the top 10 percent of the world's population hold 76 percent of global wealth, while the bottom 50 percent hold 2 percent (Chancel et al., 2022). Inequality matters. Inequality damages everyone not just the poor. Yet, policies which address inequality through social welfare and increased taxation benefit entire societies. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's (2009) groundbreaking book *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* argues that societies with less income inequality experience better outcomes across a wide range of social and health indicators not just for the poor, but for everyone.

Biodiversity (or the variety of all life on earth) sustains human life and underpins our societies. Yet, the rate of extinction of species in the last one hundred years, which has rapidly accelerated in recent decades as we destroy ecosystems for economic growth, is higher than those in most of the previous mass extinction events. The latest edition of the *Living Planet Report* (WWF, 2024), which measures the average change in population sizes of more than 5,000 vertebrate species, shows a decline of 73 percent between 1970 and 2020. Extinction rates are even more severe for insects, a situation exacerbated by habitat loss, pesticide use, pollution and climate change. Changes in the natural world may appear small and gradual but over time, their cumulative impacts can add up to trigger a much larger change. Such tipping points can be sudden, often irreversible, and potentially catastrophic for people and nature. The opportunities

for tipping points, magnify due to interacting spurs within a polycrisis. Ecological, technological and social systems are highly connected and highly homogeneous thus rendering them susceptible to the domino effect of cascading failures.

Navigating the polycrisis requires guiding principles. The principles of GCE provide a powerful way to guide our vision both as a diagnostic tool and as a way of finding common ground in diverse contentious settings. Such principles are found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals (UN General Assembly, 2015), and the Dublin Declaration (GENE, 2022). These principles are equally important in systemic risk assessment and associated responses. For instance, the Accelerator for Systemic Risk Assessment (ASRA) has co-developed a set of principles for systemic risk assessment and responses to accelerate awareness of systemic risks and to guide collective, transformative action (Figure 1). Faced with multiple, interconnected, and compounding crises in global systems, ASRA is a new and unique initiative committed to radically rethinking risk as a way to improve decision-making about current and future challenges. Characteristics of systemic risks and polycrisis listed on the left (Figure 1) reflect the nature of our capitalist, neoliberal society. The list of principles (Figure 1) listed on the right has much in common with GCE.

Figure 1. Set of principles to guide systemic risk developed by ASRA (2024:12)

Principles to Guide Systemic Risk		
Systemic risks and polycrisis characterised by:		Navigating polycrisis requires principles
Self-interest	→	Universal responsibility
Anthropocentrism	→	Non-human sanctity and interdependence
Inequity and injustice	→	Justice
Rule of the few	→	Individual and collective agency
Reductionism	→	Complexity
Overt focus on knowledge risks	→	Uncertainty
Interactions across local and global	→	Cross-scale
Narrowly focused evidence and methods	→	Multiple ways of knowing
Lack of compassion	→	Compassion
Current systems creating crises	→	Transformation

The fundamental challenge is that we have little if any precedents to guide us through these unchartered times. The pace of change is so rapid and uncertain that we are called upon to live in a new unprescribed manner. In the words of Bauman (2007) we are now living in 'liquid times' where thinking, planning and acting are no longer helping us in the way they did in the past.

The concept of hope

In light of this seemingly hopeless polycrisis, hope is a necessary part of our response. Successful social movements throughout history have stemmed from hopeful visions. For Skold, (2025: 2) 'hope is the engine of all our actions, opening up a space in which something can happen'. In spite of the stark statistics, and gloomy predictions, Figueres and Rivett-Carnac (2020) argue that all is not lost as there is still time to choose our future and collectively create it. Their work highlights the power of human choice. According to Figueres and Rivett-Carnac:

> "we still hold the pen. In fact, we hold it more firmly now than ever before. And we can choose to write a story of regeneration of both nature and the human spirit. But we have to choose" (Ibid.: 13).

Hope is situated within this space of human agency, and in the power of humans to successfully address this multifaceted challenge. While hope is deeply intertwined with different religions including Christianity and Islam, it also exists as a broader human emotion and concept with various interpretations and applications outside of religion. Hope and hopelessness are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, an acknowledgement of hopelessness can make room for hope. Lynch (1965) maintained that imagination freed people from hopelessness by presenting alternative realities to those currently being experienced.

The concept of hope has been explored by a number of influential educational theorists in philosophy, theology and psychology. For many philosophers, hope is a transformative force. Ernst Bloch, known as 'the philosopher of hope' (Hudson, 1979: 144) is known for the term 'anticipatory consciousness' which describes an individual's ability to understand what has not been known. While Friedrich Nietzsche (1996) was cognisant of hope's ability to

nurture illusions, he did recognise the transformative power of hope. Hannah Arendt linked hope with freedom, by promoting action which generates transformative processes (Arnett, 2012). Lynch (1965: 23) defines hope as 'an arduous search for a future good of some kind that is realistically possible but not yet visible'. Lynch highlighted two key aspects of hope, its relationship to realistic imagination and its collaborative nature. Henry Giroux's (2018) concept of 'educated hope' refers to a form of hope cultivated through critical education, enabling individuals to critically analyse social structures and imagine alternative possibilities for a more just and democratic society. Dewey (2008: 294) distinguished hope from optimism, arguing that optimism 'encourages a fatalistic contentment with things as they are' while hope – or what the pragmatists called meliorism – is an active process, in which 'by thought and earnest effort we may constantly make things better'. Aspirational hope should be differentiated from active/radical hope. Aspirational hope is about hoping for a sunny day or a lottery win. False hope can be a coping mechanism whereby people hope that things will improve on their own accord. Similarly wishful thinking is akin to believing that climate change is not serious or that someone else will fix the problem.

Active hope is more pragmatic and purposeful (Solnit and Young-Lutunatabua, 2023). Also described as 'realistic hope' (Hickey, 1986) or 'constructive hope' (Ojala, 2012), active hope includes considerations that one has the ability to overcome obstacles leading to constructive problem solving. Constructive hope refers to a form of hope fostering long-term, proactive environmental engagement at the collective (e.g. political engagement, participation in social movements, organisational change) and individual (e.g. lifestyle choices, individual actions) level (Vandaele and Stålhammar, 2022). Hope is more empowering than despair. It energises us, driving our desire to engage and to make a difference. Rebecca Solnit articulates this powerfully as follows:

> "Hope... is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency. Hope should shove you out the door, because it will take everything you have to steer the future away from endless war, from the annihilation of the earth's treasures and the grinding down of the poor and marginal. To

hope is to give yourself to the future, and that commitment to the future makes the present inhabitable" (Solnit, 2016: 4).

Ojala (2012) talks about constructive hope. By helping to regulate students' anxiety in the face of climate change, hope promotes awareness raising, knowledge learning and action competence development (Ojala, 2012). Ojala (2015) found constructive hope was higher when teachers accepted their students' negative emotions about social and environmental problems, while also maintaining a positive and solution-oriented outlook in the classroom.

'Hope' is a word closely associated with the work of Paulo Freire. Freire considered hope to be an 'ontological need' (2004: 2) because it's essential for our existence and our capacity to act in the world. In these terms, hope is not a passive wish but a fundamental human need, an inherent part of being. Freire believed that societal troubles could not be addressed without first believing that one was capable of addressing them. Freire cautioned against passive hopefulness, arguing that true hope requires action and commitment. Simply wishing for something to happen is not enough; hope needs to be anchored in practice and become a historical reality. Freire believed that without hope, there is no struggle, no motivation to challenge injustice and work towards a better future. Hope fuels the desire for change and provides the impetus for action. Freire emphasised that hope is intertwined with critical consciousness, or *conscientização*, which involves critical reflection on our own reality and the world around us. Freire saw education as a process of not just instilling hope, but of evoking and guiding it. He believed that education should empower individuals to recognise their own capacity for hope and to use it as a force for transformation (Webb, 2010). Freire's educational philosophy offers a hopeful vision for what education can be: a tool for liberation, critical consciousness and social justice. For Giroux (2010: 719) who knew Freire for over 15 years, 'hope for Freire was a practice of witnessing, an act of moral imagination that enabled progressive educators and others to think otherwise in order to act otherwise'. Moreover, 'at a time when education has become one of the official sites of conformity, disempowerment, and uncompromising modes of punishment' (Ibid.), the legacy of Paulo Freire's work is more important than ever before.

Macy and Johnstone (2022: 4) refer to active hope as a practice, 'something we do rather than something we have'. This practice according to the authors involves three steps: firstly, acknowledging how we feel, secondly, articulating what we would like to achieve and thirdly, identifying actions needed to achieve our goals. This approach is based on activating our sense of purpose through strengthening our capacity and commitment to act. Educationalists are faced with enormous challenges. During times of crises, how do teachers remain hopeful? Hope as an individual endeavour is not enough. It needs to inform educational policies and practices (Bourn, 2021). However, it is important to note that a declaration of hope can be a state of denial. According to Ojala (2015), this occurs among students when hope is interpreted as denial of the seriousness of climate change, so there is no need for concern. In such a scenario false hope or wishful thinking replaces agency and reduces a sense of responsibility for any environmental action.

Despair is natural when there's objective evidence of a shared existential problem we're not addressing adequately. Redirecting our anger and anxiety into constructive action, can alleviate stressful emotions. Indeed, a Finnish study of the relationship between hope and climate anxiety found that these emotions are not mutually exclusive but rather can operate simultaneously and even enhance each other in motivating action (Sangervo et al., 2022). In the words of Figueres and Rivett-Carnac (2020: 54) 'we all have to be optimistic, not because success is guaranteed but because failure is unthinkable'. In other words, we simply cannot afford the luxury of feeling powerless. The irony is, in the absence of hope, there is a tendency to freeze up and surrender, while the opposite response to the climate emergency is absolutely essential. Developing the climate resilience of young people 'involves experiencing both climate hope and distress and harnessing these cognitive and emotional responses for action' (Finnegan, 2023: 1633). Educators play an essential role in supporting young people as they develop this resilience and maintain constructive hope.

Hope and GCE

GCE has been criticised for neglecting its radical roots (O'Toole, 2024; Bryan, 2011) while others have called for a more transformative approach (Dolan, 2024). Tarozzi (2023: 2) urges us to consider how we can ensure education is permeated

with hope in order to 'think otherwise and to lay the foundations for a new transformative pedagogy'. Such a pedagogy needs to devote more attention to the question of possible futures. Adopting futures thinking as a core educational imperative will equip learners with critical insight, creative power and hopeful agency in navigating and shaping our uncertain world (Hicks, 2014).

Hope plays a crucial role in GCE by fostering a sense of possibility and agency in addressing global challenges. GCE has the capacity to support learners in recognising the polycrisis in its totality and through its constituent parts can support them in navigating these uncertain times. The global context in which GCE occurs has shifted immeasurably. Hence, the first recommendation for GCE is to acknowledge the polycrisis and all of its complexities. It is imperative for GCE practitioners to facilitate learners in understanding the underlying mechanisms of the polycrisis. There is much we can do to defuse the polycrisis and this has to be the agenda for a hopeful pedagogy within and beyond GCE. Focusing on solutions rather than problems is psychologically advantageous. Indeed, authors such as Morin and Kern (1999) highlight the importance of complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity in the world as potential sources of creativity and transformation. Secondly, we must devote more attention to the study of possible futures and adopt transdisciplinary approaches to do so (Albert, 2024). The interdependent nature of the polycrisis demands a holistic, integrated approach. Addressing issues in isolation is insufficient. For instance, GCE sometimes operates apart from education for sustainability due to separate funding schemes, historical evolution and organisational bias. Thirdly, it is incumbent on all educators in general and GCE educators in particular to explore scenarios for the future which are hopeful, evidence based and achievable. Fourthly, GCE needs to facilitate hopeful action, including peaceful protests, in every space such as classrooms, organisations, communities and Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs. By remaining silent and not speaking out against injustice, we implicitly support and enable the oppressive systems and actions that perpetuate inequality.

Conclusion

There will be a future. Of that we can be certain. The nature of this future remains to be seen. However, we are facing a predicament, a multiplicity of intersecting crises which need to be addressed 'consciously, systematically and

synthetically, taking account of all the most relevant parameters' (Albert, 2024: 225). A broad spectrum of possible futures is plausible, ranging from a collapse of human civilisation to an extensive transformation of the economy and society and a reshaping of human-nature relationships. The polycrisis does not guarantee a global collapse, nor does it inspire a fairy tale ending. For Albert (2024) future outcomes will be determined by political agency, institutional choices, social movements and technological pathways. The genocide in Gaza highlights a failure of GCE to engage with the complexities of the conflict in a meaningful and critical way, leading to silences, inaction, and a perpetuation of existing power imbalances. A more critical, hopeful and socially just approach is needed to ensure that GCE can effectively contribute to a more equitable and peaceful world.

According to much of the literature discussed in this article, hope drives action, creativity and the collective construction of a sustainable future. It inspires us to collectively work together towards a shared vision of a better future. Hopefulness is best achieved through interpersonal connections such as community-based initiatives, collaborative partnerships and collective endeavours. According to Lynch (1965: 24) hope must in some way or another 'be an act of community whether the community be a church or a nation or just two people struggling together to produce liberation in each other'. At its core, futures thinking is an act of hope. Apocalyptic scenarios and prophecies tend to disempower and alienate people. The very idea that there is a future is optimistic. For GCE, hope can be utilised as a dynamic force that transforms despair into energy for action. By questioning the root causes of the polycrisis, through critical dialogue, a series of alternative futures can be envisioned and through hopeful engagement, learners can be inspired to realise their own individual and collective agency. Paulo Freire's pedagogy of hope applied to the polycrisis, offers a powerful framework for understanding and confronting the multiple and intersecting crises of our time. Through critical dialogue, solidarity and a commitment to collective action, Freire would argue that we can transform despair into action, reclaim our futures and co-create a more equitable, peaceful and sustainable world.

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Anne M. Dolan is an associate professor and lecturer in primary geography with the Department of Learning, Society and Religious

Education in Mary Immaculate College, Ireland. She is the author/editor of *Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals to Young Citizens: A focus on hope, respect, empathy and advocacy'* (Routledge, 2024), *Teaching Climate Change in Primary Schools: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Routledge, 2022), *Powerful Primary Geography: A Toolkit for 21st Century Learning* (Routledge, 2020) and *You, Me and Diversity: Picturebooks for Teaching Development and Intercultural Education* (Trentham Books/IOE Press, 2014). She is the co-ordinator of the M.Ed. in Education for Sustainability and Global Citizenship in Mary Immaculate College.

THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF YOUNG PEOPLE SEEKING INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION AS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATORS THROUGH PERFORMANCE

CHRISZINE BACKHOUSE, AOIFE DARE AND ANGELA VEALE

Abstract: Drawing on Freire's (1970) work on critical pedagogy, this article considers how young people seeking international protection can take an active role as educators within the context of global citizenship education (GCE). It centres on a youth arts project called *Elevate Youth Arts* led by the Irish Refugee Council in partnership with Creativity and Change (Munster Technological University) and youth arts practitioners. During this project, sixteen young people from the Irish Refugee Council came together to co-create a performance on the theme of power and war. This article explores the importance of the voice of young people seeking international protection within GCE, particularly through performance. Performing arts have the capacity to engage audiences provoking both critical thinking and empathy. While people seeking international protection are often discussed in GCE literature, their role as educators is largely overlooked. Freire's (1970) anti-oppression approach supports learners to move from objects to agents of their own change. From this perspective, we argue that young people seeking international protection can play a meaningful role in GCE, provided it is through a supportive process that centres their wellbeing, long-term engagement, and creative expression.

Key words: Young People seeking international protection; Global Citizenship Education; Paulo Freire; Theatre for Change; Transformational Learning; Anti-oppression; Youth Participation.

Background and context

The asylum and migration landscape in Ireland has changed dramatically over the last few years. The war in Ukraine, the easing of COVID-19 travel restrictions and the finalising of Brexit have all led to significant increases in the number of people seeking international protection in Ireland. People seeking international protection are provided for by the state under a system known as 'Direct Provision' (DP), which was established in Ireland in 2000 in response to an increase in the number of protection applications and a shortage of accommodation (Ní Raghallaigh, Foreman and Feely, 2016) and to remove people seeking protection from the welfare system by providing for their basic needs (O'Reilly, 2018). In the 25 years since its inception, Direct Provision has been thoroughly researched, examined and criticised (see for example Fanning and Veale, 2004; Arnold, 2012; Uchechuku Ogbu, Brady and Kinlen, 2014; Atkins, 2015; Moran et al., 2019; O'Riordan and Fitzgibbon, 2020; Dunbar et al. 2020; Murphy, Keogh and Higgins, 2018; Conlon, 2014; Meany Sartori and Nwanze, 2021).

What comes through overwhelmingly in the literature and research on Direct Provision is the system's toxic, traumatic and depressing effects on people seeking protection (Hewson, 2022), which has spurred numerous protests and complaints over the years. Direct Provision is managed by the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) located within the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. The most recent IPAS statistics show that there are 32,725 people living in DP (DCEDIY, 2025) and as of September 2024, 5,068 of these were young people aged 18-25 (DCEDIY, 2024). The experiences of young people seeking international protection in Ireland are often overlooked in research, policy and practice with the focus usually being on children and unaccompanied minors or adults. Nevertheless, these young people face multiple intersecting challenges including family separation, isolation, access to education, information and services, and issues with their mental health and wellbeing. In addition to the experiences leading them to seek protection, many young people have further experienced intensely traumatic journeys to get to Ireland, including spending long periods of time without food and water, months of walking, and dangerous sea crossings. Upon arrival, they face challenging living conditions in the Direct Provision system, have very limited financial means and experience barriers to integration, inclusion and participation.

Through its youth work programme, the Irish Refugee Council (IRC) aims to provide spaces for these young people to come together, build a community, access resources, and have fun. Beginning in September 2023, the IRC collaborated with Creativity and Change, Munster Technological University and Kelvin Akpaloo from *Elevate Youth Arts*, an 18-month creative arts project which centred the voices and experiences of young people seeking international protection. Like all of the IRC's youth projects, *Elevate Youth Arts* was devised based on the learning and feedback from previous work with its youth group, and in conjunction with Chriszine Backhouse (MTU) and Kelvin Akpaloo, two GCE creative facilitators who had worked with the IRC youth group on various projects since 2020. *Elevate Youth Arts* brought together 16 young people from the IRC's youth group, three co-facilitators from the IRC's young leaders programme (Daniel Kamenyezi, Marwa Zamir and Nike-Monisola Awoyemi), two lead facilitators (Chriszine Backhouse and Kelvin Akpaloo) and two youth workers from the IRC (Natasha Muldoon and Aoife Dare). The 16 young people (eight male, eight female) who participated in the project were all in Ireland to seek international protection and came from a range of countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Somalia, Jordan, Namibia, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

All the participants were living in Direct Provision/IPAS accommodation and just over half the group were in Ireland alone, without the support of their family. The young people were all active members of the IRC's youth group and had been involved in at least one previous project. *Elevate Youth Arts* included various activities and outputs including preparatory workshops, creative facilitation training, a one week arts residential, two public performances, the establishment of a Youth Advisory Panel and a final showcase event.

Co-creating a performance on power and war

The process of developing the performance started with a one day taster session. During this session, the young people had the opportunity to try a variety of creative methods and to explore themes through open-ended questions and discussion. Through this process, the group decided their performance would focus on the themes of power and war. During the week-long residential, participants split into dance, theatre, and music groups, each co-creating work

with facilitators around the theme. While facilitators guided the process, the young people shaped the content. Each day ended with group sharings, followed by a youth advisory panel which reflected on the emerging meaning and explored how to weave the pieces into a unified whole. This process allowed for multiple perspectives and complexity of expression in response to the project themes.

Performance as a pedagogical tool

Concepts from Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy informed the collective-creation process, specifically problem-posing and conscientisation. The facilitators used creative methodologies to support the participants in exploring questions of power. For example, in the theatre group, participants created physical images to embody the power dynamics that underpin war and displacement. This process drew on an element of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed methodology of image theatre, which uses physical sculptures or 'frozen images' created by participants to explore social issues and power dynamics, and in which they use their bodies to represent experiences and emotional states as a form of social commentary. In supporting the participants to devise the collective creation performance, the facilitators put into practice Freire's (Ibid.: 52) critical pedagogy whereby 'they must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world'.

As a problem-posing method, the participant actors wanted to make visible the structural conditions that constrain the lives of young international protection applicants, to challenge Eurocentric notions of victimhood as an internal, decontextualised attribute ('that poor person'), and to evoke in the viewer a curiosity, a need to understand 'what am I being shown here'? It is pedagogical as the frozen sculptures destabilise taken for granted meanings, and through their visual uniqueness, disrupt normative, easy assumption-making. The young people then used these images to write spoken word poems, developing complex themes that included an analysis of privilege and inequality. Their sculptures and poems posed questions about making visible the humanity of those with little power, about hierarchies of victimhood, and fundamentally, about what does it mean to be human? The method invited the onlooker to really 'look' and 'see'.

In this way, the young actors became educators through performance, posed problems to the audience, avoiding simple solutions, and revealing the inequality within both war and displacement, promoting conscientisation. As one audience member said it was 'Very confronting of my chosen ignorance'. The audience member was able to see the ways in which they had previously looked away and was prompted to reflect more deeply on their own role within systems of oppression. The group's collective creative process allowed the participants to wrestle with two emerging forces: the unequal power dynamics in our world and the hope for a different future. As one audience member said, the theme of the performance was 'war and conflict but also slivers of light and hope through it'. Creativity has the capacity to hold this complexity by not forcing a binary response.

The performance

The performance struck a powerful balance between confronting injustice and inspiring hope. It began with an energetic dance accompanied by drums, immediately drawing in the audience. This transitioned into a wistful spoken word poem by project participant Sandile, titled *My Youthful Letter.* The poem described a boy conscripted into a 'fight he didn't choose, caught in a cycle he can't control'. In the poem, joyful memories of strawberry fields are replaced by the haunting image of a 'red blood pit', as he longs for lost innocence and freedom from war. As the poem ended, other performers entered singing *Rising Together*, an original song offering hope through collective strength with lines like 'In unity we find our voice'. This moment of solidarity gave way to two powerful spoken word pieces confronting inequality more directly.

In her spoken word piece titled *The Other Me*, Neo, one of the project participants, explores how birthplace shapes experience either as a space of possibility or a place of invisibility. Blessing's poem *I Am the Victim* followed, spoken from the perspective of an unreliable narrator who claims victimhood while clearly being an oppressor. Lines like 'give me the key, I will swallow it and set no one free' provoked deep reflection, sparking post-show discussion about complicity in injustice. Next came a choreographed dance to the song *In the Real World*, which imagines a world 'away from hatred and judgment' (Serra 2019). The dancers' fluid movements embodied this possibility of a world without

inequality, echoing Rob Hopkins' (2019) proposal that people need to first imagine change before they can enact change. This set the stage for *Dear Human*, a spoken word piece by project participant, Amina. Urging action and empathy, it built urgency with lines like:

> "Don't we see them calling out for us?
> Don't we see the hopelessness in their eyes?
> Don't we Humans?
> Don't we?"

It ended with a call for unity: 'If we stand together, we can make a difference'.

As the words lingered, performers returned to sing their original song, *Let's Change the World*. Rather than feeling hollow, these words carried weight after the poem, becoming a genuine call to action. The song led into a spirited dance to *Rise Up*, filling the theatre with energy. It was a joyful, defiant invitation to act – embodying Toni Cade Bambara's idea that 'the role of the artist is to make revolution irresistible' (Bambara and Henderson, 2017). The audience felt this message deeply, many rising to join the performers in an impromptu group dance. It was a joyful moment, but also a collective commitment to step up, and be part of the change. As one audience member said, 'We all have a role to play in dismantling structures of oppression'.

Audience response and impact
The interspersing of elements throughout the performance that revealed inequality, and inspired hope was an effective combination that led to a high level of audience engagement. At the performances at the Centre of Excellence for Climate Action and Sustainability (CECAS), Cork Midsummer Festival and the Creative Symposium, audience members were invited to complete a post-performance feedback survey and took part in post-show discussions. Across the three events, 42 people filled in a survey – eight at CECAS, 24 at Cork Midsummer Festival and 10 after the symposium. Of those who completed the survey, 94 percent reported deepened understanding of global justice issues after attending the performance and 93 percent said the performance had a 'high impact' of fostering empathy and understanding social issues.

An important theme for the audience was the power of art to build connection between audience and performers. This was apparent in the way that the engagement of the audience was entwined with the talent and authenticity of the performers. While not professional artists, the performers none-the-less achieved a high level of performance. The passion and personal connection to the performance resulted in an impactful show that built a strong rapport with the audience. One audience member said what stood out to them was 'the power of connection, how creativity and the arts can build understanding'. Another audience member said that 'the performance reminded me of the power of art to inspire and move'. Together, these responses highlight how the performers' genuine emotion and sincerity, combined with technical skill, created a meaningful experience that resonated with the audience.

These high levels of reported impact and connection are interesting to reflect on, given the demographic and experiential gap between the young performers and their audience. Young international protection applicants have lived lives defined by mobility across international borders, often accumulated traumatic experiences which then became stories told through words and bodies organised in space as visual metaphors. The audience was largely Irish, with most having no personal experience of the stories being portrayed. Yet the performance created an intersubjective space in which the experiences portrayed could be thought about collectively. Stern (2005) notes intersubjectivity is the capacity to share, know, and enter into the lived subjective experience of another. In entering into the storied world of international protection applicants, audience members noted an experiential sense of 'disruption' and of some assumptions being challenged. As such, the experience was developmental, resulting in a shift of perspective. One audience member recalled: 'It was challenging because it confronts us with our complacency'. Another audience member noted, 'It made me realise how easy it is to have notions of people seeking refuge when I live in comfort'.

A key developmental shift described by these audience members was that of being able to see their own positionality from the outside in, so to speak, of confronting inequality, and taking ownership of a positionality of comfort

versus that of being a person seeking refuge. As such, the performance opened up the possibility for audience members of being able to mentalise about the experience of the refuge seeker. Mentalisation is the capacity to think about one's own mind and that of others, and to interpret behaviours through the lens of mental states like thoughts, feelings, motivations. It is a crucial component in the development of social learning, empathy and in social interaction (Fonagy, Gergely and Jurist, 2018). Arguably, the performance created a contact zone between young people and their audience to support the emergence of xenosophia, a concept elaborated by Streib (2024: 154) as a 'positive, wisdom-generating process of relating' to that which is foreign, strange or unfamiliar. It is not simply tolerance, but a deeper engagement with others outside one's social group that can lead to wisdom and insight.

From object to subject: young people seeking international protection as GCE educators

Although arts-based engagement with vulnerable groups, including young people seeking international protection, have been studied, few articles explore their role as educators in developing global citizenship. A search through the *Policy and Practice* journal reveals over 60 articles that discuss refugees, but none of these articles explore the role that young people seeking international protection could play in educating others about these concepts. How could these young people contribute to educating others about the root causes of displacement? These young people have a lived experience that can directly engage people with issues in a way that promotes deeper compassion and action. This was reflected in our performance by audience members who commented: 'I'm really very moved seeing these young people. [It] makes everything I hear on the news very real' and 'who is telling the story matters'. When young people directly impacted by displacement share their story, it can connect with people in a compelling way.

The impact of this experience was not only felt by the audience members. When reflecting on the performance, the young people themselves strongly identified with this process. One young person highlighted how amazing it was to see audience members 'have emotional responses through our act' and that they were 'touched by our work'. Another young person reflected that 'there was a strong sense from the audience that they took the message that the group

was trying to give them' and that this exchange was her favourite part of the performance. The exchange of emotion with the audience was mentioned by another participant who said: 'I stared at the audience and I could feel, like, we were exchanging emotion. I was exchanging emotion with the audience...we understand each other, we are exchanging emotion together'. But the experience was not limited to emotion. The young people felt that the performance gave them a chance to raise awareness, be heard, and make change. One young person highlighted how the whole project had helped her to understand that she had a voice and she felt empowered to use it:

> "I realised that you can actually voice your opinion about how you feel about certain things, especially about social justice...there are, like, some people who are willing to hear us out and willing to give us the opportunity to voice out our struggles and everything. So for that I feel like it opened my mouth to actually kind of step up and speak up for myself".

Another young person pointed out the importance of the performance for raising awareness because 'a lot of people are also in the dark, or just don't see the seriousness or the urgency of the stuff that's going on around us'. She felt that it was important to find more ways of connecting with people to show them 'how serious everything is' and how young people 'have a voice' and have the power to 'change stuff that's happening around [them]'.

Considerations for future practice

While it is clear that young people seeking international protection can have a significant impact as GCE educators, it is incumbent upon anyone working with this cohort of young people to pay careful attention and consideration to practical and ethical considerations. Expecting young people with lived experience of displacement to share their stories as a way of educating the public and building empathy is potentially ethically problematic, and needs careful and ongoing reflective practice. Eve Tuck (2009) critiques the use of 'damage-centred research' in social science. Damage-centred research is research that focuses only on people's narratives of hardship and pain. In damage-centred research, pain and loss are documented in order to obtain particular political or material gains. Tuck

(Ibid.: 416) argues for a shift to desire-based frameworks, which are concerned with 'understanding complexity, contradiction and the self-determination of lived-lives'.

Expecting or asking young people, who have experienced forced displacement, loss and trauma, to 'educate' the public risks reifying a damage-focused narrative and putting the responsibility of changing minds and opinions on the shoulders of the very people who are impacted most by the issues being discussed. However, this is not to say that young people with lived experience should not be positioned as GCE educators; we are, in fact, arguing the opposite. Telling stories in their own voice, that is the stories *they* want to tell, can be empowering, even an act of resistance to passively featuring in other people's stories. But we are saying that certain safeguards need to be in place to ensure this is done in an ethical way.

Creative and arts-based methods of sharing personal stories allow young people with lived experience of displacement to take ownership of both the content of the story and how it is shared. Young people can choose to fictionalise their narratives; they can choose to share personal stories or create art based on a cause about which they feel strongly. Creative methods lend themselves to this flexibility and allow young people to control the narrative by putting distance between themselves and the piece, or performance, if necessary. In the Elevate youth project, the young people chose to fictionalise their characters, and to include a sense of hopefulness alongside their portrayals of the pain of injustice, which was a protective factor for them as performers.

As well as providing narrative control, creativity also allows people to connect deeply with each other through the collaborative process and collective act of performance. This process supported the emotional well-being of the participants and led to deepening friendships, something crucial to young people who have been displaced from their communities and are often isolated. One participant said 'before I joined, like, the group, right, I wouldn't say I was sad, but I was sad in a sense (*because)* I never had no friends'. The creative process facilitated the depth of these connections: 'I had really strong bonds with the friends that I was with because I got to know them on a creative level'. The project

gave the participants a sense of belonging: 'it has also allowed me to connect with others who probably have similar concerns and passions by just creating a sense of a strong community and support'.

Some of the processes we put in place to foster this sense of community included: co-creation of a group contract; opening and closing circles each day that allowed participants to share how they are feeling; small group feedback sessions; fun evening activities where the group could relax together; and the provision of nutritious food that the group were able to help choose. We drew from the resource 'Catch the fire' to establish a positive group dynamic that emphasised co-leadership and collaboration with the young people (Vera and Speigel, 2013). Through these processes, the participants were able to connect with each other on an emotional level, which promoted well-being:

> "I guess it kind of opened up my heart a bit. Not that it was fully closed. But... things weren't going through... Yeah, there was like a safeguard on it where I would feel things. But then, in the project it's like that wall was kind of taken down, and it allowed me to again connect and feel deeper".

This openness to emotional expression continued after the project: 'I discovered poetry... now I tend to write a lot about how I'm feeling... I'm voicing my opinion'.

Performance involves the creation of an intersubjective, dialogical space between performers and audience, as argued earlier. Great care was taken to ensure, as far as possible, that the audience was one that was positively receptive to the performers and their message. Ireland has experienced a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment as is the case elsewhere in Europe. A hostile or negative audience response could be a risk factor for young international protection applicants' wellbeing. Venues were chosen with care, and advertising for the public performances was done through trusted organisations' social media. Overall, the project had a positive impact on the emotional well-being of the participants, with 75 percent reporting good or very good emotional well-being at the end of the project, with the remaining participants saying they were

'neutral'. This is an encouraging outcome considering the difficult life circumstances facing these young people.

Using creative methods in this way leads to another salient point – the role of creative facilitators and facilitation. Creative facilitation in *Elevate Youth Arts* was led by two experienced facilitators, GCE educators and youth arts practitioners – Chriszine Backhouse and Kelvin Akpaloo. The Irish Refugee Council youth project had worked with both these facilitators prior to this project, completing many workshops and youth arts projects together since 2020. What this meant is that there was a pre-existing level of trust and understanding between all the partners, and between the facilitators and participants. A further point in relation to facilitation was the inclusion of three youth co-facilitators in the facilitation team. These young people were members of the IRC's young leaders' group and had all undertaken some youth arts training prior to the project starting. During the residential, they were in charge of various aspects of facilitation with one of them being the lead facilitator of the singing group. As young people who had come through the IRC's youth project, joined the young leaders programme and were now in paid youth facilitation roles, they acted not only as role models for the participants but were also key to the success of the project.

The importance of long-term engagement with young people seeking international protection cannot be overstated, particularly when it comes to ensuring that their involvement in projects like this and their experience as GCE educators is not tokenistic. The IRC's youth work programme has been running for nine years. During this time, we have implemented many short-term youth arts projects, often in partnership with Chriszine and Kelvin. All of the young people who participated in *Elevate* had previously been involved in at least one other project with us; many of them had worked with the facilitators before and relationships already existed. Although *Elevate* was a standalone project, the young people continue to participate in the IRC's youth group and some of them have also joined Young Voices of Africa, a group run by Kelvin Akpaloo. Providing opportunities for long-term engagement, putting in the work to build relationships and trust, and ensuring that young people can take on a

leadership role in projects must all be prioritised if we want to encourage and position young people to take on active roles in global citizenship education.

Conclusion: towards a more inclusive GCE

Elevate Youth Arts demonstrates the transformative potential of positioning young people seeking international protection as educators and active participants in global citizenship education. Through methods rooted in Freirean pedagogy, the project supported young people to explore the complex issues of war, inequality, and power, and to share their creativity in ways that fostered empathy, mentalisation and critical reflection among audiences. Artistically, finding a balance between revealing injustice and inspiring hope has resulted in an 'irresistable' call to action. The audience feedback highlights how performance can deepen engagement with people and concepts outside of one's social group, leading to understanding that goes beyond tolerance.

Crucially, the project's ethical approach – built on long-term relationships, youth co-facilitation, and creative control – ensured that participants' maintained agency over their stories and safety, avoiding exploitative dynamics. This project underscores the importance of sustained, trust-based engagement that centres youth voice and leadership in shaping how young people who are seeking international protection can contribute to GCE. Global citizenship educators can actively include young people with lived experience of displacement as educators and collaborators. Creative processes that emphasise belonging and connection can support the well-being of the young people, ensuring they are benefitting from their role as GCE educators. By embracing creative, ethical, and youth-led approaches, GCE can better promote justice, empathy, and social transformation making global citizenship education truly inclusive and impactful.

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Chriszine Backhouse is a lecturer on Creativity and Change in the Department of Arts in Health and Education, Munster Technological University. She is a socially-engaged theatre facilitator and co-founder of 'Speak out: Theatre for transformation'.

Aoife Dare is the Youth and Education Officer with the Irish Refugee Council, as well as a student on University College Cork's Doctorate in Social Science.

Angela Veale is Senior Lecturer in the School of Applied Psychology, University College Cork. Her research and publications explore the psychosocial effects of violence, post-conflict social reintegration, migration and globalisation on children, youth and families. Her current research examines parenting in new cultures, mental health and social trauma.

Hope Without Apologies: A Post-Foundational Approach to Pedagogy

Abdellatif Atif

Abstract: In an age marked by the collapse of grand narratives, disillusionment with positivist certainty, the eroding effects of nihilism, and the normalisation of genocidal crimes, hope is not only unfashionable but suspect. For many, it signals naivety. Historical determinism has faded, and many retreat into apolitical irony. This article insists that pedagogy must both critique and offer a hopeful vision. Rather than dismissing hope as illusion, I argue for a pedagogy of hope. We can achieve this by resisting two extremes: the absolutism that claims knowledge relies on fixed, universal truths, and the despair of anti-foundationalist cynicism, which denies stable grounds for knowledge and often concludes that meaning, progress, or shared values are impossible. Instead, post-foundationalist thinkers like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe inspire a different path. They reject ultimate, fixed grounds for knowledge or social order. They recognise that all structures are historically and politically contingent, yet they allow for provisional frameworks, ethical commitments, and democratic action. This view suggests that political and pedagogical transformation is not only possible but also necessary, as it involves legitimate forms of knowledge and action.

Key words: Hope; Foundationalism; Anti-foundationalism; Post-foundationalism; Pedagogy.

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Adorno (1970: 191) wrote: 'The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again'. However, 'Auschwitz' has happened more than once since then – only now it is, as in Palestine, live-streamed and normalised. This unbearable reality has affected me deeply, both as a researcher and as a human being. A question that has

haunted me especially after the most recent episode of genocidal extermination in Gaza began: what am I doing? What am I talking about while tens, if not hundreds, of people are massacred every day? This feeling was particularly intense in Spring 2024 when I attended one of the largest world conferences, held under the theme: *A Pedagogy of Hope: Gratitude, Diversity and Sustainability in Education*. The organisers of the conference presented this topic as timely, citing climate change, the rise of authoritarianism in the United States – as if Biden was any different – and the assaults on academic freedom. However, not once, not even in a single abstract among hundreds, was there any mention of the ongoing reality that, while we discuss best ways to teach arithmetic, experiment with artificial intelligence (AI) or defend students' autonomy, there are children in Gaza whose bodies have been buried beneath rubble for over a year.

I delivered my presentation. I enjoyed the coffee breaks, the conversations, and short talks, and the walks through that beautiful capital city. But I could not silence the voice inside me that laughed bitterly at the hypocrisy: a whole conference on hope and engagement and call for humanism and universalism, without even acknowledging the elephant in the room – the genocide in Gaza. This normalisation of genocide even among communities of scholars who are expected to have at least a minimum of empathy, reveals something profoundly wrong, not just in geopolitics, but in how we think about hope itself. I began to think that perhaps the problem is also theoretical, not just a product of the academic system, where the 'squid game' of chasing jobs makes us care more about what the system pays us for, rather than genuine concerns in the world.

I think that there is a serious crisis of hope even for those who have taken on the burden of reflecting on the possibility of hope. I refer to the fact that there seems to be reasonable grounds for many that being hopeful might mean either being less critical or naïve. In this article, I highlight this problem, arguing that, on the contrary, we indeed have all the reasons to be hopeful and that an alternative vision of hope is both necessary and possible. To that end, we must rethink the pedagogy of hope without apologies (apologies to those who think they are very smart in their hopelessness, backed by a 'realism' that is, as they say, engendered by the fall of grand narratives or nihilist tendencies).

On the need for a new political imaginary

Critical pedagogy has long sought to liberate education from political and economic domination, aiming to prevent it from merely reproducing oppressive systems. Freire (2000) argued that education can empower learners to challenge oppression and reclaim agency. Philosophers such as Giroux (2021) and McLaren (1987) have demonstrated that schools are not only sites of dominance but also spaces where counter-hegemonic practices and democratic possibilities can emerge. These visions evolved alongside hopes that shifts in the social and political sciences – especially after the fall of positivism, which viewed knowledge as solely empirical and measurable – would help build a more democratic intellectual culture. Specifically, positivism is seen as fuelling essentialism (the belief that social categories have fixed traits) and determinism (the view that outcomes are inevitable due to structural laws). By rejecting positivism, scholars sought greater intellectual flexibility, debate, and the coexistence of multiple perspectives. However, the decline of universalism has instead produced many micro-narratives focused on separate interests, rather than forming broader coalitions. Sometimes, the idea that all viewpoints are equally valid without universal truths allows neo-conservative groups to justify exclusionary politics (Atif, 2025). In the neoliberal era, this decline strategically weakens political debate and critical reflection, encouraging people to accept the status quo rather than challenge it (McLaren, 1987).

Hence, the decline of grand narratives, the fall of positivist epistemologies, and postmodern skepticism have produced a 'crisis of hope'. Educators now face a double bind: past foundational certainties are discredited, while the alternative – anti-foundational nihilism – offers no basis for resistance or transformation. Thus, invoking 'hope' risks dismissal as naïve or irresponsibly utopian. This article argues for a way forward: developing a pedagogy of hope inspired by the post-foundational political theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2012). I will clarify the theoretical underpinnings most relevant to reimagining hope within current educational and political constraints and conclude with implications of this pedagogy for classroom practice.

A post-foundational approach to the pedagogy of hope

Post-foundationalism rejects fixed, universal grounds but avoids the view that no grounds exist at all. It claims that while ultimate foundations are missing, this absence allows for new political and social constructions. As Laclau (1989: 81) notes, 'the dissolution of the myth of foundation does not dissolve the phantom of its own absence'. Marchart (2007) refers to this approach as post-foundationalism. Understanding the differences between foundationalism, anti-foundationalism, and post-foundationalism is crucial for grounding our concept of hope here. Foundationalism ties hope to certainty – anchored in stable truths or guaranteed progress. Here, hope depends on a belief that history leads to a final, unified completion. When foundations crumble, hope can turn to disillusionment. For anti-foundationalism, losing certainty leads to skepticism or cynicism, making hope seem naive or false. Post-foundationalism, on the other hand, sees hope as an active stance shaped by political struggle and uncertainty. It treats hope as a commitment to act within ongoing negotiations over meaning, with new beginnings always possible – even without guarantees. Thus, post-foundationalism rejects both fixed foundations and the surrender that follows their collapse. What do these views suggest for teaching hope?

A foundationalist pedagogy frames hope as teaching universal truths or certainties, guiding students toward a fixed ideal. This approach offers direction but may stifle inquiry and exclude alternative futures. Anti-foundationalist pedagogy views all claims with suspicion, creating distance and treating hope as illusion or ideology. This perspective often leads to cynicism, as noted in the article's introduction. A post-foundational pedagogy of hope embraces uncertainty as a means of learning. It treats education as an ongoing negotiation, where students and teachers challenge the present and stay open to new futures. In this model, hope is created by collective action, grounded in the possibility of change – even without fixed ends.

A post-foundational pedagogy of hope resists both rigid certainty and passive cynicism. Instead of relying on fixed systems or falling into resignation, it encourages acting within uncertainty (Ichikawa, 2022). Hope is not naive optimism or a return to grand narratives, but a critical stance toward the future and a refusal to accept the present as unchangeable. This approach means

rethinking educational methods. Rather than offering final answers, it requires learning to deal with uncertainty and conflict together. Hope means seeing education as a continuous, unfinished project rooted in the belief that change is possible, even in the face of difficulty. Instead of waiting for perfect conditions, we act now in imperfect, contested spaces. This kind of hope affirms that new solidarities and futures can emerge, not by ignoring complexity, but by facing it. Teaching with hope insists that education can create new and better possibilities.

Turning to classroom practice is not an escape from global issues into local matters. Instead, it highlights that the classroom is where global struggles are felt – and where critical pedagogy can either be silent or an open space for new solidarity. Gaza is not 'outside' education; it tests whether pedagogy can face the political realities shaping our shared present and future.

Enacting a pedagogy of hope in the classroom

An articulated post-foundational approach to the pedagogy of hope can reconfigure the classroom as a space where education becomes a practice of opening possibilities. Teaching is understood as a political and ethical commitment that keeps the horizon of the possible open. In concrete terms, this implies a shift in pedagogical priorities: from certainty to critical engagement, from compliance to agency, and from replicating the given to constructing the new. First, a pedagogy of hope requires educators to treat the classroom as a site of struggle over meaning. It rejects the assumption that the present social order is either natural or inevitable. Instead, it insists that all social arrangements – curricula, disciplinary norms, assessment practices – are historically contingent and subject to articulation. This view mandates that teachers create conditions where students can interrogate dominant narratives and develop counter-hegemonic understandings of their world. This might involve problem-posing education, project-based inquiry, or critical reading of texts that foreground multiple and contested perspectives. The point is not to impose alternative truths but to cultivate an awareness of the political constructedness of truth itself and, in doing so, affirm the possibility of thinking and acting otherwise.

Second, this pedagogy calls for reimagining the teacher's role – not as an expert who transmits knowledge but as a co-learner and facilitator of

democratic dialogue. To teach with hope is to commit to pedagogical relations that are dialogical, relational, and open-ended. In this sense, authority is not abandoned but reconstituted as a shared responsibility for sustaining a learning community oriented toward justice and transformation. Teachers enact hope when they invite students to bring their lived experiences into the learning process, validate diverse knowledge, and refuse closure in favour of critical openness. Importantly, this does not mean the abdication of intellectual rigour; rather, it means rigour aligned with emancipation rather than domination.

Finally, a pedagogy of hope engages the future as a field of potentiality. It resists the fatalism of neoliberal realism and the paralysing detachment of postmodern irony. Instead, it insists that education can still be a space to imagine new social forms even amid fragmentation and crisis. This pedagogical stance entails cultivating not passive optimism in students but a critical orientation toward the future – an understanding that the world, as it stands, is not all that it could be. Classroom practices that embody this orientation might include speculative writing, utopian thinking, or community-based learning projects aimed at real-world intervention. What matters is not the achievement of a final goal but the enactment of a disposition: to act *as if* change were possible and to teach in ways that make this belief intelligible and actionable.

Conclusion

Reclaiming a pedagogy of hope is not a retreat into naïvety or a denial of political complexity. On the contrary, it is an acknowledgment that without hope, education may reproduce the very systems of despair it seeks to challenge. And yet, in moments of fatigue, one might confess: 'I hope not to hope – hope is killing me'. So, is the solution to give up on hope? The same despairing voice would answer, 'I hope so'. But this contradiction is precisely where a pedagogy of hope begins – not in clarity, but in the play between irony and urgency. A pedagogy of hope without apologies is, above all, a pedagogy of engagement. It does not wait for perfect conditions but begins in the messiness of the everyday. While students and teachers acknowledge that power is uneven, they can dare to imagine otherwise thanks to a sober hope that is not a guarantee, but a practice – one that lives in the tension between despair and action, between exhaustion and the stubborn belief that something new might still emerge.

To return to where this article began: the genocide in Gaza, and its unsettling silence in educational spaces, poses a challenge to any pedagogy of hope. Post-foundationalism helps us understand this situation by insisting that there are no ultimate guarantees or stable moral grounds that will prevent atrocities. Yet, it also affirms that this absence does not mean resignation. Instead, it calls for political and pedagogical practices that remain open, contingent, and committed to rearticulating solidarity in the face of despair. A pedagogy of hope, then, is not simply about classrooms but about how educators, students, and intellectuals position themselves about the most urgent injustices of our time.

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Abdellatif Atif is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Galway, working at the intersections of political and educational theory. His research explores the instrumentality of education within populist discourses, which he approaches with a particular interest in rethinking its possibilities. Drawing on the post-foundational perspectives of Laclau and Mouffe, he develops a renewed understanding of education theory that moves beyond framing populism and instrumentality as mere pathologies. Instead, he considers them as productive sites for reimagining the conditions of democratic education and for addressing contemporary challenges posed by populism.

REIMAGINING TRANSFORMATION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION THROUGH VIRTUE COACHING: REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF EVERY CHILD TO CREATE SOCIAL CHANGE

JULIE SARMAH

Abstract: Over thirty educational agencies collaborated on 'The Case for Global Learning' (Global Learning Network and Development Education Research Centre, 2024), urgently calling for a United Kingdom (UK) national strategy for global learning (GL). Central to this conversation is elevating student awareness around sustainability and equity, with renewed hope for current and future generations. Despite this much-needed renewed focus, GL frameworks lack a direct approach to inner student transformation and children's potential to advance in virtue development for the co-creation of hopeful social change. The lack of a statutory primary GL programme reflects a paternalistic notion that children cannot engage with challenging concepts and fails to acknowledge their potential to connect with their higher, more selfless, nature.

Two processes essential to transformation occur at the level of individual and collective betterment. This article focuses on the former process: teaching virtues as building blocks for individual transformation. Teacher-supported inner reflection in a virtues-empowered school culture is proposed, to release each child's potential to create positive change. Although not a key focus, reflexive pedagogy is mentioned as a necessary factor in conscious classrooms empowering purposeful student-agency, without which the effects of inner reflection are limited. Through reflective inquiry and application of virtues, schools could create a culture that contributes to bettering the world, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2017). Critical thinking skills that support dialogue, such as through Philosophy for Children (P4C), can increase students' sense of responsibility. Likewise, opportunities for service-oriented action can support students to apply virtues and widen awareness of the needs of

fellow humans and our planet, empowering small scale, age-related contributions to humanity's global struggles. Observations shared are within the context of thirty years of UK and international primary teaching practice, as well as teaching on the 3-11 Initial Teacher Training undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Key words: Global Learning; Hope; Inner Transformation; Student Agency; Virtues Coaching.

Introduction: nurturing inner potential for global change

Schools play a critical role in preparing students for an interconnected world and in addressing global challenges through global learning (UNESCO, 2017). To effectively equip students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to advance social equality, sustainability and justice, a transformative framework is essential (Global Learning Network and DERC, 2024). This article acknowledges that transformation must occur at both individual and collective levels. However, a meaningful shift towards ethical global citizenship requires more than curriculum content – it demands inner transformation: engaging each student's higher or spiritual self to foster critical awareness and a sense of responsibility. This inner dimension remains largely unexplored within the current global learning conversation. Therefore, this article focuses on the individual dimension of transformation, specifically the teaching of virtues as building blocks for inner growth and ethical development.

In the National Curriculum, the Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural (SMSC) dimension offers scope for student reflection, emphasising curiosity about inner values, others and the wider world (Ofsted, 2019a: 59–60; 2019b: 40). Whole-school investment in character education has shown promise, particularly when values are modelled by staff and integrated into the curriculum rather than treated as a standalone initiative. However, initiatives like the emphasis on British values in the 2014 Department for Education policy, risk moving SMSC towards conformity, rather than shared spiritual values that unite diverse cultural and religious groups (Moulin-Stozek, 2020: 10).

Global citizenship, defined as 'an awareness of self, the world and one's position within it' (Kraska et al., 2018: 87), aligns with spiritual values across

faiths. Baha'is, for example, view spirituality as living in our true, higher nature (Clarken, 2024), while humanists describe it as the 'deepest values and meanings by which people live' (Sheldrake, 2007: 1-2). Drawing on Soka teachings, Sharma (2020) underscores inner transformation through spiritual values as a foundation for social progress. Although abstract to some teachers, these concepts reflect familiar pedagogies – such as conflict resolution, growth mindset and collaborative dialogue – that support inclusive learning and widening perspectives. For many choosing the teaching profession, unlocking students' inner potential is core to their role, warranting renewed attention to the spiritual dimension of global learning. Amidst pressing environmental and social crises (Waldron, Mallon and Kavanagh, 2021; IPCC, 2018), UNESCO urges educators to remould learning opportunities for social change and to cultivate new behaviours that support global competencies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO 2017; 2021).

Whilst tools like the Global Competence Framework – designed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) – assess empathy, respect and responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being (OECD, 2019: 166), there is no mention of the inner processes required to develop these skills. English programmes for global citizenship (GC) and education for sustainable development (ESD), which promote global competency in secondary schools, remain non-statutory. In primary schools their adoption is inconsistent, often reflecting the values of senior leadership. Critics like Farid-Arbab (2016) argue that educational curricula often lack intent to nurture socially conscious minds, or equip students for critical issues that face them and their world. Dewey stressed the vital role of schools in connecting learning to real-life challenges, warning against the 'isolation of the school – its isolation from life' (Dewey, 1938: 89 cited in Landorf and Wadley, 2021). Without regular, guided opportunities for social action, change tends to remain at the individual rather than systemic level (Storms, 2012).   Furthermore, student agency is rarely empowered where action is predominantly teacher-led.

This article explores three key questions. First, how can primary teachers better realise each child's agency for hopeful social change? Regular opportunities to engage with real-world issues combined with critical thinking and

inner reflection can strengthen students' capacity to become co-creators of meaningful, service-oriented action. UNESCO's *Reimagining our Futures Together* report envisions this as: 'equipping [students] to collaborate with others and developing their agency, responsibility, empathy, critical and creative thinking, alongside a full range of social and emotional skills' (UNESCO, 2021: 56). Second, what are the building blocks for global competence? Citizenship programmes often overlook underlying neoliberal values – those that prioritise competition over empathy, consumption over sharing, self-progress over social responsibility and power over justice – thus undermining the transformative potential of global learning (Selby and Kagawa, 2010). This article proposes a model rooted in virtues, which Aristotle referred to as the building blocks to a set of values. Echoing this, Gadotti (2008) describes the virtues of justice and compassion as foundational to rebalancing economic priorities over human values. Third, how do virtues shape student-led social action? The practical application of virtues can foster in students a deeper sense of responsibility and shared humanity. A shift in inner thoughts and attitudes is positioned as central to the school's role in nurturing service-oriented, eco-conscious and globally minded behaviours. By nurturing students' inner world through reflective practice and virtues-focused learning, schools can cultivate sustainable habits that contribute to positive change, locally and globally.

Whilst not the central focus of this article, reflexive pedagogy is crucial in facilitating such inner transformation (Idrissi, Engel and Pashby, 2020). Freire's concept of critical pedagogy has profoundly influenced ESD, underscoring the need for learning experiences that challenge systemic inequalities (Freire, 1985). Through this process, students can become active protagonists in their communities and contributors to a more just world. Bourn stresses the importance of global learning programmes that address systemic injustices underlying poverty. He notes that whilst inner transformation is a gradual process, educators can observe attitudinal shifts as students engage in deeper reflection, dialogue and critical thinking to challenge stereotypes and assumptions (Bourn, 2022). Unexamined teaching practices and materials can perpetuate power imbalances, evidenced by scholars such as Andreotti (2006), who warn educators of the need for a critical dimension to global citizenship education. Thus, ongoing professional development for school leaders and teachers is vital,

not only to maintain accurate awareness of global issues but also to sustain their role as agents of change. Leadership commitment is essential to supporting educators to model and embed virtues such as fairness, open-mindedness and curiosity. When paired with critical reflection, these virtues empower schools to challenge harmful stereotypes and social inequalities.

Individual transformation: the coaching of virtues

The place for virtues coaching in the curriculum

Considering where virtues coaching may sit in the primary curriculum, superficial mention of fairness and kindness is shoehorned into a school's Personal, Social and Emotional learning (PSHE) programme, often including Social and Emotional Learning, teaching skills for emotional self-regulation and relationships. However, the key aims of PSHE are to develop knowledge and skills for children to make 'safe and informed' choices, not necessarily ethical ones (DfE, 2020). A didactic approach within the English National Curriculum limits opportunities for inner transformation and undermines students' potential as co-creators of a hopeful future (Wyse and Manyukhina, 2024). Arguably, PSHE programmes would be more impactful if complemented with virtues coaching that supports each child in connecting with their higher, more selfless, nature. Sustainability and Altruism through Project-Based Learning (SAPBL) is examined later as an ESD framework that integrates virtues education with sustainable development (Haslip et al., 2025).

Student councils, eco committees and assemblies, provide natural collective spaces for student voices to engage with global citizenship and virtue development. Whilst English lessons in debating, public speaking and persuasive writing strengthen oracy, without virtues such as humility, truthfulness and open-mindedness, these skills risk reinforcing neoliberal values – superficiality and a single-minded desire to be right – rather than fostering self-reflection and metacognition.

Coaching and embedding virtues into school culture

Aristotle's key to a virtuous life was rooted in participatory citizenship practices and the cultural embedding of moral virtues. This vision resonates today with

many primary schools, whose mission statements emphasise such virtues as compassion and truth-seeking, reflecting an aspiration for student transformation. However, translating this vision into a tangible culture requires embedding virtues through whole-school focus and teacher modelling. When virtues are collectively valued as important building blocks to growth, students and teachers can engage in non-judgemental dialogue and foster reflective practice, without evoking shame or condescension. One tool that supports embedding virtues is the 'Framework for Character Education' developed by the Jubilee Centre (2017), which categorises intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues. They reject a fixed list of virtues, acknowledging that the expression of virtues varies in intensity depending on individual circumstances and developmental stages. Smith and Pye (2018), co-developers of this programme, trained staff to teach, model and identify virtues in students' actions. Concepts introduced through assemblies were embedded in classroom practice, strengthening positive relationships across the school community. Features of each virtue were taught explicitly using a sequence of lessons from *The Virtues Project*, designed by Popov (2000). Introducing virtues as a child's inner strength, Popov encourages teachers to seek out and acknowledge virtues being developed by each child at their own stage of development. A useful point she makes in addressing challenging behaviour is the importance of student ownership in goal setting, and using sensitive teacher input to cultivate potential in a latent virtue, rather than judge unwanted behaviours.

Inner reflection can deepen further through class discussions or journalling, where students celebrate personal progress in virtues practiced. Peer and adult coaching to 'catch' a virtue supports resilience, essential in overcoming defeatist resistance. Teacher reflection can be assisted through self-assessment tools, such as the Early Childhood Educators' Spiritual Practices in the Classroom (ECE-SPC) instrument (Mata-McMahon, Haslip and Kruse, 2023). The ECE-SPC identifies teacher strengths in supporting students' spiritual nourishment and areas for improvement in nurturing practice. With deeper reflection on school culture, mission statements to create socially conscious, just citizens could become better realised, strengthening inclusive values – such as the oneness of the human race and respect for our shared planet – amongst parents, staff and students.

A depth to teaching virtues systematically

Building sufficient conceptual depth is crucial to create new habits like truth-seeking, alertness to prejudice, consultation and the desire to serve others. Just as progression maps in core subjects support teacher assessment to identify attainable next steps in knowledge and skills, systematic layering in progression and depth of virtues can ultimately build capacity for inner transformation. For example, building virtues of curiosity, patience and responsibility can guide children in higher-order ethical decision-making. The nineteenth-century education activist 'Abdu'l-Baha upheld the belief in children's innate goodness emphasising that it must be cultivated through systematic teaching, exploration and the practice of virtues. His father, Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Baha'i Faith, likened the role of teachers to that of miners. Through critical teaching opportunities, he regarded it as their duty to excavate and refine each child's innate 'gems' (virtues), so they may be of optimal benefit to society. 'Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom' (cited in Bahá'u'lláh, 1978: 260).

In this analogy, the unrefined qualities of a rock-like gem initially remain hidden – its potential to refract light unrealised until mined and polished. Correspondingly, through intentional teaching and daily practice of virtues, students' inner capacities can become visible and impactful. Foundational virtues such as kindness and caring can build on each other to create higher-order capacities like service for others, perspective taking and ethical decision making. This capacity-building mirrors a depth in progression in subjects like mathematics, where understanding foundational operational skills can be applied to solve complex problems involving decimals and fractions. Similarly, a value like generosity may initially appear as simple sharing in the early years but when developed alongside qualities such as patience and tolerance in older children aged nine to eleven years, it could evolve into meaningful acts of local service. Agency and commitment can be further strengthened where empathy supports students to identify others' needs and selflessness fosters service where recognition is not sought after. A systematic depth to teaching virtues supports authentic inner transformation, without which there is a superficial tendency to express virtues when someone else is watching, for manipulative gain. However,

encouragement and recognition of the practice of virtues is a necessary part of the nurturing process for extrinsic motivation to gradually become more intrinsic.

Applying virtues for student-led action

Applying virtues that promote perspective-taking and ethical collaboration are important in adulthood for fostering a united workforce, as shown by a study on the impact of virtues-based training in a social enterprise (UK Baha'i Office of Public Affairs and Apax, 2025). Sadly, many workplaces appear to have lost this alignment with core human values, often prioritising economic outcomes at the expense of social well-being (Giroux, 2022). In schools, while staff training may introduce teachers to virtues such as tolerance and inclusiveness, there is a need for sustained virtues-based professional development. Such training can empower educators to support students in the holistic and practical application of virtues, ultimately preparing them for meaningful social engagement.

An effective virtues-based school programme must provide students with authentic opportunities to apply the virtues they develop in ways that encourage service-oriented and responsible behaviour. The previously mentioned SAPBL moral framework supports this aim by promoting the integration of virtue embodiment with sustainable development. Through collaborative student-led projects, co-designed with teachers in response to local sustainability issues, learners are encouraged to engage with empathy and compassion. These experiences contribute to the well-being of others and the environment, while strengthening altruistic behaviour and fostering development of a global moral identity (Blaisdell et al., 2024). Gradually, students start to identify as global citizens with a shared responsibility for their planet and fellow humans, appreciating 'solidarity, care, and love for all people as members of one's complete human family' (Haslip et al., 2025: 5). Teachers trained in SAPBL have reported greater commitment to teaching challenging ESD issues, as well as raised student and teacher consciousness. A culture of increased kindness has been reported alongside the pursuit of local and global action.

To support the meaningful application of virtues in real-life contexts, higher order critical thinking skills must be developed in parallel. These skills enable students to analyse situations, consider multiple perspectives and start to

evaluate ethical complexities to make informed, principled choices. It is essential that teachers carefully align responsibilities with each student's developmental stage and capacity. By working within the student's zone of proximal development – where new learning occurs just beyond current understanding within an emotionally safe space (Vygotsky, 1978) – educators can sustain engagement, and ensure that participation in social action fosters a sense of hope and agency, rather than confusion or despair. Experiential pedagogies, such as Forest School, create environments where students can inquire, test solutions and reflect meaningfully, while simultaneously cultivating virtues such as compassion, curiosity and patience (Kalla et al., 2022). To illustrate the application of virtues in student-led action, the following examples pair closely related virtues to highlight their subtle distinctions.

Developing the virtues of curiosity and justice

For authentic student-led action, it is essential to spark children's curiosity through inquiry. Teachers who cling rigidly to the role of expert impedes student agency, which occurs best when they step into the role of facilitator. By engaging students with rich provocations, the virtue of curiosity can be stimulated. Giroux and Paul (2022: 8) call on students 'to think, doubt, question, and expand their critical capacities to be reflective about themselves, others, and the larger world'. Students with a weak foundation in critical thinking skills may resist new learning and allow limiting beliefs to sustain neoliberal attitudes. In adulthood, we see how this can exacerbate division and deepen an intent into defending biased and potentially harmful points of view. Curiosity, when not guided by the complementary virtue of justice, may promote self-interest and obscure the ethical implications of actions. The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) capitalises on children's natural curiosity, by setting time at the start of each unit to support each student's learning questions. Provocations to spark this may include ambiguous images or posed problems that develop curiosity as children try to create meaning. Question-layering is also used by teachers to deepen criticality, as they plan questions that are factual, conceptual and debateable (IBO, 2020). Examples of debatable questions include: Should we have country borders and immigration laws? What are the perspectives of newcomers versus longtime residents in a city? What responsibilities does a country have towards refugees? Thus, questions arising from curiosity can evolve

into more conceptual inquiries, widening perspectives and factors of causation and fostering a sense of justice.

In the context of climate change, teachers could support students through inquiry to recognise the disproportionate impact of global warming on communities in the global South, fostering dialogue on the profound inequalities in our human family. Case studies showing local organisations collaboratively addressing injustice could foster hope, appreciation of diversity and further curiosity, avoiding paralysing feelings of pity or apathy that often result from crisis-based learning. Sharing stories of youth who act as global agents of change further promotes solidarity and a shared humanity working for justice. Ultimately, applying justice in student-led inquiry can cultivate advocacy and responsible action, progressing beyond passive recognition of unfairness.

Developing the virtues of reflection and detachment

An analysis of discussion-based inquiry suggests that students' initial thinking broadens, allowing greater detachment when considering peer perspectives. However, this requires well-designed small group classroom experiences, with reflection on shared goals (EEF, 2018). Approaches like Philosophy for Children (P4C) enable children as young as five years old to engage in collaborative dialogue, active listening and conceptual reflection, skills necessary for leading social action. Stimuli that can elicit multiple perspectives help students question unexamined beliefs and generate new insights. Unlike debate set-ups, a truth-seeking process is prioritised over winning or absolutist thinking. With clear facilitation, students learn to think critically and creatively in a safe environment – here shame has no place. The ability to reconsider previously held viewpoints without fear of judgement cultivates the virtue of detachment. This enables authentic action, through increased awareness of others' needs and reduced self-centred thinking.

Developing the virtues of empathy and consideration

Empathy and consideration for people and the planet must be integrated into subject content, to invite students to put themselves in others' shoes and switch perspectives, thus prompting solution-oriented social action grounded in authentic inquiry. Harvard's Project Zero educators designed visible thinking

routines to support students' reflective processes (Ritchhart et al., 2011). The 'See, Think, Wonder' routine, for instance, engages students with a stimulus that prompts observation, interpretation and questioning, encouraging deeper reflection and avoiding superficial responses. When learning about potentially traumatic global issues, engaging with empathy and consideration can deepen conceptual understanding and critical thinking, beyond fear or sympathy. However, providing a balance of stimuli that provoke diverse responses and challenge stereotypes is important; teachers must carefully consider how to share important issues of climate change, global poverty and gender equality, in ways that widen perspectives and engage children in metacognition (Bourn et al., 2016). Overexposure to distressing or one-dimensional images – for example, of fearful children in troubled settings – can reinforce harmful assumptions, such as: 'poor people are pitiful', 'safety exists only in familiarity', 'environmental issues affect only those less advantaged than me' or 'these issues are not my responsibility'. Such responses undermine a sense of global citizenship.

Developing the virtues of service and responsibility

Turning inwardly allows students to uncover their core responsibilities towards humanity and the planet, often inspiring the desire to act and serve collaboratively. The Baha'i International Community has documented grassroots social action projects rooted in virtues-based transformation. One example shows youth engaged in a virtues-based programme, who demonstrated responsibility and service during a natural disaster, and were empowered to support their local community armed with hope rather than paralysis (Dugal, 2019). Of course, when exploring service opportunities, teachers must remain mindful of paternalistic attitudes that frame service as charity, rather than mutual learning and the questioning of assumptions (Andreotti, 2006). The potential of transformative education depends, in part, on the teacher's willingness to turn inwardly and examine their own values and unconscious biases when guiding student-led social action.

Conclusion

For decades, nations have addressed global issues through frameworks largely disconnected from the full spectrum of human virtues. The climate crisis is primarily tackled as a scientific or economic issue- approaches that overlook the

spiritual and ethical dimensions for collective action. As Haslip et al. (2025: 4) argue, 'the next generation will not broadly commit itself to the responsibilities of sustainability and human rights without learning to transcend self-interest'. Giroux urges teachers:

> "to guide young people to be informed, active, creative, and socially responsible members of society and the larger world. They have a responsibility to educate young people to be not only knowledgeable and critically informed, but also compassionate and caring, refusing to allow the spark of justice to go dead in themselves and the larger society" (Giroux, 2022, cited in Giroux and Paul, 2022: 167-8).

While educators are united in the importance of teaching beyond knowledge and skills (UNESCO, 2017), global challenges require a deeper focus on how we equip students to develop the building blocks for global competencies. In sum, global learning must be rooted in the cultivation of virtues if it is to inspire meaningful, sustained social action.   Primary education has transformative potential – not only to impart knowledge but to nurture student agency. Embedding virtues within school culture, fostering their development in teachers, and modelling them through senior leadership all help create the conditions for service-oriented action. Frameworks like SAPBL offer opportunities for students to critically engage with injustice, and reflect deeply on their role in shaping a more equitable world. Within these learning spaces, grounded in both reflection and action, children can begin to imagine what it is possible to achieve together for collective betterment.

Future research is recommended to measure the impact of virtue-development on fostering student agency and promoting service-oriented action. Additionally, there is a need to design classroom tools that evaluate sustainable attitudes and behaviours, rooted in concepts such as shared humanity, rights and responsibilities from early education onwards (Lopez-Claros, Dahl and Groff, 2020). Longitudinal studies tracking these impacts into secondary education would offer insights for further avenues of research.

To realise the goals of the 2030 Agenda in upcoming years, a wave of new ESD initiatives is anticipated to advance ethical eco-pedagogy. Whilst the wheels of education reform often grind slowly, especially when calling for deep inner transformation, the desire for change towards a more equitable and sustainable education is palpable amongst educators and stakeholders. Ultimately, what higher purpose can education serve than to raise a global citizenship mindset that empowers students to contribute positively and meaningfully to their world?

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Julie Sarmah is a primary educator with thirty years' experience predominantly teaching the English National Curriculum and International Baccalaureate programme. As a teacher trainer, Julie facilitates inquiry-based teaching with a focus on P4C, student agency and collaborative inquiry. She has lectured in primary English and Teaching Climate Justice on Initial Teacher Training undergraduate and post-graduate programmes. Her research interests include how to embed values of human solidarity and ESD through a transdisciplinary approach, that naturally engages students' voices and their authentic contributions to social action.

Viewpoint

UNMASKING FASCISM: EDWARD SAID'S PEDAGOGY OF WAKEFULNESS IN AN AGE OF EDUCATIONAL REPRESSION

HENRY A. GIROUX

The war at home – state terrorism on full display

Across the globe, we are living in a moment of profound crisis where the very essence of education as a democratic institution is under attack (Giroux and DiMaggio, 2024). In the United States, the assault on higher education is part of a broader war waged by authoritarian forces aiming to dismantle the pillars of not only academic freedom, dissent, and human rights, but also the essential foundations of democracy itself (Stanley, 2024). Universities are no longer seen as spaces of intellectual freedom and critical inquiry but as battlegrounds for ideological control. Campus protests are met with police brutality; students are abducted for their political views (Giroux, 2025a), and those who dare to speak out against the prevailing orthodoxy face expulsion, censorship, and criminalisation. Trump's administration has fuelled this campaign, not only targeting academic freedom but also pushing policies that criminalise dissent, especially when it comes to movements like those advocating for Palestinian liberation. The erosion of civil liberties extends to international students protesting in solidarity with Gaza, with threats of deportation looming over them. The chilling message is clear: higher education is no longer a sanctuary for free thought; it is a field of repression where the rule of authoritarianism dominates.

State terrorism at home targets those who dare to engage in the dangerous practice of critical thinking and the courageous act of holding power accountable. It is a violent apparatus that imposes terror on all who are deemed 'other' – immigrants, Black people, trans people, brown people, campus

protesters (Giroux, 2025b), and anyone who refuses to conform to the narrow, racist vision articulated by Stephen Miller (Tait, 2025), the White House Deputy Chief of Staff. He is notorious for his white nationalist views and has become a central figure in shaping the Trump administration's policies. At a Trump rally in Madison Square Garden, he boldly declared that 'America is for Americans and Americans only' (Democracy Now, 2024), a mantra that echoed the Nazi slogan, 'Germany for Germans only'. As Robert Tait (2025) reports in *The Guardian*, Tara Setmayer, a former Republican communications director on Capitol Hill, warns that his rise is a direct threat, as he now wields the power of the federal government to impose his fascist worldview. Setmayer, who now leads the women-led political action committee Seneca Project, explains that his vision has been fully embraced as a core political strategy under Trump. 'That view has now been transformed into the main political policy and aim of Donald Trump's presidency', she states (Ibid.). The demagoguery surrounding immigration has always been at the heart of Trump's political ascent. With Miller's goal to make America whiter and less diverse now backed by the unchecked power of the presidency, Setmayer warns that this combination is not just dangerous, it poses a grave threat to American values and the rule of law itself (Ibid.).

Under Trump rule, state terrorism is not confined to domestic borders; it extends its reach through reckless, international aggression. Trump's administration is waging war not just within the United States (US), but abroad, with flagrant violations of international law. His unprovoked aggression against Iran, coupled with his unwavering support for Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza and its unthinkable war on children (Giroux, 2025c), exemplifies the regime's disregard for global norms and human rights. Beyond the Middle East, Trump's regime seeks to impose its will through threats, tariffs, and naked displays of power. His brutal crackdown on immigration (Luscombe, 2025), the transformation of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) into a Gestapo-like force, and the relentless narrowing of who is permitted entry into the US expose his deeper authoritarian impulses. In this vision, the international community becomes little more than a pawn in his relentless pursuit of geopolitical dominance.

Trump's disdain for allies and international cooperation reached alarming heights, exemplified by his call to attack Panama, annex Canada, and seize Greenland (Collinson, 2025). These wild, imperialistic notions reflect a deeply rooted belief that America's might should dominate the global stage, with little regard for diplomacy or the sovereignty of other nations. In Trump's worldview, global relations are defined by the logic of conquest and dominance, where the violence of state terror is justified by the expansion of America's influence and control. This is a regime that knows no limits, expanding its machinery of fear and violence, both at home and across the globe, in a sustained assault on humanity, justice, and the most basic principles of international law.

The scourge of neoliberalism

The ongoing assaults on democracy, both domestically and globally, are not isolated events but part of the groundwork laid by gangster capitalism for the rise of fascism in American society. Central to this process is the transformation of the university from a public good to a privatised institution, where students are seen as human capital, courses are dictated by consumer demand, and more recently the curricula are whitewashed and filled with far-right propaganda, often under the cover of implementing patriotic education, cleansed of antisemitism (Goldberg, 2025). Under the market-driven logic of neoliberalism, universities have become spaces that prioritise economic outputs over intellectual autonomy, turning critical thought and democratic engagement into commodities. This shift has undermined the university's role as a crucible for challenging the status quo, replacing it with a system of training rather than fostering a culture of critical learning, dialogue, and informed judgment.

As neoliberal policies encourage privatisation, restrict access, and force institutions into service to corporate interests, the university is no longer seen as a public trust. It has become a tool for ideological indoctrination, training citizens to uphold the status quo rather than challenge it. This transformation, in part, is a direct response to the democratisation of the university that reached its peak in the 1960s, with intellectuals, campus protesters, and marginalised communities seeking to broaden the educational mission. The assault on higher education as a site of critique and democratisation has intensified over the last four decades with the rise of the far-right, with broader implications that include intellectuals,

minority students, and critical formative cultures essential to the foundation of a substantive democracy.

As the South African Nobel Prize winner in literature, J M Coetzee (2013), points out in a different context, the reactionary hedge-fund billionaires 'reconceive of themselves as managers of national economies' who want to turn universities into training schools equipping young people with the skills required by a modern economy'. Coetzee's words are even more relevant today, given that this attack on higher education, which is both ideological and increasingly dependent on the militaristic arm of the state, reflects a broader attempt to eliminate the university's critical function. Rather than serving the public good, the university is increasingly framed as a private investment, or an arm of state repression, where its governance mirrors the merging of the exploitative practices of corporate models, such as Walmart's labour relations and the governing principles of fascism. In the spirit of this concern, Coetzee advocates for the defence of education as an institution dedicated to cultivating intellectual insight, civic responsibility, social justice, and critical thinking.

The questions we must ask at this crucial moment in American history are not about how the university can serve market interests or the authoritarian ideologies of the Trump regime, but how it can reclaim its role as a democratic public sphere. How might we redefine the university to safeguard the interests of young people amidst rising violence, war, anti-intellectualism, authoritarianism, and environmental collapse? As Zygmunt Bauman and Leonidas Donskisastutely (2023: 139) point out, 'How will we form the next generation of intellectuals and politicians if young people will never have an opportunity to experience what a non-vulgar, non-pragmatic, non-instrumentalized university is like?' In this spirit, we must recognise how larger economic, social, and cultural forces threaten the very idea of education, especially higher education, at a time when defending it as a space for critique, democracy, and justice has never been more urgent. Moreover, any defence of the university as a public good demands an alliance of diverse groups willing to recognise that the fight for higher education cannot be separated from the wider struggle for a socialist democracy. The threats being waged against higher education are also a threat to the nation, a culture of

informed citizens, and how we think about agency and its fundamental obligations to democracy itself.

At the same time, as neoliberalism faces a profound legitimacy crisis (Bonanno, 2017) failing to deliver on its promises of prosperity and social mobility, it increasingly resorts to fascist rhetoric. This rhetoric scapegoats Black communities, immigrants, and dissenting students, blaming them for the deepening crises plaguing America. In doing so, neoliberalism shifts blame while reinforcing a narrative that justifies authoritarian measures, further marginalising those already oppressed. As this rhetoric spreads, the very institutions meant to foster critical engagement – like the university – are further corrupted, their original role of challenging the status quo replaced with one of reinforcing the existing power structures.

Edward Said's pedagogy of wakefulness: dreaming the impossible

It is within this oppressive context that Edward Said's work gains renewed relevance, offering the crucial pedagogical framework (Alkateb-Chami, 2024) for resisting authoritarianism and reclaiming higher education as a site of resistance. In opposition to the debased view of educational engagement promoted by the neoliberal agenda and far-right politicians, Said championed what I label as the 'pedagogy of wakefulness' (Said, 2000). This pedagogy emphasises the need for intellectuals to remain vigilant, awake to the realities of power, work with an array of social movements, and actively engage in resisting systems of oppression. Said's pedagogy demands that education be used as a vehicle for social change, not simply as a means of economic productivity or ideological conformity. Moreover, he argued that cultural workers and all manner of engaged intellectuals work in a variety of sites and on different platforms in order to address the public in a language that is rigorous, accessible, and comprehensive in its ability to connect a variety of issues.

In defining Said's pedagogy of wakefulness, I am reminded of a deeply personal passage from his memoir, *Out of Place* (Said, 2000), where he reflects on the final months of his mother's life in a New York hospital. Struggling with the ravaging effects of cancer, his mother asked him, 'Help me to sleep, Edward'. This poignant moment becomes a gateway for Said's meditation on sleep and

consciousness, which he links to his broader philosophy of intellectual engagement. Said's meditation moves between the existential and the insurgent, between private pain and worldly commitment, between the seductions of a 'solid self' and the reality of a contradictory, questioning, restless, and at times, uneasy sense of identity. The beauty and poignancy of his moving commentary is worth quoting at length:

> "'Help me to sleep, Edward', she once said to me with a piteous trembling in her voice that I can still hear as I write. But then the disease spread into her brain – and for the last six weeks she slept all the time – my own inability to sleep may be her last legacy to me, a counter to her struggle for sleep. For me sleep is something to be gotten over as quickly as possible. I can only go to bed very late, but I am literally up at dawn. Like her I don't possess the secret of long sleep, though unlike her I have reached the point where I do not want it. For me, sleep is death, as is any diminishment in awareness ... Sleeplessness for me is a cherished state to be desired at almost any cost; there is nothing for me as invigorating as immediately shedding the shadowy half-consciousness of a night's loss than the early morning, reacquainting myself with or resuming what I might have lost completely a few hours earlier... A form of freedom, I like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. That scepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place" (Said, 2000: 295-296).

Said's reflection here is more than a personal meditation; this passage becomes a powerful metaphor for Said's pedagogy of wakefulness. It is a call to remain in constant motion – intellectually, politically, and socially. The metaphor of sleeplessness, for Said, embodies a refusal to succumb to the seductions of conformity or passive consumption. This state of 'wakefulness' requires intellectual vigilance, a refusal to settle for easy answers or unchallenged ideologies. It speaks to the necessity of embracing discomfort, of being 'not quite right and out of place', as Said himself puts it. In this intellectual space of uncertainty, a new, critical sense of identity can emerge – one that is always questioning, always in motion. For Said, intellectuals – those who are alive to

thinking critically and acting bravely – must engage critically with the world, confronting its injustices and inequalities, and using their positions to challenge power. His pedagogy insists that education is not merely about transmitting knowledge but about awakening students to the complexities of the world. It demands that we lift complex ideas into public discourse, recognising human suffering and injustice both inside and outside the academy, and using theory as a tool for critique and change.

This pedagogy is particularly urgent in the context of the current Trump regime, where the state has weaponised ignorance and repression, seeking to silence dissent and erase marginalised histories. Said's pedagogy of wakefulness provides a framework for resisting this intellectual and cultural erasure; what Marina Warner (2014) in a different context called 'the new brutalism in academia'. By embracing Said's vision, educators can transform their classrooms into spaces of radical engagement – spaces where students are encouraged not only to critique but to act, to connect their private struggles to the larger social issues that shape their world. This is particularly relevant in the fight for Palestinian liberation, where Said's work has long offered a framework for resisting colonial violence and challenging the narratives that justify oppression.

In a time of rising civic cowardice in the mainstream media, elite education institutions, and cravenly law firms, hiding behind appeals to balance and objectivity makes it difficult for educators, journalists, public servants, and media pundits to recognise that being committed to something does not cancel out what C. Wright Mills once called hard thinking (Miliband, 1962). More specifically, Mills argued that:

> "social analysis could be probing, tough-minded, critical, relevant and scholarly, that ideas need not be handled as undertakers handle bodies, with care but without passion, that commitment need not be dogmatic, and that radicalism need not be a substitute for hard thinking" (quoted in Milliband, 1962).

Building on Said's pedagogy of wakefulness 'hard thinking' points to a pedagogy that needs to be rigorous, self-reflective, and committed not to the dead zone of

instrumental rationality or the abyss of indoctrination, but what bell hooks (1994) calls 'the practice of freedom', to a critical sensibility capable of advancing the parameters of knowledge, addressing crucial social issues, and connecting private troubles and public issues.

The role of culture in pedagogy: a call for resistance
In my own work (Giroux, 1994), I have long argued that culture plays a crucial role in shaping the civic consciousness necessary for resistance. Culture is not merely a passive reflection of society (Giroux, 2025d); it is a dynamic force that shapes our understanding of the world and our place within it. In an era where neoliberalism and fascism are increasingly intertwined, culture becomes a vital space for alternative narratives to take root. It is crucial to acknowledge that culture has become a tool for authoritarian regimes to control public consciousness, suppress dissent, and maintain the status quo. However, it remains one of the few spaces where resistance can also flourish. Said's pedagogy of wakefulness offers a critical lens through which to view the role of culture in education. It calls on educators to resist the commodification and militarisation of culture and instead cultivate a pedagogy that is engaged, critical, and rooted in the politics of resistance. This is not simply an intellectual exercise in critical thinking or a new-found attentiveness about the rise of fascist politics, but a call to arms – an invitation to create a culture of resistance within the university and other cultural apparatuses, that equips students and the broader public with the tools to challenge the growing tide of authoritarianism.

This cultural resistance must be grounded in the belief that education is a public good, a space where the radical potential for social change can be realised, anti-capitalist values can be challenged, and the groundwork can be laid for mass resistance to an America marked by what the late Mike Davis, cited in *Capitalist Realism*, called 'an era in which there is a super saturation of corruption, cruelty, and violence...fails any longer to outrage or even interest' (Fisher, 2022: 11). Universities must reject the neoliberal redefinition of education as a commodity and instead embrace the idea that education is a moral and political practice, one that is central to the health of democracy. As Said argued, intellectuals and educators have a responsibility to bear witness to human suffering, to challenge

power, and to use their positions to promote justice. In doing so, they can help reclaim education as a space for imagination, resistance, and liberation.

Conclusion

The current assault on higher education is not just an attack on academic institutions but on the very idea of humanity, thinking, and democracy itself. As universities become increasingly corporatised and ideologically colonised, we must resist the neoliberal and fascist forces that seek to transform education into a tool of indoctrination. Edward Said's pedagogy of wakefulness offers a powerful framework for resistance, charting a course for education that is both critically engaged and politically transformative. By embracing this pedagogy, educators can reshape the university from a site of ideological conformity into a vibrant space where students are not merely recipients of knowledge but active agents in the fight for justice and democracy. Zohran Mamdani's triumph in New York's mayoral primary embodies the potential of a focused, economically grounded campaign that speaks directly to the needs of marginalised and working-class communities. His populist approach, centred on accessible policies like affordable housing, fair public transportation, and universal childcare, fostered deep connections with those often ignored by mainstream politics. His victory, a powerful rejection of corporate-driven politics, offers invaluable lessons for resisting neoliberalism through a populist pedagogy that emphasises issues shaping people's everyday lives, speaks in relatable and inclusive language, and forges coalitions that transcend partisan divides. Mamdani's campaign repositions education as a central pillar of political life, demonstrating that the struggle for education is inseparable from the struggle for democracy itself. His success reflects Said's call for an engaged pedagogy of wakefulness, one that invites us to imagine a world where education is not only a means of intellectual liberation but a force to defend and strengthen democracy. The fight to reclaim education as a space for democratic engagement will shape not only the future of our universities but the very future of our democracy itself.

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Henry A. Giroux currently holds the McMaster University Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest in the English and Cultural Studies Department and is the Paulo Freire Distinguished Scholar in Critical Pedagogy. His most recent books include: *The Terror of the Unforeseen* (Los Angeles Review of books, 2019), *On Critical Pedagogy*, 2nd edition (Bloomsbury, 2020); *Race, Politics, and Pandemic Pedagogy: Education in a Time of Crisis* (Bloomsbury 2021); *Pedagogy of Resistance: Against Manufactured Ignorance* (Bloomsbury 2022); *Insurrections: Education in the Age of Counter-Revolutionary Politics* (Bloomsbury, 2023); *The Burden of Conscience: Educating Beyond the Veil of Silence* (Bloomsbury, 2025); and coauthored with Anthony DiMaggio, *Fascism on Trial: Education and the Possibility of Democracy* (Bloomsbury, 2025). Giroux is also a member of Truthout's board of directors.

THE CASE FOR AN ALL-IRELAND APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL EDUCATION

STEPHEN MCCLOSKEY

Introduction

The international development sector and its sub-sector, global education, have come under greater scrutiny and financial pressure, both in Ireland and across the world, as the far-right has sought to displace multilateralism with national self-interest. This has been destabilising for the international development sector in the island of Ireland which has had to contend with the outworkings of the substantial cuts to the USAID budget (Sandefur and Kenny, 2025) and the steep reduction of overseas aid spending by the Labour government in Britain from 0.5 per cent of gross national income (GNI) to 0.3 per cent from 2027 (House of Commons Library, 2025). These cuts, of course, will have their severest impact on the partners of the United States (US) and British aid programmes in the global South, where many countries are also assessing the potential economic fallout from US tariffs imposed by the Trump administration that are targeting several low-income and highly vulnerable economies (Paz and Clarke, 2025). Meanwhile, Ireland's government and international non-governmental sector (Irish Aid, 2025; IDEA, 2022) continues to frame its policy objectives for international development in the context of the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2025) which are deeply flawed (Alston, 2020) and completely off-track for delivery by their completion date of 2030 (UN, 2024: 2). Ireland's international development policy context is also deeply fractured by a partitioned island governed in the north by a devolved Assembly with no official remit or resources for overseas development assistance (ODA) or global education (NI Assembly, n.d.).

In the south of Ireland, the international development and global education sectors are severely under-funded with the ODA budget sitting around

half of the UN's 0.7 percent of GNI target for overseas aid agreed 55 years ago (OECD, 2024). This article considers the impact of partition on Ireland's international development and global education sectors and argues that an all-island approach would benefit development partners locally and globally. Rather than adhere to a flawed, neoliberal SDG-driven policy framework, an all-island international development policy could be solidaristic, empowering and transformative.

International Development in the north of Ireland

The international development sector in the north of Ireland has regularly found itself caught in a policy limbo between Dublin and London (McCann and McCloskey, 2024). While many of the international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) based in the north operate on a cross-border or East-West basis, they are normally headquartered in Dublin or London where resources, staff and policy formation are usually concentrated. Although a local Assembly was established by the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998 (NI Assembly, 1998), international development has been a reserved matter meaning that policy in this area remained in the purview of Westminster and was not devolved to Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA's). Similarly, global education, which is a sub-sector of international development with the aim of increasing public understanding of the root causes of poverty and inequality in Ireland, was not devolved to the local Assembly.

However, as formal education is a crucial carrier of global education through the schools' curriculum in subject learning areas such as Geography, Science and Local and Global Citizenship, the Department of Education in the north could have created a policy framework for global learning in schools. It has instead opted out of policy formation in global education, deferring to the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) as the policy leader in this area. This has left a policy vacuum in global education beyond the classroom that encompasses all aspects of formal education including teacher professional learning (TPL), initial teacher education (ITE), extra-curricular activities, and community links.

Local delivery of overseas aid and global education in the north is, therefore, heavily dependent on international development policy at Westminster. Between 1970 and 1997, the British ODA budget mostly hovered around 0.40 per cent of GNI and declined to 0.26 percent by 1997 (FCDO, 2023). However, the election of a New Labour government in 1997 heralded a period of expansionism in both overseas aid and global education. Labour established the Department for International Development (DFID) which had a seat at the cabinet table and the resources to match. It formulated a strategy for global education called *Building Support for Development* and increased spending on global education in England, Scotland Wales and the north of Ireland from £1.5 million in 1998/99 to £24 million in 2009/10 (COI, 2011: 12). It also increased overseas development assistance to 0.57 per cent of GNI in 2010 (FCDO, 2023) and launched a White Paper on International Development called *Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century* (DFID, 1997). This interventionist period from 1997-2010 resulted in innovative global education practice in formal and informal sectors such as schools, youth, trade union, minority ethnic, community and voluntary. Whilst the policy agenda was set by government, there was a degree of consultation with partners through sectoral panels and grant schemes were made available that supported both large and small-scale projects.

The interventionist period ended with the election of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010 which immediately commissioned a review 'to identify whether DFID should continue to use aid funds in the UK to promote awareness of and public involvement in development issues' (COI, 2011: 4). The review concluded that:

> "...raising awareness of development issues in the UK is *likely* to contribute to reducing global poverty but it is not possible to establish a direct link or quantify the contribution made by DFID-funded activity. Therefore, a decision to continue funding activity in this area cannot be entirely evidence-based" (Ibid.: 4-5).

On the basis of the review, the global education funding instruments created by New Labour were discontinued with just two UK-wide formal sector programmes

resourced by Westminster in the decade that followed: the Global Learning Programme (2014-18) (Centre for Global Education, 2018) and Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (2018-2021) (British Council, 2022). The UK policy environment deteriorated further when DFID was merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 2020 and the ODA budget cut from 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent of GNI (Gov.UK, 2020). Writing in *The Guardian*, economist Larry Elliott described this cut as 'wilful political vandalism' (Elliott, 2020). This was partly because the amount saved, £3-4bn, he considered 'chickenfeed' in the context of a budget deficit running at 20 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but mostly because it completely undermined 'the idea of aid as global public investment for the common good' (Ibid.). This folly was compounded by another major aid cut from 0.5 to 0.3 per cent of GNI in February 2025, this time by a Labour prime minister, Keir Starmer, to increase defence spending by 2.5 per cent from 2027 (Nevett, Francis, and Beale, 2025). This cut was self-imposed without any economic logic with the apparent aim of gaining political traction with the newly elected Trump administration in the US and its unilateralist world order. The moral bankruptcy of this approach was particularly evident in billionaire Elon Musk, Trump's unelected administrator of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), gleefully posting on X a few weeks before Starmer's aid cut was announced, that 'We spent the weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper' (Musk, 2025).

Britain's alignment with that deeply damaging and shortsighted approach to international development disregarded the fact that the aid budget is calculated as a percentage of GNI which means that if the economy contracts so does ODA. But beyond that, aid is a form of soft power, that can build solidarity with partners in the global South and as Irish Aid has understood it, contributes to 'a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world' (Irish Aid, n.d.). Starmer's redeployment of aid for defence spending reduces Britain's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises and accelerates militarisation in a period of heightened conflict in Europe and the Middle East. For the north of Ireland, there is no immediate prospect of a resumption of Westminster funding of international NGOs or restoration of global education programmes.

International Development in the south of Ireland

Irish Aid is the arm of the Irish government responsible for ODA and global education although it uses the term global citizenship education (GCE) which it defines 'as a lifelong educational process, which aims to increase public awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, inter-dependent and unequal world in which we live' (Irish Aid, 2021: 4). Ireland's aid programme has been a core component of foreign affairs since 1974 and maintains strong cross-party consensus. However, it has yet to reach the UN's 0.7 percent of GNI target for ODA, coming closest in 2008 with 0.59 per cent (€920.66m) (Irish Aid, 2023: 76). But since the 2008 global financial crisis, the aid budget declined to as low as 0.30 per cent, rallying somewhat to its current level of 0.38 per cent (€1.467.2bn) (Ibid.). The government considers expenditure on providing refugee support for 100,000 Ukrainian people since 2022 as ODA-eligible which raises the total aid spend to 0.67 per cent or €2.604bn (Ibid.: 75).

The cut to USAID funding has already had a significant impact on the Irish aid sector with the development agency, GOAL, informing 900 of its 3,250 staff that their jobs are at risk owing to abrupt funding cuts in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Britain and, particularly, the US (Reuters, 2025). USAID contributed 50 per cent (€103 million) of Goal's income in 2023 but Dóchas, the Irish association of non-governmental development organisations, has warned that the 'interdependent' nature of the aid system means that organisations not directly funded by USAID will also be impacted by its reduced support to multilateral bodies like the UN (Fox, 2025). Unlike its European partners, Ireland does not have former colonies that absorb most of their aid spending, and its top five aid recipients are: Ethiopia (€39m), occupied Palestinian Territory (€36m), Ukraine (€28m), Mozambique (€26m) and Tanzania (€25m) (Irish Aid, 2023: 81). In term of multilateral funding, Irish Aid contributed €368 million to the European Union's ODA budget which in 2023 represented 42 per cent of global aid funding (Ibid.: 37). The NGO sector received 18 per cent of the Irish Aid budget in 2023 or €267.4m with €2.1 million set aside to support 33 organisations working in the global education sector (Ibid.: 42).

Irish Aid's global citizenship education funding is available to NGOs in the north of Ireland with the proviso that their projects must be cross-border.

Irish Aid's Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-25 operates strategic partnerships in a range of education sectors: primary education, post-primary, adult and community, higher education, youth and minority ethnic sectors (Irish Aid, 2021). With the exception of their post-primary programme, WorldWise Global Schools, which was introduced to the north in the 2024-25 academic year, the other programmes are restricted to the south of Ireland. There is a missed opportunity here to support closer collaboration between schools, youth groups, civil society organisations, universities and colleges, and INGOs on an all-island basis. While schools are operating under the auspices of different curricula, north and south, there is enough common ground in both to support the sharing of good practice and resources. Similarly, teacher training institutions, colleges and universities could benefit from closer collaboration in areas such as research, methodologies and publications in international development and global education.

There is a degree of cross-border working already in place through all-island networks, including:

- The Development Studies Association of Ireland (DSAI, 2025), 'a community of over 800+ researchers, practitioners, and interested parties, who share a passion for international and sustainable development cooperation research and practice'.
- Dóchas, a network of international development and humanitarian organisations, has 46 full members and 11 associate members across the island of Ireland (Dóchas, 2025).
- And, the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) which has over 120 individual and organisational members engaged in global education in the north and south of Ireland (IDEA, 2025).

But within all these networks there is an imbalance in membership with the majority from the south of Ireland which reflects the stronger concentration of resources, staff and government intervention in both international development and GCE.

The policy environment for the international development sector in Ireland and across the world has been dominated by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a 15-year programme agreed by the United Nations in 2015 with the ambitious aim of 'eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions' (UN, 2015a). The next section argues that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) created by the 2030 Agenda have not been equal to the challenges they have been set because they are complicit with the same neoliberal approach to 'development' that has precipitated most of the world's social and economic problems.

The Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 SDGs and their 169 targets have been described by the UN as 'a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future' (UN, 2025). The Goals address a range of development areas including hunger, health, gender equality, climate action, clean energy and oceans, and peace and justice. The Goals' colour coded posters, icons and sound bite aims are a common sight in schools and universities seemingly representing an irresistible tide of public support for 'sustainability'. But the Goals are a flawed endeavour because of what they omit from their framework as well as the approach to poverty eradication adopted within it. The Goals fail to acknowledge the history of colonial expropriation by European powers, and later by North America, in the global South that propelled their industrialisation (Murphy, 2020). The root causes of poverty in the global South, both historical and contemporary, found in the patriarchy, racism, sexism and exploitation of resources and labour, often indentured, inherent in capitalism and later the more aggressively deregulated neoliberal economics, are missing from Agenda 2030. Far from being consigned to history, Oxfam's latest global inequality report finds that colonialism is a 'powerful force driving extreme levels of inequality today' (Oxfam, 2025: 10). The insidious structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) of the World Bank and IMF impose neoliberal 'reforms' on low- and middle-income countries as conditions for loans or debt restructuring (IMF, 1999). These economic constraints on the global South maintain the peripheral position of low-income countries in terms of trade and development.

But beyond the historical omissions of the SDGs are the current interventions that align with the same growth-driven model of development that has precipitated the climate emergency, polluted our rivers with toxins and plastics, and accelerated wealth accumulation by the richest one per cent of the world's population. In a withering and wide-ranging critique of the SDGs, Philip Alston, the former UN Rapporteur for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, found that the Goals' claims in relation to human rights to be illusory (Alston, 2020). 'Despite almost 20 mentions of human rights in the text, there is not a single reference to any specific civil and political right', argues Alston, 'and human rights in general remain marginal and often invisible in the overall SDG context' (Ibid.: 12). Alston is scathing of the SDGs' reliance on the World Bank's flawed 'international poverty line' of $2.15 per person per day – it was $1.90 when Alston compiled his report – which is a 'staggeringly low standard of living, well below any reasonable conception of a life with dignity' (Ibid.: 5). Even using this ridiculously low level of poverty measurement, Alston found that 700 million people were living on less than $1.90, which is 'abhorrent' (Ibid.: 8). Moreover, where it not for the fact that the number of people in China living below the international poverty line had decreased from 750 million to 10 million between 1990 and 2015, the global poverty count would hardly have changed (Ibid.: 7).

In regard to the monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs, Alston found that 'instead of promoting empowerment, funding, partnerships and accountability, too much of the energy surrounding the SDG process has gone into generating portals, dashboards, stakeholder engagement plans, bland reports and colourful posters' (Ibid.: 14). He criticises progress toward gender equality which is the focus of SDG 5 that aims to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (UN, 2015b). 'Closing the gender gap in economic opportunity', argues Alston, 'is projected to take 257 years' (Alston, 2020: 12). But, perhaps, the main criticism directed by Alston at the Goals is their dependence on the same tried and failed neoliberal growth model that 'can have devastating effects on the well-being of poor people and the state's capacity to reduce poverty' (Ibid.: 15). Drawing upon the example of SDG 8.1 (UN, 2015c) which has the target of achieving '7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries', Alston argues that 'Economic growth is at the core of the SDGs, the engine relied upon to lift people out of poverty'

(Alston, 2020: 15). The failure of most countries to decouple economic growth from fossil fuels is making 'it almost impossible' to achieve the Paris Climate Accord target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C by the end of this century' (United Nations Climate Change, 2015).

Given the fundamental flaws in the Agenda 2030 framework, it will come as no surprise that the 2024 UN SDGs' Report finds that 'only 17 per cent of the SDG targets are on track, nearly half are showing minimal or moderate progress, and progress on over one third has stalled or even regressed' (UN, 2024: 2). As the clock ticks down to 2030 and the assured failure of the SDGs as a means toward poverty eradication, we are reminded by Philip Alston that 'poverty is a political choice and will be with us until its elimination is reconceived as a matter of social justice' (Alston, 2020: 20). With that in mind, it is imperative that the international development sector in Ireland reflects on what it means by 'development' and how it can create a policy environment that is coherent across the island and informed by solidarity with the global South.

An all-island international development approach

Stopping tax evasion

Overseas development assistance is always likely to be a necessary component of development policy because of the accelerating climate emergency and the resulting increase in weather-related disasters causing forced displacement. For example, in 2022, 32 million people were internally displaced by floods, storms, wildfires and droughts (UNHCR, 2023). Forced displacement is also likely to increase as a result of conflicts such as that in Sudan where 12.5 million people have been internally displaced and 3.3 million have fled for safety to neighbouring states (UN News, 2025).   But the importance of ODA as a development instrument has always been inflated by countries and INGOs in the global North which rarely acknowledge that aid flows to the global South are dwarfed by resources lost by unequal exchange. So, for example, for every dollar received by countries in the global South in aid they lose resources worth $30 dollars through 'drain' to the global North (Hickel et al., 2022). The popular narrative that countries in the global North are helping to 'develop' poorer nations in the global South has been well and truly punctured by the continued appropriation of

resources in the global North through debt repayments, tax evasion and the use of transfer pricing (Tax Justice Network, 2025a). The latter is used by multinational corporations to shift profits out of the countries in which they operate using tax havens where they can pay much lower taxes. Indeed, the Tax Justice Network (2025b) has named Ireland as ninth on its list of global corporate tax havens and estimates the tax loss inflicted on other countries by Ireland's facilitation of global tax abuse at $20bn. This represents 4.08 percent of global tax losses with $11 billion of the total representing corporate tax abuse and $9 billion resulting from private tax evasion (Ibid.). As a country which prides itself on stalwart solidarity with the global South, Ireland's facilitation of tax losses to developing countries through its use as a tax haven sits uneasily with its standing as a proud development actor on the world stage.

A new all-island approach to international development needs to be solidaristic, which means ending Ireland's tax haven status that facilitates the hoarding of wealth by the super-rich and corporations. This status was revealed to the world when the European Commission found in 2016 that Ireland gave the tech giant Apple 'illegal tax advantages' amounting to €13 billion between 2003-2014 (*The Journal*, 2024). The Commission found that Apple was routing profits made on product sales across Europe through its Irish entities which 'were not technically liable for tax in any jurisdiction' (Ibid.). Apple joined Ireland in appealing the Commission's finding but lost the appeal in September 2024 (Croft, 2024). According to the Tax Justice Network (2024: 8), $492 billion is lost to tax havens every year; $347.6bn is lost to cross-border corporate tax abuse and $144.8bn to offshore tax evasion by wealthy individuals. Although global North countries lose larger sums to tax evasion, low-income countries lose 'five times as much of their public health budgets compared to higher income countries' (Ibid.: 12). In order to address tax evasion, the International Institute for Sustainable Development is urging all countries to implement a UN Convention on International Tax Co-operation which would 'close gaps in existing tax systems that prevent many countries from collecting much-needed tax revenues' (Mutaba and Rita, 2025). Such an initiative should be central to Irish development policy to ensure that low-income countries are not denied valuable income streams that can resource key public services like health and education.

Increasing ODA

Overseas aid is never going to be a panacea for addressing the polycrisis created by neoliberalism, militarism, the climate emergency and tax evasion, but is needed to provide emergency assistance to low-income countries. The taxes and duties collected by Ireland in 2024 amounted to €107bn, which means we could afford as a country to be more generous and finally reach the 0.7 percent of GNI target for ODA (Irish Revenue, 2024). In 2023, Ireland invested just €2.1m or 0.96 per cent of the Irish Aid ODA budget to global citizenship education which is well below the European benchmark of 3 percent of ODA (IDEA, 2024: 6). The Dublin government needs to expand its support of the global education sector in the north which is starved of funding and lacking a policy framework. This means increasing the global education budget and extending the purview of existing programmes to participants in the north such as schools, community and voluntary groups, minority ethnic organisations, youth groups and INGOs. There are existing all-island networks that can support a more integrated all-island approach to policy-making and practice in global education if the necessary resources are made available to them.

Neutrality and the triple lock

As a neutral country with a distinguished record of maintaining a continuous presence on UN-mandated peace support operations since 1958, Ireland needs to maintain the triple lock which is a central component of our neutrality. The triple lock means that Irish Defence forces can only be deployed on overseas missions that have been approved by the government, Dáil Éireann and a UN mandate. There are concerns that proposed changes to Ireland's defence and security policy could include amendments to the triple lock (Purdy and Lawrence, 2025). However, the Transnational Institute argues that:

> "The Triple Lock provides Ireland with a unique opportunity to show decisive leadership, to reassert itself as a neutral state and to actively use its voice and its leverage in the multilateral sphere to advocate for justice and peace, and for the protection of international law" (Ní Bhriain, 2025: 14).

In a period of escalating conflict, militarism and global instability, Ireland's neutrality, triple lock and peace-keeping missions can help to bring 'about stable conditions necessary for sustainable development' (DFA, n.d.). That neutrality means Shannon Airport should not be used as a transit point by the US military (McNally, 2024) and Israeli war planes should not be transiting munitions to Israel through Irish territory (The Ditch, 2025), particularly when it is prosecuting a genocidal air and ground offensive on Gaza (Albanese, 2024) and imposing a complete siege including food, water, fuel, medicine and aid on 2.1 million Gazans (McKernan, 2025). Facilitating Israel's use of Irish airspace to transit munitions runs contrary to Ireland's support of human rights and civil society organisations in Palestine as part of its aid programme and funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees. Ireland's development programme needs to align with an ethical foreign policy based on its longstanding neutrality and multilateralism. It needs to support efforts toward conflict de-escalation and military disarmament and, in regard to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank, the government needs to fulfil its promise (Molony, 2024) to sanction Israel by implementing the Occupied Territories Bill (House of the Oireachtas, 2024).

Meeting climate emission targets

According to the Climate Change Performance Index (2025), Ireland occupies a medium rating in renewable energy, energy use, and climate policy, but a low ranking in greenhouse gas emissions. Implementation of Ireland's Climate Action Plans remains 'problematic' and it could be on course to pay a staggering €8-26 billion bill (Frost, 2025) to other EU member for failing to meet binding national targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions as part of the EU's Effort Sharing Regulation. Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency projects that the country is well off track to meet its agreed target to cut emissions by 51 per cent by 2030. Meeting this target and transitioning to a climate neutral economy, is not only essential to protecting Ireland's natural environment and the health of its citizens, but mitigating the impact of global heating on low-income countries in the global South most vulnerable to the impact of climate related weather events. An all-island international development programme must be informed by climate justice and meeting internationally agreed targets for reducing carbon emissions.

Tackling neoliberalism

But the most essential component of a future all-island approach to international development is tackling the economic root causes of poverty and inequality in neoliberalism. In 2022, the Centre for Global Education and Financial Justice Ireland commissioned research into the extent to which the international development and global education sectors in Ireland 'incorporate a critical analysis of the currently dominant form of economics, i.e. neoliberalism, in their education work with the public' (Fricke, 2022: 8). The research found 'that little consideration seems to be given to systematic explorations of global economics or of root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice' (Ibid.: 7). What is evident in the research is a lack of systems thinking in the sector that would support analysis of how single issues are connected through the dominant economic system of neoliberalism. The research was based on the assumption that:

> "in order to effectively contribute to sustained change that addresses and aims to overcome poverty, inequality and injustice, the international development sector needs to give public attention to the global processes and structures that cause, exacerbate or maintain poverty, inequality, injustice" (Ibid.: 8).

What it found instead through an analysis of web site content, policy statements, a survey of practitioners and interactive seminars was that most INGOs do not consider development issues within a broader global economic framework which limits their understanding as to how these issues are connected and can be addressed. For an international development strategy to be successful and effectively tackle inequality, it has to include an analysis of neoliberal economics using systems thinking. The unpalatable alternative is the chaotic, patchwork approach represented by the SDGs which only pay lip-service to poverty eradication.

Conclusion

The International development sector and its global education sub-sector are under severe financial pressure owing to a succession of cuts announced over the past decade (CONCORD, 2024). In 2023, ODA from EU Member States amounted to €82.4 billion, or only 0.51 percent of GNI with Britain, France,

Italy and Spain announcing cuts to development aid spending in 2024 (Ibid.: 6). These cuts preceded the announcement in late March 2025 that USAID was to be absorbed into the state department, with a cut of 83 percent of its programmes and loss of 1,600 jobs (Omer, 2025; Faguy, 2025). So far, the Irish government has indicated that it will not follow suit and cut its aid budget (*The Ditch*, 2025) but Trump's unilateralist 'America First' agenda is resonating across the world and squeezing ODA spending. This dysfunction is compounded by Ireland's fractured approach to overseas aid and global education in the north and south of the island. Britain's dramatic slashing of its aid budget removes any short-term prospect for a return to the kind of expansionist policy platform we saw between 1997 and 2010. As international development is a reserved matter and not in the purview of the Assembly, there is a policy vacuum in the north of Ireland and scarcity of resources. In the south of Ireland, both international development and global education are under-funded, and most Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education programmes are not extended across the island. Moreover, the failing SDG agenda continues to dominate the policy environment in international development despite serious flaws in their capacity to address the systemic causes of global poverty in neoliberal economics.

The Irish international development sector is in urgent need of a solidaristic and transformative agenda that tackles the fundamental causes of poverty in the global North and South, including: the closure of tax loopholes that facilitate corporate and super-rich tax evasion in Ireland; supporting multilateral efforts to cancel the unpayable debt saddled on global South countries by international financial institutions and private lenders; a bold and effective approach to climate mitigation that meets emission reduction targets; a maintenance of Irish neutrality and the triple lock, and a commitment to demilitarisation. This requires a systemic approach to development that recognises the neoliberal origins in the polycrisis enveloping our world. We need an approach to development rooted in solidarity, not charity. As the film director Ken Loach (2017) put it:

> "Where there is injustice, oppression or exploitation there will be solidarity from those who stand with victims. Solidarity may do charitable things, but it is not the same as charity. Charity makes the

intolerable become bearable and perpetuate it; charity can normalise the unacceptable. Solidarity is concerned with redressing injustice and supporting those who need allies".

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Stephen McCloskey is Director of the Centre for Global Education and Editor of the journal *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review.*
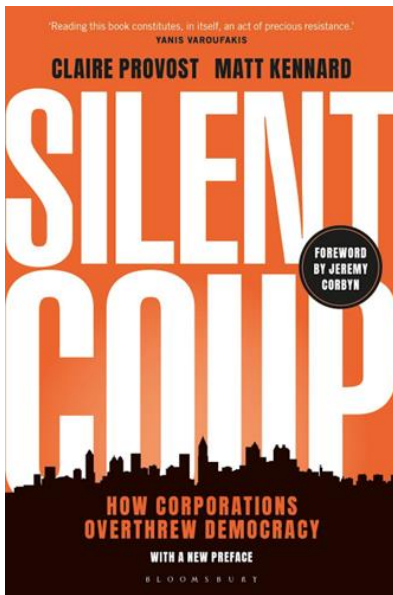
Resource reviews

Silent Coup: How Corporations Overthrew Democracy

Chris O'Connell

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Quiz question: which politician said, 'the liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself'? If the answer does not spring to mind, you could be forgiven. The rollcall of current political figures who would *not* express such anti-business sentiments would be long, including leaders of all the world's wealthiest countries, and more besides. The fact that few of us would guess that the statement was made by a US (United States) President – Franklin Delano Roosevelt – highlights just how far the private sector has travelled to its current, unassailable global position. Put another way, the decline in critical thinking about corporate power and the wider economic system raises deeply uncomfortable questions for all of us, including the development education sector.

Enter *Silent Coup: How Corporations Overthrew Democracy* by investigative journalists Claire Provost and Matt Kennard. The book provides an in-depth exposition of corporate power and is a must-read for all critical educators. As noted in the Foreword by Jeremy Corbyn – one of the few current politicians that would pass the 'FDR test' – '*Silent Coup* does many things. Above all, it educates people' (Ibid.: xiii).

Questioning neoliberalism

Rising corporate power and the political-economic system that supports it – neoliberalism – is the key challenge of our time. No credible path to tackling the climate, biodiversity or inequality crises can avoid private sector wealth and power. Most worryingly, all indicators are going rapidly in the wrong direction. Oxfam reports that billionaire wealth grew by \$2 trillion in 2024, meaning the richest one per cent now hold an astonishing 45 per cent of all wealth (Taneja et al., 2025). Meanwhile, big corporations use their influence to weaken labour and environmental protections, deepening inequality and injustice. These systemic issues should be front and centre for all international development and development education organisations. And yet engagement, including in Ireland, is fragmented at best, with many failing to give due consideration to the ecosystem of corporate power.

Research by the Centre for Global Education and Financial Justice Ireland (Fricke, 2022) indicates a widespread sectoral failure to engage with the systemic drivers of inequality from an educational perspective. The report points to several reasons, including a lack of political will to tackle this thorny issue. Neoliberalism is a poorly understood concept, typically used by capitalism's most fervent critics and, in turn, widely denigrated. Additionally, the system's core tenets are now so normalised – as political theorist Wendy Brown puts it, neoliberalism 'governs as sophisticated common sense' (2015: 35) – that many fail to pay it any attention. Another reason is a lack of confidence to address economic issues appropriately (Fricke, 2022). This is understandable, given the complexity of the global economy, with its dizzying array of financial instruments and mathematical models. But a growing body of scholarship indicates that economics is not the right approach to understanding neoliberalism; instead, it

must be viewed primarily as a political project. In other words, it was and continues to be about power.

David Harvey's groundbreaking book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2007), makes clear that neoliberalism was from the outset far less concerned with economic growth than restoring elite power. To achieve this, both Harvey (2007) and Brown (2015) stress that neoliberalism sought not to weaken but to repurpose state power to protect, but not interfere with, the economy. This protective role includes using the full range of coercive powers to safeguard elite interests from the real danger: democracy. The work of historian Quinn Slobodian further deepens our understanding. In *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Slobodian, 2018), he reveals the identities, aims and strategies of the 'neoliberalists': a group of early twentieth-century conservative Austrian economists appalled at the collapse of empire and the 'threat' of democracy. Slobodian pulls back the curtain to reveal that neoliberalism – far from the inevitable product of some 'natural laws' of economics – was a reactionary political project to leverage economics to restore elites and safeguard private property.

According to Slobodian, a core tactic of the neoliberalists – right after crushing the labour movement – was to make the economy 'unknowable' so as to prevent meddling. In this they succeeded, shrouding deep injustices in a cloak of technocratic language and policies, aided by a network of think tanks. Understanding this is key for anyone concerned with corporate power: it compels us to avoid distraction and instead examine the actual workings of the political economy.

The four horsemen of corporate power
This is where *Silent Coup*, by focussing on the mechanisms used to deepen neoliberalism as a political project designed to enhance corporate power, makes a hugely important contribution. While some or all of the areas highlighted may be familiar, there is immense analytical value in bringing together across four sections – each title prefaced by the word 'corporate' – the pieces of this terrifying puzzle.

'Justice' focuses on the secretive arbitration system that allows corporations to sue states (but not vice versa), even for the loss of potential profits. This system – known as Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) – creates a 'chilling effect' around labour, environmental and, increasingly, climate action (Morgera, 2025). 'Welfare' explores the flows of development aid toward the private sector, creating a perverse equivalence between the most vulnerable humans and the largest corporations. 'Utopias' examines the corporate states-within-states known as 'Special Economic Zones' (readers will receive a crash course in business's ability to make even radical ideas seem bland). Finally, 'Armies' brings us to the neoliberalists and the ever-expanding security apparatus designed, above all else, to protect capital.

Useful as this analysis is, the book is at its strongest when unearthing the stories and detailing the actors, methods and lived impacts of these 'four horsemen' of corporate power. Never less than hard-hitting, and at times jaw-dropping, they consistently reveal the extent of forward planning and organisation by business and its allies with a view to isolating political decision making from citizens. The most remarkable stories include:

- How Ireland's Shannon Free Zone served as the model for Special Economic Zones globally, with Shannon-based consultants spreading the gospel of policy experimentation and selective enforcement far and wide. Such has been the influence of Shannon that former Chinese premier Wen Jiabao went there to pay his respects in 2005.
- How the ISDS system undermined post-apartheid South Africa's landmark constitution and black economic empowerment laws, when a mining company sued the country for $350 million on the grounds that the laws 'expropriated' its assets and received a sizeable exemption as settlement.
- How for-profit corporations are increasingly cannibalising the space, funds and language of non-profits actors, styling themselves as the true bringers of 'development'. Notable examples include the CEO of Unilever – a transnational food conglomerate with a history of colonisation, forced labour and mass displacement – labelling the company 'the world's biggest NGO' (Ibid: 91).

- How Israel's Defence Forces use the occupied Palestinian territories as a laboratory to develop new products and then market them as 'battle-tested'. The close links between Israel and corporations remain key to support for its genocidal war and illegal occupation, as made clear in the recent landmark report by UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese (2025).

The authors ask where the media reporting on these hugely consequential issues has been, but similar questions could be put to those working in development education and international development. *Silent Coup* may not have all the answers, but it provides more than enough evidence to shape the questions we should be asking.

Bringing in the history and the hope

Silent Coup is not without shortcomings, with the first edition containing important gaps that the second edition somewhat addresses in a new Preface. The first relates to the book's relatively weak engagement with the history of the symbiotic ties between corporations and colonialism, aside from detailing how some individual corporations evolved from colonial 'chartered companies'. The systemic nature of the relationship is made clear by Francesca Albanese's report, which notes that colonial endeavours and violence 'have historically been driven and enabled by the corporate sector' (2025: 2). The Preface nods to this history with references to key enabling legislation like the UK's 1862 Joint Stock Companies Act, which extended limited liability to all companies, giving owner-shareholders routes to profit with no corresponding obligations. This state of corporate impunity exists virtually unchanged to this day, with only voluntary standards like the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* (UN, 2011) to constrain global corporate behaviour.

Once again, the strength of the book lies in its stories, and one tale in particular of Hermann Abs, a German 'celebrity banker' with prior ties to the Nazis, is both compelling and horrifying. It was Abs who charted a path for wealthy countries and private interests through the 'chaos' of post-war decolonisation. Firmly rejecting African calls for reparations, Abs argued that direct interventions such as the 1954 CIA coup in Guatemala were too expensive

and unpredictable. His solution? The international arbitration system now known as ISDS, which has led to corporate awards 'roughly equivalent to the gross domestic product of 45 of the world's poorest or smallest countries put together' (Morgera, 2025: 9).

The first edition of *Silent Coup* also paid relatively little attention to examples of resistance, as signalled in the book's sub-title. More hopeful outcomes appeared only tangentially and focused on local struggles (e.g. El Salvador's ban on metal mining) or national governments. But the systemic nature of corporate power the book reveals makes clear the need for sustained global responses. At Trócaire, we see clearly the negative impacts of growing corporate power in the countries where we work: it is no coincidence that *Silent Coup* explicitly references most of them, from Honduras to Malawi, Palestine to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This is why we are active in advocating and campaigning for many of the positive global initiatives cited in the Preface, including a binding UN treaty to regulate transnational corporations, and the campaign for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Conclusion

Corporate power and the neoliberal economic order are challenging issues for educators and campaigners alike, but no one could argue that they are not important. *Silent Coup* does a remarkable job of demystifying them, revealing in clear prose the actual workings of the system and detailing through first-hand testimony its devastating consequences. The evidence is all here: it is now up to those of us who care about people and the planet to put it to use. To repeat the famous Zapatista refrain, also referenced in the book, 'another world is still possible'; but it will require struggle to achieve it. This book contributes to that struggle.

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Chris O'Connell is Human Rights Policy and Advocacy Advisor at Trócaire. His work centres on holding large corporations accountable for human rights abuses and environmental damage; and struggles to defend civil society space and fundamental freedoms. Chris holds a PhD in Politics from Dublin City University and has authored publications on modern slavery, climate change, trade agreements, civil society space and Latin American social movements.

THE MYTH OF NORMAL: TRAUMA, ILLNESS AND HEALING IN A TOXIC CULTURE

CAROLINE MURPHY

Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté (2022) *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture*, London: Penguin Books.
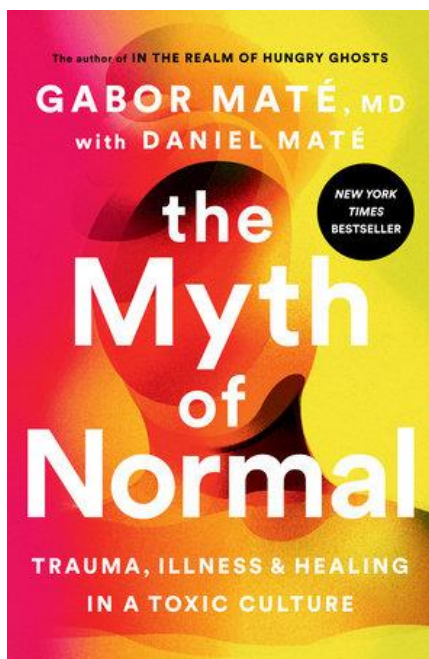
Neoliberalism has conditioned us culturally, politically, and even biologically to accept endless economic growth as not only desirable but as the sole viable solution to social challenges. Yet this growth-centric ideology does not merely obscure the structural roots of inequality, it actively generates harm (Schrecker and Bambra, 2015; Hickel, 2020). Built on colonial logics of domination, settler colonialism, and extractivism, the global economy sacrifices ecosystems, cultures, and lives in pursuit of profit (Gómez-Barris, 2017). The mantra that 'more is better' has normalised planetary degradation and human disposability. Today, we witness not just inequality, but the systemic destruction of life, through ecocide, genocide, and mass displacement (Knittel, 2023). These are broadcast in real time, absorbed as routine. Hence, we have entered a dangerous threshold of

crisis: one where the commodification of life is so deeply embedded, that we are being conditioned to accept widespread violence as normal. From genocide to ecocide, the destruction of human and planetary life no longer shocks (Slovic, et al., 2013). Rather, it flickers across screens, quietly eroding our capacity to feel. In this numbing cultural landscape, the sacredness of life is at risk of being forgotten.

It is precisely in this context that Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté 's (2022) *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture*, becomes an essential read. The authors invite us to pause, to feel again, and to question what we have come to accept as 'normal'. Their work refuses to treat illness, whether mental or physical, as a private defect, instead framing it as a mirror reflecting broader societal dysfunctions. In a culture where competition replaces care and growth displaces meaning, the authors reveal how systems rooted in trauma, disconnection, and domination don't just shape our politics and economies, but quite literally, inscribe themselves into our bodies and minds.

Growth as harm: neoliberalism, illness, and development education

Maté and Maté expose how patterns of illness mirror systemic dysfunctions. Drawing on psychoneuroimmunology and trauma studies, they argue that chronic stress, manifested through precarity, inequality, and alienation, is biologically toxic. As they write:

> "in our times, the context of all contexts is hypermaterialist, consumerist capitalism and its globalised expressions worldwide. Its fundamental ‑ and, it turns out, quite distorted ‑ assumptions about who and what we are show up in the bodies and minds of those living them out" (Mate and Mate, 2022: 198‑199).

In other words, the cultural values embedded in neoliberal capitalism are not just external forces. Rather, these inscribe themselves into our biology, making visible the profound ways social environments and ideologies shape both physical and mental health. Health is thus reframed not as personal responsibility but as a reflection of social pathology. This resonates with public health scholars like Schrecker and Bambra (2015), who argue that neoliberal restructuring has made

life more insecure, competitive, and stress-inducing. Such conditions, they argue, are known to weaken immune function and exacerbate disease.

For development educators grappling with a world in crisis, Maté and Maté's insights challenge us to rethink the boundaries between health, justice, and education. These are not discrete domains, but deeply interconnected struggles rooted in the same systemic conditions. Chronic illness, inequality, and disconnection are not merely medical or psychological problems; they are symptoms of a culture that prioritises profit over people, individualism over community, and productivity over care. From this perspective, development education must be more than the transmission of knowledge, skills, and values. Rather, it must also be a practice of healing and reconnection. It must help learners understand themselves as embedded in social, ecological, and historical relationships.

This calls for pedagogies grounded in empathy, critical consciousness, and structural awareness: approaches that do not simply resist neoliberal norms but actively unlearn their logic. Indigenous worldviews offer powerful alternatives, emphasising interdependence, relationality, and the wellbeing of both people and planet. Development education, in this light, is not about consuming more effectively, but about participating in a communal process of becoming more fully human. Development should not be measured in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or personal advancement, but in the cultivation of collective flourishing. Education must be reclaimed as a healing and transformative practice, one that reconnects us to one another, to land, and to more just, caring, and sustainable ways of living.

Toxic culture: disconnection from ourselves and each other

In their critique of the toxic culture underpinning neoliberal capitalism, Maté and Maté argue that chronic stress and trauma – driven by social inequality, economic insecurity, and cultural disconnection – manifest in both physical and mental health issues that mainstream medicine often overlooks or treats superficially. They show how persistent uncertainty, lack of control, and social exclusion quite literally 'get under the skin', weakening the immune system and increasing vulnerability to chronic illness and psychological distress.

Drawing on thinkers like Harari (2014), Maté and Maté observe how capitalism has shifted from fulfilling basic human needs to manufacturing desires, driving alienation not only from others but from our authentic selves. They highlight Kristeva (2004) who states, 'desires are manufactured as surely as are the commodities meant to fulfil them. We consume our needs, unaware that what we take to be a "need" has been artificially produced' (cited in Maté and Maté, 2022: 173). At the heart of their argument is the claim that Western culture promotes hyper-individualism, disconnection, and unhealthy competition, producing a society in which stress and self-alienation become normalised.

This critique is particularly relevant to development education, which aims to promote collective well-being, critical awareness, and social responsibility. Maté and Maté's insights affirm the need for cooperative learning, community-building, and pedagogical approaches that interrogate the structural roots of suffering, namely neoliberalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. In this context, development educators might turn to pedagogies and epistemologies grounded in reciprocity and relationality: knowledge systems that refuse to separate health from land, the body from community, or learning from ethics. These perspectives centre wholeness, interdependence, and sustainability, recognising relationships with people, place, and planet as foundational to meaningful education and development.

Disconnection from nature as a root of illness

Maté and Maté further emphasise that modern Western society not only alienates us from ourselves and each other, but also profoundly disconnects us from the natural world. As they write: 'in the Western world, at great cost to ourselves, we have long lost touch with this unity that Indigenous cultures recognise and honor' (Maté and Maté, 2022: 473). The authors contrast this disconnection with the deep sense of kinship found in many Indigenous traditions, where humans are understood as fundamentally interwoven with land, animals, plants, and all living systems. When they speak of having 'long lost touch with this unity', they are identifying a cultural rupture: one that erodes not only spiritual and communal bonds but also has tangible consequences for our mental, physical, and ecological health. In essence, disconnection from nature is not merely philosophical or

emotional. Rather, it has profound physiological implications. Living in opposition to our natural state – where we are trapped in systems marked by constant uncertainty, job insecurity, and relentless competitiveness – delivers biological disturbances driving widespread stress and chronic illness.

Moreover, the same growth-at-all-costs model that undermines individual wellbeing simultaneously fuels environmental degradation. The pursuit of endless economic expansion accelerates resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and climate collapse, destroying the very ecosystems upon which human and planetary health depend. In this respect, development education must recognise the physiological toll of our alienation from nature: a disconnection that contributes to stress, illness, and social fragmentation. This underscores the urgent need to centre nature as a teacher, reintegrating land-based learning, ecological ethics, and relationality into the curriculum. This aligns with Maté and Maté's broader cultural critique, which exposes a toxic culture that values consumption and disconnection over belonging and care. Reconnecting with nature, therefore, is not merely symbolic but a vital path to healing: one that involves reclaiming the relationships essential for the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and the planet.

Racism as a systemic driver of injustice

This disconnection from the natural world is intertwined with other forms of systemic alienation – most notably, racism – which Maté and Maté also identify as a profound driver of trauma and illness rooted in social and structural injustice. Maté and Maté powerfully highlight racism as a deeply entrenched system that inflicts profound trauma on individuals and communities, shaping both mental and physical health outcomes. They emphasise that racism is not only a matter of prejudice or individual acts of discrimination but a structural force that 'gets under the skin', embedding itself biologically through chronic stress and social exclusion. This systemic oppression leads to measurable disparities in conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and premature aging: health inequities rooted in social injustice rather than biology alone.

For development educators, this insight reinforces the imperative to address racism not merely as a social ill but as a critical determinant of wellbeing.

It calls for pedagogies that unpack and challenge the intersecting systems of colonialism, neoliberal capitalism, and white supremacy that perpetuate trauma and marginalisation. Centring anti-racist education and critical consciousness is essential for fostering collective healing and equity. By confronting racism as a foundational cause of disconnection and illness, development education can contribute to building more just, caring, and healthy societies.

Limitations of this review: a partial lens on a multifaceted work

While this review has focused through the lens of development education and critiques of neoliberalism, it is important to acknowledge the breadth and depth of Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté's work, which spans far beyond these themes. The book is a deeply interdisciplinary exploration of trauma, touching on fields such as neuroscience, childhood development, addiction, attachment theory, public health, and intergenerational suffering. Its insights emerge not only from structural analysis, but also from compassionate case studies, personal narratives, and years of clinical experience, making it both intellectually rich and emotionally resonant.

Hence, this review offers only a partial reading: one shaped by a specific interest in the implications for development education practice. Readers from other disciplines such as psychology, public health, sociology, and medicine will each find different resonances and implications for their respective fields. This review should therefore be understood as one contribution to an ongoing conversation about the social roots of illness and disconnection, and the role development education can play in fostering more just, caring, and relational ways of learning and living.

Development education takeaways

Maté and Maté argue that trauma is not merely an individual experience but a deeply social and systemic reality, embedded within structures such as capitalism, colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. This makes their work particularly powerful and relevant for development education. At this moment, development educators are called to do more than critique; the work demands a fundamental reorientation of our pedagogies, politics, and priorities toward a future where development is defined not by growth and accumulation, but by connection,

relationality, and care. Drawing on Maté and Maté's insights, development education should:

- Employ critical pedagogy to reveal how neoliberal systems inflict both internal and external harm, and to envision alternatives grounded in justice and sustainability.
- Integrate Indigenous perspectives not as token gestures but as foundational epistemologies shaping how we understand knowledge and development.
- Centre wellbeing – personal, communal, and ecological – as a primary metric for measuring development success.
- Embed trauma-informed, relational pedagogies that recognise learning itself as a process of healing.

Importantly, Maté and Maté's critique of capitalism's relentless pursuit of growth and manufactured desires invites development educators to challenge dominant development paradigms that equate progress with economic expansion. The pervasive conditioning to believe growth will 'fix everything' damages both human wellbeing and the planet's ecological balance. Therefore, development education must embrace alternatives grounded in ecological sustainability, trauma-informed practice, collective wellbeing, and Indigenous wisdom: principles of reciprocity, relationality, and critical pedagogy.

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Caroline Murphy is currently working as the CEO for Comhlámh. She has over fifteen years' experience of working for organisations across the Irish international development sector with key experience in development education, strategy, policy, and safeguarding. Caroline has contributed a range of research and evaluation consultancies to the wider sector, focusing on development education, public engagement, safeguarding and NGO messages and frames.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON REFUGEES AND MIGRANT INTEGRATION IN EDUCATION: GRASSROOTS NARRATIVES FROM MULTIREGIONAL SETTINGS

AHMED AL-AWTHAN

Marcus Otto and Tania Saeed (eds.) (2025) *Critical Perspective on Refugee and Migrant Integration in Education: Grassroots Narratives from Multiregional Settings*, London: Bloomsbury Academic. Open access at: https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/monograph?docid=b-9781350452374.
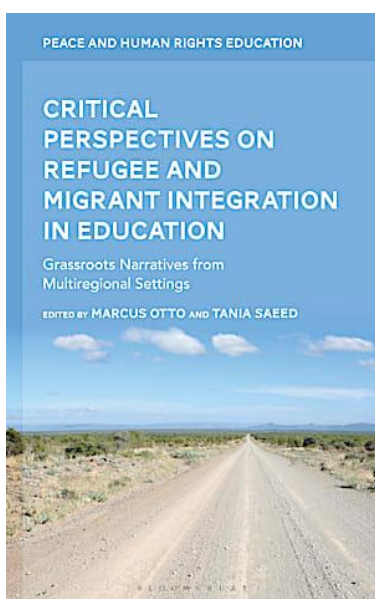
This book brings together various researchers who are interested in the education and integration of migrants, refugees and internally displaced people in hosting communities. Some of their discussions emanate from first-hand experiences and some of them conduct ethnographic studies or interviews with refugees. The book is accessible, and it targets a broad audience including educators, policy makers, researchers and students interested in issues of migration, integration and inclusive education. The central aim of the book is to critically examine the concept of integration within educational systems in hosting countries. Central questions include how the concept of integration is defined and negotiated within educational systems? And, to what extent is it implemented in relation to inclusivity of refugees and migrants?

The book is divided into two parts: part one focuses on narratives or real-life experiences of refugees from regions across South America, Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. It sheds light on reframing integration and the role education plays in the process of integration. Part two presents analytical commentaries and a conceptual grasp of the narratives presented in the first part of the book. Authors approach lived experiences or stories of refugees by implementing the concept of 'thinking with stories' instead of thinking about stories (Morris, 2002: 196). They made great efforts to live the daily struggles of asylum seekers to understand and unfold various layers of their experiences. They employed a bottom-up approach to gain deeper knowledge and present these stories in an emotional manner which is a powerful approach that draws the reader into the journey of refugees. The book successfully captures the journey of asylum seekers after their arrival in host countries.

These ethnographic chapters reflect the lack of integration of displaced people due to inadequate educational support and focus on the isolation of these refugees in centres that are unable to provide access to public schools. These centres present several barriers to education, such as the lack of transportation, limited financial support and insufficient space for classes. The recurrent themes identified in the first four chapters include: the absence of educational facilities for refugees; a lack of teacher training in areas such as trauma-informed pedagogy and intercultural education; and a lack of inclusive teaching practices. These challenges are linked by a conscious avoidance of hosting states in addressing these needs. This isolation extends beyond separation from the community to exclusion from public schooling. The structural barriers that hinder the integration of these refugees include racism, as well as social and systemic barriers. Although these barriers are commonly shared among refugees, the insight offered by these chapters is more powerful because of the lived experiences shared by authors that illustrate the emotional, psychological, social and institutional impact of exclusion. It also draws our attention to the social injustices experienced by minorities and the urgent need for inclusive education reforms in hosting estates.

Teshome Mengesha Marra's (2025) chapter, for example, explains that there are efforts to connect refugees with the broader community through the involvement of educators and community leaders. However, the gap between

refugees and hosting communities continues to widen, often leading to hostility and the spread of false narratives against refugees. In response, educators have sought to implement pedagogies that are different from traditional approaches – such as pedagogies of care and love – to address the deep isolation experienced by the refugee population. These pedagogies have been shown to yield more effective learning outcomes among refugee learners. Sally Wesley Bonet's (2025) chapter highlights the example of the Cairo Academic Christian School (CACA), a school established exclusively for refugees. I was struck by how Sudanese students living in camps in Egypt were able to achieve academic success, despite being denied access to public schools and facing harassment in public spaces. One key factor in their success was that their educators also came from similar backgrounds and applied the pedagogy of care. This shared experience allows teachers to empathise with their students' daily struggles, helping to build a bridge of trust. Therefore, students find safety, comfort, motivation, and hope in their teachers' pedagogy, which inspires them to believe in a brighter future, and motivates them to work hard and advance in their studies.

It is evident that refugees have made remarkable efforts to integrate into host communities and adapt to their new culture. However, they often face rejection from both the authorities and the public and are subjected to various forms of harassment. The book recalls Freire's argument that education can function as a tool of oppression (Freire, 2000). A striking example of this is found in Nasir's educational experience, as detailed in Melissa B. Hauber-Özer's (2025) chapter. Nasir, a Syrian refugee in Turkey, made significant attempts to integrate; he learned Turkish, took part in community events and advocated for the rights of Syrians. Despite this, he experienced discrimination at college not only from fellow students, but also from professors. Syrian students were excluded from discussions in classrooms, received unfair grading, and were denied academic support. Nasir, for example, was expected to score at least 80 percent on an exam, but he was only given 5 percent. When he approached his professor for clarification, the professor responded: 'Nasir, there is nothing wrong with your paper, but I will make you fail the exam because you are Syrian' (Hauber-Özer, 2025: 70). This case study shows how educational institutions can be complicit in systems of exclusion and oppression. For instance, Nasir's case highlights how higher education institutions often treat Syrian applicants unfairly, sometimes

cancelling their registration without just cause. This forces Syrian students to leave college and abandon their academic dreams. The book underscores how difficult it is for refugees to remain motivated and continue to pursue their educational dream in the face of such systemic barriers that constantly work against them.

Sometimes, integration and social cohesion are out of reach for nationals, let alone for refugees and migrants. In the case of Myanmar, as highlighted in Jessica Gregson's (2025) chapter, internally displaced people like the Rohingya live in isolated camps with substandard living conditions. They are segregated, and there are no governmental efforts to include them in the education system. The chapter provides insights into the lived experiences of Rohingya, revealing educational and contextual details that might elude outside researchers. What really stayed with me is that even if they gain access to public schools, the Rohingya are unable to benefit due to linguistic constraints, as each region uses its regional language as a medium of instruction. The curriculum itself is discriminatory, designed to serve a specific social group. If the system marginalises its own citizens, how can it be expected to welcome and integrate foreign asylum seekers? I describe this as 'intentional discrimination' when the state purposefully isolates a group of its citizen and ignores their needs.

Dilek Latif's (2025) chapter highlights a slightly different situation in Cyprus, a country experiencing a growing number of refugees. Integration encounters challenges because the country is divided and operates two separate public education systems, each with its own ethnocentric versions of history and identity in a segregated society. The strength of this chapter lies in how it raises the question of how newcomers are expected to integrate into a society that is itself divided. It draws our attention to the fact that integration is not a neutral process, but one shaped by the sociopolitical context into which refugees are placed.

The book proceeds to describe the largest refugee influx in 2016 of 1.2 million refugees entering Europe, 40 percent of whom were hosted by Germany. Germany offered better services to refugees and asylum seekers compared to some other countries discussed in this book such as Myanmar, the Czech Republic and Cyprus. However, what I found compelling in Denise R. Muro's (2025) chapter

is that even in systems that genuinely seek to integrate refugees, a single individual can hinder this integration and contribute to their exclusion. This is illustrated by the example of the German teacher assigned to teach refugees. She was unapproachable, serious and strict. She showed little interest in connecting with her students, relied on traditional teaching methods and dominated class discussions. I believe that the chapter could have focused more on the importance of training language teachers in innovative pedagogies such as the pedagogy of love and care to better support and motivate refugees, as language serves as a gateway to the integration process. An important factor discussed in the book is the power dynamics between refugees and the asylum system, as well as refugees and members of the hosting community, which play a significant role. Systems often ignore the needs of these refugees, patronise them and reduce them to case files. Likewise, hosting communities frequently view refugees through a lens of pity. Instead of connecting with them on a human level, they approach them from a position of superiority rather than building a mutual relationship.

The second part of the book provides commentary on the narratives presented earlier and engages with insights from both Germany and Pakistan, drawing on theoretical perspectives derived from the global North and South. I was intrigued by the concept of pluralism and its connection to the concept of integration. Mneesha Gellman's (2025) chapter emphasises how pluralism can lead to integration not only of newcomers but also of other marginalised groups within local communities. It affirms the principle that every human being has equal rights, regardless of their origin, and that individuals have the right to preserve their identity – unlike political regimes that push newcomers toward assimilation into 'the language and beliefs of the ethnic majority' (Gellman, 2025: 142). The chapter highlights how powerful institutions influence education to both control economic power and the identity of individuals. Therefore, public education is far from inclusive, with curricula that lack the flexibility needed to truly integrate newcomers.

Integration can be understood as a political practice, as it is often defined and predetermined by political powers. What is missing in this process, as discussed in Annett Gräfe-Geusch and Johanna Okroi's (2025) chapter, is the agency of migrants in shaping what integration should look like. As a result,

integration becomes a form of 'one-sidedness' (Gräfe-Geusch and Okroi, 2025: 153). The chapter argues that to move beyond this one-sided approach, greater attention must be given to the agency of refugees. It also offers valuable guidance on how to achieve both structural and social integration through various approaches, aiming to strengthen the relationship between education and integration. This strongly resonates with me from personal experience as I have seen how migrants and refugees are often excluded from conversations about integration and that everything is decided for them without their input or consent. Saeed's (2025) intersectional perspective highlights how inclusion or exclusion depend on the extent to which refugees can assimilate and conform within the host community.   The level of inclusion or exclusion is largely shaped by how the host state responds to the arrival of refugees, particularly to their identity, race and religion. The book concludes by problematising the notion of integration, arguing that integration remains a deeply troubled concept, even within diverse societies.

Ultimately, each chapter provides a story that captures the everyday realities and struggles faced by refugees living in refugee centres. Many asylum seekers carry stories marked by hardship, loneliness, and isolation, having fled a wide range of circumstances including war, persecution, poverty, and human rights abuses. The book uncovers how asylum systems and host communities contribute to the suffering of refugees, which leads to identity crisis, dehumanisation, and cultural emptying. I believe that the process of assimilation is imposed on refugees when host communities fail to acknowledge the full journey of these asylum seekers prior to their arrival in the state – an issue not deeply discussed in this book and that needs further exploration through narrative approaches. Recognising that displaced people are seeking safety rather than causing harm to host countries can promote empathy, leading to a better integration at both educational and social levels.

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Ahmed Al-Awthan is a third-year PhD candidate in Education at Maynooth University, where he also works as a part-time lecturer. His research focuses on the educational experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland, employing narrative inquiry and autoethnography.

Contesting Colonial Capitalism in the Americas, Africa, and Asia

Neil Alldred

Dip Kapoor (ed.) (2025) *Contesting Colonial Capitalism in the Americas, Africa, and Asia*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Readers of *Policy and Practice* may be familiar with Dip Kapoor's earlier book, *Education, Decolonisation and Development: Perspectives from Asia, Africa and the Americas* (Kapoor, 2009). It importantly gave voice to Indigenous peoples and their impressions of and reactions to imperialist exploitation in the supposedly post-colonial world of the twenty-first century. For those of us in the development sector of the global North, that book was a wake-up call to recognise that development could no longer be just a top-down charitable initiative from the global North but had to wrestle with concepts, ideas, language and perceptions from different cultures and world views. Kapoor's (2025) latest book is, in principle, a celebration of the life and work of Aziz Choudry, another important figure in the struggle to get the global North to recognise and give value to those different perceptions emanating from the global South. Choudry was an activist in New Zealand and in Canada where he was an associate professor at Magill University, as well as a leading organiser, teacher and activist with the Immigrant Workers' Centre in Montreal. He campaigned for Indigenous peoples everywhere, but especially for Palestinians, immigrants, the landless and others, as well as being the author and inspiration of many publications championing contemporary victims of modern colonial exploitation (Choudry, 2009; 2012; 2013; 2015).

But the book is more than a salute to Choudry's impressive work. With over 24 chapters it offers case studies covering activist movements in more than 30 countries, and challenges those of us who may be finding that the exigencies

of academic life conflict with the moral imperative to activism. Clearly, for many development teachers, learners, researchers and others in the global South, activism is not simply an add-on, or a secondary priority to academic career advancement. This important collection shows that language and naming remain of huge importance to communities whose very identities have been challenged and denied. Aotearoa and the Māori are examples of Indigenous names that are deeply connected to culture, ancestry and the land, and show that colonial appellations were nothing more than misnomers. Turtle Island is the name given to much of North America by Indigenous communities there and it behoves us to recognise and accept that the way colonial powers imposed their names on Indigenous lands, cultures and identities was nothing less than thoughtless and shameful.   When European explorers wrongly sought India by travelling westwards, they called the Caribbean, the West Indies, and the inhabitants of North America 'Indians' – even 'Red Indians' – which was a perfect example of imperial ignorance and arrogance, and overdue for change.

Kapoor offers us myriad examples of everyday English language failing to reflect the perceptions and realities experienced by Indigenous communities across those three geographical areas of the Americas, Asia and Africa. There are concepts that exist in other tongues and other cultures but of which most of us in the global North remain completely ignorant, so our ability to step in with developmental initiatives is immediately challenged. Most of us are familiar with the concept of Ubuntu, which Desmond Tutu neatly translated for us as 'I am because we are' (Tutu, 2023). This book adds to our understanding of that with the important inclusion of a proverb in the Zulu language, 'Ubuntu ungumuntu ngabantu', which translates as 'a person is a person through other people' (Kapoor, 2025: 163). The enormity of that challenge to Western liberal thinking and its emphasis on the importance of the individual is huge. Many of us in the development education (DE) sector in the global North often want to help people and communities in poorer countries but we want to do it in our chosen way, based on our perceptions, our understandings and our values, which of course often presupposes that we want to see the continuation of a globally unequal distribution of power and resources since that is what we have grown up (comfortably) with.

Most of the contributors to this edited text are themselves academics and activists, mainly from the global South, who are conscious of the need to respect accepted academic practice on research, analysis and the compilation of their research and findings. But the frequency with which contributors point out that Indigenous knowledge, perceptions and understandings are important and need to be brought into the foreground hammers home the point that the struggle for social justice and equity worldwide is more important than mere academic practice. To be a 'value-free' discipline is neither a worthy nor valid aim in the ongoing struggles of poorer communities across the world, and academics in the global North need to remind themselves that their work will only have value if it contributes practically and materially to the improvement of lives of poorer peoples.

Anthropology was very much a Western-invented discipline, designed to help administrators of colonial peoples to understand their 'subjects' more intimately, and with the clear aim of using that knowledge for the more effective management and manipulation of those subject communities, a position that was morally bereft. Contributors to Kapoor's book argue convincingly that, if the rural, dispossessed communities are not at the heart of the research initiative, then the moral value of the development enterprise has been lost from the beginning. Wherever we may be from, and whatever may be the contexts of our work on development, many of us in the DE sector need to engage more fully in grasping and using Indigenous languages. We need to ensure our research, teaching and learning are central – and not at all marginal – to the struggles that those communities face day after day. Academics need to be a part of the solution to the agonising and even existential inequalities disfiguring the entire world, and we need to be allied with the rural communities, so that we do not become a part of the problem.

The book offers case studies of Indigenous communities and their struggles, and each case study is rarely more than ten pages long, so the book would make an excellent primer for pupils in secondary schools. It would enable students to see that the world is bigger than the English language, that identities are not just something arbitrarily imposed on people – like passports or driving

licences – but something that is essential for the clarity of purpose that is a necessary precondition for any development initiative.

The language in the book is challenging and one needs to spare a thought for the editor of the book and for the editors of the Routledge Critical Development Studies series: when activists submit manuscripts to editors using concepts not familiar to audiences in the global North, the work can be quite challenging. I noted 'Englishisms' such as 'rematriation', ('returning to the sacred teachings of Māori women and girls') (Kapoor, 2025: 43), de-citizenised (Ibid.: 64), commoning ('those responsibilities that are enacted through loving relationships between humans and more-than-human relatives across the sky world, this world and the interior/beneath world') (Ibid.: 66-7), 'othermothering' (Ibid.: 121), 'shack-dwellers' (or Abahlali – 'people who do not count') (Ibid.:161) and 'philanthrocapitalism' (Ibid.: 179) among many others.

For the editors, presenting such material from so many disparate communities and popular initiatives must have been daunting. That Aziz Choudry was a person and a theme around which all submissions could cohere was doubtless helpful, and indeed each chapter presents an important part of a coherent book whose central theme is that activist struggle is not so different to academic research on developmental issues, precisely because struggle is a learning process, conflict is an enlightening experience, and challenging perceived oppressions is an important way of learning how better to understand those oppressions and respond more effectively to them.

The book also highlights a major factor of dispossessed people's perceptions: whereas people in the global North assume that colonialism ended with the rush of independences being granted by (not won from) colonial powers, in the 1960s and 1970s, for migrant groups, for the landless, for women and girls, for the Dalits, the untouchables, the disabled and discriminated against, colonialism is very much a continuing reality. The book is titled *Challenging Colonial Capitalism* and readers are rightly reminded that for so many people across the globe the legal status of colonies may have disappeared, but colonial exploitation and capitalist extraction of value continue as before.

There is a chapter devoted to Bill Gates' 'Target Malaria project', which is intended to be a major technological intervention in the struggle against malaria, by using the very latest scientific discoveries in gene therapy. Its aim is, of course, wonderfully humane, but the case study clearly shows the application of technological 'cures' to problems involving human beings, their understandings and behaviours is fraught with difficulty. This example of 'philanthrocapitalism' is neatly laid out and challenged because Gates' idea that money in the global North can be the solution to poor people's needs is itself a part of the problem. In his world view, the money from outside comes with the Big Tech from outside and conducts itself in splendid isolation from the research subjects as well as from the eventual beneficiaries of the project. There is no attempt to understand how people feel about a high-tech approach to malarial control and the whole experience is a clear example of a project being thought up in an office, worked out in a laboratory and announced on social media – all without any meaningful input from the people who matter. Kapoor's collection really is a fascinating read and does what it says on the cover: it challenges us all, by making learners, teachers, researchers and activists dealing with issues of development take into account the needs and circumstances of dispossessed communities and thus change the emphasis and orientation of our work. In effect, the book's contributors remind us constantly and convincingly that peace and prosperity did not come to the global South with the ending of formal colonial rule.

But this is not a daunting or intimidating book. Readers of *Policy and Practice* will feel at home with the many references to Freire, Fanon, CLR James, the anti-globalisation movement, the coloniality of power, the corporate capitalism model, and so much more. I found practically every page was rewarding, either with new knowledge, new perceptions of familiar situations or ideas, or new ways of looking at problems with which we have wrestled for years. The development education sector has perhaps spoken too often and for too long with other members of the same community, and we have been attempting to help people in the global South even if we don't really know what 'they' want or need. This book emphasises the urgency of welcoming 'the other' into our intellectual community – and of ensuring that our community of learners, teachers, researchers and activists is not a closed shop of closed minds, but a vibrant

community of people committed to clearer values of social justice, of community struggle, of learning from the very fact of struggle and action for justice.

Aziz Choudry passed away in 2023 but this book is not only a very fitting tribute and memorial to him but – as he would have wanted – it is a call to action, in recognition that fancy PhDs do not solve society's most urgent problems, that 'ordinary' people have an awful lot to offer to our understanding of this wider world, and that a career in the development education sector is not worth two dimes if it does not add substantively to the ongoing struggle for social justice.

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Neil Alldred has spent more than fifty years working on development issues in both the global South and in Ireland and the UK. These two complementary perceptions convinced him that
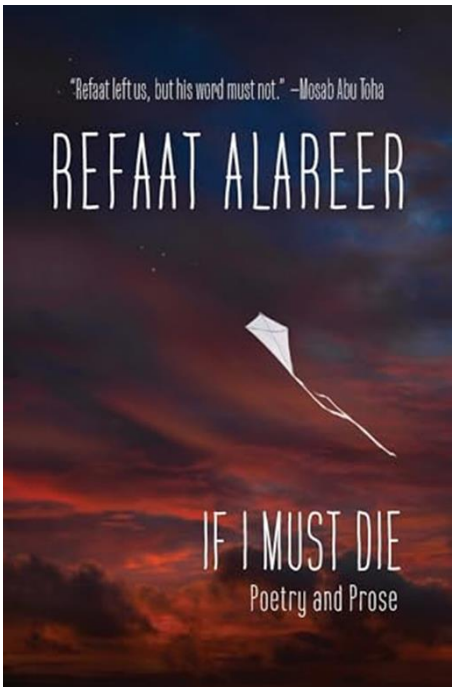
development has been a neatly managed concoction of global northern initiatives, defending and expanding the interests of elites and their supporters in the global North. Now in retirement, he seeks new avenues of pensioner activism.

If I Must Die: Poetry and Prose

Stephen McCloskey

Refaat Alareer (2024) *If I Must Die: Poetry and Prose*, London and New York: OR Books.

On 6 December 2023, the Palestinian poet, writer, teacher and activist Refaat Alareer, was murdered by Israeli forces in a targeted strike in northern Gaza together with his brother, sister, and four of his nephews. He had been sheltering with his family in a UN school in the al-Tufah neighbourhood of Gaza city and received an anonymous phonecall from an Israeli officer who told him that they knew of his location which would soon be reached by advancing ground forces. Refaat moved into his sister's apartment which eyewitnesses confirmed was deliberately targeted following weeks of death threats. Refaat had used *The Electronic Intifada* (Barrows-Friedman, 2025) and other online publications and social media sites to provide firsthand reportage of the horrors of Israel's genocide in Gaza (Albanese, 2024). It was the power and effectiveness of Refaat's online profile as an activist for Palestinian rights and an educator/mentor for his students that saw him targeted by the Israeli military.

Refaat was one of 519 educational staff killed during Israel's genocide in Gaza between 7 October 2023 and 25 February 2025 (OCHA, 2025a). In the same period, 12,441 students were killed, and 88 percent of school buildings were damaged or destroyed. The higher education sector was decimated with 57 university buildings damaged and 51 destroyed (Ibid.). This deliberate and systematic destruction of the Palestinian education system has been described as 'scholasticide' by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights in Gaza (Reliefweb, 2024).

If I Must Die is the title of a posthumously published anthology of Refaat Alareer's poetry, writings and interviews and, of course, includes the eponymous poem dedicated to his daughter Shymaa that has become an anthem of Palestinian humanity and loss in Gaza. It captured both the pain of bereavement and the exhortation to carry on living; a child's kite, 'white with a long tale', will bring 'back love' and 'bring hope' (Alareer, 2024: 19). In her 'Foreword' to *If I Must Die*, the Palestinian-American novelist, Susan Abulhawa, who corresponded with Refaat while he was writing his doctorate thesis at the University Putra Malaysia, writes that 'Refaat believed there was great value in speaking and writing to the people of empire to lay bare our humanity before them' (Ibid.: 10). This was why he risked so much to document and share the agonies of life under occupation, bombardment, blockade and genocide. The collection is edited and introduced by Yousef M. Aljamal, one of Refaat's students, who recounts his inspirational encouragement to become part of 'an army of young writers and bloggers' believing that in order to live in a free Palestine 'they have to create a free Palestine in their imagination through stories, films, novels and the arts' (Ibid.: xviii). Refaat fervently believed that education is a means toward breaking Israel's siege of Gaza and the isolation of its young people from the rest of the world. While he encouraged his students to pursue educational opportunities around the world, he also wanted them to return to Gaza and share their knowledge with learners. He described writing to his students as 'an obligation to ourselves and to humanity and to the future generations because it's usually the most important thing we leave behind' (Ibid.).

Gaza writes back

While revisiting Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (2008), Refaat sees Israel's colonial intent in how 'Friday's story was mediated by a self-appointed, colonial, supremacist master assuming control of a land that was not his' (Ibid.: 35). Palestinians, he argues, 'have to own their own narrative' … 'If Israel's apartheid has to be fought, Israel's narratives have to be challenged and exposed' (Ibid.: 35-36). It was the desire to assert the Palestinian narrative and challenge that written for them which prompted Refaat to invite his friends and students 'to write about what they endured' (Ibid.: 38) during Israel's twenty-three-day military onslaught in Gaza in 2008-09 called Operation Cast Lead. A total of 1,383 Palestinians were killed during Cast Lead, including 333 children and 114 women, and more than 5,300 were injured (OCHA, 2017). 'Every single person in Gaza had to mourn a loved one', wrote Refaat after Cast Lead, and his aim was to 'counterattack the twenty-three days of terror' with stories of 'life in the face of death, hope in the face of despair and selflessness in the face of horrible selfishness' (Alareer, 2024: 39). 'Writing is a testimony', he told his contributors, 'a memory that outlives any human experience, and an obligation to communicate with ourselves and the world' (Ibid.: 38).

A collection of fifteen stories was published under the title *Gaza Writes Back* (Alareer, 2014) and post-publication, Refaat embarked on a month-long tour of the United States (US) with two of the contributors to the book. He met with Jewish and Palestinian activists and learned about the 'often-invisible wall of racism' that scars so much of US society (Ibid.: 43). Refaat recognised a resonance in the struggle against police racism in the US with the struggle against isolation and segregation in Palestine. The journey from conceiving the idea for *Gaza Writes Back* to getting it compiled, edited, published and launched must have been one of the most rewarding of his career. He wrote that:

> "*Gaza Writes Back* is a weapon to shatter the Israeli narratives of a land without a people, of a people without roots, a people who never existed and never will – through this writing, we not only assert our existence, but also envision our future" (Ibid.: 42).

Operation Protective Edge

In 2014, Gaza suffered its third Israeli military operation in seven years. But Operation Protective Edge was of a scale and severity unprecedented to that point with the fifty days of relentless Israeli bombardment and ground assault killing 2,251 Palestinians, including 551 children and 299 women, with 11,231 injured (OCHA, 2015). Casualties on the Israeli side included six civilians and sixty-seven soldiers. For Refaat and his wife Nusayba, this was a traumatic period as they lost thirty members of their immediate family, including Refaat's brother Mohammed who he movingly remembers in a piece dated 28 July 2014 (Alareer, 2024: 47-53). 'There is a clear attempt to ethnically cleanse Palestine', he writes, 'to make us leave and never come back' (Ibid.: 52). He adds that: 'Israel has been acting like a wild rhino let loose in a field of lavender. Palestinians have been acting as they should: resilient, steadfast and even more determined' (Ibid.: 54).

As a teacher and parent, many of Refaat's articles deal with the impact of Israel's blockade and military aggressions on Gaza's children. He finds that his niece Raneen has become absent-minded since her father's death with a propensity to talk to herself. He writes about his fears of children growing up in a world that has betrayed them and forced to live in 'ruins and destruction' (Ibid.: 61). In a piece about 'Israel's killer bureaucracy' (Ibid.: 65), Refaat recounts how the blockade claimed the life of his eighteen-year-old cousin, Awad, who dies from bone cancer while awaiting Israeli permission to receive medical treatment outside Gaza. Israeli authorities often use permission to travel as blackmail to force patients and their families to become informants in return for what should be a fundamental right (Ibid.: 70). Medical permissions have also been used as traps to lure patients or guardians to a checkpoint on the promise of travel out of Gaza, only to find themselves arrested (Ibid.: 71). These bureaucratic cruelties are part of the daily apparatus of oppression visited on Gazans that are recorded so powerfully by Refaat's poems and prose. And, yet his poems find hope in the humanity around him such as that simply titled 'Mom' dated 30 July 2012:

> "On Ma's face
> There is a book
> And life's preface.
> Between these lines

And in these two caves
Life dwells.
That line is hope.
That one is love.
That death.
When she smiles,
She gives hope,
She gives love,
She gives life,
To life"
 (Ibid.: 93).

The great march of return

In a transcribed interview titled 'every Palestinian was a target', Refaat recalled his participation on the first day of the great march of return, an overwhelmingly non-violent and grassroots weekly protest held at Gaza's perimeter fence with Israel (Ibid.: 95). The demonstrations persisted between 30 March and 31 December 2018 despite Israel's use of lethal force on unarmed protesters. 'This was not a political march', argues Refaat, 'it was a popular march' (Ibid.: 96). An independent international commission of inquiry on the protests carried out by the Human Rights Council found that 189 Palestinians were killed, 170 of whom died from live ammunition shots to their heads and torso (Human Rights Council, 2019: 6). The inquiry found that, with the exceptions of two incidents, 'the use of live ammunition by Israeli security forces against demonstrators was unlawful' (Ibid.: 18). These findings are consistent with Refaat's account of the first day of the great march return with Israeli snipers firing early in the day as families assembled before and after Friday prayer. He recalled a general mood of hope and optimism as many of those who gathered on the march genuinely thought they were returning home. An estimated 100,000-150,000 gathered at the fence which meant that many of those who assembled were unaware that live fire was being used on protesters at the front of the march. Reflecting on Israel's brutal and indiscriminate use of lethal force on peaceful protesters Refaat concludes: 'no matter what method of resistance we will use, Israel will brutalize us, demonize us' (Alareer, 2024: 100).

Refaat's interviews, poetry and writings have a broad chronological structure covering the period 2010-2023 and address a wide range of topics including: cyber-surveillance; Israel's use of administrative detention (imprisonment without trial) and Palestinian hunger strikes; education as resistance; and Western complicity in Israel's human rights abuses. There is inevitably a degree of duplication in the anthology as he returns to critical themes related to the welfare and rights of Gazans under blockade and the constant threat of violence. Perhaps the most tender passages are those that deal with the impossible choices he faces as a parent to try to protect and reassure his children. As the children become swept up in the displacement, hunger and constant danger posed by Israel post-7 October 2023, Refaat writes: 'And the kids know. They feel all the lies we tell them, that it's going to be okay, that the bombing is far away. They're not working' (Ibid.: 187).

A war against everything

The final section of the book carries Refaat's articles and interviews between October and December 2023. On 7 October, Hamas killed 1,200 civilians and military personnel in a surprise attack on southern Israel (OCHA, 2024). Israel's subsequent ground and aerial military assault on Gaza claimed 48,405 Palestinian lives and injured 111,835 others by 4 March 2025. Refaat describes this as a 'war against everything'; 'a brutal European colonial enterprise that has been brutalizing Palestinians for over seven decades' (Alareer, 2024: 180; 182). He is devastated by news that the Islamic University has been targeted and fears for his 1,500 colleagues left without employment and 20,000 students without classes. There is a darkly comical tone to his description of the 'brutal normality' of the conflict which has settled in like a 'grumpy relative' who you can't stand but can't get rid of (Ibid.: 203). When his home is bombed, Refaat moves his family into a UN school like hundreds of thousands of Gazans carrying their most valuable possessions in plastic bags. He identifies the five major emotional stages during conflict: denial, fear, silence and numbness, hope, and despair and submission (Ibid.: 217). These final pieces are poignant and moving because we know they lead us to the end of Refaat's life on 6 December 2023. He was spared the agony of knowing that his beloved daughter Shymaa, for whom he dedicated the poem *If I Must Die*, would herself be killed with her family in an Israel airstrike on 26 April 2024 (Abunimah, 2024).

Refaat's anthology is infused throughout with hope and humanity. He writes in 2022:

> "we are very hopeful that the grassroots – the organisations, the unions, the people who vote – can say something. The more people take to the street, the more hope we have that this is going to have an impact" (Ibid.: 157).

His anthology is a fitting testimony to a life dedicated to education and his many students. He wrote that 'knowledge is Israel's worst enemy. Awareness is Israel's most hated and feared foe' (Ibid.: 34). Development educators will be uplifted by Refaat's faith in critical understanding and awareness raising, and his Freirean sense of education as the basis of anti-colonialism, anti-racism, anti-oppression and hope. Refaat posed this question to readers of *Gaza Writes Back*: 'Reader, as you peruse these chapters, what can or will you do, knowing that what you do can save lives and can change the course of history? Reader, will you make this matter?' (Ibid.: 137). The very same question can be posed to readers of *If I Must Die*.

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Stephen McCloskey is Director of the Centre for Global Education and Editor of *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*.