

# PUTTING INTO PRACTICE PEDAGOGY OF HOPE

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**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.

**Keywords:** Eco-anxiety; Global Citizenship; Pedagogy; Social Justice; Sustainable Development.

## 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 Atwood (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 devastating 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 DEC's 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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