DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND HOPE

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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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