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Special issue: *Global citizenship as a pedagogy of hope*

Research article

## Futures and hope of global citizenship education

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## Abstract

This article provides a conceptual discussion of the role of hope in promoting global citizenship education (GCED) and argues that a global perspective in education requires a hopeful imaginative ethos to lay the foundations for a new transformative pedagogy. After introducing UNESCO's recent report *Reimagining Our Futures Together*, which addresses urgent global challenges and assigns a major role to a global perspective in education, the article discusses the meaning of GCED as a non-neutral transformative approach in education. While this report, as well as previous ones, has been criticised for its visionary over-idealism and lack of attention to the power dynamics governing education, it will be argued that hope has transformational power and can play a political role in education. The article will then highlight contrasting ideas in envisioning different images of the future promoted by international organisations that have a significant

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impact on global educational policies and the construction of the global discourse on education. Finally, drawing especially on the legacy of Freire's vision of critical education, radical hope is reviewed by comparing it with two related issues: utopia and optimism.

**Keywords** global citizenship education; global education; UNESCO education report; futures of education; hope; pedagogy of hope; utopia; optimism

## Introduction

Drawing on the recent report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021), *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A new social contract*, this article provides a theoretical discussion on the educational role of hope. It argues that a global perspective in education requires an ethos imbued with hope, seen as the political virtue to imagine possible worlds, and to lay the foundations for a new transformative pedagogy.

The transformational role of hope in education has been widely addressed from different perspectives (Bourn, 2021; Freire, 2021; Halpin, 2003; hooks, 2003), but its pivotal role in the discourse on global citizenship education (GCED) has scarcely been scrutinised. In fact, the transformative role of hope is embedded in a GCED vision of the future, endorsing a paradigm shift that would view things differently. GCED is transformative because it presupposes a radical cultural shift to be seen as a horizon of change and an organising principle for rethinking the curriculum across diverse education settings, rather than new content or a set of competencies to be taught within the current institutional learning framework. In this sense, it can be regarded as an ethos connected to a future-oriented transformative pedagogy.

Regrettably, GCED is an ill-defined and multifaceted concept (Camicia and Franklin, 2011; Davies, 2006; Schattle, 2009); nonetheless, there is an extensive body of literature that seeks to conceptualise this widely acknowledged notion in education policy and practice, as well as in academic research – a goal that is also championed by UNESCO. This is why it is important not only to clarify what we mean when we talk about GCED, but also to highlight its transformative role, widely promoted by UNESCO, and the role of GCED educators as agents of change (Bourn, 2016).

After introducing the aforementioned report published by UNESCO (2021), which foreshadows new prospects in the future of education to meet urgent global challenges and assigns a major role to a global perspective in education, this article will clarify the meaning of GCED as a *framing paradigm* that allows for a non-neutral way of thinking. Next, the article will address the notion of hope in education by highlighting different and contrasting ideas in envisioning different images of the future promoted by international organisations that have a significant impact on national educational policies and the construction of the global discourse on education. Subsequently, following Freire's (2021) later work on the pedagogy of hope, the concept of hope will be compared and contrasted with similar but not identical ideas, such as optimism and utopia. Finally, the article will argue that critical hope is needed as a political virtue for educators and policymakers to overthrow the fatalism and passive acceptance of the present embodied in the neoliberal narrative.

## The UNESCO report *Reimagining Our Futures Together*

Transformative education is not a well-defined approach (Taylor, 1998). Originally grounded in Mezirow's (1978) work, it is understood here, following Freire (2020), as a powerful tool for social change that enables the oppressed to break the cycle of oppression and promote social change and critical reflection.

To achieve this change, educational systems should be driven by a strong 'future-facing vision that can shift current systems and values' (Odell et al., 2020: 916). This is why UNESCO's recent exercise in reimagining the futures of education is particularly relevant for examining the transformative role of GCED.

More than 25 years after *Learning to Be: The world of education today and tomorrow* (Faure et al., 1972), UNESCO launched the drafting of an ambitious report aimed at reimagining how knowledge

and education can shape the future of humanity and the planet. Following two years of work amid the Covid-19 global health crisis, an authoritative independent international commission of thought-leaders from diverse fields and different regions of the world, chaired by Sahle-Work Zewde, the president of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, issued the report *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (UNESCO, 2021). Significantly, the commission was led by a woman from an African country, and was composed of experts from the worlds of politics, academia, the arts, science, business and education, including António Novoa, Fernando Reimers and Arjun Appadurai.

This is the third time in UNESCO's history that a commission has been set up to rethink education at a global level (Elfert, 2018), with the previous instances producing the renowned reports by Faure et al. (1972) and Delors et al. (1996).

The UNESCO (2021) report, like the previous two, marks crucial historical steps forwards in recognising the transformative role of education. It also reflects UNESCO's catalysing role in analysing the problems that challenge the present and future of humanity and the planet, and also in identifying innovative responses for educational policies and practices.

In particular, by looking ahead to 2050 – a time frame beyond that of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the report *Reimagining Our Futures Together* (UNESCO, 2021) highlights both the emerging challenges facing education in these complex times and the opportunities that education can offer in terms of fuelling social change and ensuring the interests of future generations. On closer inspection, however, the report's recurring references to the themes of *emergency* and *hope* acquire a particular significance, considering that the committee worked during a global pandemic that also caused unprecedented disruption to millions of students around the world. The entire report is punctuated by these two keywords, not only indicating the dramatic realism of this reflection, but also emphasising the transformative potential of education to help us exit the emergency and build possible futures (significantly, in the plural form).

The report also claims that to create peaceful, just and sustainable futures, education itself should be transformed by changing the system of relations not only between men and women, but also between humankind, the planet and technology.

To this end, the commission indicates a number of priorities and imperatives to which education can make a transformative contribution. These can be placed on three levels, all of which call for a radical rethinking of the premises and aims of educational action:

1. To heal the wounds of deep inequalities within and across nations. The report claims that it is vital to rebuild a solidarity-based, cooperative and socially just social architecture so as to repair the injustices generated by social inequalities and gender inequalities, and more generally to counter power asymmetries. Above all, however, it promotes a decolonising vision of North–South relations, beginning from a decolonial redefinition of the shared knowledge that takes shape in school curricula.
2. To redefine humans' relationship with the environment, overcoming the anthropocentric humanism that has justified an irresponsible relationship with the biosphere, unconditional exploitation of natural resources, systematic pollution and a recklessly myopic perspective on climate change. The report claims that the anthropocentric humanism underpinning school curricula must be profoundly reconsidered from an ecological justice perspective, implying structural inseparability between environmental and social issues.
3. To rethink the use of technologies, not only to bridge the inequalities of the digital gap so dramatically highlighted by the Covid-19 emergency, but also to propose new forms of digital citizenship necessary for a critical and responsible use of media and digital tools. I will not elaborate on this latter issue in this article.

In the UNESCO (2021) report, the idea of education as a common good with a public mandate – an idea which had already been discussed in the research (Locatelli, 2019), but rarely or never put into practice – is enriched with the notion of *knowledge common*. This is conceptualised as a collective body of knowledge, information and wisdom that humankind has accumulated through the generations, and which exists in a constant state of transformation. Framed in this way, invisible forms of knowledge heritage, such as that of Indigenous peoples and cultural minorities, can find the space to be recognised and valorised within curricula. These expected changes require a new social contract to shape more just, peaceful and sustainable futures, and this idea is the leitmotif running through the entire report, as well as being the subtitle of the report itself. Although the meaning of the concept of a social contract is not

clearly defined, the general orientation of the report is clear: it claims that, rather than recommendations and guidelines, what is needed is a new social contract for education (Elfert and Morris, 2022), whose peculiarities and limitations I have discussed elsewhere (Tarozzi and Milana, 2022).

Meeting these challenges requires adopting 'cooperation and solidarity pedagogies' as a founding principle that 'should be based on shared principles of non-discrimination, respect for diversity, and reparative justice, and framed by an ethic of care and of reciprocity' (UNESCO, 2021: 50). Above all, however, it demands a paradigm shift based on caring, healing and recovery (terms which abound in the report). These pedagogies are posited as enabling the construction of a future capable of repairing the wounds created by selfish, socially inequitable and ecologically unsustainable policies.

The second part of the report includes concrete proposals and guidelines for renewing education by rethinking its pedagogical premises, school curricula and teacher training, with universities framed as having a key role among types of educational agencies. These proposals are definitely innovative, and they deserve more space than is available here, but the integrated perspective proposed by the commission is worth examining in more depth: the core point conveyed vividly by the report is that we need to reconceptualise how human beings relate to each other (the human sphere), to the planet (the non-human natural sphere) and to technologies (the non-human artificial sphere). Integrated and holistic, this vision echoes the one represented by GCED.

Unlike the twentieth century, when education was aimed at developing skills to support national citizenship, as also reflected in earlier reports (Faure et al., 1972; Delors et al., 1996), the futures in the UNESCO (2021) report are shared, closely interconnected and global, and they involve various human and non-human spheres.

The paradigm shift advocated here in the relationship between humans and the planet is also reflected in some educational practices being enacted outside and inside school settings. In particular, GCED seems to respond to this need, in that it represents an educational approach framing the core idea of interdependence and integration between the social and natural spheres.

In the next section, prior to examining the idea of the future conveyed by the UNESCO (2021) report, GCED's integrated approach will be briefly introduced by highlighting the role that UNESCO has played in promoting it, and the relevance of hope as one of its main building blocks.

## Global citizenship education as a framing paradigm

GCED takes shape from the very idea of interdependence and integration between the social sphere and the biosphere. Moreover, as it integrates knowledge and approaches that relate to each other (Tarozzi, 2021), it is the educational approach that specifically takes this holistic perspective as its organising principle. More broadly, the entire United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the need to adopt a cross-cutting view to address the challenges highlighted there. Notably, Target 4.7 of the SDGs casts students as global citizens who require the knowledge and skills to build the sustainable futures of an increasingly interdependent world. GCED is presented in the UNESCO (2021) report as the educational approach that gives rise to students with this interconnected vision of planetary responsibility, to be pursued by building sustainable futures in cooperation, not competition, with others.

The educational ideas of interdependence and holistic educational visions emerge in all their pedagogical power in the renewed conceptualisation of the social contract, stemming from a body of common knowledge that is neither exclusively Western nor exclusively national.

What is GCED, according to UNESCO's view? To counter conceptual vagueness and to empower GCED policy worldwide, over the last decade UNESCO has engaged in relentless efforts to reconcile many distinct streams of thought under a shared perspective (Pashby, 2018; Pigozzi, 2006; VanderDussen Toukan, 2018).

UNESCO (2014: 9) has advocated for recognising the holistic nature of GCED as a framing paradigm since 2014, when it was defined as: 'A framing paradigm which encapsulates how education can develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes learners need for securing a world which is more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable.'

Despite UNESCO's effort to conceptualise GCED as an all-encompassing term, however, the concept remains vague and widely debated (Hartung, 2017; Jooste and Heleta, 2017). The diverse views underpinning GCED prove that it is open to being understood according to many different typologies,

all rooted in contrasting discursive orientations and political positionings (Oxley and Morris, 2013; Pashby et al., 2020; Stein, 2015; Veugelers, 2011).

The debate on these issues is extremely rich and nuanced, but, in a nutshell, the many perspectives can be summarised as neoliberal, liberal and critical (Pashby et al., 2020):

1. Neoliberal: a growing trend promoted by supranational agencies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which promotes GCED as part of a neoliberal knowledge economy discourse (Shultz, 2007) focused on providing global expertise to global elites.
2. Liberal: GCED understood as an approach that fosters a widespread, often naive, sense of internationalism, a cosmopolitanism founded on human rights as a universal value and a sense of belonging to a common humanity.
3. Critical: an approach to GCED that emphasises equality and social justice as fundamental educational goals (Bourn, 2020; Jefferess, 2008; Tarozzi, 2021; Tarozzi and Torres, 2016), and advocates for a post-colonial perspective (Abdi et al., 2015).

Not all of these GCED perspectives are consistent with the philosophy of change promoted by the UNESCO (2021) report. While critical and liberal approaches to GCED endorse a creative vision for a better future – one that is more just, equal and decolonial, in line with the humanist and transformative perspective embedded in the report – neoliberal (Gaudelli, 2016; Shultz, 2007), economic (Mannion et al., 2011; Oxley and Morris, 2013) or entrepreneurial (Stein, 2015) models of GCED seem to fuel a conservative and neoliberal pessimism and fatalism, fixed in an eternal present, with little or no drive towards envisioning the future.

After reviewing the idea of the future proposed by UNESCO, and by its counterpart the OECD, and presenting some critiques of the report, the notion of hope, and its various meanings in relation to GCED, will be unpacked. The article will discuss what possible future GCED foreshadows, and what kind of hope can be seen as the key political, and not merely emotional, tool for building the future.

## Contrasting ideas of the future

Compared to the two previous reports (Delors et al., 1996; Faure et al., 1972), the UNESCO (2021) report presents elements of continuity and discontinuity. Above all, what the three reports have in common is an ideal vision of a just society and the role that education can play in building it by overcoming the mistakes of the present. Elfert and Morris (2022), while appreciating the way in which the report challenges the errors of neoliberalism in education, argue that it lacks a political vision and critical analysis of power dynamics, without which its vision of the future risks invoking abstract utopianism and confirming the status quo. They critically observe that ‘it describes a utopia that is not grounded in reality’ (Elfert and Morris, 2022: 41). According to the authors, these radical changes cannot be envisaged without addressing the relationship between power and knowledge, or examining the consequences of capitalism. This criticism echoes other critical views on UNESCO’s approach to education for sustainable development, suggesting that it tends to be weak in its critique of mainstream educational culture (Sterling, 2017).

Elfert and Morris (2022) also argue that there is a risk that the humanist vision of the future proposed by the report will be endorsed by other bodies advocating a neoliberal vision. They make explicit reference to the OECD, the twin international organisation that, like UNESCO, analyses the role of education in building a future global society. Indeed, this international organisation appears to be re-wrapping its approach to education inside a neo-humanist shell (Robertson, 2022).

In 2015, the OECD launched a project called Future of Education and Skills 2030, which resonates in many ways with the futurological path taken by UNESCO since the Second World War, as an international organisation offering policy for the future framed as anticipatory global governance strategies (Berten and Kranke, 2022). The first phase of the OECD project is aimed at identifying the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed by today’s students to shape their world in 2030, and how instructional systems should be reformed to enable this change. The OECD (2015: n.p.) proposed the Learning Compass 2030 as a navigational tool intended to guide students ‘to navigate by themselves through unfamiliar contexts, and find their direction in a meaningful and responsible way’.

In a recent article in a special issue of *Global Society* edited by Berten and Kranke (2022), Susan Robertson (2022) observed that, in the last decade, both UNESCO and the OECD have changed their

strategy for a vision of the future, proposing anticipatory strategies in an effort to claim for themselves the role of guardians of the future. Whereas the future imagined by the OECD places marked emphasis on responsibility and individual agency to succeed in future scenarios, UNESCO endorses a global perspective based on global social justice. Instead of focusing on individual global competencies, UNESCO continues to promote a humanistic idea of global citizenship possessed of its own political and transformative value, even though, as shown above, it is open to being interpreted in various ways.

Viewed in this way, UNESCO's concept of the future appears as non-politically neutral, counter to the arguments made by Elfert and Morris (2022) and Sterling (2017). Although it does not propose an explicit critique of neoliberal capitalism, it does propose a philosophy of the future (Robertson, 2022) that is critical and transformative and oriented towards social justice. Following Appadurai (2013), who sat on the commission that wrote the report, we could say that the future proposed by UNESCO is a cultural fact that endorses an *ethics of possibility*, whereas the one envisaged by the OECD is based on an *ethics of probability*. According to Appadurai (2013), the notion of an ethics of probability refers to those ways of thinking, feeling and acting that derive from accountability regimes, the obsession with measurement and the datafication of all spheres, including educational experiences. Appadurai (2013) argues that there is no room for the constructive role of hope in this vision of the future, since the future has been taken over by economics and economic knowledge.

By an ethics of possibility, in contrast, Appadurai (2013: 295) means:

those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase the horizons of hope, that expand the field of the imagination, that produce greater equity in what I have called the capacity to aspire, and that widen the field of informed, creative, and critical citizenship. This ethics is part and parcel of transnational civil society movements, progressive democratic organizations, and in general the politics of hope.

In this vision, education can instead play a critical role, imagining possible futures and empowering students' capacity to aspire. It must be acknowledged, of course, that the capacity to aspire and hope is itself not equally distributed, and that disadvantaged and underprivileged people struggle more to build aspirations for a better world. Therefore, the capacity to aspire must be seen as a social and collective, and thus as a political, capacity.

In sum, since futures are not predetermined, to build a possible future and not only a probable one, it is fundamental that each and every person be equally educated in the capacity to aspire. GCED embodies this future-facing vision and its transformative implications for a radical cultural shift in education. This transformative capacity can also be defined as hope. In educational terms, constructing the future requires a pedagogy of hope empowering students to imagine possible futures and build them. Since the term *hope* is extremely broad, and frayed by extensive use, however, it is necessary to clarify this concept in order to reconceptualise the idea of transformative hope in education as a political approach to change. In the concluding section, following Freire, who, together with bell hooks, is one of the few authors quoted directly in the report, at the beginning of Chapter 7 (UNESCO, 2021), I will outline various visions of hope to pinpoint a critical hope that is inherently transformative and political.

## Hope and utopia in education

Hope is a very broad and ambiguous term used in a variety of linguistic discourses, including everyday speech. In this section, I will aim to clarify this multifaceted concept and why it is needed in today's education. In particular, following Freire (2021), I argue that hope and its transformational power, as embedded in GCED, have a political role to play in education. A radical idea of hope is reviewed here by examining various approaches to its pedagogical use. Related issues such as utopia and optimism are also examined, drawing on the legacy of Freire's contribution to critical education especially.

According to Freire's (2021) *Pedagogy of Hope*, even today there is still an overwhelmingly urgent and timely need to reiterate the role of hope, not only in educational processes, but also in educational policies. Critical hope is what is needed to transform social reality and to imagine possible futures. It is also particularly important in the historically uncertain moment of the present, in which an entire generation of youth is emerging from the global crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the resultant worrying social and economic conditions – a generation pervaded by deep existential malaise, often with no vision of the future and often unable to cultivate the feeling of hope. As a recent Italian

survey shows, 6 out of 10 young people have changed their view of the future as a result of the pandemic, and only 22 per cent believe that the future will be better (Censis, 2022). Similar results have been found in Australia, where young people have been those most dramatically impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially when it comes to their future prospects (Biddle et al., 2022).

Even beyond the present circumstances, however, the understandable hopelessness with which the new generations view their future, and that of the planet, is also dictated by other, structural, conditions. Neoliberalism has become the dominant narrative of this century (Teodoro, 2020; Torres, 2011), bringing with it insecurity in the labour market, harsh competition and profound injustice. This social concern is coupled with concern for the future of the planet, heading as it is towards an irreversible climate crisis, as well as with the disenchantment that stems from an awareness that world governments are doing little or nothing to stave off disaster. Nevertheless, it is precisely under these conditions – and indeed because of them – that progressive educators and policymakers need to be able to cultivate and promote a perspective of hope for change that is critical rather than naive, as recently argued by Douglas Bourn (2021). In precisely this moment, when the dominant discourse, in the name of cynical realism, is calling for passive acceptance of the fact that we have no alternative to choices based on economic rationality and anticipatory regimes, education for global social justice must be able to nurture hope and optimism – always critical and never idealistic – for social transformation. In this sense, hope is an ‘ontological need’ that allows us to challenge the dominant ‘pragmatic discourse that would have us adapt to the facts of reality’ (Freire, 2021: 1).

That is why, drawing on, but also moving beyond, Freire (2021), I argue that a global perspective in education requires a hopeful imaginative ethos in order to think in another way, and to lay the foundations for a new transformative pedagogy.

In his *Pedagogy of Hope*, published in Portuguese in 1992 and the following year in Spanish, Freire (2021) raises the issue of how hope can be fostered through education, a key issue for all progressive educators in an era dominated by neoliberal discourse.

In the introduction, Freire (2021: 1) describes himself as ‘hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative’; to immediately dispel the risk that this formula might be interpreted as abstract idealism, he highlights the concept of critical hope and its transformative power. Beginning with his earliest works, the dimension of hope has always been closely connected with the notion of *conscientização* (conscientisation) in Freire’s thought. This conscientisation is the critical attitude that enables individuals to become aware of the reality of oppression, but also of their power to transform it. Such an awareness requires adopting a utopian stance towards the world, not only cognitively, but also transformatively, and thus politically.

Like Freire (2021: 1), I believe that nurturing hope is ‘an existential, concrete imperative’; it involves believing that hope has the power to unveil the contradictions, injustices and mystifications that a hopeless pragmatic fatalism tends to generate. I am in accordance with Freire’s (2021) criticism of the fatalist neoliberal ideology, according to which we must accept the natural order of events as if it were an ineluctable result of history. I join Freire (2021) in believing in the political role of hope to pave the way for change by showing that another world is always possible. Like Freire (2021: 2), I hold that hope is crucial but not sufficient in itself – that there is no hope in sheer hopefulness, and that ‘just to hope is to hope in vain’.

Beyond Freire (2021), however, I also believe that a pedagogy of hope is needed both to think and to achieve global social justice. Hope is necessary in order to conceptualise a global perspective on education that considers equality and social justice as imperative. In contrast, hopelessness and fatalism force us to understand global education in merely pragmatical terms, as an efficient way to educate global elites or to spread an entrepreneurial attitude worldwide. However, hope is also needed to act to put global social justice into practice.

Unlike Freire (2021), I furthermore maintain that terms such as *hope*, *utopia* and *optimism* – which Freire too often uses interchangeably – are closely related, but actually have different meanings, and point at different targets. A brief clarification of the terms *hope*, *optimism* and *utopia* therefore seems to be in order.

The very concept of hope is ambiguous, and sometimes entangled with strong ideological assumptions. In many neo-Latin languages, it is embedded in the Catholic tradition: capitalised, Hope is one of the three theological virtues, along with Faith and Charity, the foundation of Christian moral activity. In the pre-Christian Western tradition, instead, the Greek concept of *Elpis* seems to refer to an undifferentiated expectation for the future, without the subject having any transformative intentionality.

Accordingly, *Elpis*, or *Spes* for the Romans, is worshipped as a goddess to which humans can turn in order to appease the future, ensure a rich harvest, an advantageous marriage or a prosperous future for a new-born child. In antiquity, this mythological vision of hope was criticised by Aristotle and Stoicism. On the one hand, they critiqued it on the grounds that it obscures the truth, confusing our perception of reality and the future by masking it with often unfounded and visionary expectations. On the other hand, it was criticised for being too emotionally charged, and therefore opposed to the rational view that stoically accepts the harsh reality of the world.

Both the deification of hope in Greco-Latin mythology and hope as a Christian virtue, coupled with Providence and its salvific power, end up undermining the role of individuals in creating their futures. Hope understood in this way deprives subjects of agency and renders them non-responsible.

Conversely, the version of hope that might underpin global social justice is *radical hope* (Lear, 2006; Swanson and Gamal, 2021); this version is an eminently political virtue and it is characterised by its great transformative power. It has the power to inform pedagogies and educational practices, and to provide both learners and educators with a perspective for change.

This latter conceptualisation of hope echoes Ernst Bloch's (1986) *The Principle of Hope*, a genuine encyclopaedia of hope that attempts to combine the scientific, rational Marxian perspective with a more existential and spiritual vision. In this book, Bloch (1986) invites us not to take the world as it is, but, through hope, to make the effort to see how things are moving, how they evolve. Hope is thus a cognitive and political act of anticipation of that which is not yet given. However, it also takes on a critical value for the present, as a sense of possibility that acts counter to the hopelessness, routine and laziness that constitute the antidepressants allowing people to endure bourgeois life.

From this vision of hope emanates a perspective of *optimism*. As Bertolini (2021) argues, all educators must necessarily be optimistic: not with the candid naivety of Voltaire's Pangloss, but because their optimism originates from the intentional drive of possibility, the intrinsic capacity of every authentic educational practice to recognise possible futures within every educational experience and in every subject in training.

In this sense, optimism is a pedagogical virtue structurally linked to a political perspective that evokes Gramsci's optimism of the will. In a letter to his brother Carlo, dated 19 December 1929, referring to his experience in prison, Gramsci (2011: 299) acknowledges that he was trying to overcome both pessimism and optimism as trivial concepts: 'I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will.' The latter is not only a moral virtue; it is also a fundamental perspective of political theory thanks to which we can perceive the possibility of our influencing processes of social change.

In political activity, Gramsci (2011) discards daydreaming and abstract idealism with its consolatory style and lack of concrete power to make a positive impact on life (Tarozzi and Torres, 2016). Rather than gazing naively at some dreamed-of future, his optimism is firmly anchored in the present that one wants to change, and in the dynamics through which the present might develop. A realistic understanding of the present, especially based on historical knowledge, brings with it a pessimism of the intellect, that is, as the tendency to glean worst-case scenarios from the critical analysis of historical reality; indeed, this key political perspective should always be coupled with the optimism of the will. Unlike naive utopianism and romantic idealism, the moral laziness that paved the way for Nazi-Fascism, Gramsci's (2011) pessimism of the intellect makes people active, responsible and committed. It is only from this soil that the optimism of the will – an existential but also political attitude that can be tempered by the hard trials of life and critical analysis of reality – can germinate. On the basis of such optimism, people can develop an awareness characterised by enough energy and momentum to face the political challenges of change, with responsibility and ethical and political coherence.

Another key concept related to hope that plays a crucial role in Freire's work, and in that of those building on him, is *utopia*: an ideal project that is driven by good intentions but cannot actually be achieved. Beyond the utopian studies which have tried to conceptualise this notion in positive terms (Claeys, 2010), in a strict sense the term is ill-suited for describing the political attitude of those who envision possibilities for change and act concretely to realise them. It literally envisages the visionary and dreamy, and therefore submissive, attitude of those who take refuge in dreams, rather than struggling for change. In Freire's (2021) view, however, utopia is not unrealisable idealism, even if it is in fact unrealisable by definition. Rather, utopia can be a vision of the future, provided that it is coupled with a rational understanding of the present, or, as Appadurai (2013: 3) nicely puts it, with an existential struggle to 'find the right balance between utopia and despair'.



Freire (2021) tries to show that he conceptualises utopia not as abstract idealism or vain aspiration for the unattainable, but as a historical commitment, similar to the position that Torres takes when he describes the SDGs as a new utopia of the twenty-first century (Tarozzi and Torres, 2022).

Utopia is linked to hope, since only 'utopians can be prophetic or hopefuls' (Freire, 1972, cited in Catarci, 2016: 52). Within this framework, Freire (2021: 70) evocatively defines his utopia as 'unusual possible' or 'untested feasible' (*inédito viável*). It represents a theoretical and practical background to counter two contrasting stances that tend to anchor educators and policymakers to the present: hopelessness, fatalism and resignation on the one side, and illusions and naive optimism on the other.

Utopia is the scenario in which an intolerable present pervaded by oppression and injustice comes up against a future that must necessarily be built collectively. Taking a stand against the neoliberal fatalism of passively accepting the present, Freire (2021: 1) calls for non-naive critical hope: 'we need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water'.

In contrast to the neoliberal market-centred dystopian vision dominated by personal interests, where hope can only exist on the individual level, Giroux (2003: 477) similarly argues for 'educated hope' as a form of militant utopianism to drive social struggle.

## Conclusion: critical hope as a political virtue

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. The mantra of TINA also characterises the neutral educational perspective lacking in political vision and is therefore fixated on technicalities in which such technical concerns are delegated to experts acting on the basis of seemingly rational logic and predictive models of the future. On the contrary, a pedagogy of hope could provide a conceptual framework for GCED, and for its potential role in addressing contemporary social and environmental challenges.

In this article, I have provided a conceptual analysis of the UNESCO (2021) report *Reimagining Our Futures Together* and the vision it conveys, in which a global perspective in education is assigned a central role. Not all GCED perspectives are consistent with a vision of the transformative possibilities of education, however. A social justice global education is, but to be such, it must be infused with the pedagogy of hope to increase its transformative potential and to foster the 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2013: 179) to a better world. To avoid slipping into empty idealism, however, the notion of hope in education has been examined in depth, showing its various meanings and distinguishing it from similar concepts, such as optimism and utopia. Visions that deny the global perspective in education, as seemingly found in emerging ethnic-nationalisms or right-wing populisms or other visions of GCED (particularly the neoliberal one), do not require hope as a political virtue to imagine possible futures through transformative education.

What emerges from the UNESCO report and a vision of global social justice based on Freire's (2021) pedagogy of hope is critical hope as a political virtue that can pave the way for a possible and preferable future, not only one that is statistically probable. This critical hope will enable students to creatively envisage possible futures, thereby empowering them to take transformative action.

In concluding his *lectio magistralis* at the University of Bologna, dedicated to the idea of global citizenship through the spirit of the Renaissance and Leonardo, Daisaku Ikeda mentioned the importance of hope, quoting a tercet from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Alighieri, 1909–14: Purgatorio IX, 46–8), in which the poet awakens in fear in purgatory and is encouraged by his guide Virgil not to lose hope:

*'Non aver tema', disse il mio signore;  
'fatti sicur, ché noi semo a buon punto;  
non stringer, ma rallarga ogne vigore'.*

'Fear not,' my master cried,  
'Assured we are at a happy point. Thy strength  
Shrink not, but rise dilated.'

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Conflicts of interest statement

At time of publication the author is UNESCO Chair in Global Citizenship Education in Higher Education. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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