Resistance of Hope: A Pedagogical Response to the Politics of Fear

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From "Sad Passions" to the Politics of Resignation

Almost two decades ago, Miguel Benasayag and Gérard Schmit (2005) coined the expression *sad passions* to describe the widespread feelings of powerlessness, fear, and frustration that tend to paralyse political action and foster regressive and passive attitudes. Yet passions are not merely private phenomena or inner states. They are social energies that shape collective action and contribute to the modelling of political imaginaries (Pulcini, 2020).

The economic and social transformations associated with neoliberalism have provided fertile ground for the emergence of such emotional dynamics. Growing precarity, permanent competition, and a pervasive sense of vulnerability have nurtured feelings of disengagement, uncertainty and disempowerment. At the same time, neoliberal discourse has nourished a form of social pessimism that invites individuals to internalise resignation through the logic of TINA (*There Is No Alternative*). According to this view, market-oriented policies, competitiveness, and performativity are perceived not as political choices but as unavoidable necessities, notwithstanding their profound role in exacerbating inequalities, social exclusion, and democratic disengagement.

More recently, these conditions have also nourished the rise of right-wing populist movements. To neoliberal pessimism they have added a further repertoire of sad passions, dominated by defensive fears, identity-based grievances, and nativist sentiments. Their political appeal relies less on rational argument than on the mobilisation of emotion, appealing to voters' "hot" fears and resentments rather than to their "cold" critical reasoning.

Giorgia Serughetti (2021) has shown how contemporary radical right movements are fuelled by and politically capitalise on destructive and toxic passions such as anxiety and uncertainty. These emotions inform social imaginaries that often culminate in forms of despair, cynicism, resignation, and fatalism, emotions that are paralysing and defuturising.

Against this bleak backdrop, the need for an alternative *paideia* becomes increasingly urgent. Elena Pulcini (2020) has called for a critical and transformative educational project

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capable of countering the sense of defeat that surrounds contemporary political discourse, nourished by right-wing populisms and of fostering different passions and new emotional dispositions. Among these, hope occupies a particularly important place.

Hope as Resistance and Political Imagination

In this perspective, hope can be understood as a form of resistance. It is not merely an emotion in itself; rather, it is connected to a wider constellation of affective states that contribute to the construction of political imaginaries. For this reason, hope can be regarded as a crucial pedagogical and political resource for imagining and building the future.

Hope is a broad and polysemic concept. It may be understood as a passion linked to emotions such as trust, desire, courage, and motivation. It can also be conceived as a disposition, an attitude, or, when endowed with ethical significance, a virtue. Overall, hope may be defined as an affective-cognitive orientation toward a future good that is possible yet uncertain, and that can inspire social action.

The value of this definition lies less in attempting to reify hope than in claiming its pedagogical significance and its educability, provided that education adopts a critical and transformative posture. Thus conceived, it captures the complexity of hope by integrating three dimensions: an emotional dimension, expressed through desire and aspiration; a cognitive dimension, involving the assessment of possibilities; and a practical dimension, oriented toward individual agency.

On the one hand, hope entails an affective orientation toward the future: a tension toward what does not yet exist but can be imagined and desired. On the other hand, it requires an assessment of what is possible and of the conditions that make alternative futures conceivable. Finally, hope possesses a pragmatic dimension, since it mobilises commitment and guides both individual and collective action.

The Legacy of Critical Pedagogy

The educational implications of hope originate from the tradition of critical pedagogy, whose foundational text is certainly Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 2021). Freire's insights have subsequently been developed by numerous scholars and educators, including bell hooks, who explicitly incorporated a "pedagogy of hope" into the subtitle of *Teaching Community* (hooks, 2003).

In recent years, the transformative role of hope has received renewed attention in international educational debates (Halpin, 2003; Carolissen et al., 2011; Bourn, 2021; Vittoria, 2023). This renewed interest is closely connected to the growing sense of defeat and resignation that many people experience when confronted with global and planetary challenges (Tarozzi, 2023; Bourn & Tarozzi, 2023; McCloskey, 2025).

Within this framework, hope can be situated at the heart of Global Citizenship Education, understood not merely as a curricular matter but as a transformative horizon and an organising principle for social change. This is the perspective I have explored in my recent book *Cultivating Hope* (Tarozzi, 2025).

Because futures are not predetermined, constructing possible futures rather than merely adapting to probable ones requires what Arjun Appadurai eminently called the "capacity to

aspire" (Appadurai, 2013). It is precisely here that the crucial role of education really stands out: This capacity is not inscribed in individuals' DNA as a fixed attribute, but education can contribute to its development. Educational processes can provide learners of all ages with the cultural and symbolic resources needed to imagine futures different from the present.

Cultivating hope therefore becomes a fundamental educational practice. It allows us to challenge the fatalism and resignation that often accompany contemporary crises while fostering alternative passions to those promoted by right-wing populist discourse: trust, optimism, commitment, responsibility, moral energy, empathy, and care.

Developing a pedagogy of hope means empowering students not only to imagine alternative futures but also to participate actively in their construction. At the same time, the widespread and often rhetorical use of the concept requires a renewed theoretical effort to reclaim hope as a genuinely political and transformative category of education.

Hope as a Radical and Political Virtue

The conception of hope proposed here is politically radical. Hope is not understood as a private feeling of reassurance but as the expression of a transformative potential linked to the pursuit of global social justice.

This radical understanding of hope draws directly on Freire's work. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, he reaffirms hope as an ontological condition of educational and political action. In an age marked by historical uncertainty, economic crises, and deep inequalities, cultivating critical hope becomes particularly urgent. As Freire famously writes, "We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water" (Freire, 2021, p. 14). Against the backdrop of the widespread disenchantment and social fatalism that pervade Western societies, an education committed to global social justice must resist the cynical realism that presents the existing economic order as inevitable.

For Freire, however, hope does not coincide with naïve optimism, since he is well aware that "just to hope is to hope in vain" (p.14). Rather, it constitutes an "existential, concrete imperative". In this sense, hope is closely connected to the notion of utopia.

Freire's evocative concept of the *inédito viável*, which can be rendered as "untested feasible" or "unusual possible", captures the possibility of imagining and creating what does not yet exist but can emerge through collective action. Utopia, in this sense, is not an unattainable dream but a horizon of possibility that guides political and educational engagement.

Hope, therefore, becomes a transformative political virtue: a disposition that can be consciously chosen, cultivated, and strengthened through education. This perspective echoes Freire's insistence on the deep reciprocity between education and politics (Freire, 2018). Indeed, one of the central aims of a pedagogy of hope is to challenge the TINA logic, or, in Freire's terms, its cynical realism, that presents the existing social and economic order as inevitable and immutable.

Cultivating hope, by contrast, means keeping the horizon of the possible open. It means nurturing the capacity to imagine alternatives, which is a defining feature of both education and politics.

Educated Hope in an Age of Global Crises

The relevance of this educational posture becomes particularly evident in the contemporary historical moment. Economic insecurity, social inequalities, climate disruption, and growing distrust in democratic institutions have generated widespread feelings of hopelessness, disenchantment, and fatalism. These conditions provide fertile ground for right-wing populisms, which repurpose and amplify such anxieties through narratives of fear, and nostalgic visions of an idealised past portrayed as orderly, secure, and harmonious.

In opposition to the neoliberal fatalism that naturalises the existing order, critical pedagogy advocates what Henry Giroux (2003) calls *educated hope*: a form of militant utopianism capable of orienting education toward social justice and sustaining the political imagination required for social transformation.

Educated hope also represents a form of critical imagination that supports civic engagement and democratic participation. Such participation is increasingly threatened by the passivity generated by fear and uncertainty, by the abandonment of civic responsibility, and by forms of cynical resignation that make authoritarian solutions appear attractive because they offer simple, reassuring and securitarian responses to complex problems.

Educating Alternative Passions

If radical right movements draw strength from destructive passions, it is possible to cultivate alternative emotional dispositions. These passions are not simply given by nature; they can be nurtured, strengthened, and especially educated.

Hope, as it has been conceived here, provides the integrative framework that brings together and orients a constellation of positive emotions that nourish a transformative political discourse. For this reason, it represents an indispensable pedagogical and political resource for developing political imagination and orienting action toward possible futures.

This conviction has informed several research and educational projects that I have developed in recent years with adults and young adults designed to support the development of social change agents. These initiatives have focused on ethically and politically sensitive issues, including Global Citizenship Education and the promotion of more just, sustainable, peaceful, and inclusive societies.

The pedagogical approaches employed in these projects draw inspiration from what I have called a *pedagogy of the sublime*: a form of embodied and experiential learning that emerges through encounters with the unexpected. Such experiences can generate both discomfort and fear, but also wonder and astonishment. Through these dissonant experiences, students are invited to break through the perimeter constructed by implicit assumptions, prejudices, and stereotypical, repetitive representations. By stepping outside their comfort zones, they are encouraged to overcome the fear of encountering otherness and to gain first-hand experience of unfamiliar social and cultural contexts (Tarozzi, 2025).

Conclusion: Keeping the Horizon Open

If fear is one of the principal emotional resources mobilised by radical right politics to sustain nativist, exclusionary and resentful narratives, education has both the possibility and the

responsibility to cultivate alternative passions capable of supporting the exercise of democratic citizenship.

Political emotions are not natural givens or spontaneous reactions to social events. They are shaped, sedimented, and transformed within cultural contexts and educational practices. For this reason, an education committed to global social justice cannot be limited to the transmission of knowledge and skills. It must also assume the explicit task of educating public emotions.

To cultivate hope means to keep the horizon of possibility open. It means acting beyond the boundaries of the present order, resisting fatalistic narratives that portray existing arrangements as inevitable, and sustaining the capacity to imagine alternative futures free from fear. Ultimately, hope is not an escape from reality but a way of engaging with it critically and transformatively. It is the emotional and political condition that allows individuals and communities to believe that another future remains possible, and to work collectively toward its realisation.

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