EDUCATION AS HOPE, EDUCATION IS HOPE. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICAL PATHWAYS TOWARDS A POSSIBLE FUTURE

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Abstract

This chapter explores the intrinsic and transformative relationship between education and hope, proposing that education is not merely a vehicle of hope, but the very embodiment of it. Drawing upon key theoretical frameworks, such as Snyder's Hope Theory, Freire's Pedagogy of Hope, and Appadurai's concept of the capacity to aspire, the text examines how hope functions as a motivational, cognitive, and relational process crucial for lifelong learning and social empowerment. The author discusses hope as a transversal competence and an act of personal and collective agency, capable of guiding individuals through adversity while inspiring educational communities to cultivate resilient and inclusive environments. Particular attention is given to the "enemies of hope"—resignation, cynicism, fatalism, and dogmatism—and to practical strategies for educators and communities to counter these dynamics. Ultimately, the chapter advocates for a renewed moral and pedagogical commitment to nurturing hope as a concrete force for personal development and societal transformation.

Keywords: Hope, Education, Empowerment, Future-oriented thinking, Lifelong learning

1. *Education and Hope: an unbreakable connection*

Education and hope are deeply intertwined, to the extent that some have proposed moving from the notion of *"Education as hope"* to *"Education is hope"*. Indeed, there can be no education without hope, just as there can be no hope without education. These two realities are fundamentally connected, both pointing towards the possibility of change and improvement. Every educational act, in whatever form it may take, is permeated by

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hope: whether education involves transmitting and sharing the traditions and cultures of the past or projecting oneself into the future and promoting transformation. In other words, education always implies an attentiveness to what is possible and an openness to what could be different and better. From this perspective, hope represents precisely the tension towards possibilities not yet realised.

This close relationship between education and hope is widely acknowledged in both academic literature and international educational policy. As Burde and King observe, «It is common wisdom, both in research and practice, that education fosters hope»[1] For instance, in regions affected by conflict or humanitarian crises, education is considered a crucial vehicle for restoring hope among young people. As one European commissioner declared, «It is our moral duty to bring hope to millions of children affected by crisis. Education in emergency situations is therefore an absolute priority». Similarly, international networks such as the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies emphasise that schools can mitigate the psychological impacts of conflict by creating stability, structure, and hope for the future. These assertions underscore how, especially in challenging contexts, education becomes a means of instilling hope, offering prospects where uncertainty and fear prevail.

It is therefore clear that education and hope form an inseparable pair, oriented towards the future and towards change. Education nourishes hope by opening horizons, cultivating possibilities, and providing the tools to realise them. Conversely, hope acts as the driving force behind educational action: the conviction that it is worth striving for possible improvement. Without hope, education would lose its impetus and its transformative purpose. As Paulo Freire reminds us, «To attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, is a frivolous illusion… hope is an ontological necessity which requires anchoring in practice to become concrete in historical reality»[2]. In other words, it is hope that renders the educational aspiration to transform reality tangible: without at least a minimum of hope, we could not even begin the educational process or the journey of change.

[1] D. Burde, E. King, *An agenda for hope: How education cultivates and dashes hope among youth in Nairobi and Karachi*, in «Comparative Education Review», 67(3), 2023, 367-389.

[2] P. Freire, *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed. Continuum. (Trad. it. Pedagogia della speranza,* Milano, Il Saggiatore 1992.

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2. *Hope between Psychology and Education: a future-oriented process*

From a scientific perspective, hope should not be understood as a vague optimism or as mere passive desire, but rather as an active, future-oriented psychological process. In positive psychology, C. R. Snyder's Hope Theory defines hope as «the perceived capability to derive pathways towards desired goals and to motivate oneself (agency) to use those pathways»[3]. This theory identifies three key components underpinning hopeful thinking:

1. **Goals** – Hope begins with having clear and meaningful goals that guide future behaviour. Without a goal to strive for, it makes little sense to speak of hope.
2. **Pathways** – The ability to plan routes and alternative strategies to achieve set goals. Hopeful individuals imagine multiple ways to overcome obstacles and move closer to their objectives.
3. **Agency** – The motivation and confidence required to embark on these pathways and persist despite challenges. In other words, agency thinking reflects the belief *"I can do this"*, which propels action towards the goal.

According to Snyder, the stronger an individual's confidence in their ability to formulate pathways and their drive to pursue them, the higher their level of hope. Hope, therefore, is not an ephemeral emotion but a complex cognitive-motivational construct that encompasses both *planning ability* (knowing how to identify routes to achieve objectives) and the *operational will* to actively pursue them. This helps to distinguish hope from related concepts: for instance, optimism refers to a general expectation of positive outcomes, often regardless of one's actions, whereas hope entails an active role by the individual in achieving the desired outcome. Similarly, self-efficacy involves confidence in carrying out a specific action but does not necessarily extend to achieving the desired result; hope, by contrast, combines both elements, integrating self-belief (personal competence) with the vision of a goal attainable through concrete planning and effort.

From an educational perspective, recognising hope as a future-oriented process means fostering in individuals the very capacities outlined by the psychology of hope: the ability to set meaningful goals, to design their educational and life pathways, and to motivate themselves in the face of

[3] C.R. Snyder, L. Irving, J. Anderson, *Hope and health*, in *Handbook of social and clinical psychology*, a cura di C.R. Snyder e D.R. Forsyth, Pergamon 1991.

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obstacles and crises. In pedagogical terms, hope is often linked to *planning ability*: to hope is not to daydream or passively indulge in wishful thinking, but to possess the ability to design realistic and attainable alternatives. As Snyder emphasises, vague or unrealistic "wishes" do not constitute genuine hope: if a goal is entirely unreachable or fanciful, it cannot truly be considered hopeful, as it lacks the reality-oriented thinking and the presence of concrete pathways. Real hope is thus far removed from idle dreams or passive optimism, as it demands concreteness; it is anchored in the principle of *future-oriented thinking*, a mindset persistently directed towards the future and towards possible choices.

Another fundamental aspect of hope is that, once initiated, it tends to reinforce itself in a circular way: imagining multiple pathways boosts one's sense of efficacy and thus motivation (agency), while motivated action helps to uncover new routes even in the face of obstacles. In this way, hope generates a virtuous cycle: those who actively hope are better equipped to confront difficulties, perceiving them as challenges to be overcome through alternative routes, rather than as insurmountable barriers. This intrinsic resilience explains why *"people with high levels of hope achieve better outcomes"* in many areas of life, from education to sport, from psychological well-being to social adjustment. Numerous studies indeed link high levels of hope to positive outcomes: for example, more hopeful students demonstrate stronger academic performance, greater perseverance, and better overall well-being compared to their less hopeful peers. A recent meta-analysis confirmed that hope makes a unique contribution to academic success, independently of factors such as intelligence quotient or personality traits. Specifically, cultivating hope in students strengthens their ability to pursue academic goals despite difficulties, reducing the risk of burnout and safeguarding their mental health. Therefore, hoping is not merely "thinking positively"; it is a concrete factor of achievement and resilience within educational pathways.

3. *Hope as a transversal competence and transformative act*

Within the educational context, hope can be regarded as an essential transversal competence, one of those fundamental abilities that support individuals throughout their personal and professional lives. It is no coincidence that contemporary pedagogy places strong emphasis on fostering

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personal planning, orientation skills, and self-motivation: all these competences find their core in hope. To hope means, in fact, to perceive oneself as an *agent* of change, to recognise in oneself (and in others) the capacity to make a difference. This agentive dimension immediately connects hope with education, since education is about helping individuals to find in their daily lives the meaning of their actions and to recognise themselves as capable of impacting reality

Luigi Pati aptly defines educational hope as «the desire to give concrete form to subjective potential, to pursue increasingly higher levels of awareness, imprinting a chosen direction upon one's personal development»[4]. From this perspective, educating for hope means accompanying individuals along a path of conscious self-realisation, where they can actualise their potential and orient it towards meaningful goals, progressively increasing their level of critical awareness (or, in Freire's terms, *conscientisation* — the critical consciousness of oneself and the world).

Hope therefore possesses a clear transformative and self-reflective value: it implies that individuals reflect upon themselves, their aspirations, and reframe their beliefs by opening their minds to new possibilities. In this sense, hope can trigger those processes of *frame of reference transformation* described by Mezirow in his theory of transformative learning. Unsurprisingly, Mezirow[5] describes hope as an act of self-reflection and transformation: it is when individuals hope for something better for themselves (and for others) that they begin to *change the way they perceive themselves and the world*. Hope invites people to *re-examine* the status quo within themselves, to imagine alternative scenarios, and thereby to revise their mental frameworks to embrace new possibilities.

For instance, an adult returning to education after years of inactivity must first *hope* to improve their circumstances: this hope prompts them to reconsider previously limiting beliefs ("I am no longer capable of studying") and to gradually transform them ("I can learn new things and change my job"). In this way, hope acts as a catalyst for empowerment: it initiates a growth process in which the individual, through reflection and experience, *transforms*, acquiring greater self-awareness, a sense of efficacy, and openness to change.

[4] L. Pati, *Educare alla speranza*, in «Pedagogia e vita», 3(4), 2006, pp. 74-89.

[5] J. Mezirow, *Transformative learning as discourse,* in «Journal of Transformative Education», 1(1), 2003, pp. 58-63.

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A concept that effectively illustrates hope as an educational competence is that of guidance: in educational and career guidance activities, individuals are supported in *designing their futures*, imagining educational or career pathways, and activating themselves to achieve them. *Guiding hope* is precisely the ability to envision a future for oneself and to chart routes towards it.

The pedagogist Andrea Canevaro, reflecting on the educability of individuals facing disadvantage, writes that we must «identify a pathway connecting the situation a person currently experiences with an ideal place they wish to reach, which may seem inaccessible given their condition. Connecting these two points on a hypothetical map becomes the opportunity to discover that there is not a desert between them, but rather other elements that make up the landscape of future life, connected to past and present life, which enable one to follow routes that draw closer to that ideal place, even if it is not fully attained»[6].

This compelling cartographic metaphor perfectly encapsulates the educational role of hope: helping individuals to map the journey from their current reality to a possible future, discovering that between the "here and now" and their aspirational goal, there is not an unbridgeable void, but rather a landscape filled with intermediate steps, resources, and opportunities waiting to be explored. Even if the ultimate ideal remains out of reach, the very act of hoping allows progress in the chosen direction, significantly improving the starting condition.

This process is inherently educational and transformative: by supporting someone in building hope for their future, we help them develop *life design competences*, resilience, autonomy, and the ability to learn from experience.

We can therefore affirm that hope, far from being merely an emotion, is a key competence for lifelong learning. It integrates cognitive aspects (such as planning and creative problem-solving), emotional dimensions (feeling motivated and confident despite uncertainties), relational skills (such as seeking support, collaborating, and drawing inspiration from others), and behavioural strategies (taking action, exercising personal agency). As such, it should be intentionally cultivated within educational settings.

For example, this can be achieved through teaching methods that pro-

[6] A. Canevaro, *Percorsi di integrazione*, in *Trattato di pedagogia speciale* a cura di D. Ianes, R. Vianello, Trento 2004.

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mote student autonomy and active participation, goal setting and planning exercises, and opportunities for success that strengthen personal efficacy. Educators can foster hope by *teaching students to learn from failure* (interpreting setbacks not as definitive verdicts but as information to adjust their course), developing critical and creative thinking (to see alternatives where others see dead ends), and encouraging students to *envision their futures* in positive and realistic terms. All of this renders hope a true "life skill," essential not only for learning but for personal and professional growth.

4. *Hope, Liberation, and Empowerment: the perspective of Critical Pedagogy*

Beyond the individual dimension, hope carries a powerful social and political significance, long recognised within the field of critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire, one of the foremost exponents of this approach, dedicated an entire work to the *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992), as a continuation of his seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For Freire, education is intrinsically an act of hope and liberation: teaching and learning mean believing in the *possibility* of transforming reality, especially for oppressed populations. Hope is what drives both educators and learners not to passively adapt to the status quo, but to strive to become *"more than what we are"* and *"different from what we are"*, as he writes. In other words, to hope within education is to reject the fatalistic acceptance of current conditions, imagining and collectively constructing more just and humane alternatives.

Freire insists that hope is neither pure illusion nor a messianic waiting: «without at least a minimum of hope, we cannot even begin the struggle, but without the struggle, hope diminishes, loses direction, and turns into despair». Authentic hope, then, is *concrete*; it must be "anchored in practice" (praxis) to become historical reality. In educational processes, this means that hope must translate into action: the hopeful educator is one who, despite being fully aware of present difficulties, stubbornly seeks openings for change and involves students in this effort of actively imagining the future. Freire's *pedagogy of hope* is essentially a pedagogy of empowerment: it aims to return to learners – often from marginalised or oppressed backgrounds – the power to believe in themselves and to impact the world. He writes that one of the tasks of the progressive educator is «to reveal the opportunities for hope, however challenging the circumstances… After all, without hope, we can do very little». Educating,

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therefore, means nurturing in learners that "capacity to aspire" (to borrow from Arjun Appadurai), which enables them to actively design their futures rather than passively endure them.

Appadurai, an anthropologist and development theorist, introduced the concept of the *capacity to aspire* to describe hope as a cultural and collective faculty. He emphasises that the capacity to cultivate aspirations is not equally distributed across societies — impoverished and marginalised groups often find their hopes stifled by contexts of deprivation. For this reason, «we must see the capacity to aspire as a social and collective capacity, without which words like 'empowerment', 'voice', and 'participation' are empty»[7]. This highlights a crucial point: hope is not solely an individual phenomenon but also a social and political one. A community deprived of hope will struggle to mobilise for change or to claim rights; by contrast, cultivating hope among people creates the emotional and cultural foundation for active participation, emancipation, and development.

In his influential essay *The Capacity to Aspire* (2004), Appadurai argues that empowering the poor requires, first and foremost, expanding their horizons of aspiration: when even the most disadvantaged social groups learn to "imagine elsewhere", the *not yet*, then terms like empowerment gain tangible meaning. In education, this translates into practices that encourage all students — regardless of their socio-economic background — to hold realistic dreams and ambitions for their future, while also equipping them with the means to pursue them. For example, mentoring programmes, career guidance, and service-learning initiatives in underprivileged schools can increase young people's capacity to aspire, exposing them to educational and professional pathways previously considered unimaginable and thus fostering an active form of hope.

It is important to recognise that the political dimension of hope concerns not only the oppressed but also educators and citizens more broadly. Martha Nussbaum has analysed in her works how societies steeped in fear and cynicism risk "stifling" collective hope, which is essential for sustaining democratic institutions and social progress. In *Political Emotions* (2013) and *The Monarchy of Fear* (2018), Nussbaum highlights how widespread negative emotions — such as resentment, cynicism, and a sense of powerlessness — can erode citizens' motivation to engage for the common good,

[7] A. Appadurai, *The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition,* in *Culture and public action,* a cura di V. Rao, M. Walton, Stanford 2004.

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leading to apathy. Conversely, cultivating public hope means nurturing feelings of possibility and trust in change: this requires leaders and educators capable of inspiring positive and credible visions of the future.

Nussbaum identifies what she calls *"schools of hope"*, referring to five domains (critical thinking, volunteering, inclusive religion, the arts, and dialogue) that can counteract the culture of fear and foster hopeful and responsible citizens. Even in uncertain times, she argues, it is crucial not to succumb to resignation or cynicism, but to cultivate hope by striving for justice, equality, and human dignity. This message resonates strongly within the educational sphere: schools themselves should be spaces of hope, where students not only acquire knowledge but also learn to trust in their capacity to change their destinies and contribute to society.

5. *Obstacles and adversaries of Hope in educational processes*

If hope is so central to educational processes, it is also essential to recognise and address what undermines it. In real contexts, there are various obstacles that can "paralyse" hope, both in students and educators. At least four can be identified — aptly termed the *"enemies of hope"* — which represent cultural attitudes or psychological dispositions capable of extinguishing the proactive drive of hope:

- **Resignation**: a form of passive surrender in the face of difficulties or perceived limitations. Resignation manifests in sentiments such as *"there is nothing more to be done"* or *"we've always done it this way; it's pointless to try and change."* It is a dangerous attitude because it stifles any attempt at innovation or improvement at its inception. In educational settings, resigned teachers or students cease to make efforts and accept the status quo, even when it is dysfunctional. Resignation often stems from repeated negative experiences without adequate support: those who feel persistently defeated may end up succumbing to despair. Counteracting it requires restoring a sense of efficacy (even if limited) and reframing failure not as a definitive condemnation but as an integral part of the learning process.
- **Cynicism:** an attitude of scornful disillusionment, whereby every action is suspected of being self-serving and expectations of change are derided. In education, cynicism is particularly toxic: a cynical

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educator communicates to students that striving is futile and that values such as effort or solidarity are naïve. This can devalue individuals entirely, making them feel "foolish" or naïve for having believed in something. Cynicism destroys hope because it *denies the possibility of sincerity and progress.* Combating it involves restoring confidence in values and in positive intentions: for instance, by highlighting real stories of improvement, showcasing acts of honesty and altruism, and demonstrating that change occurs because people dare to believe in it, despite cynicism.

- **Fatalism:** the belief that events are governed by fate or uncontrollable external forces, rendering human action irrelevant. In education, a fatalistic attitude leads to the perception that student outcomes are predetermined by factors such as family environment, luck, or misfortune, and that teaching efforts are inconsequential. Attributing success or failure systematically to external causes (*"it went well purely by chance"*, *"he failed because it was destined"*) results in disempowerment and self-devaluation. Fatalistic students do not credit themselves for their successes (*"I only got a good grade because the test was easy, not because I am capable"*) nor take responsibility for their failures (*"I failed because the teacher dislikes me, so there's no point in trying"*). Such an attitude extinguishes motivation. To counter this, it is crucial to foster realistic attributions: recognising both personal effort and external influences, without losing sight of what we can control. Promoting a *growth mindset*, for example, helps replace fatalism with the belief that, despite constraints, there is always room for improvement through practice and strategy.
- **Propaganda and dogmatic thinking:** at first glance, it may seem unusual to include "propaganda" among the enemies of hope, but here it refers to the kind of *coercive collective thinking* that allows no divergence or alternatives. In educational contexts, this can manifest as an intolerant environment dominated by a single ideological, political, or even methodological approach that suppresses creativity and individual initiatives. If *hope* implies the plurality of possibilities, propaganda dictates that there is only one permissible path. This destroys hope because it renders dissent or exploration of new routes unthinkable. For example, in a school rigidly anchored to top-down programmes with no flexibility, both teach-

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ers and students may lose hope of innovating or expressing diverse needs (*"this is how things have always been done, and questioning it is forbidden"*). Combating this enemy means defending freedom of thought and diversity of perspectives: democratic education encourages the exchange of ideas, participation, and the amplification of marginal voices, all elements that keep the horizon of possibility open and, consequently, nurture hope.

These *enemies of hope* can infiltrate educational environments insidiously, especially when operating under difficult conditions (schools with scarce resources, classes with severe disciplinary issues, socio-culturally deprived contexts, etc.). For instance, a teaching staff worn down by years of frustration may fall into cynicism or resignation, inadvertently transmitting this disenchantment to students. Likewise, young people raised in deprived environments, lacking positive role models, may develop fatalism or self-devaluation early on.

Recognising these attitudes and naming them is the first step towards overcoming them, refocusing attention on the fact that they are not inevitable truths but rather modifiable mindsets. In this regard, working on *emotions* and *narratives* proves beneficial: Nussbaum[8] suggests that combating cynicism and resignation involves cultivating *alternative imaginaries* and practising *active empathy*, creating an environment where hope can flourish. For example, discussing with students the stories of individuals who have overcome obstacles (resilience) or of communities that have improved their circumstances through collective effort can help to challenge the notion that "nothing ever changes." Actively involving students in social projects or volunteer activities allows them to experience firsthand the power of contributing to change, providing a concrete antidote to fatalism.

Ultimately, maintaining hope in schools requires awareness and intentionality. This means monitoring the classroom and staff climate, recognising signs of burnout or cynicism, and intervening through mutual support, professional development, and collective reflection on the meaning of educational work. It also involves equipping students with *critical tools* to recognise feelings of helplessness or resignation within themselves and others, teaching them strategies to respond (such as setting achievable goals,

[8] M.C. Nussbaum, *La monarchia della paura: Considerazioni sulla crisi politica attuale*Il Mulino*,* Bologna 2004.

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celebrating progress, seeking help when needed, etc.). In this way, the entire educational community (teachers, students, families) can become a "stronghold of hope", counteracting those psychological and cultural adversaries that threaten its flourishing.

6. *Cultivating Hope: the role of educators and communities*

Faced with these challenges and obstacles, the question arises: *how* can we effectively cultivate hope within education? This question is particularly pertinent in today's world, marked by multiple crises (pandemic, conflicts, climate emergencies), which often leave young people disoriented about their future. According to many scholars, the answer lies in a renewed moral and professional commitment by educators, and in the collective engagement of the wider educational community to act as agents of hope.

First and foremost, teachers and trainers must themselves be bearers of hope. This does not mean adopting naïve optimism at all costs but rather embodying a *critical hopeful attitude*: believing in the growth potential of every student while maintaining a realistic awareness of the challenges at hand. Freire argued that educators should combine *pedagogical love* (care and respect for learners) with *"righteous anger"* towards injustice, and above all with an *"unshakeable hope"* that sustains their daily practice. Being a hopeful educator means, in concrete terms, not giving up in the face of initial setbacks, seeking new teaching strategies; it means conveying to students trust in their abilities, even when they themselves harbour doubts; it means recognising and highlighting progress, even when it is modest.

A student in difficulty, who encounters a teacher capable of saying *"I know you can do this – let's work together to make it happen"*, and who genuinely believes it, learns not only mathematics or literature but also learns hope: the trust that effort is worthwhile because improvement is possible.

Several studies confirm that teachers' positive expectations of their students can significantly influence student performance and attitudes (the so-called Pygmalion effect). Similarly, when a school cultivates a *culture of hope* – by fostering an inclusive climate, setting challenging yet achievable goals, and celebrating milestones – students demonstrate greater intrinsic motivation and resilience in the face of adversity. Conversely, educational settings perceived as cold, overly critical, or resigned tend to breed disengagement and drop-out. It is no coincidence that the loss of hope among

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young people is cited as a root cause of school abandonment and other forms of distress. When an adolescent leaves school saying, *"there's no point in staying"*, it reflects the *gap between the promise of education and the reality experienced*, a gap noted by many experts. The task of education, therefore, is to bridge this gap, *reconnecting young people's hope* to the educational promise.

Another crucial role is played by families and the wider community. Educational hope is not built solely within the classroom: the extra-curricular environment must also contribute, offering opportunities and positive role models. Peer mentoring projects, engagement with successful alumni from the same neighbourhood, and stimulating extra-curricular activities (arts, sports, volunteering) are all ways to keep the flame of hope alive among young people, especially in disadvantaged areas.

Arjun Appadurai spoke of *"navigational capacity"*, the ability to *navigate* towards the future even amidst present storms. The educational community – comprising schools, families, social services, and associations – should serve as both *compass and wind*: providing direction and propulsion. This can be realised, for instance, through *local educational pacts* that ensure every young person receives the support they need – whether in the form of career guidance, academic tutoring, safe spaces for self-expression after school, or simply the shared expectation that learning has purpose and value for their future.

In this context, Andrea Canevaro's concept of the alternation between the "established" and the "establishing" – drawn from institutional analysis – is highly relevant. The *established* represents existing norms and customs; the *establishing* is the innovative force, the grassroots ferment driving change. Canevaro notes that educational progress occurs through a continuous dialectic between these two dimensions: sometimes it is grassroots culture (the establishing force) that surpasses normative barriers and imposes change (a bottom-up process); other times, enlightened new norms anticipate cultural shifts (a top-down process), creating novel spaces for society to fill with meaning. In both cases, hope is the thread connecting this dynamic: it takes hope (and courage) to challenge the established order and propose new paths, just as it takes hope to implement reforms in advance of cultural readiness, trusting that society will eventually follow.

Consider, for example, the inclusion of students with disabilities in Italian schools: it was a *visionary choice*, enshrined in law in the 1970s (a normative act of the establishing force), yet it was supported by the ped-

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agogical hope of figures like Canevaro, who believed that schools and society could grow by embracing everyone. That hope has been largely realised, transforming the Italian school system and generating a new inclusive culture. Similarly, every educational innovation — from environmental education to digital learning technologies — requires hopeful, establishing educators, capable of envisioning better futures and working towards them, even when the existing system initially resists.

Ultimately, to *educate for hope* and *hope for education*, concerted action is needed on multiple levels. On a personal level, every educator should cultivate within themselves a passion for and confidence in educational values, continually updating their competences to address emerging challenges (an empowered, well-prepared teacher is more likely to sustain and inspire hope than one left isolated and disheartened). On an institutional level, educational policies should invest in dignified working conditions for teachers, welcoming and stimulating school environments, and enriching learning opportunities for students: all these elements *communicate hope* by demonstrating society's belief in education. On a collective level, finally, we must promote a public narrative of education not as an irredeemably failing system but as a national horizon of hope — much as the post-war expansion of compulsory schooling represented hope in the future of Italy, or as today we see in the emphasis placed on education within the UN 2030 Agenda (*"quality education for all"* is Sustainable Development Goal 4, inherently filled with hope).

7. *Conclusions: rediscovering Hope in Education*

In conclusion, embracing the notion of *"Education is hope"* means recognising that hope is both the foundation and the outcome of education. It is the foundation, because every educational endeavour is born from the belief that it is possible to learn, to improve, to emancipate oneself — a belief without which there would be no purpose in educating. And it is the outcome, because a successful education should leave people with the very capacity to hope: to see possibilities where others perceive only obstacles, to imagine different futures, and to commit themselves to making them a reality.

We have explored how hope operates on multiple levels: within the individual, as motivation and resilience; within the educational process, as

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a transversal competence linked to planning and self-determination; and within the social sphere, as a collective force for empowerment and participation. To renew the pedagogy of hope today means enriching it with contemporary theoretical and empirical tools, from psychological hope theories to inclusive and democratic educational practices, in order to face new educational challenges with both rigour and optimism. It also means grounding it in the findings of current research: we now know, for example, that targeted programmes aimed at developing hope (such as teaching goal setting, creative problem solving, and anxiety management) can enhance not only students' psychological well-being but also their academic performance, particularly among those in disadvantaged circumstances. This provides concrete guidance for future action.

Finally, restoring hope in education is crucial in an era where public discourse about schools and the future of young people is often dominated by pessimism. Without denying the real problems, it is important to reaffirm, with Freire, that to forego hope in the struggle to improve the world leads nowhere. Hope is an ontological necessity, an integral part of the human condition, and in education it is the leaven that enables every learning process and every transformation to grow. It is our responsibility, as educators, scholars, and citizens, to keep this hope alive, nurturing it through our daily practice and critical reflection. In doing so, education can truly continue to be – today and in the future – an enabler of hope: hope for individuals, who through education discover paths to personal fulfilment, and hope for society as a whole, which in the educational endeavour continually regenerates the possibility of a better future.

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