



7 Adopting critical approaches draws into question how we see the world and renders visible social stratification and inequity. Coming to understand these realities can contribute to pessimism, disillusionment, or retreat from engaging in the work of leadership for social change. This chapter offers tools to aid educators with purposefully cultivating critical hope.

## Cultivating Critical Hope: The Too Often Forgotten Dimension of Critical Leadership Development

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We call on leaders of all ages to cultivate critical hope as an essential part of the leadership development process. *Critical hope* reflects the ability to realistically assess one's environment through a lens of equity and justice while also envisioning the possibility of a better future (Dugan, 2017; Duncan-Andrade, 2009). It is a fundamental element of critical leadership development that sustains one's energy, passion, and commitment to social change (Dugan, 2017; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). However, it is imperative that critical hope is differentiated from traditional concepts of hope. Traditional conceptualizations cannot create the type of change that is so desperately needed in society because they lack the necessary critique and understanding of inequities (Bozalek, Leibowitz, Carolissen, & Boler, 2014; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Freire, 1998). It is imperative that hope is not simply seen as a lofty, wishful concept. Instead, we must critically engage in the past and present while simultaneously thinking about how we can collectively impact our communities through *praxis*, which is defined as continuous and cyclical process of reflection and action (Freire, 1970; Jacobs, 2005; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009).

Cultivating critical hope starts with us—the educators. It is impossible to develop in youth that which we are not actively cultivating in ourselves. Educators are consistently exposed to policies, programs, social interactions, and systems that are unjust, and continue to disadvantage those at the margins. This runs the risk of causing individuals to retreat from leadership processes.

Further complicating educators' experiences is the need to navigate systems with a dual lens of attempting to contribute to positive social change while also orienting youth to the painful realities of the world and still seeing the possibilities for progress. This is important work, but it also comes at a toll for educators. Critical hope provides a resource to stay in these struggles in ways that are healthy and sustainable (Bozalek et al., 2014; Dugan, 2017; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Since educators play key roles in supporting, developing, and nurturing the leadership capacities of students, we call on them to cultivate critical hope in their own lives so they are better prepared to do so in the lives of their students.

Leadership for social change requires individuals to collectively engage with one another in an ongoing struggle for justice and equity (Dugan, 2017; Ospina et al., 2012). As today's youth take on these challenges, cultivating critical hope is essential to leadership development. A key aspect of leadership is one's responsibility to be in service to others and work within a collective toward addressing social concerns (Komives, Wagner, & Associates, 2016). Social issues that impact our communities are not easily fixed overnight and require a high level of emotional endurance and stamina. As a result, critical hope allows leaders to support the work of the collective and contribute to a process with the understanding that individuals may see limited to no progress toward resolving these issues within their lifetime.

The focus of this chapter is to equip leadership educators and youth alike with an understanding of what erodes critical hope and what builds it. Although we will reference building critical hope alongside students, the primary purpose of the chapter is to serve as a guide for educators. The chapter provides readers with concrete considerations and vignettes to illustrate how to examine issues of leadership through a framework that stimulates reflective thinking on the topic. Finally, the chapter outlines a number of practices associated with the design and delivery of leadership education that hold the potential to stimulate critical hope if explicit connections to the concept are made.

## A Deeper Examination of Critical Hope

The infusion of critical perspectives into leadership development requires us to call into question the use of the word "hope." It is a term that is bandied about so frequently that it often loses its intended power. We have already distinguished between the concepts of critical hope and hope as it is more generally defined. Duncan-Andrade (2009) took the explanation of critical hope a step further by outlining *enemies of hope* or those leaders and "policies [that] eroded true hope and give rise to false hope, a reactionary distortion of the radical premise of hope" (p. 182). False hope has been used to misguide, distract, and maintain marginalization within society (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Freire, 1994).

**Table 7.1 Enemies of Hope**

<i>Hokey Hope</i>	<i>Mythical Hope</i>	<i>Hope Deferred</i>
Arises when iniquities are known yet unaddressed due to a desire to remain optimistic	The belief that a singular momentous event would resolve eons of injustice	Placing blame on systems for inequitable outcomes (i.e., education gap) but cannot identify their role in creating a resolution

Adapted from Duncan-Andrade (2009) and Solorzano and Bernal (2001).

Practicing critical hope requires an acknowledgement of the various ways in which hope has been used to both advance democracy, equity, and justice as well as to maintain the status quo. When a critical social lens is applied to the concept of hope, it mandates the exploration of the concept in the context of inequity. This section builds upon Duncan-Andrade's (2009) work by exploring the intersections of hope and systemic oppression at a personal level. When Duncan-Andrade (2009) introduced "enemies of hope" he explored three types of enemies: hokey hope, mythical hope, and hope deferred (see Table 7.1).

Let's build upon our understanding of the enemies of hope by illustrating the concept in practice. Presume, for a minute, that you are someone who deeply believes in a critical leadership development approach to working with youth. Now imagine that progress in these efforts is like moving up a steep, yet traversable hill. As you engage your students in learning and development about social inequities, a ball begins to form in front of you. This ball makes it more challenging, but not impossible, to continue your progress up the hill. The ball serves as a form of resistance and can often grow in size and weight. Through a critical social lens, we understand this resistance to come in the form of ableism, classism, sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression. To be clear, these "isms," and the ball that they create, influence everyone in society but contribute to disproportionate labor and emotional tolls among minoritized people. Encountering these "isms" on a personal level may cause you as an educator as well as your students to experience the enemies of hope and the resultant emotions that they often elicit: fear, apathy, isolation, and despair.

As leadership educators, we know that these experiences of resistance and subsequent enemies of hope are real, and that the emotions that surface because of them are valid. It is understandable that one may want to give up or lose hope during these encounters. However, we must recognize that losing hope ultimately comes with the consequence of interrupting critical leadership development and the progress so desperately needed in society.

**Table 7.2 Considerations and Reflections on the Enemies and Allies of Hope**

<i>Enemies of Hope</i>	<i>Allies of Hope</i>	<i>Leadership Considerations</i>	<i>Reflection Questions</i>
Fear	Love	<i>Leading with love and passion as opposed to fear helps educators focus on addressing concerns rather than avoiding them</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you operating out of fear or love?</li> <li>• Are your actions and decisions made based on what you want to accomplish or what you are attempting to avoid?</li> </ul>
Apathy	Anger	<i>Apathy promotes disengagement, whereas anger, when leveraged productively can ignite action</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is causing you to feel apathetic?</li> <li>• What are ways to productively express anger?</li> </ul>
Isolation	Community	<i>Educators who resist isolation by finding community can be more resilient leaders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the people that support and challenge you with care?</li> <li>• Who else may feel isolated?</li> <li>• How can you align with and draw support from allies?</li> </ul>
Despair	Struggle	<i>Educators can challenge despair by understanding the context and forms of resistance, but still choose to engage in leadership committed to the struggle</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the context of your struggle, who is involved, and what is at stake?</li> <li>• At what point do you choose to continue or to back out?</li> </ul>

Losing hope causes us to become stagnant, decreases our efficacy to engage in leadership, takes away our sense of agency to act as leaders, and widens the gap between espoused and actualized values (Bozalek et al., 2014; Dugan, 2017; Martin & Te Riele, 2011; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Although as authors we hold space and honor the ways in which educators and youth experience the enemies of hope, we must also simultaneously hold space for those emotions, tools, and actions that foster critical hope. We have come to understand these emotions, tools, and actions as an invaluable counterpoint to enemies of hope and refer to them as *allies of hope*—love, anger, community, and struggle. The allies of hope serve as values that guide educators and youth to counteract the enemies of hope.

Table 7.2 depicts the enemies of hope in the first column as well as their corresponding allies of hope in column two. To cultivate, sustain, and/or

regain critical hope, leadership educators can utilize the considerations in columns three and four to determine how to effectively leverage the allies of hope. We encourage leadership educators to utilize Table 7.2 as a tool to build one's capacity for critical hope.

## Applying the Concepts of Critical Hope

The following vignette serves as a tool for educators seeking to promote critical hope within themselves and youth with whom they work. As you read the vignette, identify both the enemies and allies of critical hope and their potential influences on critical leadership development. We encourage our readers to utilize Table 7.2 as a guide when reflecting on the debrief questions that follow the vignette.

**Vignette.** *You are an educator at a public school. You ask students to reflect on issues that they would want to address in contributing to social change. After small group conversations and significant dialogue, students share the multiple issues they would like to address and how they arrived at their varying decisions. You then announce, "I want our class to enact change around one of these issues as a collective. To do that, we are going to apply the lessons we learned regarding leadership development."*

One student immediately states, "I want to address the wage our food service workers receive because they feed us every day and they are a part of our school community and don't get paid enough." You ask the rest of the class how they feel. Some students agree while others feel there are more important issues. You ask the group to consider their values, the values of the community they are collectively a part of, and how these values are being demonstrated and/or absent from the conversation.

Ultimately, the class decides to move forward with advocating for the underpaid food service workers. Collectively, they engage with the workers to develop a campaign guided by a mission statement. They create group expectations and agree that everyone's voice matters in the process. Once they establish their common purpose and ways of working together, they decide to request a meeting with the school leadership. You are pleased to see the students building capacity to seek social change as a collective. You feel a sense of hope and so do your students.

As a class, the students write a direct, yet respectful, letter to the school leadership. The letter asks them to increase worker wages and provides a sophisticated rationale for the request along with possible solutions to consider. The next day, you receive a meeting request from the school principal. In that meeting, you are told that your students may draw negative attention to the school. You are also told to discontinue your work with them and prohibit them from moving forward with their project.

**Debrief.** Consider how you would respond to the vignette individually or as part of a coalition with others. As you develop your action plan we ask you to consider the following questions:

- What themes or frameworks regarding critical leadership development are present?
- What are the presenting enemies of hope?
- How might you leverage the allies of hope?
- How do you create space for your emotions and the emotions of your students?
- How do you encourage critical hope?

This vignette drives home the importance of value-based leadership and illustrates youths' desires to actualize their values by contributing to social change. The students' abilities to work through conflict and controversy to establish a common goal is evidence of their ongoing leadership development. However, the challenges from the school leaders leave you experiencing some of the emotions associated with the enemies of hope. As the educator, you must engage in a self-reflective process to recognize if and how the mandate may contribute to a decline in critical hope both for you and for the young people with whom you are working. This self-reflection must occur before engaging with the students, as you do not want to influence their experience or project your own reactions onto them. This does not mean that you cannot be emotive or authentic with the students. Your ability to demonstrate and role model how you move through struggle and channel resilience is one of the ways you develop critical hope within your students. Ultimately, how you decide to navigate the request of the principal will be the result of your praxis.

## Cultivating Critical Hope in Practice

Cultivating and sustaining critical hope is an essential skill that evolves over the lifespan and is necessary for leadership grounded in social change (Dugan, 2017; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Combating the enemies of hope by intentionally bolstering the allies of hope sustains critical leadership development. The sections that follow explore specific ways to assist educators with integrating critical hope into their work. Although the elements below are geared toward educators, the same tools are transferable to youth. Each consideration is meant to serve as a guide to lay the foundation so that critical hope can be sustained and grown in the multiple spaces that educators occupy.

**Praxis and Accountability.** Praxis is imperative to critical hope. Without reflection and action, critical hope cannot exist; diminishing our collective capacity to reconstruct society in more just and equitable ways (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Engaging in a deliberate and ongoing cycle of reflection and action allows educators to actively sustain their efforts around leadership for social change.

We encourage educators to go beyond simple reflection to engage in critical self-reflection—a process by which individuals assess and

reassess their assumptions, presuppositions, thought processes, and meaning-making (Mezirow, 1990). See Chapter 3 for additional content on developing critical self-reflection. Additionally, questions are provided below to help inform your actions as you support students:

- What type of harm could I be imposing on others intentionally or unintentionally through leadership development processes? How can I act agentically to adjust these practices and reduce harm?
- To what extent do I connect my agency in adjusting leadership practices to be more equitable and to foster critical hope?
- How do my social identities shape my views on and practice of leadership development? How might this in turn influence my sense of critical hope?

We encourage educators to build time into their schedule for praxis until this thought process becomes second-nature. Use of a journal, audio/voice recording apps, and meditation techniques are a few vehicles to engage in this process. This type of self-reflective homework should be required by educators and students alike to transform our environments into anti-oppressive spaces, to allow critical hope to flourish, and to advance critical leadership development (Kumashiro, 2002). Additionally, we encourage praxis to occur beyond just the individual level. To ward off the enemies of hope, educators should seek out and create formalized critical hope accountability partners. *Accountability partners* are individuals or groups of people that you can turn to and state, without judgment, that you are struggling and need motivation to move forward. Once educators find these partners, they can turn to them when their critical hope tank is at, or near, empty. At the onset, accountability partners should discuss what grounds their critical hope and why they engage in leadership for social change. Partners should also develop an understanding of what stokes the flames of critical hope for one another so that in times of significant resistance or fatigue they are able to offer support. Your accountability partner will help tap into your reserves and remind you of why you do what you do, what is at stake, and motivate you to continue through a focus on critical hope.

**Sharing Power.** Critical hope can only exist when we acknowledge and resist the traditional power dynamics at play in social systems (see Chapter 6 for more on power in critical leadership development). By virtue of our roles as educators, we have power over our students' learning as well as their ability to enact leadership. Every day we make decisions to either increase the agency of youth with whom we work or to constrain it (see Chapter 2 for more on how adults can stimulate youth agency for leadership). Critical leadership development demands that learning environments be positioned as liberatory spaces in which educators and students co-construct knowledge (Dugan, 2017; Freire, 1998). To create these spaces, we must first disrupt traditional forms of education that are

unidirectional. Educators must deconstruct the traditional power dynamics that exist in the student–teacher relationship by practicing collective learning.

A critical component of power sharing is respecting the autonomy of the learner and their ability to think freely to build their consciousness (Freire, 1998). One strategy to deconstruct this power dynamic is through giving opportunities for students to share their lived experiences and make meaning of their world (Freire, 1998; hooks, 1994). Below are two examples that demonstrate how power sharing can occur in educational environments:

- As the advisor of a leadership preorientation program, you work alongside your student leaders to co-construct learning objectives. Instead of telling them what or how to do it, give students the autonomy to create the activities, agenda, and processing questions. Set up check-in meetings to review plans and give feedback. Center the youth as the primary conduits for executing the program as well as facilitating its content.
- As a teacher, you have students sign-up to teach 20–30 minutes of class every week. At the beginning of the course, you model an example and give them guidance on how to prepare, such as requiring them to bring in relevant issues or topics that relate to the course material. As the educator, you purposefully position yourself as a participant as well. This not only flips the power dynamic, but it also allows students to make connections beyond the classroom and gives them power over their own learning.

Giving students the opportunity to teach each other or construct activities demonstrates the value and worth they bring to their learning. The seeds of critical hope are planted in this sense of agency and self-worth. These are experiences that youth will revisit time and again as they encounter the challenges of leadership for social change. However, this only happens when educators take the time to make explicit connections between learning experiences, a growing sense of agency as a learner, and critical hope.

**Awareness of the Past to Understand the Present.** Educators and students alike must have a solid understanding of the events, policies, and structural issues that manifest as today’s struggles around leadership for social change. To sustain critical hope, assessing the past with a critical lens is imperative so that leadership development is grounded in reality. Below are three considerations:

- Connect with individuals who have taken part in leadership and social change movements. Conduct informational interviews to learn more about their experiences and the strategies they employed to develop and sustain critical hope.



- Expand what you read on leadership beyond the traditional canon to materials authored by those whose histories are not being told. Examine these readings through a critical lens to draw out lessons about critical hope in long and short-term leadership struggles.
- Consider the celebrations, heritage months, and holidays that exist. Take time to understand how they came to be so that you can simultaneously honor the past while envisioning your role in a better future. Use all of this to remind yourself about and celebrate moments of progress. This is essential in developing critical hope.

Possessing knowledge about the history and lifespan of the struggle for justice is a fervent motivator for building and sustaining critical hope (Friere, 1998). As an ally of hope, educators must use both love and anger to sustain their energy and funnel anger toward creating social change. In a leadership context, this allows us to expand our understanding of community, shared values, and purpose. It also gives educators and youth the opportunity to understand how leadership is enacted differently by generation, culture, and context. Knowing one's history from a critical lens allows us to see the seeds of progress that have been planted and is one way that critical hope is sustained.

**Intergroup Dialogue.** Intergroup dialogue is another strategy for cultivating critical hope. Grounded in Freirean (1998) values, the goals of intergroup dialogue are: “consciousness raising, building relationships across differences and conflicts, and strengthening individual and collective capacities to promote social justice” (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007, p. 9). We suggest educators seek intergroup dialogue spaces for their own learning and provide intergroup dialogue opportunities for youth.

It is important to note that the word “dialogue” has become a buzzword within education and is often used as a replacement for “discussion” or “conversation.” Educators have been called to differentiate conversation and discussion from dialogue, while building students’ capacities to respond to process as well as content (Dugan & Velázquez, 2015). Freire (1970) stated that for dialogue to exist, there must be love, respect, and a shared accountability to make positive social change. These foundations of dialogue relate directly to the allies of hope.

Through intergroup dialogue, individuals gain the necessary knowledge, awareness, and skills for critical leadership development while building the critical connections with one another that sustain leadership efforts in the face of struggle. Some might argue that dialogue runs the risk of both diminishing critical hope and differing attention away from direct action. However, dialogue is in and of itself an important form of action, although clearly a pathway to social change, rather than the destination. Furthermore, complex and well-facilitated dialogue stimulates relationships and can inspire the trust and visions of a better future that undergird

critical hope. Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, and Cytron-Walker (2006) remind us that

We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. I have learned that in this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of "critical mass." It's always about critical connections. (p. 40)

**Healing.** The erosion of critical hope can be caused by racial battle fatigue, combating injustices, and experiencing resistance at a personal or organizational level. It is imperative that we take care of ourselves along the journey of leadership for social change. Critical hope rests not on a foundation solely of sacrifice but of wholeness. Especially for communities at the margins, we must prioritize our individual and community well-being while moving beyond simply coping and managing (McGee & Stovall, 2015). Engaging in therapy, rest, prayer, meditation, hobbies, and mindfulness are a few ways to protect our well-being. When all else fails, remember to fill your cup with what brings you joy and inner peace. These are not selfish acts but the nurturing of critical hope. You cannot pour from an empty cup.

Too often, educators are depleted and asked to do far more than what their job descriptions suggest. To avoid feeling burnt out or resentful, taking care of ourselves allows us to continue showing up for students with whom we work. It also allows us to show up for those we love and care about in our lives outside of work. By doing this, we are demonstrating to our students that they, too, need to take care of their well-being. We cannot tell our students to take care of themselves if we have not done the same for ourselves.

## Conclusion

Leadership educators must see hardships as opportunities to leverage the power of critical hope. This is done through understanding how our leadership identity is influenced by the enemies and allies of hope. Although this chapter focused on cultivating and sustaining critical hope among leadership educators, the aforementioned tools, suggestions, and practices are vital to youth leadership development as well.

Far too often in leadership education, we frame hope as a static trait—something that a person either has or does not have. When hope is more than a static trait, it still is typically framed as the responsibility of the individual. “Just have a little hope.” “Be positive.” “Things will get better.” These sentiments may be well intentioned, but they bely the reality of the world. Critical hope grounds the concept as both developmental and attentive to the realities of equality and injustice that permeate society. As educators, we have an obligation to cultivate critical hope as an essential

part of the leadership development process, and this work begins at home and in our own lives.

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