

“Hope inspires the good to reveal itself.” -Emily Dickinson

By the WECAN Early Childhood Research Group

At the turning of the year, it is natural to look back at the past year and forward to the year ahead. What were last year’s lessons and what are we carrying into the coming year? Beneath our New Year’s intentions, resolutions and goals lies something deeper and even more fundamental to human life — hope! Hope is not wishful thinking. Hope is not optimism. It has a kind of ineffability, and at the same time, it is an act of imagination with real-life consequences. Hope is necessary.

Where does it come from? It seems to be an intrinsic element in the human soul. It appears at birth and, acknowledged or not, accompanies us through life’s joys and trials toward our individual and collective destinies! We can also find it in the world and other human beings, in pictures and images that remind us we can choose hope, even in the current confluence of challenges. An apricot sky on a frosty winter morning, a packet of seeds waiting for the soil to warm, a bitter scowl redeemed by a sudden smile, are fleeting images of hope.

Here are some other images of hope in our times offered by colleagues in the WECAN Early Childhood Research Group:

Hope is captured for me in a photo of an exhausted Rohingya woman from Myanmar touching the shore in Bangladesh after crossing by boat through the Bay of Bengal with other refugees.



I see the force of hope in the touch of the woman's hand as she caresses the grains of sand on the shore of the place that offers her a possibility for a future. Hope arising from suffering, the suffering summoning will and action, the suffering becoming the potentiality for healing, for the future.

A teenage girl from Sweden, slim and looking even younger than her years, stood in front of the leaders of the world in 2019 and again in 2021 and spoke on behalf of her generation. Her message was direct and dire, "You are failing us!" But her life and actions are based on hope, not hopelessness. She endures the criticisms aimed at her and like a true warrior does not waiver in her commitment to calling out the necessity for us to wake up to the plight of the planet and its peoples.

Despite the pandemic-inspired fear, anxiety, and doubt that circle around us, the young child's eagerness for life remains and we teachers can counter that circle of fear by accompanying the children in their eagerness for life. I discovered the term "active cherishing" in a book by Gregory Boyle. The etymology of the word,

'cherish', comes from the old French, *cherir*, meaning to hold dear and from the Latin word *carus*, which suggests active participation towards one who is beloved. To actively cherish a child is to tenderly care, nurture, and carry hope for the present and future times. To bathe the little child in 'active cherishing' is to revere their very existence; it tells the child, "you have chosen just the right time to be in the world, I will step with you into life with enthusiasm and meet it."

Recently, I spent eight extraordinary days witnessing a seven-month-old struggling to make her way across the carpet, trying to mobilize her body in a coordinated way. Eight days later, after practicing every time she was given "floor time," she still was only occasionally achieving the capacity to come up onto her knees and propel herself forward. Many times, she would collapse onto the floor exhausted and then start all over again with complete devotion to the task at hand. This was not a casual deed, but a passion fueled by a clear inner strength of purpose. To use a common, modern expression, "she was on fire!" What emanated from that child were qualities like strength of purpose, determination, courage, including the drive to overcome obstacles and an expectation to succeed. When the goal on the other side of the carpet was reached- by many contortions such as bellyflopping, rolling and not quite crawling- then the sun came out! Her family saw a radiant display of joy and satisfaction, followed directly by touching and sampling the object of her journey (often a wooden toy) with her mouth and fingers. And on the way to that satisfying destination, her every gesture was pregnant with expectancy and hope!

Hope is the welcoming gesture of humanity. Hope keeps our dreams alive in the face of ever ebbing tides and trials we all face in our journey through life. In the words of Dr Martin Luther King, "We will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope." Hope speaks of enduring love and of humility. Last evening, while outside late at night, I witnessed a beautiful starlit sky. Above me, constellations brightly shone. In the distance, I heard call from a familiar Barred owl. I felt personally embraced by the universe, but was I alone in the midst of so many glowing stars, planets, and night animals? The owl's call into the night, let me know that I was not alone in my witnessing of enduring beauty. A night sky full of promise and time, not only for me but us all.

Aura of Hope

Hope knocked on the door of the unknown.

Faith answered the calling, understanding that....

Only a prayer of love could be pulled from the sea of courage

When darkness walks across the void, leaving footprints in the path