Hope in the Face of Climate Change: A Bridge Without Railing

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Abstract
Hope in the face of increasingly dire projections of climate change and incommensurate societal response is difficult to muster and even harder to maintain as time goes on. This paper examines a broad, multi-disciplinary scholarly literature and non-academic contributions to answer seven interrelated questions about hope in the age of climate change and other sustainability challenges: Why do we need hope? Is there a "hope deficit"? What is hope? How do we foster hope within ourselves? How do we support others in their search for hope? And what do and can we hope for? Our answers aim to synthesize relevant literature to clarify what hope entails, and make this knowledge practical and actionable for use in communication, engagement and education.

Keywords
Hope deficit, worry, despair, communication, maturity, active engagement, transformation

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[text+abstract+references = 7,369 words]

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1. Introduction

A famous bridge in Myanmar, the U Bein Bridge, crosses the Taung Tha Man Lake near the former royal capital of Amarapura. With its 1.2 km (3,967 ft) span, it is the longest and oldest teakwood bridge in the world.[1] Besides its beauty and remarkable, long-lasting construction, the bridge has a notable feature: it is missing a railing. Maybe after the essential portions of the bridge were built from beams reclaimed from a former, earthquake-destroyed royal palace, no suitable pieces were left to build hand holds; maybe the locals didn't deem them necessary. Whatever the case, it is a bridge that requires some guts to cross.

Hope is just such a construct: an essential bridge between here and there, now and tomorrow, between what is and what could be, without much safety to hold on to. It is a bridge humanity has needed and crossed for as long as it has occupied this planet. So, clearly, hope is not a new theme. But it has emerged as a pressing need in this time of climate change, and as a topic among our best and most demanding thinkers (e.g., Macy and Johnstone 2012; McIntosh 2008; McKibben 2010; Orr 2011), in conferences and special issues like this, and is becoming a growing topic in scholarly research. Attentive people everywhere are asking how to stay hopeful when climate change and other sustainability challenges make our stay on planet Earth ever more precarious.

Without a doubt, for many this is a question about what – in the face of increasingly dire projections emanating from the scientific community – we can hang on to. Many wonder how we can keep our good spirits up as the outlook grows ever darker. And surely, many would love to hear a reassuring answer: that it won't be all that bad, and that there are, in fact, rather quick and easy solutions. But if history (and extensive scholarship) have taught us anything, real answers to truly grave and complex problems are never found in taking the easy road. This may be disappointing to hear, yet people probably sense that simplistic answers will not do in the face of the gravity of the situation. Moreover, what is equally true is that the most empowering and ennobling response, it always seems, is to do what it actually takes.

In fact, it could be a hopeful sign that people are asking about hope, that this collection of papers and others elsewhere are helping to create a serious discourse on hope. It is the very inquiry into what hope is, where we can find it, and how we can foster it in ourselves and in others that is inspiring.

This paper grew out of ongoing conversations about climate change between a social scientist studying climate change (SM) and a student of depth psychology investigating the transformative opportunity that climate change presents (CB). Both of us "bridge builders" across multiple disciplines and between the world of scholarship and practice, we have grappled with hope in the face of climate change within ourselves, met many who didn't know where to find it, and were fortunate to encounter others who did. Many more have asked – half afraid to admit their own hopelessness – how as educators and communicators they can help foster hope in others.

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[1] http://www.allmyanmartours.com/U-Bein-Bridge/

In this paper we attempt an answer – not a final, but a considered answer that integrates what we have learned from the existing scholarship in the social and humanistic sciences, from public intellectuals and thinkers, and from our own work of fostering hope at this time. We gather these insights in six sections, each addressing an important question: Why do we need hope? Is there a "hope deficit"? What is hope? How do we foster hope within ourselves? How do we foster hope in others? What do and can we hope for? Our answers aim to synthesize what is known but also invite readers into continued and ongoing exploration.

2. Why Do We Need Hope?

It might seem absurd to ask why we need hope. As an integral part of the human experience, we rarely question the need for hope. Every major challenge, every trial and threat is inherently linked to it. If everything goes swimmingly, there is no need for hope. But when difficulty arises and we have life left to live, we need a reason to go on.

And indeed, we are now confronted with a challenge the size of the Earth; the need for hope becomes "an imperative," as David Orr (2011) says. The contours of the challenge force us to look for it. First, the climate prognoses from scientists are increasingly dark. The trends they track (e.g., indicators of "The Great Acceleration" at http://www.igbp.net/), and the growing understanding of the Earth systems' complex and momentous interactions feeding the projections of the future (e.g., IPCC 2013) are not looking good. Maybe most disconcerting is the documentation of climate changes and their far-reaching impacts already underway (e.g., Melillo et al. 2014). In short, climate change is presenting a very real danger, the likes of which humanity never had to confront before[2]: a global and practically permanent threat to our life support system.

Indications of just how dire things are becoming stem not just from the scientific literature. Those who hold the deepest insights about the changing climate through disciplined and systematic study now speak out in public in unprecedented ways. For many scientists the world we are creating is increasingly difficult to grapple with (for several testimonies see Moser [2012]). Other scientists publicly express their feelings about climate change (see http://morethanscientists.org). Culturally, the emerging sense of doom becomes reflected in film ("cli-fi"), writings, art, music, and social media echo chambers (Raymond 2011; Swyngedouw 2010; Strauss 2015).

But it is not just the evidence and prognoses of climate change that make the need for hope so pressing; the glaring lack of action to address it adds to the gravity. A big problem met by an equally big solution may not register as a significant danger; a big problem without a real answer is an entirely different kind of threat.

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[2] The once-acute threat of global nuclear holocaust may be the closest we have come before to a similar awareness, although we have prevented it so far, and managed to push it out of daily and constant awareness enough so that few know how large that threat really still is.

Despite some encouraging progress, it remains difficult to grasp what it actually means to keep global atmospheric carbon concentrations by 2100 to $2^{\mathbf{o}}C$ above pre-industrial levels (IPCC 2013). Experts tell us that if the efforts made to date were simply continued through the end of the century, the global temperature increase by 2100 could be as much as $3.6\text{-}4.2^{0}C$ (and this is not a worst-case scenario); the additional policy pledges made to date in the lead-up to the international climate treaty negotiations in Paris in December 2015, if implemented, would get us to $2.9\text{-}3.1^{0}C$. Only more radical emission reduction pathways, where emissions peak by 2020 and then steadily decline are consistent with temperature increases of $2^{0}C$ or less by 2100 (http://www.climatetracker.org). Some claim this lower emissions reduction goal is now out of reach and no longer politically feasible, while others insist that even $2^{0}C$ is too high to ensure human security for many on this planet, not to speak of the fate of many non-human species (Hamilton 2010; Hansen et al. 2013). As former *Grist Magazine* blogger, David Roberts (2012), put it, "That is where we are: stuck between the impossible and the unthinkable... And so for the rest of your life, your job is to make the impossible possible."

Serious public discussions of alternative pathways to a livable future are essentially missing, however, which leaves a terrifying silence in which hopelessness can grow. Not surprisingly, increasing numbers of people are asking how to maintain hope as they become more aware of the climate conundrum. Whatever answers are offered need to be believable. Faced with an unprecedented threat, while still alive, we cannot give up. We need a way to cope and keep going. We need hope as a call to do our best and, in fact, to do what seems now nearly impossible.

3. Is There a "Hope Deficit"?

If the need for hope is clear then, the question arises whether people have it or lack it. Empirical studies to date give telling indications, but much remains to be learned about the extent and true nature of our climate hopes.

Repeated surveys allow us to get a first perspective on the existence of hope – or the lack thereof – in the American population. Researchers at Yale and George Mason Universities have tracked people's attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and feelings about climate change, producing a longitudinal study of different audience segments (the "Global Warming's Six Americas" studies). First then, do Americans recognize the danger that climate change presents? According to the most recent reports available, only majorities of the two audience segments most inclined to believe that climate change is happening and mostly human-caused, the Alarmed and the Concerned, are somewhat or very worried about climate change, while the remainder worry significantly less (Leiserowitz et al. 2014b). The researchers suspect that worry is related to an expectation of personal harm as there is a close correlation (Leiserowitz et al. 2014a),

A tangible, big danger that evokes worry only becomes overwhelming and paralyzing if there is no commensurate response to avert it. In fact, it has been well established that hopelessness, despair, apathy, and even denial of the threat itself arise from the combination of a big danger and no available or effective response (Bandura 1977; Costello et al. 2011; Feinberg and Willis

2011; Gifford 2011; Klöckner 2013; Lorenzoni et al. 2007; Norgaard 2011). Thus, it is important to examine how Americans feel about available responses.

Leiserowitz et al. (2014a) asked Americans who believe global warming is happening whether they thought the problem will be taken care of, in which case there would be no need to worry about it. They found that very few Americans believe the problem will "go away" by some magic intervention or silver bullet and similarly small numbers feel it is too late to do anything about global warming. At the same time, Americans are highly skeptical that people, governments and corporations will do what it takes to deal with the problem adequately. About nine out of ten of the Alarmed, Concerned, Cautious and Disengaged have some kind of doubt that effective action can or will be taken (Roser-Renouf et al. 2014). These figures reveal that those who are most worried about global warming also have the biggest doubts that we can avert the threat, pointing at least to the *potential* for help- and hopelessness in the American public.

Leiserowitz et al. (2014a) also asked directly about survey respondents' feelings about global warming. They found that Americans are aware of various feelings: 43% feel "very" or "moderately strongly" helpless, as many feel hopeful (42%), 40% are sad, 35% feel afraid, and 24% say they feel depressed about global warming. The conscious naming and public admission of feelings that could feed into or indicate hopelessness is thus considerably lower than the "potential" for such feelings. There is no direct explanation or research to explain the difference. However, qualitative studies available from the US and elsewhere offer hypothetical answers that require further testing. Several reviews (e.g., Moser 2014; Reser et al. 2014) suggest that people are increasingly convinced that climate change is already here: they perceive greater frequency or intensity of extreme events, gradual changes, as well as unusual events not previously experienced in particular places. Regardless of whether or not such perceptions are matched by objective changes and events (Akerlof et al. 2013, Myers et al. 2013), a growing number of people claim a direct experience of the impacts of climate change. This counters the tendency to keep the issue psychologically distant (Spence et al. 2012): the threat is becoming personal (Weber 2006).

Numerous qualitative studies of people personally confronted with climate change (e.g., the Arctic, low-lying coastal areas) suggest that direct experience of a momentous change in the climate makes denial more difficult to maintain and – without knowing or seeing a commensurably large response – fosters overwhelm, helplessness, apathy, and despair (Moser 2007; Lertzman 2008). Often, in cases where extreme hopelessness and despair are found, it is the combination of loss of home, ancestral land, connection to place, lifestyle, and livelihood and other stresses that leave individuals bereft. In case of acute climatic disasters, PTSD and other lasting mental health effects are frequently found (Swim et al. 2010; Clayton et al. 2014). More anecdotally, one of us (SM) regularly provides communication trainings to a wide range of educators, communicators and climate change actors (ranging from elected officials to government and NGO staff). Years ago, the expressed training needs focused on how to effectively communicate the science; then the most pressing need moved to questions became how to communicate climate change in an increasingly polarized and politicized environment; in the past couple of years, training participants state a growing concern and need to counter overwhelm, hopelessness, and despair in their audiences.

Most of these studies and the anecdotal evidence do not come from focused inquiry into hope or hopelessness itself; rather they constitute discoveries of despair and a sense of futility along with other emotional experiences among various populations. But collectively they may well point to a mental health crisis in the making. As climate change impacts are experienced with growing force and in more and more places, without a swift and decisive political response that moves the global community to a clean energy future and increased resilience, people will be left to face a terrifying future with little anticipation of or faith in a worthwhile future.

4. What is Hope?

So far, we have treated hope as a distinct and unified, felt experience, and have not questioned what exactly it is. Our understanding of hope is shaped by insights from psychology, but also from medicine, sociology, economics, philosophy, religious studies, and mythology.

In psychology, hope has been variably defined as an optimistic *attitude of mind* based on an expectation of positive outcomes, the *cognitive skill* to maintain drive and direction (so-called "agency thinking" and "pathway thinking") (e.g., Snyder 2000; Shorey et al. 2002), a *way to maintain motivation* or a *mechanism* to overcome lack of motivation, a cognitive *attribute* of a person, or a motivating *force* for change (e.g., Herth 1992). Some have translated that optimistic attitude in terms of a person's *risk-seeking stance* in the face of ambiguity (Viscusi and Chesson 1999). Most of this literature links hope to the existence of a goal (sometimes more specifically with the need of a realistic perception of goals), combined with a determined plan and the will power for reaching it.

Medical psychologists frequently find hope to be a *contributing factor* in helping people heal, recover from or cope more effectively with illness, stay healthy, and giving them a greater sense of well-being and enhanced quality of life (e.g., Gropmann 2005; Snyder et al. 1991). Importantly, researchers here have found significant differences in the impact of realistic hope versus wishful thinking.

A touch point with the contributions from economics to our understanding of hope is that people in the transition from a less desirable to a more desirable state experience hope as the *result of* social and economic *empowerment*. For example, in post-colonial development or otherwise deprived socioeconomic contexts, it is typically the combination of external forces having deprived "the powerless of the material access and resources to be active shapers of their lives" with internal disempowerment stemming from "the almost always present internalization of inferiority and resulting self-rejection" (Moser 2013, p.285) that has led to disempowerment and hopelessness. Hope, then, grows or returns when people find and claim their voice, their skills and powers to become active shapers of their lives.

Moving into the humanities, philosophy brings yet a different perspective to the definition of hope. For American philosopher Rorty (1999), for example, hope is a *metanarrative* or prevailing cultural story that offers a promise of a better future. Such narratives can be a motivating force for change by putting forth a vision, for example, in which good triumphs over evil. In religious studies, hope has been viewed as a *virtue*, a *consequential way of conducting*

oneself, a *precondition* for, or *benefit* of, spiritual attainment. That reward typically is some kind of "heaven," including promises of enlightenment, salvation or eternal justice (Bennett 2011). And last, but not least at all, in Greek mythology, Hope has an important but ambiguous place in the famous story of Pandora. She opened the jar from which all manner of evil escaped, except hope, which remained at the bottom. What mythology adds to our understanding of hope most importantly perhaps, is its understanding of hope as an *archetypal human experience* whose essence is universal, multidimensional, and indeterminate.

Contemporary critics and thinkers echo some of these formal conceptualization of hope, yet also enrich them in crucial ways, and make them accessible to a wider audience than most scientific studies ever will. McKibben (2010), Orr (2011), and Macy and Johnstone (2012), for example, all speak to the need of sustaining hope in the face of climate change. They reaffirm first and foremost the "agency" component of psychological definitions. "Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up. In contrast to optimism or despair, hope requires that one actually do something to improve the world. Authentic hope comes with an imperative to act" (Orr, 2011, p. xix). Similarly, McKibben points to action when he says, "My only real fear is that the reality [now] increasingly evident in the world around us will be for some an excuse to give up. We need just the opposite – increased engagement" (2010, p. xv). And Macy and Johnstone, in their book *Active Hope*, call for "a readiness to engage" which means not watching the world – risk-free – from an armchair, but to discover it and ourselves by "playing our part" in it (2012, p.35). Solnit (2004) is more political, more radical, when she proclaims that for her hope is "an act of defiance, or rather [...] the foundation for an ongoing series of acts of defiance, those acts necessary to bring about some of what we hope for and to live by principle in the meantime" (p.137). So, in contrast to the psychological scholarship reviewed above, for these writers, hope in the face of climate change is not merely a cognitive skill or attribute, but an *active practical, civic and political skill*.

As for the "outcome" orientation of hope, these writers are exceedingly clear that despite the uncertainty in scientific understanding (cf. Markowitz and Shariff 2012), there is no more room for wishful thinking with regard to climate change. McKibben, for example, forces us – by renaming our fundamentally changed planet from Earth to Eaarth – to grapple with the loss and painful disruption we have brought on ourselves, and calls that the bravest act of hope we can undertake. McIntosh (2008) argues that, "humankind needs to shoulder the burden of awareness that comes with the knowledge that we are now in a great dying time of evolutionary history" (p.191). Others remind us that simplistic optimism for a future no longer available is misleading. Echoing the findings in medical psychology, Hamilton (2010) for example argues that, "Optimism can be destructive if it is unrealistic and keeps us from facing a harsh reality" (p.131). And Orr (2010) demands,

> Hope [...] requires us to check our optimism at the door and enter the future without illusions. It requires a level of honesty, self-awareness, and sobriety that is difficult to summon and sustain. ... Authentic hope, in other words, is made of sterner stuff than optimism. It must be rooted in the truth as best we can see it, knowing that our vision is always partial. (pp. 326-327).

With futures free of harm now out of reach, the focus on achievable outcomes must turn elsewhere. Lutz Warren (2011, p.257) suggests one possibility when she cites Aldo Leopold, who wrote to a friend some 60 years ago, "That the situation is hopeless should not prevent us from doing our best." Similarly, Sufi mystic, Vaughan-Lee (2010), echoes the sentiment saying, "Something is over and is not coming back, but that doesn't mean one should go and dig a hole for oneself. The Prophet said 'Even if you know the world will end tomorrow, plant a tree.' – that is an affirmation of life" (para. 14).

Curiously, hope here is not seen as a feeling state or cognitive skill to become and stay motivated toward a worthwhile goal. Hope emerges as a *commitment* to a positive, communal outcome even if that outcome cannot be assured. It points to a deeper source, *an inward orientation*, that should not be understood as narcissistic naval-gazing and abandonment of the outward tasks ahead of us, but as a search for a more durable source of motivation. Hope becomes a *call to mature*, to take on the responsibility of safeguarding the possibility of a livable future, regardless of whether it will actually be realized. As the empirical work of Ojala (2012a,b) with children, youth and older adolescents suggests, it may even be a *sign of maturity*. As McKibben puts it, "Maturity is not the opposite of hope; it's what makes hope possible" (2010, p. xv).

Without framing it through a developmental lens, the Norwegian psychologist and economist Stoknes (2015) offers a typology of different "varieties of hope," which rests on the two major factors described in this review: the degree of agency or active engagement and the inner or outer focus underlying our motivations. He distinguishes four types of hope: (1) passive optimism or "Pollyanna Hope," in which a person believes in a positive (e.g., safe, bright, thriving) future that will simply come about on its own, or by someone else's doing (e.g., god, nature, or some technological fix); (2) active optimism or "Heroic Hope," in which the person has a similarly positive outlook but understands he or she needs to actively help bring it about; (3) passive skepticism or "Stoic Hope," in which a person is not at all convinced that the future will be bright and easy, but believes not much needs to be done because it will be bearable; and, finally, (4) active skepticism or "Grounded Hope," in which a person is realistically informed about the state of affairs, and thus skeptical of a positive outlook, but chooses to do whatever she or he can to bring about the best possible outcome, because standing by is an unacceptable and unethical option.

Grounded hope for Stoknes is similar to the mature hope espoused by McKibben, Orr, Macy and Johnstone, and McIntosh: deeply rooted in a sense of cross-generational responsibility, a willingness to bear pain and suffering, and to act without immediate or egocentric gratification and outward success. This kind of hope demands inner transformation and echoes positive psychology (Seligman 1990), which sees "strong support for the potential for growth and transformation to emerge from the climate crisis" (Fritze et al. 2008, p.9). For McIntosh (2008), this transformative potential lies precisely in the confrontation with climate change: "I perversely hold out hope for humanity, not in spite of global warming, but precisely because it confronts us with a wake-up call to consciousness" (p.10). Says Vaughan-Lee, "We need a certain number of people in the world who are present in life as it is [rather than in an illusion], to hold a certain axis of awareness and love in the world, to keep watch on the world and for the world" (2010, para. 14). For Orr, this is the hard work we face: "Hope requires the courage to reach farther, dig deeper, confront our limits and those of nature, work harder, and dream dreams" (2011, p. 327).

And if Loeb (2004) is right, this dream of a livable, dignified world, "the impossible" that David Roberts asked us to make possible, that will "take a little while."

5. How Do We Foster Hope in Ourselves?

Returning to the practical then, we find ourselves standing on the shores of today, looking toward tomorrow, and realize that the bridge that takes us across will not come from simply wishing for it. We must build it, and in light of the unprecedented challenge we face, we have to build it as we go. Arguably no other major transformation humanity has undergone had to happen so fast, in such an all-encompassing manner, demanding such profound changes. So how do we foster and maintain hope within ourselves? The understanding of hope developed above gives us some answers.

Maybe most importantly, fostering authentic hope in ourselves requires inner work and is not a quick program. It begins with having the courage – counter-intuitively – to go to hopelessness, to our own despair.[3] We get there by way of a clear-eyed look at the facts describing what is happening to the things that we love and grieving actual and anticipated losses, including the future we previously hoped we would have. It is painful to "get real" about the situation we are in (Moser 2012) and, eventually, accept that reality. Acceptance here means an illusion-free assessment of the situation; a clarity on what are we working with and what we are up against. Curiously, the process of experiencing rather than suppressing, denying, or collapsing into our fears, grief, and despair, lets us discover what we most care about, what matters most, what our deepest values are. This then becomes the basis for our hopes and our actions.

Over the course of the long transformation that is before us, we have to be continually willing to go back into grief, and come back out. And because our lives, our families, our work, and the world around us are still full of beauty, we will have to learn to hold the paradox of beauty and destruction, the here and now and the tomorrow, the global and the minute. Out of that persistent tension, the possibility of "both and," of multiple futures, slowly emerges.

Grounded in a realistic assessment of what is, this opening up of the future to multiple outcomes becomes creative uncertainty. For Macy and Johnstone (2012) that uncertainty opens a space for mystery and adventure. For others it simply opens up possibility, which, ultimately, asks us how we want to help shape it. It forces us to grapple, very personally, with what we believe the point of life is and what the specific purpose of our own lives is, what drives us most deeply. As Lutz Warren (2011) argues, we are wired to have "realist dreams" for our future, which give us meaning and which are never just self-serving or ego-centric but serve a higher purpose, a greater and common good.

6. How Do We Support Others in their Search of Hope?

Fostering hope within ourselves is never complete and may, in fact, fail if we have to do so by ourselves (Pipher 2013). As Roberts (2013) says, "When we ask for hope, then, I think we're [...]

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[3] For some, the "despair work" described by Macy and Young [1998]; Macy and Johnstone [2012] may be helpful.

asking for fellowship. The weight of climate change, like any weight, is easier to bear with others." Grief and despair work is more powerful and easier when done with others; finding a powerful vision rooted in what holds most meaning for us and then enacting it requires company.

But if we need others to maintain our hope, we are what others need to maintain theirs. We can offer that gift to our fellow travelers most dependably and believably, if we do our own deep work of maturing and growing authentic hope within ourselves. If we can be real about what is going on, we offer a space for others to become real; if we are grounded in reality, we can frame the hard work of hope for others; our own maturity becomes their model; if we are genuinely inspired, we become inspiring. Thus, the messenger, the teacher, the mentor, the guide may be the most important element in whatever specific steps for fostering hope we may take.

But along the long road toward everyone's own authentic hope, we have interactions that can help others. When communicators and educators come with the heavy news of climate change, it helps to think of ourselves as "friendly communicators" (the "communicator as friend"). As a friend, we would first show up not as a scientist or teacher or an advocate, but as a human being. We all have our personal ways of building a human-to-human connection – saying hi, checking in, asking about the other's well-being, connecting around something we share in common are just some examples. And before the "bad news" is delivered, the sensitive person first warns his audience that he comes with tough news. This helps the receivers to brace themselves but stay open. Previewing that there are interesting issues to discuss, that there are worthy tasks to shoulder together, helps to tap into people's curiosity. From that groundwork fostering hope can commence (Textbox 1).

It begins with truth telling in the sense that Orr proposes: "Telling the truth means that the people must be summoned to a level of extraordinary greatness appropriate to an extraordinarily dangerous time" (Orr 2011, p.330). It goes beyond joint fact finding, an expert presenting the state of the science, or a class learning about the different aspects of the problem.[4] It could include stories from history of when a country or group has overcome seemingly insurmountable

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TEXTBOX 1

Seven Ingredients for Fostering Authentic Hope

1. **Clear-eyed diagnosis and space for all reactions**: Where are we at? How does that feel?

2. **Vision of a worthwhile outcome**: What is achievable?

3. **Feasible path**: How can we get from here to there?

4. **Strategy for setbacks and interim goals**: What to do when the going gets tough?

5. **Meaningful role for individuals**: What can I do?

6. **Call on people's highest self:** Who do I most want to be? Which deepest values will sustain me?

7. **Doing it together**: What will you (others) do?

Source: Synthesized from Shorey et al. (2002), Snyder (1990), Gropmann (2005) and others cited in the text.

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[4] Much has been written elsewhere about how to present climate change in audience-specific ways (for a rich source of communication and engagement resources, see: www.climateaccess.org).

obstacles. It includes truth-telling about one's own despair and coming back to full commitment to the world, to the future.

Inevitably, the facts will bring up strong beliefs and emotions, even profound despair, and we must hold a space for these reactions. If people are only presented with the "diagnosis," but have no space to ask what it means and what can and cannot be done – they will shut down. How then can educators and communicators create a safe space for emotions? True emotions cannot be forced, only invited. Those sharing them must have a true choice about whether they do or don't. We must learn to authentically validate what is shared – no matter what feelings arise – and normalize them by illustrating that you, others in the room and elsewhere have similar experiences, and maybe more importantly, that we all have all kinds of emotions about climate change. Crucially, emotions ask to be witnessed, *not* "fixed." Attempts to stop tears or rage or despair suggest that there is something wrong with having them. Thus, our work is to be true witnesses, not interveners. This shows compassion and respect. Making space for emotions and other reactions in this way requires that we grow our own capacity to be with people in distress, which ultimately points us back to doing our own emotional work.

But the work of fostering hope does not end there. What comes next is helping people find what matters most to them, formulate a vision of a worthwhile goal, and finding a way toward it. Such a vision in the face of climate realities is not a wishful paradise, but a "realistic dream" that inspires: it depicts – in real places – some version of a clean and resilient future, socially connected, culturally alive, and filled with dignity, mutuality, and justice. It is difficult and vulnerable for people to put their hopes and desires out for others to see, but doing so with one's community can itself be an enriching and hope-inspiring experience.

The feasible path toward it is an arduous transition between here and there: a journey made up of many steps, punctuated with surprises and setbacks. Not every step and turn can be known; but knowing the first few makes it more actionable and believable. In fact, an important element of any journey is to discuss what the possible setbacks and disappointments along the way might be, and how to prepare for and buffer against them, or what the possible responses might be, should they arise.

The final ingredients in making hope real is that everyone finds their role in bringing the common vision about: what is my unique and realistic contribution? What is yours? What can we expect from each other (governments, businesses, other people)? How will we support each other and go the distance together? It is crucial to foster a sense of togetherness and trust. Everyone's contributions must be real, practical and doable. The anchoring in our deepest values and aspirations for a meaningful life will motivate and sustain us, give us meaning, regardless of outcome, and thus help us carry through and carry on.

7. In Summary: What Then Can We Hope For?

Surely, the bridge of hope we will build and cross together will be sturdy in places and shaky in others. Some parts of the crossing will be harder than anything we can now imagine; others may surprise us by their ease. Communities all over the world will not all hope for the same, and we

have little if any external railing to hang on to. Fundamentally, most will hope for survival and that we won't descend into cruelty as the going gets tough. For others the hopes will focus on stability, dependable livelihoods, or thriving communities with healthy ecosystems and productive economies. On a deeper level we may hope for a profound, transformative shift of how we humans live on this planet, how we behave toward non-human nature and each other. That may not all happen in our lifetimes. But as the inspiring thinkers of our time suggest, we should not hook our hopes on unrealistic futures or immediate gratification. Instead we may be the modern equivalents of medieval cathedral builders, who laid – stone by stone – the foundations but never saw the towers. The work of hope that lies before us is the willingness to work for something larger than maybe we can imagine, but surely larger than we, today, may ever see.

Like all archetypal experiences – such as love, truth, faith, and beauty – the hope we will need to create a future of truth and goodness is not reducible to a simple emotion, a cognitive state of mind, a motivation, skill or attribute. It is a verb, an inward orientation, a sign of maturity, an affirmation of life, and – at this crucial time in human history – an emerging and powerful inquiry for our deepest commitment to what matters most.

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