Active Hope as Pedagogical Activism: The Courage of Attuning to Multidimensional Temporalities

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Abstract

Building on critiques of clock time as a disciplinary force underpinning neoliberal logics in early childhood education (ECEC), this conceptual paper discusses how accelerated and outcome-driven temporalities shape how we live, relate, and become with/through education. Simultaneously, inspired by the concept of Active Hope as 'something we do', rather than 'wishful thinking', something we 'possess' or 'wait to be rescued' (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 35), the paper reframes activism in ECEC as situated, relational, and ethical action that unfolds through micro-acts of courage and curiosity that make time for care, deep listening, and the refusal of acceleration in everyday pedagogical encounters. The paper argues that these seemingly minor yet significant gestures can interrupt accelerated temporal regimes, opening possibilities for re-imagining education through relational forms of shared time. In this sense, Active Hope is conceptualised as a form of everyday pedagogical activism that sustains relational and temporal reconfigurations, including possibilities for 'gift economies' of shared time (Kimmerer, 2024), as openings toward pedagogical imaginaries that dwell in the present while reaching toward the not-yet and expanding conditions for what may become possible.

Keywords: Active Hope, pedagogical activism, resisting clock time, micro-acts of resistance, multidimensional temporalities, 'gift economy of shared time'

Introduction: Active Hope as an Everyday Pedagogical Activism

Following Dahlberg and Moss (2005), we understand neoliberalism as a governing rationality characterised by instrumentality, calculation and managerial logics that increasingly organise educational life through efficiency, accountability and measurable performance. Within ECEC, these logics are enacted not only through policy but also through the everyday conditions of pedagogical practice. We argue that one of the principal ways this governing rationality is enacted is through temporal regimes that regulate how educators teach, relate, respond and imagine what becomes pedagogically possible. Neoliberalism has increasingly reorganised early childhood education and care (ECEC) through accelerated, linear, and measurable temporal regimes that discipline the purpose of education, how educators teach, what children learn, when and how they 'appropriately' develop. Clock time manifests through tight schedules, developmental timelines, predetermined learning outcomes, and productivity imperatives. It operates not as a neutral organisational tool but as a governing force that shapes subjectivities, relations, and what becomes possible within ECEC (Birth, 2012; Mondschein, 2020; Shahjahan & Zembylas, 2025). In this paper, we argue that resisting these temporal regimes requires Active Hope as a form of pedagogical activism, enacted through everyday micro-acts that disrupt clock time and re-centre care and relationality.

Inspired by the work of Joanna Macy, a scholar of Buddhism, systems thinking and deep ecology, and Chris Johnstone, a psychologist focused on resilience, wellbeing and social change (Macy & Johnstone, 2012), the concept of Active Hope names a readiness to engage, remain present, and act without guarantees of success or achieved outcomes. Conceived as a practical philosophical tool to help transform eco-anxiety and despair into meaningful, collective action for planetary healing, Active Hope is understood not as 'passive optimism', something we simply 'long for', merely 'have' or "waiting for external agencies to bring about what we desire" (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 3). Instead, Active Hope is a practice of acting with intention, care and responsibility without guarantees of success or outcomes; a readiness to engage and remain present amid uncertainty. Applied in ECEC, Active Hope suggests that change becomes possible (Giamminuti, 2025) through the collective mobilisation of curiosity, attentiveness and courage. Rather than locating resistance within isolated individual acts, Active Hope makes visible and values the everyday micro-acts through which educational communities collectively interrupt neoliberal temporal logics and cultivate alternative pedagogical possibilities.

As a framework, Active Hope provides a conceptual language for recognising seemingly minor temporal actions, such as slowing down, listening, and refusing to rush, as deliberate, meaningful, pedagogical, ethical, and political acts of resisting clock time from within. In this sense, Active Hope is understood as pedagogical activism, a situated, everyday practice that unfolds within pedagogical encounters. As such, it takes the form of deliberate micro-acts of care and resistance (rather than grand gestures) through which educators respond to and rework dominant logic—such as efficiency, standardisation, and chronological governance—while remaining attentive to relational and ethical responsibilities, as well as to minor gestures of care. As a form of pedagogical resistance operating within neoliberal structures that increasingly reduce pedagogy to technical implementation, predetermined outcomes and measurable performance (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Giamminuti et al., 2024), Active Hope creates openings for alternative, multidimensional temporalities, thereby making different ways of being, relating, and learning possible in everyday pedagogical life.

In what follows, we first discuss clock time as a colonial and capitalist force governing ECEC. We then conceptualise Active Hope as a form of pedagogical activism enacted through everyday micro-acts of curiosity and courage that disrupt clock time and attune to multidimensional temporalities. Finally, we consider how such practices may open possibilities for ethical and relational forms of exchange, including 'gift economies' of shared time (Kimmerer, 2024), while disrupting neoliberal logics of productivity and acceleration.

Clock Time as Neoliberal and Colonial Governance

We use the term clock time to refer to standardised, measurable units of time, represented by clocks, calendars, and age markers that structure and control most aspects of our lives, including ECEC (Birth, 2012). Far from being a neutral, purely technical construct, clock time functions as a disciplinary regime deeply entangled with colonial and capitalist histories (Mondschein, 2020). Through standardised schedules, age-based groupings, curricular pacing, and developmental timelines, clock time privileges predictability, efficiency, and linearity, governing the rhythms of education and constraining alternative rhythms and ways of being, learning, relating and living (Shahjahan & Zembylas, 2025).

The word 'clock' originates from the German 'glocke' (bell); its history begins in monastic life, where bells signalled prayer and work. Over time, the bell evolved into mechanical clocks, enabling precise, standardised timekeeping in industrial production (Mondschein, 2020). The advent of mechanical clocks was not just a technological development; it also

had significant colonial implications. European colonisers imposed Western timekeeping systems, including the Gregorian calendar and the seven-day week, on societies whose timekeeping was originally based on natural or spiritual cycles, thereby displacing Indigenous systems and asserting temporal dominance (Ogle, 2015). Consequently, many non-Western societies willingly (or not) adopted these Western time regimes to demonstrate progress and conform to global norms (Ogle, 2015).

Shahjahan and Zembylas (2025) conceptualise clock time as a disciplinary force grounded in three interrelated assumptions that together organise education in exclusionary ways. These are universality, linearity, and epistemic–moral authority. Clock time is assumed to operate universally, abstracting learning from cultural and contextual specificities and enforcing standardised temporal structures (e.g., timetables; full-day, half-day programmes). It is also viewed as a linear and progressive construct ("time as arrow"), turning education into a forward-moving trajectory toward predefined outcomes, with its value attached to measurable advancement and productivity (Shahjahan & Zembylas, 2025, p. 3). Finally, clock time holds epistemic and moral authority, legitimising dominant temporal norms as natural and desirable, while regulating everyday educational practices and subjectivities. For example, educators may recognise that a child or a group's investigation is deepening through dialogue, uninterrupted time and pedagogical documentation, yet feel compelled to interrupt it because the timetable signals that it is time to move to the next experience. Taken together, these assumptions render clock time invisible, undermining its power to organise and discipline education. Yet, the clock time normalises certain forms and rhythms of development and learning, privileging those who align with its temporal expectations over those who do not, thereby positioning the latter as 'backward' or 'underdeveloped' (Shahjahan & Zembylas, 2025).

Ultimately, clock time is not only a structuring force but also an affective one. It mediates and regulates everything that happens in ECEC (i.e., curricula and pedagogies), shaping affective experiences and foreclosing possibilities for alternative being and relating in ECEC. Importantly, it also drives thoughts and ways we 'travel' through our lives. In *Sand Talk,* Tyson Yunkaporta (2023) speaks of the lasting impacts of such settlers' colonial and neoliberal logic of time on Aboriginal people and communities, sharing that the Aboriginal notion of time can only be described as 'non-linear' in English. But it is still so inaccurate, as there is no word for 'non-linear' in Aboriginal languages, as

> nobody would consider travelling, thinking or talking in a straight line in the first place. The winding path is just how the path is, and therefore, it needs no name. One man tried going in a straight line many thousands of years ago and was called *wamba* (crazy) and punished by being thrown up into the sky. This is a very old story, one of many stories that tell us how we must travel and think in free-ranging patterns, warning us against charging ahead in crazy ways (Yunkaporta, 2023, p. 21).

In stark contrast to the Aboriginal, non-Western and non-dominant worldviews of time, the colonial narrative of 'charging ahead' in a linear, accelerated manner is central to the logic driving the neoliberal vision of 'successful, progressive[1], contemporary' education/ECEC. Neoliberal regimes enforce linear, accelerated time—the ticking of performance indicators, the calendar of outcomes, the stopwatch of efficiency—leaving traces on bodies and minds, reshaping wellbeing and foreclosing open-ended, relational learning experiences (Shonkoff et. al., 2000; Siegel & Bryson, 2012). Neoliberal logics

[1] Throughout this paper, we use the term 'progressive' critically to refer to neoliberal discourses of progress associated with acceleration, productivity and measurable performance, rather than to progressive traditions in education grounded in democracy, experimentation and social justice.

not only regulate what is valued in education; they also delimit how time—and life itself—is lived. As Moss (2006) observes, "the historical process of the institutionalisation of childhood is in a period of intensification, as children enter educational institutions at ever earlier ages and remain in them for longer periods" (p. 127). Nearly two decades later, this regime of compressed time and the vision of 'success' continues to dominate, reducing education to the technical practice of 'readying' for "the next stage" (i.e., school, employment), thereby disconnecting it from the essence of being human: the possibility of living in a complex, multidimensional, multidirectional way, or, as Bateson (1979) describes, losing touch with 'the pulse of life'.

Since the neoliberal logic operates through clock time, through its pacing, sequencing, and moral authority, pedagogical resistance must attend to how time is lived, shared, and re-configured in everyday practice. Taking seriously the warning against 'charging ahead in a straight line as wamba' (Yunkaporta, 2023, p. 21), which is exactly what neoliberal logic demands, we call for Active Hope, as a situated, everyday practice of pedagogical activism that supports and sustains micro-acts that disrupt clock time. We argue that Active Hope, as a practice of resisting clock time through slowing down, deep listening, and connecting with one another, can cultivate the courage to attune to a multidimensional way of existence, enabling us to become "active participants in bringing about what we hope for" (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 3).

Active Hope as Micro-Resistance: Curiosity and Courage to Resist Clock Time

Critical scholarship has extensively examined the impacts of neoliberalism in ECEC through the lenses of marketisation, governance, accountability, and standardisation (Kamenarac, 2023; Ball, 2016; Moss, 2006; Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021; Sims & Hui, 2017). With a few notable exceptions (Farquhar, 2016; Clark, 2023; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012; Tesar, 2016; Wien & Kirby-Smith, 1998), the temporal dimension, particularly clock time, has received comparatively less sustained attention, despite its role in privileging efficiency, linear progress, and measurable outcomes over relational presence and care.

Against this backdrop, and in dialogue with Rinaldi (2021, p. 158), we return to the question: "Is it legitimate today, when everything seems to move towards ever greater speed—towards super-speed—to admire slowness, empty time, pauses?" In response, we argue that Active Hope can be enacted through micro-acts of resistance, such as pausing, slowing down, and deep listening that begin to reconfigure how time is lived in pedagogical practice. As an enactment of time that interrupts chronological urgency, Active Hope is oriented toward presence and enacted through the courage to linger, remain curious, and stay with unfolding pedagogical moments. In doing so, such micro-acts allow educators to both recognise acceleration and attune to alternative rhythms, even if only momentarily.

Active Hope is situated, often quiet and yet a cumulative practice that can open possibilities for multidimensional, relational ways of being, even when clock time demands that we accept that it is impossible. As an ethical orientation enacted through intention and deliberate action, something we "do", Active Hope is

> a readiness to engage
> […] a readiness to discover the strengths in ourselves and in others;
> a readiness to discover the reasons for hope and the occasions for love.
> A readiness to discover the size and strength of our hearts, our quickness of mind, our steadiness of purpose, our own authority, our love for life, the liveliness of our curiosity, the unsuspected deep well

> of patience and diligence, the keenness of our senses, and our capacity to lead (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 35).

In this sense, Active Hope is neither naïve, passive, nor consolatory. Nor does it rely on heroic or large-scale forms of activism beyond institutional contexts. While we acknowledge and value the importance of such collective mobilisations, we argue that activism does not always require grand gestures. Instead, Active Hope takes form through micro-acts of resistance embedded within everyday pedagogical encounters. Although it does not remove neoliberal conditions or offer guarantees, Active Hope remains an ethical and agentic response—sustained through a readiness to act, the courage to remain with the not-yet, and a commitment to opening space for alternative possibilities.

When considering what Active Hope as micro-resistance may look like in ECEC practice, we foreground how educators enact seemingly minor yet significant acts—deliberately slowing down, attuning to children, one another, and the unfolding of pedagogical life. Similarly, extending moments of inquiry by staying "five more minutes" (Clark, 2023) with children's questions, rather than adhering strictly to predetermined schedules, becomes a minor political intervention in accelerated childhoods. As a situated practice, Active Hope as micro-resistance emerges within neoliberal constraints through deliberate micro-acts of refusal, curiosity, and courage. These include slowing transitions, pausing routines, sustaining dialogue, and cultivating deep listening and attentiveness. Through these practices, educators interrupt accelerated temporal regimes and unsettle demands for speed, certainty, and closure, cultivating pedagogical spaces grounded in relationality, care, and collective becoming.

Building on this understanding of Active Hope as a situated practice of micro-resistance, it also entails a willingness to stay with discomfort, uncertainty, and the 'not-yet'. As established at the outset, such a stance requires recognising that relations of power are never fixed and that there is always "a certain degree of freedom on both sides" (Foucault, 1997, p. 292). In other words, even when power relations appear profoundly asymmetrical—as they often do within neoliberal ECEC contexts— there always remains a possibility for resistance, as we are "freer than we think we are" (Foucault, 1997, p. 292).

Foucault's concept of 'free subject' further reminds us that if there were no possibility of resistance, through flight, refusal, or strategies capable of reversing the situation, "there would be no power relations at all", rather, "if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere" (Foucault, 1997, p. 292). While such relations are uneven, they nonetheless leave a margin of possibility, "the problem is knowing where resistance will [and can] develop" (Foucault, 1997, p. 292).

Active Hope does not appear in exceptional moments, often unfolding within the ordinary rhythms of pedagogical life. It may emerge when educators choose to remain with shared inquiries instead of bringing them to closure, extending the temporal possibilities of encounters through dialogue, documentation, and collective reflection. As Clark (2023) suggests, staying "five more minutes" is not simply about allowing more chronological time, but about creating the conditions for different ways of knowing, relating, and becoming to emerge. Such moments are sustained through pedagogical cultures that value shared interpretation, documentation, and collective responsibility for educational decision-making (Giamminuti et al., 2024).

Recognising that resistance and freedom are always immanent within power relations—however constrained—opens a space for rethinking clock time as historically, discursively, and politically constituted, and therefore as something that can be resisted, reworked, and disrupted. It is within this space that Active Hope becomes meaningful:

not as a promise of transcendence, but as a situated practice that renders visible and inhabitable these margins of possibility. As such, Active Hope manifests through curiosity and the courage to slow down, pause, and think, be, and act differently—creating openings to identify cracks within neoliberal temporal regimes and to introduce alternative ways of relating to time (Kamenarac, 2025).

Such practices of resistance can be understood as acts of courageous and curious engagement—what we might conceptualise as resistant curiosity (Kamenarac, 2025). As an ethical and relational force, resistant curiosity refuses the neoliberal temporalities through which ECEC, children, and educators are rendered governable and calibrated to productivity, profit, and compliance (Kamenarac, 2025). In this sense, curiosity is not innate but cultivated as an active force that "breaks up our familiarities" and enables us to "regard otherwise the same" (Zurn, 2021, pp. 86–90).

As a mode of active refusal, resistant curiosity unsettles the taken-for-granted assumptions of clock time—its claims to universality, linearity, and epistemic–moral authority (Shahjahan & Zembylas, 2025)—which organise ECEC rhythms as standardised and outcome-oriented. By interrupting the forward "arrow" of clock time, it disrupts economised approaches to ECEC and reconfigures the educator's role as ethical and deeply relational work, re-centring care, attentiveness, and the 'pulse of life' (Bateson, 1979) over the cadence of the market.

Crucially, this mode of Active Hope as resistance—enacted as curiosity, courage, and refusal—takes form through micro-acts that decelerate neoliberal temporal regimes and reassert multidimensional human time. These include pauses for deep listening, attentiveness, and dialogue (Rinaldi, 2006), alongside gestures that restore the 'pulse of life' within situated pedagogies. As scholarship suggests (Archer, 2022; Kamenarac et al., 2022), such everyday acts of micro-resistance can mobilise educators to momentarily step outside the rules of the neoliberal institutional game and reconnect with the ethics of care and education as a relational public good.

Although these acts are often localised—partial, situated, and temporary—they nonetheless have the capacity to 'melt what is frozen' in the temporal organisation of ECEC, opening space for becoming otherwise (Kamenarac, 2025). In this sense, educators may begin to emerge as critically curious and relational public intellectuals who speak truth to power (Kamenarac, 2025), co-creating pedagogies grounded in deep listening, caring for and with (Tronto, 1993), and more responsive ways of relating to one another and the world.

In this context, as Petrini (2007) reminds us, 'slow' is not primarily about speed, but about cultivating a thoughtful, attentive, and relational mode of being in which quality is not compromised by the demands of efficiency. The 'slow' advocated here concerns depth of engagement—with oneself, with others, and with the more-than-human—enabling us "to see the unknown and to distance ourselves from what is already known," and to resist the "naturalisation of solutions" imposed by dominant educational visions (Novoa, 2018, pp. 551, 553).

Active Hope, as such, is not simply a disposition but an ethical and political act. It lingers with discomfort and uncertainty, refusing the reduction of education to economic productivity while opening possibilities for alternative, multidimensional temporalities and futures. In doing so, it resists the reproduction of the "same old sameness" (St. Pierre, 2021) and instead aligns with what may appear as the "too-strange" or "too-much" within neoliberal logics (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 607), fostering democratic experimentalism (Moss, 2017) and sustaining a commitment to relational ethics, care, and attentiveness in everyday practice.

At a time when neoliberal regimes generate despair, erode solidarity, and strip joy from pedagogical work (Moss, 2006; Smyth, 2017), practising Active Hope can help reclaim agency, vitality, and curiosity for educators and children alike. To contest such conditions is to open spaces of dialogue, conversation, and *confronto*[2], nurturing collective capacities for resistance and renewal. Etymologically, *spirare* (to breathe, to give spirit) contrasts with *des-pair*, the cutting off of breath and disconnection from others. Active Hope dwells within this fracture yet turns towards *in-spir*e: to breathe into life, to re-pair, to breathe-with. In this movement, education re-emerges as encounter, as relational possibility, and as a practice of co-creating collective vitality (Manning, 2016).

Through these everyday gestures of micro-resistance, Active Hope not only interrupts neoliberal temporalities but also cultivates relational forms of exchange grounded in reciprocity, attentiveness, and shared time. In the following section, we extend this argument by exploring possibilities for moving beyond neoliberal, transactional conceptions of the economy—structured through clock time—towards relational alternatives, including the restoration of abundance through 'the gift economy of shared time' (Kimmerer, 2024).

Disrupting Clock Time through Micro-Acts of Shared Time

Building on our conceptualisation of Active Hope as enacted through micro-acts that interrupt neoliberal temporal regimes, we turn to the ways in which such practices may open spaces for shared time. As discussed above, these situated acts, pausing, lingering, listening, and refusing premature movement, do not exist outside clock time but begin to reconfigure how time is lived and shared within pedagogical encounters. Yet, as we all experience beyond our classrooms and professional lives, there remains an enduring difficulty in finding time to pause, to think, and to cultivate spaces of reciprocity. As Peter Moss recently observed, "it is such a paradox that we don't have much time to talk about time" (personal conversation, December 2025). This paradox speaks precisely to the grip of clock time that Active Hope seeks to unsettle.

While Active Hope does not promise transformation in linear or measurable terms, it offers a way of inhabiting this tension differently. Through micro-acts of staying, pausing, listening, and slowing down, educators may begin to create conditions for attuning to multidimensional temporalities—not as an abstract ideal, but as something lived in practice. Importantly, such reconfigurations of time also open possibilities for shifting beyond transactional logics towards what Robin Wall Kimmerer (2024) describes as a gift economy, grounded in reciprocity, relationality, and shared abundance.

Within a gift economy, the 'currency'—if we momentarily borrow the very economic vocabulary shaped by neoliberal thinking—is not profit or productivity, but time for connection, reciprocity, and interdependence. In contrast, neoliberal constructions of education orient practice towards markets rather than life, eroding relational complexity and the ethical foundations of care (Tronto, 1993). Re-imagining value through Active Hope makes visible alternative modes of relating grounded in mutual care, shared presence, and collective wellbeing. Such reconfigurations emerge through everyday micro-acts—pausing, lingering, listening, and refusing accelerated tempos. Sustained by Active Hope, these everyday gestures begin to loosen the grip of neoliberal, transactional, and utilitarian logics, opening alternative onto-epistemic spaces for thinking and practising economy otherwise.

[2] Confronto is a lived, daily experience of dialectical exchange, relational support, and co-constructed knowledge. Through the ongoing dialogue of ideas, points of view, and perspectives, confronto sustains enrichment and nurtures personal and collective trans-formation. It is, as Giamminuti and coauthors remind us, "a generous attitude, which refutes indifference, and has a fundamental ethical value" (2024, p. xxiii).

As these temporal and relational practices take hold, the language of economy itself begins to shift—from one grounded in extraction, accumulation, and scarcity to one of gift, abundance, and reciprocity. In this sense, the gift economy is not an abstract ideal but an emergent effect of lived pedagogical practices: an economy of time shared, of presence sustained, and of care enacted in relation. As Kimmerer (2024, pp. 90–91) reminds us:

> I cherish the notion of the gift economy, that we might back away from the grinding system which reduces everything to a commodity and leaves most of us bereft of what we really want: a sense of belonging and relationship and purpose and beauty, which can never be commoditised.

Drawing on Stacchiotti (forthcoming), we read these ideas and experiences as metaphysical *la-piazza*: generative spaces of intergenerational encounter where reciprocity is cultivated and sustained. Such relational spaces are inherently abundant and generous, yet they are increasingly rendered scarce by dominant neoliberal logics that constrain both time and space. In this sense, the erosion of shared time is not incidental but central to how neoliberal temporal regimes operate.

Rather than submitting to anonymous exchange and profit, Kimmerer (2024) invites us to imagine the possibility of cultivating gift economies of time alongside—and within—these conditions: relational economies grounded in presence, reciprocity, and face-to-face encounters rather than anonymous exchange and profit. What is at stake here is not the accumulation of wealth, but the restoration of relationships that are already abundant, yet systematically obscured and diminished by large-scale economic systems. In this sense, the gift economy is not a separate framework but an extension of Active Hope's relational and temporal reconfigurations. It takes form through the same micro-acts of care, attentiveness, and reciprocity that characterise Active Hope. It is within moments of disruption—at the edges and gaps of dominant temporal orders—that such economies begin to take shape. These in-between spaces invite both incremental shifts and creative re-orientations, reminding us that transformation is not only possible but already underway in how we relate, respond, and give. As Ingold (2013) reminds us, life unfolds through ongoing movements of attending, responding, and being carried forward together. From this perspective, the gift economy emerges from educational relationships continually sustained through reciprocal responsiveness. It is within these ongoing correspondences that alternative temporalities and relational economies gradually take shape.

These micro-acts of shared time resonate with what Manning (2016) conceptualises as 'minor gestures': small, often fragile actions that gently displace dominant norms without seeking to replace them outright. Rather than operating outside existing systems, such gestures work from within, reconfiguring established logics through experimentation, attentiveness, and relational care (Massumi, 2017). In this sense, micro-acts of Active Hope are never merely personal choices; they emerge through collective responsibilities to attend and respond with- to others. As such, Active Hope becomes a practice of interrupting the moral authority of clock time and a generative force for cultivating educational communities capable of inhabiting alternative temporalities and relational economies grounded in care, reciprocity, abundance, and shared becoming.

Extending the argument that Active Hope unfolds through micro-acts of shared time and relational exchange, the Italian term cura—from the Latin cūra—offers a generative lens for understanding such care as both an ethical and temporal practice. Cūra denotes an attentive and diligent engagement that encompasses both one's inner disposition and one's actions toward others. As a sustained relational commitment, it unfolds over time

through presence, responsibility, and involvement (Treccani, 2023). Through this lens, care is inseparable from temporality: it cannot be rushed, compressed, or detached from the conditions in which it takes place. Rather, it demands persistence, attentiveness, and a willingness to remain in relation, even when dominant regimes demand efficiency, movement, and closure. It is within this temporal-relational ethics of care that Active Hope is enacted, and where the conditions for a gift economy of shared time can be cultivated.

The possibility of resisting accelerated temporal regimes depends upon educational communities that collectively create and protect the conditions for lingering, dialogue, uncertainty, and sustained inquiry. Professional risk is therefore not eliminated but redistributed through shared pedagogical responsibility, making resistance less an individual burden than a collective ethical commitment to preserving the temporal conditions necessary for education.

In ECEC, caring *for* and *with* children involves creating temporal conditions necessary for listening, dialogue, and mutual responsiveness. As Tronto (1993) argues, an ethics of care foregrounds attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness as ongoing relational practices. Here, care is not a discrete act, reduced to individual disposition or emotional labour. Rather, it is a collective ethical practice that unfolds through time-place relations, requiring a shared commitment to remain accountable not only to institutional demands, but also to the relational and ethical dimensions of pedagogical life. From this perspective, time is not a neutral backdrop, but constitutive of care itself: care requires time to notice, to listen, to respond, and to remain with others.

Such an understanding reframes everyday temporal decisions as inherently political. In contrast to the compressed and instrumentalised temporalities of neoliberal contexts, an ethics of care calls for a reconfiguration of time as relational, situated, and shared—time that is lived rather than measured. In this sense, small acts of slowing down, pausing, and staying with others are not simply pedagogical choices, but forms of micro-resistance. Grounded in Active Hope, these gestures create conditions for alternative temporalities to emerge and for relational pedagogies to take hold. By situating care ethics within a temporal framework, care becomes both an ethical orientation and a mode of resistance. It sustains the courage to remain relational within systems structured by acceleration, while enabling educators to attune to multidimensional time that honours reciprocity, attentiveness, and shared presence. In this way, care ethics and Active Hope converge in their insistence on the temporal conditions necessary for ethical pedagogical relations, offering a counter-story to the dominance of clock time.

Importantly, these acts of resistance are rarely spectacular; rather, they re-tune time from within. Through micro-acts—pausing transitions, extending conversations, sustaining collective presence—educators enact what has been described throughout this paper as minor, situated gestures of disruption. Precisely because they unfold within, rather than outside, dominant systems, their transformative potential depends on collective commitment and responsibility. Such gestures are never neutral: they are deeply political, requiring ongoing ethical attentiveness to both risks and possibilities. In this sense, shared time, generosity, and everyday acts of reciprocity are not only relational practices but collective and political responsibilities central to pedagogical activism enacted through Active Hope.

Conclusion: Reclaiming Multidimensional Time through Active Hope

In this paper, we have argued that clock time functions as a governing force in ECEC, sustaining neoliberal and colonial logics that privilege speed, efficiency, and linear progress at the expense of relational, ethical, and care-full pedagogical life. Attending to time as a site of power reveals how everyday educational practices are shaped,

constrained, and normalised through accelerated temporal regimes. At the same time, it also illuminates how resistance becomes possible through the re-configuration of time in practice.

We have proposed Active Hope as a conceptual framing for understanding pedagogical activism enacted through everyday temporal micro-acts. While the notion of Active Hope emerges from environmental activism, its conceptual value for ECEC lies in its reconfiguration of hope as something we do. Here, hope is not positioned as a feeling or disposition, but a practice of engagement and responsibility enacted through situated action. It names a commitment to act courageously and ethically in conditions of uncertainty, where outcomes cannot be measured or assured (Macy & Johnstone, 2012). In doing so, Active Hope provides a conceptual language for recognising forms of pedagogical practice that are already present and emerging in ECEC yet often rendered invisible and insignificant within neoliberal regimes of time, accountability, and productivity.

Understood this way, Active Hope foregrounds a readiness to engage, remain present, and act responsibly amid uncertainty. In the context of ECEC, Active Hope enables educators to enact resistance not through grand or heroic gestures, but through deliberate acts of slowing down, lingering, listening, and refusing acceleration—micro-acts that interrupt clock time from within and open space for multidimensional, relational temporalities. By situating pedagogical activism within care ethics and everyday practice, we have shown how small, often imperceptible gestures—making time, extending dialogue, staying with children's inquiries for 'five minutes longer' —carry ethical and political significance. These micro-acts do not dismantle neoliberal systems, nor do they offer guaranteed outcomes. Rather, their force lies in their cumulative capacity to unsettle the naturalised authority of chronological governance and to sustain alternative ways of being and relating in ECEC.

In (post)neoliberal[3] contexts marked by uncertainty, exhaustion, and proliferating crises, such forms of activism are neither simple nor benign. They involve risk, require courage, and demand collective responsibility. Yet, it is precisely through these care-full and hope-full temporal practices that ECEC can reclaim its ethical and relational commitments. Pedagogical activism grounded in Active Hope sustains education as a space of encounter, attentiveness, and democratic experimentation—where time is not merely measured and managed, but lived, shared, and continually re-opened to what might yet become.

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[3] We use the term "(post)neoliberal" not to suggest that neoliberalism has ended, but to acknowledge that contemporary contexts are characterised by emergent critiques, movements and reforms that develop within and against neoliberal societies, while neoliberal rationalities continue to shape social, political and educational life (Davies & Gane, 2021).

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