

Groningen, March 26th 2026

Dear Sonya Smyslova,

- Thank you for submitting your second draft entitled '*Learning in the Dark: Exile and the Temporal Reordering of Hope*'. We reviewed this revision using the journal's guidelines, specifically focusing on strengths, clarifications, practical advice and relevant literature. For a detailed elaboration of these points we invite you to read our reviewer comments. In this letter we share an overall summary.

Our compliments for this revision, it's a strong improvement of the first version. It's clear that you actively worked through our reviewer feedback. The paper now has a clear structure, it's now possible to follow the logic, both the methodology and findings are now more transparent. In the findings there's much more balance between the three dimensions, they now carry pretty well equal weight. Also the conclusion is much stronger, it now synthesizes, engages future studies and offers practical implications. We appreciated your additional mailing in which you shared your responses to our 2 general questions and 5 practical suggestions. It helped us to understand what choices you made for this revision.

Although we all agree that the paper is much improved and we are looking forward to publishing it, we invite you to make a final improvement round by means of the following 3 points:

1. **Darkness** As Mark Curcher mentioned in his comments, the paper now reads as a movement from darkness toward hope rather than exploring what darkness itself generates. Could it be that the focus on transformations of hope has obscured other potential important findings -e.g. experiences related to darkness? We invite you to explore in what way darkness is traceable in your empirical findings. As in the abstract we read "*this study explores how educational practices are reshaped under conditions of prolonged uncertainty*". This creates an expectation that you will explore *how HEPs are reshaped in darkness*. in which the reordering of hope might be accompanied by other transformations as well. See also the comments in the track changes document and the 3rd point that Mark addressed in his comments.
2. **Readability & sense of story** - Although it is clear for us you cannot radically rework your paper considering the overall structure of your PhD thesis, we nevertheless encourage you to make your paper accessible for a broader public (both academic and non-academic readers). The fact that this paper is intended to be one of the chapter of your PhD thesis does not mean that you need to use unnecessary complex wording. Try to avoid inconsistency in terminology and unnecessary repetition. In the track changes document we share some examples and suggestions. In his reviewer comments Seth Oliver invites you to explore how you could build a sense of story by presenting your findings in a more dynamic narrative in which darkness is not only placed more in front, but readers can also access "hopeness" as lived experience whilst reading this paper. A more dynamic narrative would also more align with the participatory interventions in this study to avoid "subject-object dynamics".
3. **Literature check** You have already included a really impressive amount of highly relevant work, so you don't need to include more literature. Instead we invite you to explore where in the text it's possible to make theoretical concepts more accessible for non-academic readers (see 2nd point

above) and to check whether you adequately applied references (see e.g. Seth third comment in relation to Barbara Adam's work) and where you might have missed relevant literature. E.g. in the conclusion in the second paragraph you state "While anticipation presupposes a finitely temporal relation to an imagined future that will sooner or later be either fulfilled or will disappoint". In the track changes document we share some critical questions in relation to this statement as well concrete suggestions to do justice to the work of e.g. Poli and colleagues.

We hope that our review will be well received by you. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me by email (j.gulmans@pl.hanze.nl). Then we can also discuss the follow-up process.

Hoping to hear from you soon and sending you warm wishes,

On behalf of the reviewers:

Mark Curcher (TAMK University, Tampere Finland)

Seth Oliver (Future Matters Collective, Cardiff UK)

On behalf of [Futures Reframed](#) editorial team:

Jitske Gulmans-Weitenberg PhD

UNESCO Chair Futures Literacy in Higher Education

Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen The Netherlands

General questions

1. *Does this journal fit with the specific criteria of your PhD thesis?*

In your paper you included two references of your earlier work on the HEPs, we assume this manuscript is intended to become the third paper of your PhD thesis? If so, we wondered whether the specific PhD criteria of Cambridge University match the challenging purpose and experimental nature of the Futures Reframed journal. Some of our suggestions (see below) are assuming degrees of freedom in the way you organize your paper. If your academic freedom turns out to be limited given the PhD criteria, then our main suggestion is to consult your supervisors whether this journal is an appropriate choice for your PhD thesis.

2. *How does this paper precisely relate to the call for papers?*

Is this paper showing us how darkness generates new possibilities or how hope persists despite darkness? The call explicitly invites to explore “darkness” as a generative force, i.e. how “acknowledging and confronting darkness may catalyze urgent, meaningful action” and “create space to grieve what might not be changed in time or what is already lost.” For us as reviewers it seems that darkness in this paper functions more as a *context* than as *analytical focus*. E.g. the paper’s RQ is formulated “*How does HEP transform the temporal structures of hope in the darkness of exile?*” The paper is thus focused about how hope transforms, with crisis/exile as the condition that provokes transformation. As a result the paper runs the risk to read as “hope persists despite darkness”. Our suggestion is to elaborate how “darkness” (hopelessness, loss, grief, rage, uncertainty) worked in the HEPs as a generative force. What grief work is happening in these spaces? What rage circulates even within caring communities? How does hopelessness itself (not just its overcoming) generates kairotic experiences? What actual practices of dwelling in darkness look like - not just moving through it? This does not mean giving up on the hope focus, but showing how darkness and hope are co-constitutive in HEPs as learning spaces. The empirical material seems rich enough to support this reframing - those quotes about withdrawal, blocked trauma, illegitimate suffering all point toward this darker generative potential.

Main suggestions

1. *Better align the theoretical framework with empirical findings*

The paper establishes Bloch's three dimensions of hope (future-oriented, progressive, agentic) and says these will guide the analysis. But then the findings are organized in three different categories: hope as mattering today, hope as care, hope as kairotic time. How we get from one to the other is not clear, as Figure 1 (mindmap) does not seem to match the text. We suggest you to explicitly align the theoretical framework section with the methodology and findings sections so that readers can follow the argumentations and understand how the theory relates to the empirical findings. In addition you might add a paragraph at the start of the findings section that explicitly maps how the three empirical findings sections relate to Bloch's three dimensions. A clear roadmap would really help readers follow the analytical logic.

2. *Do more justice to the richness of your empirical data*

There seems to be descending depth across the three findings sections. The first section "hope as mattering today" is relatively well-developed with substantial theoretical elaboration, whereas "hope as care" and "hope as kairotic time" are somewhat brief. This is surprising as you collected all these rich data in the learning diaries and reflexive interviews, even photos and pictures. How can you elaborate more on the richness of these data?

3. *Be more explicit about the "participatory" approach in your methodology*

The participatory methodology is a real strength - using learning diaries and reflexive interviews to trace how faculty and students together navigate temporal rupture feels ethically and methodologically sound. We do invite you to be more explicit on what made your work "participatory". Be explicit about what your role was in this participatory methodology and share your first person voice. In Chapter 23 of 2015 [Handbook of Action Research](#) Jack Whytehead shares 4 questions which might assist you in this:

- How can I enhance the comprehensibility of my explanation?
- How can I strengthen the evidence I use to justify my assertions or claims to knowledge?
- How can I deepen and extend my sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings of their influence in my writings and practice?
- How can I improve the authenticity of my explanations in showing over time and interaction that I am truly committed to living as fully as possible the ontological values I claim to hold?

4. *Significantly strengthen the conclusion*

By the end, the conclusion seems too thin, while it could synthesize more and push the significance further. In line with the comments above: how do the three dimensions of transformed hope relate to each other? What are the implications for education in exile more broadly? What does this tell us about futures thinking under crisis? How does this circle back to darkness as generative force?

5. *Explicitly address a futures thinking audience*

Currently the paper sits more in education/ displacement studies, while the journal aims at futures studies / anticipation studies / possibilities studies. Could you make the contribution to futures thinking more explicit? What does this teach us about temporal imagination when futures become illegible? About how anticipatory consciousness operates under authoritarian crisis?

Above questions and suggestions are an overall summary. We invite you to read our reviewer notes and the summary of our reviewer meeting for a detailed elaboration regarding strengths, clarifications, practical advice and relevant literature.