

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

HOW EARLY CHILDHOOD HOPE LESSONS IMPACT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

By
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Norman, Oklahoma
2024

HOW EARLY CHILDHOOD HOPE LESSONS IMPACT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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DEDICATION

My doctoral work is dedicated to my father, Charles Robert Pursifull. Forever the role model for “pressing on” to accomplish hard things, I admired him deeply. He had great stories of growing up in the small town of Tonkawa, Oklahoma, shining shoes at the local barbershop, and fishing in the Salt Fork River. These, along with tales of his legendary antics playing the tuba in the Navy Band and string bass in local bars as a student at OU, revealed something important. Wherever you are in life, you can make the most of it. His wholehearted commitment to a career in public accounting and his mid-life evolution to his “best career ever” as a professor at the University of Central Oklahoma allowed me to see where a lifetime of hard work and dedication can lead. I am certain, along with the moon and the stars, he is shining and smiling down on his daughter for sticking with the challenging pathway of higher education and completing this dissertation. Though he missed the opportunity to see me walk across a stage to receive my diploma, he walks with me in my heart, always.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Upon the completion of my Master's in 1995, I was certain, beyond a doubt, that I was done with higher education. Satisfied for years with a career I loved as a teacher and principal in public education, I was shocked in 2017 when an urge came over me that I cannot attribute to anything but God, knocking on my door and saying, "You just thought you were finished, but I have plans for you."

This third journey at The University of Oklahoma has been incredibly fulfilling, as I have grown immensely as an educational leader, and so many have provided support along the way. Dr. Maiden, I am thankful for your guidance through not one, but two degrees. Back in the 90s, when my understanding of education finance was minimal at best, you let me know that you were there to help, and I learned not to fear communicating with professors. Thank you for many interesting classes and assignments over these past years. I appreciate your acceptance of my decision to use a qualitative process and your steadfast guidance and support.

Dr. William Frick, having you as my first instructor in the program inspired my "why." I admit that on my first day in class, your intellectual and sesquipedalian orations led me to say, "What have I gotten myself into?" to one of my cohort members. You helped me past all doubt to realize I had what it took to meet your high expectations and to think creatively and abstractly about educational issues. You led me on an inward search for meaning, pushing me toward selecting a dissertation topic I felt passionate about in educational leadership.

If it were not for you, Sheryl Marseilles, lunch at the Mont, and a name written on a napkin regarding an interesting concept related to mitigating trauma, I would never have reached out to Dr. Chan Hellman. "Hope can be taught" were the words you said that struck a chord, which led me to become a student of Hope. Dr. Hellman, thank you for allowing me to study

Hope Theory independently and for pushing me into great discovery. The path that led you to dedicate your professional life to Hope was full of challenges, but please know just how many lives you have positively touched through your books, workshops, and teachings.

Dr. Curt Adams, Dr. John Jones, Dr. Angela Urick, Dr. Courtney Vaughn, and Dr. Katherine Gutierrez, you helped me acquire the necessary skills to meet the expectations of this challenging program, and I am grateful to all of you and your unique styles of teaching. Though I never had the privilege of having you as a professor, Dr. Gregg Garn, I always appreciated interactions in the field. I witnessed you guiding many students to success as educational leaders, and I am thankful for the help you have given me with case study methodology.

My beloved mom, Barbara Pursifull, nothing was better how you smiled with twinkling eyes each time I shared an accomplishment. It is a blessing to have been by your side on your final pathway of life. Kevin Jackson, your unwavering love, and willingness to continually support my work allowed me to finish this degree. Jenny and Jaci Kay, my beautiful and talented twins, sending you off to college this year brought mixed feelings but mostly so much pride. Andrew and Kasia, I'm thrilled about your educational and professional journeys, and I'm thankful you found each other. I am fortunate to have such precious immediate and extended family members.

Thank you, cohort members Dr. Catherine Miller, Dr. Seth Meier, and Rex Wall, for making me feel like my thoughts were important and for trusting me as a collaborative partner. Eisenhower, Truman, and Oklahoma State Department of Education friends, you were my biggest cheerleaders. Pam Wood and Paula Simchak, my sisters, and best friends, you stood by me during particularly hard times. Thanks to so many people in life who simply believed in me. Thank you, God, for the gift of your Holy Spirit and for always shining light on my pathway.

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ABSTRACT

While focusing on instruction and academics, today's classroom teachers must also meet the individual needs of students who come to the learning environment socially and emotionally unprepared. Positive psychology Hope lessons may be one way to strengthen skills which must be in place before learning can happen. This case study explored the perception of eight pre-kindergarten teachers as they reflected on early childhood Hope Theory lessons involving goals, pathways, and motivation. Through interviews, observations, and artifact analysis, over the course of a seven-month span of time, this work explored whether Hope instruction made a positive difference for students and determined how including these lessons in the school day impacted teachers. The term "impact" for this dissertation is defined by the researcher as the assessment of the perceived effect of Hope lessons on teachers and students following lesson implementation based on data collected from participant interviews, observations, and artifacts. Findings indicated that teaching Hope is possible, even with young students, and that Hope positively impacts social-emotional wellbeing and academic growth. Hope lessons were found to build relationships between students, teachers, parents, and the community at large. Including the concept of Hope within school curriculum was determined to be important. The results of this study inform future practices for all educators, and recommendations are presented for administrators, teachers, social-emotional and academic curriculum decision-makers, teacher-preparation entities, and legislators.

Chapter 1: The Research Problem

Introduction

The spring of 1991 was an electric time as I entered the front doors of a little country school east of Norman, Oklahoma, and my heart raced with excitement. I remember walking down the long hallway to my very own classroom, where I was set to take a group of nineteen third-grade students on the most incredible educational journey imaginable. The hallway leading to my room was full of artwork and “Welcome back to school” messages, and as I thought about the months and years that were before me, I could barely contain my joy. A young teacher, just out of college and feeling prepared to the fullest, with a shiny, brand new degree in Education and my green Thompson’s plan book at the ready, I approached teaching with wonder. Thrilled by the subject matter, I meticulously thought out every lesson. Following written outcome expectations and standards, I made sure I would be able to engage students and accomplish everything the district and the state required. My goal was to help each child be successful, learn, and grow in just the right way. I was a champion at building relationships with people, and I just knew, between my carefully planned instruction and my love for kids, that every child would be successful.

It took me about two days to notice that not all students were as receptive to my efforts as I had imagined. Though most engaged with my well-planned and exciting lessons, what was with the student who lost focus every five minutes? Although my young, 23 year-old self oozed positivity and love, why did I have students who seemed angry at the world, taking it out on their math fact worksheet with black scribbles? Though I incorporated kinesthetic, visual, auditory, verbal, and social teaching styles in masterful ways, how was it that a child doing a simple art

project was troubled enough to tear up another child's flower painting? Runners, criers, kids hiding under desks and refusing to do the amazing work I had planned...why didn't all kids thrive in my pleasant classroom environment? My own, near-perfect childhood experience in school had created an illusion that I was quickly realizing was not reality.

Honing my skills in the classroom over the course of many years, I learned the necessity of pinpointing the root cause of some of these behaviors, if there were to be any chance of certain students succeeding academically. I came to realize that the social-emotional needs of students must be met, and that this was not happening in each home. As I moved from teacher to principal, I found that other educators had not come to this realization yet, and were overlooking social-emotional, life-skill instruction as a key component of education. It became my goal, as an educational leader, to help move all to a higher level of understanding in this area. More than that, I wanted to be a person who could provide answers and solutions to classroom teachers who struggled with both prevention and remediation when it comes to students exhibiting the effects of trauma. Ultimately, this led me to look toward teacher-friendly, research-based lessons that could provide support for these children, so that learning might more successfully take place.

During my doctoral studies at The University of Oklahoma, I happened upon Rick Snyder's Hope Theory. I was intrigued by the research on successful Hope interventions with the elderly and with college students, and I took an interest as to whether this type of work with young children might be a key component for positive change. According to Snyder (2002), Hope in schools would be the process of teaching children to set goals and create pathways to successfully achieve these goals, while helping them increase their willpower to continue to move forward along that path. The idea of Hope in schools sparked excitement for me as an

educational leader, and when I discovered a school district had just begun using Hope lessons, I knew I wanted to research the success of these efforts.

Children come to school with diverse backgrounds and stories, different cultural experiences, varied emotions, and fluctuating levels of relational support. Regardless, all who come to school should have every opportunity to achieve life satisfaction and well-being (Marques et al., 2009). According to Snyder (2002), Hope Theory provides a positive psychology framework for educators as we help children develop intentional thought that leads to positive adaptive endeavors (Marques et al., 2009). A theory with defining properties and capable of being measured, Hope can provide the basis for actionable lessons and interventions to be developed to increase confidence, ability, achievement, motivation, and ambition in students (Snyder, 2002).

Bernard Williams said, “There has never been a night or a problem that could defeat sunrise or hope.” As educational leaders, we are responsible for being the sunrise for each child, showing them that every day is full of opportunity. The education profession is about having a heart for children and optimism for their future. But Hope, according to Snyder (2002), is more than well wishes, positive thoughts, luck, or dreams of success. Snyder (2002) believes Hope can be taught, and that Hope can function as a verb, inspiring action, which can result in positive outcomes. By exercising Hope learned from a caring adult and practiced with fidelity and support, students may be better prepared to navigate life. Illuminating the path for educators to equip students with tools to help them face anything they may encounter in their educational journey is my own goal. This research on how Hope lessons impact children and the practice of teaching is a colossal steppingstone on my own Hope pathway, moving me toward this goal.

Background of the Problem

In recent years, the words “trauma-informed” have become regular vernacular in the educational setting. According to Pynoos et al. (2008) and The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN, 2019), many students enter the public school system with a history of trauma, and if not addressed, this can negatively influence learning in multiple ways. Martin et al. (2017) state that two-thirds of children in the United States are exposed to some type of violence, crime, or abuse each year, and evidence of this appears regularly when you observe behaviors of students in schools. Bellis and Zisk (2014, p. 1) define childhood trauma as, “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence.” Examples of stressors a child may realistically face from these larger categories include bullying, motor vehicle accidents, natural disasters, physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, or witnessing trauma of others (Bellis & Zisk, 2014).

Short-term stress is considered important to the normal growth and development process, as it assists in learning problem-solving and resilience skills (Martin et al., 2017). This is especially true when there is a caring adult situated in the life of a child who is able to buffer the effects of the trauma and help regulate the child, so that healing can occur in a healthy way (Martin et al., 2017). Toxic stress is a different story. Martin et al. (2017) explain toxic stress as prolonged exposure to trauma, which causes the stress response system to be continually activated and results in unproductive reactions. When a child comes to school in this state, it is a true problem of practice for educators. Students who have experienced trauma rarely make it far into a school year before inappropriate behaviors manifest from not knowing how to manage deeply seated psychological wounds.

Martin et al. (2017) describe the school setting as a place of regular contact, where teachers are in a unique position to safeguard against the effects of trauma and stress, assist with direct care of students, and prepare students for future traumatic events. According to Heath et al. (2017), the majority of families rely on natural support, including self-help and assistance from trusted and respected community leaders like teachers, rather than seeking professional assistance for mental health needs. Educators can improve outcomes for children and connect children and families to additional resources (Ko et al., 2008).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), according to Weissberg (2019), is the process through which children and adults “acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Heath et al., 2017, p. 547). The educator's aim of growing the whole child is enhanced when SEL is in place in the school setting. Important effects for students, which can result from school SEL intervention, include decreased anxiety, avoidance, and PTSD (Martin et al., 2017). Positive outcomes include improvement of emotional regulation, gains in social and academic confidence, refined classroom behavior, higher grades and test scores, and an increased likelihood of school completion (Martin et al., 2017). Heath et al. (2017) liken SEL to providing immunizations. Small doses of prevention will strengthen a child's ability to successfully navigate life challenges (Heath et al., 2017). Most school-aged children are not subjected to social-emotional screenings; therefore, teachers, counselors, and administrators often do not know exactly who needs SEL strategies. This need not be an issue, as Ko et al. (2008) explain, because the good news is that all students can benefit from SEL.

There is no one in a better place to bring light to the hidden darkness that inhibits overall learning than the classroom teacher. Helping diverse populations of students navigate social-emotional needs requires diverse actions. This has historically been problematic for classroom teachers, as they desire clear-cut, and prescribed instructional methods, similar to those used in academics, to remedy difficulties. However, when it comes to human issues, exact responses and answers for what to do are difficult to produce. Ko et al. (2008) point to the question of how to balance the primary academic mission of schools with mental health support. Teachers already have packed schedules, trying to fulfill academic and instructional needs, balance parental and student relations, accomplish organizational tasks, and meet accountability expectations (Martin et al., 2017). Adding mental health to the plate seems like, as teachers often say, “just one more thing.” Walkley and Cox (2013) also discuss that teachers may be ill equipped to handle the depth of feelings and mental health needs that rise to the surface during SEL. Though much has been written about the positive effects of SEL and life-skills work in classrooms, many teachers have not shifted to comprehending their own social-emotional roles and responsibilities. Altering the mindset of teachers, parents, and the general public, to help them understand that schools are the place to generate growth for the whole child, rather than simply academic and intellectual growth, has been a problem. Continued research of successful classroom lessons that equip students for life and, in the end, result in human flourishing, will help convince naysayers of the need for more social-emotional educational processes. Situated in an educational setting, positive psychology Hope lessons may foster mental health and well-being in students of trauma, but more importantly, in all students (Shankland & Rosset, 2016). Trauma, after all, may be around the corner for any human, and being equipped with skills to mitigate roadblocks is something everyone will need.

Statement of the Problem of Practice

A problem exists in education today of how to provide effective social-emotional support for students. Lesson ideas and interventions, which will allow students to take full advantage of academic instruction without a fog of interpersonal struggles getting in the way, have not been effectively utilized or even shared with teachers. Teachers have to decide that taking time for social-emotional activities with students is valuable. The absence of SEL and life-skill training may be one of the factors leading to academic deficiencies seen in schools. My desire, through this study, was to uncover specifics about how all children, and the teachers themselves, may benefit from Hope lessons, as these can be easily incorporated into the day-to-day instructional processes of a classroom (Snyder, 2002). Educators must find a way to teach children coping skills efficiently and effectively, which will lead to better cognitive functioning, emotional health, and physical health (Martin et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how positive psychology Hope lessons can affect students and teachers. Case study methodology was used to explore how teachers perceive the impact of lessons (Yin, 2018). Interviews, as well as classroom observations, provided the opportunity for me to insert myself into the case to appraise all aspects of the Hope lesson processes (Yin, 2018). Examination of artifacts produced over time added further data on the impact of Hope lessons.

Significance of the Study

Why Hope? In 1959, Frank Sinatra sang a song about the action of Hope, and how it propels you forward in life with just the right momentum to accomplish even the toughest of goals.

Just what makes that little old ant
Think he'll move that rubber tree plant
Anyone knows an ant, can't
Move a rubber tree plant

But he's got high hopes
He's got high hopes
He's got high apple pie
In the sky hopes

So any time your gettin' low
'Stead of lettin' go
Just remember that ant
Oops, there goes another rubber tree plant
(Sinatra, 1959)

Besides being a catchy tune, Sinatra's song, about moving the idea of Hope into action, is inspiring. The song was so motivating back in the day, it even became the theme song to John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1960, with slight alteration to the lyrics (JFK Library, 2020).

Hope is the process of generating pathways or routes to achieve goals, while having the motivation or agency to move forward in the process (Snyder, 2011). According to Snyder (2011), Hope is measurable and can be a change agent and coping strategy. Hope lessons are situated in a larger context of student growth and learning, with the ultimate goal of maximizing

human potential and flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Hope is a strength, and having high Hope can help ease the troubled times in life (Marques et al., 2009). Along with higher Hope comes the mental energy needed to overcome adversity and continue on the path to great things (Snyder, 1995). According to Snyder (1995), people of high Hope begin to see roadblocks and interferences as normal, and they can anticipate issues and divert course as needed. Hope strength equals positive results in areas of academics, athletics, physical health, and psychological adjustment (Snyder, 2002). An example from education would be utilizing multiple-pathway thinking in problem solving to complete a science experiment (Snyder, 2002). An example in athletics would be having the skills, the motivation, and the agency necessary to be able to perform well while under extreme stress (Snyder 2002). Snyder et al. (2003) mention that high Hope individuals often stretch simple goals to maximize a learning opportunity. Hope is positively associated with strengths such as perceived confidence and social competence (Snyder et al., 2003). High Hope people make friends easily, serve as role models to others, exercise and eat right, obtain satisfactory amounts of sleep at night, laugh at themselves, and refrain from taking life too seriously (Snyder, 1995).

Lessons and intervention to counterbalance low Hope would likely be helpful to students of trauma (Snyder, 2002). Hope can be lost in children and in adults (Snyder, 2002). People who lack Hope either were not taught pathway and agency skills at a young age, or something happened to destroy Hopeful thought, such as the death of a parent, abuse, or neglect (Snyder, 2002). The best news is Hope can be learned, and it is learned in the context of others (Snyder, 2002). When young people are taught pathway processes, they discover the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow often is not what matters most (Snyder, 2002). It is the pursuit of a goal that can bring fulfillment and well-being in life (Snyder, 2002).

My study is important because newly developed Hope-based lessons are currently being implemented in school settings alongside academic instruction, and we need to know the difference this makes in the life of a young person. We also need to know the difference these lessons make for the classroom teacher. Research in Hope is quite new, and my work is valuable to educators who strive to help equip a child with the ability to get past the roadblocks that seem too big for a tiny little person to manage. In this study, I thoroughly analyzed interview data on teacher perceptions of Hope lessons used in early childhood classrooms to identify their impact. In addition, by describing classroom lessons and activities and including samples of artifacts produced during these lessons, positive programming characteristics can be duplicated in other educational settings in the future. Triangulation of all three types of data collected fully revealed the impact Hope lessons have on early childhood students and the teachers who work with them daily.

Research Questions

My own personal history as an educator, combined with new knowledge of Hope Theory, led me to the following research questions for this qualitative case study:

1. How do early childhood Hope lessons impact students?
2. How do early childhood Hope lessons impact teachers?

The term “impact” for this dissertation is defined by the researcher as the assessment of the perceived effect of Hope lessons on teachers and students following lesson implementation based on data collected from participant interviews, observations, and artifacts. It is important to acknowledge my positionality regarding the research. Though I have utilized many social-emotional lessons and interventions with students in my roles as both teacher and principal, I have not had experience specifically using Hope Theory with children. I have shared information

about Hope Theory and the possibilities that may exist for use in schools with colleagues at the district and state level. I have also taken specific Hope courses at the University of Oklahoma to study this topic.

Research Design, Assumptions, Limitations

My research was conducted through a qualitative case study. Case studies allow a researcher to investigate a person, group, or specific event over a period of time (Yin, 2018). This case study objective was to discover how Hope lessons impact both students and teachers. My qualitative research allowed for deep analysis of early childhood classroom Hope practices. As Miles et al. (2020) mention, knowing what you want to find out leads to decisions about sources you would use in analysis. Quantitative research was not appropriate in this instance because, as a researcher, I wanted to analyze perceptions of teachers using the Hope lessons, and triangulate this with classroom observation and artifact analysis, rather than use surveys or scales to look at statistical data.

Specifics of the data collection process involved conducting interviews with school personnel who utilized Hope lessons, in addition to observing these processes in classroom settings and examining artifacts produced by students along the way. Interviews produced much information on how Hope programs impact students, and open-ended questions provided less structured instrumentation, which led to additional discovery about the impact of Hope on students and teachers (Miles et al., 2020). Hope lessons within the classroom setting were observed, and all aspects of the environment, the lesson process, the reactions and conversations, and more, were recorded. It was also important to look at documents, including student writing and artwork, which were produced both before and after lessons took place.

Data analysis happened after data were collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews were coded, artifacts were scrutinized, and field observations were assessed to reveal common themes. Data were sorted and organized through comparing, contrasting, and labeling (Schwandt, 2015). It was necessary to winnow down the vast amount of information gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Logically, before the study, one could assume there would either be congruence in findings, and similar themes would begin to emerge, or there would be a lack of congruence and themes. Resulting themes were analyzed through the lens of Hope Theory, and important findings were reported. Results were reported in narrative form, and were also represented in a table (Schwandt, 2015).

All research was conducted in an ethical way, with the necessary permissions obtained, and there were no connections between this school site and myself as the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study was conducted with as little disruption of learning environments as possible, and participants were privy to the results of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Trustworthiness was a priority, and the quality of the investigation makes it noteworthy to audiences of education professionals who strive to help students of trauma flourish (Schwandt, 2015).

Several assumptions guided my research and informed this study:

- Children who come to school have life experiences that have influenced the way they will be able to learn in both positive and negative ways.
- Negative life experiences manifest into behavioral and classroom management issues that can impact learning success of individual students and the collective body of students.

- Teachers are in a position to intervene in proactive ways and can impact both short-term and long-term student success.
- Early childhood students can learn Hope strategies at their young age.
- All students would be included in Hope lessons.
- Participants interviewed would accurately describe their experiences with Hope interventions.
- Participants would utilize Hope lessons with fidelity.
- Teacher reflection is a key component to learn about what works in schools.

Limitations of the Study Included:

- Currently only two districts in the state are using Hope interventions with students in classroom settings.
- This study was one case with eight participants, situated in a specific geographic location.
- Educators are creating their own lesson plans with only partial guidance from experts in psychology.
- The sample included only early childhood examples, and did not look at students in later elementary, middle school or high school grades.
- Hope lessons were taught with varying levels of fidelity.
- The study was not conducted for a full school year.
- Participants have their own experiences with trauma that may impact the study.

Summary

In a world that is becoming more and more complicated, targeted efforts to cause Hope to rise in students may have a positive impact on not just the individual, but on society (Snyder,

2002). The challenge before me was to discover specifically how Hope lessons during early childhood years make a difference for children and teachers. There is a great cause for concern in schools, knowing so many children have faced, or will face, traumatic events in life, yet are expected to absorb vast amounts of information and learn well, even if their minds and bodies are not ready. Research to discover what can mitigate the effects of trauma and allow successful learning to take place for all students is important.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Relevant empirical and theoretical scholarship for this study includes information on childhood trauma, social-emotional learning, Positive Psychology, and Hope Theory. Being trauma-informed moves educational leaders into a place of action readiness, and an awareness of the neuroscience of trauma can push those who work with children daily to seek multidisciplinary approaches to improving their well-being (Anda et al., 2006). Having knowledge of social-emotional learning allows for an understanding that teaching cannot solely be about reading, writing, and arithmetic, and can move educators to a higher level of comfort to address needs that are not always academic in nature. Positive Psychology literature supports the need for proactive social-emotional interventions to be put in place in schools to help avoid academic and behavioral setbacks. Rick Snyder's Hope Theory is the underlying theoretical framework supporting my qualitative investigation and the interventions and lessons used throughout the study. Though numerous and important bodies of literature exist to inform my study, there are gaps when it comes to research on Hope lessons used in school settings.

Childhood Trauma and Education

Being Trauma-Informed

The brain, according to Perry et al. (1995), is a complex organ that functions to achieve sensing, perception, and action to help human beings survive. Development of the brain occurs from infancy to adolescence, and according to The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN, 2019), when a person experiences trauma or toxic stress, the body's stress response

system develops irregularly. Trauma is the experience of an event that is emotionally painful, stressful, and often overwhelming, stemming from abuse, neglect, and violence (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Trauma can be pervasive and chronic, like in an abuse or domestic violence scenario, or it can be time limited, as might occur from a natural disaster or motor vehicle accident (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Walkley and Cox (2013) define toxic stress as occurring when a child experiences strong, frequent, and drawn-out adversity. Perry et al. (1995) describe what happens in this scenario as “adaptive stress becoming maladaptive” (p. 271).

The effects of trauma and toxic stress on the brain are numerous. Anda et al. (2006) report with trauma comes dysfunction in the brain’s hippocampus, amygdala, medial prefrontal cortex and in other limbic structures that, in normal functioning, help to regulate anxiety and mood. Bellis and Zisk (2014) found that experiences of trauma weaken neural pathways in the thinking area of the brain and shift normal functioning to a constant state of survival. Pawlo et al. (2019) report when the survival part of the brain is kicked in, there is much less room to receive and integrate new information, and children simply cannot learn.

Normal amounts of trauma and stress are useful in life, as they help build resilience and coping skills, like being able to wait your turn or make healthy choices (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Unfortunately, increased amounts of adversity in childhood create a situation where future distress cannot be managed (Bellis & Zisk, 2014). Trauma affects relationships, and rather than learning to trust and regulate emotions, children of trauma are not able to fully understand how to interact with the world around them (NCTSN, 2019). They have trouble expressing emotions and can overreact or react violently in interpersonal situations (NCTSN, 2019). Other counterproductive coping strategies evolve, and you may see children of trauma being overly sensitive to the moods of others, constantly assessing the adults around them to try and predict

emotions, and withholding their own feelings and thoughts (NCTSN, 2019). Resilience is not well-developed in children of trauma. In a longitudinal study of individuals who experienced neglect and abuse, only 22% achieved resilient states based on a comprehensive assessment of healthy adult functioning (Bellis & Zisk, 2014).

In school, behaviors of students who have experienced trauma may include low academic achievement, unsafe risk-taking, loss of self-control, profound emotional issues, physical impairment, difficulty with peer relationships, problems with attention, low recall of information, and other cognitive struggles (Bailey et al., 2019; Ko et al., 2008; Perry et al., 1995). Children of trauma experience brain states that are not optimal for learning, such as disassociating from the problems that come their way, and not being able to self-regulate and calm their emotions (Anda et al., 2006). Some are quick to evolve into the “fight, flight or freeze” mode, where they turn combative, try to escape, or completely disengage (Walkley & Cox, 2013; Anda et al., 2006). Trauma and stress alter executive functioning, and this can affect how a student remembers information, recognizes cause-and-effect, reasons and problem-solves, and attends to work and tasks (Blitz et al., 2016).

As Anda et al. (2006) explain, trauma and toxic stress are often hidden from caregivers, but the chances they exist in significant amounts in schools are high. Research reveals important statistics regarding the state of mind of the students in our public schools. Wellander et al. (2016) make the claim that 15 to 20% of children have mental health problems, and the George Lucas Foundation (2018) reports more than half of U.S. children experience trauma in the form of abuse or neglect, violence, or challenging household circumstances. According to Ko et al. (2008), approximately 25% of children and adolescents experience at least one potentially traumatic event. Educators are at a disadvantage not knowing who has experienced adversity in

childhood, but based on statistics, we can assume that something deep may be behind the precious eyes we gaze into in classrooms daily (Anda et al., 2006).

The effects of childhood trauma and toxic stress are not only seen in school-aged children. If unaddressed, childhood issues are likely to persist into adulthood and can result in negative outcomes including incarceration, unemployment, and reliance on public assistance (Bruns et al., 2016). Later in life, an adult who has experienced childhood adversity is more likely to engage in substance abuse, participate in partner violence, have impaired memory from childhood, and demonstrate risky behavior (Anda et al., 2006). Many health issues can arise for people who have had early trauma, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, asthma, obesity, and infection (Anda et al., 2006). A cycle of anxiety, social isolation, physical and psychological aggression, domestic violence, high rates of illness, victimization, and other negative emotional and social outcomes can continue in the short and long-term, unless intervention occurs (Hellman & Gwinn, 2016).

Though trauma has immediate and long-term effects, there is evidence that those in education can do something to mitigate this, while positively impacting all students in the process. Bellis and Zisk (2014) report that social-emotional support buffers biological stress deregulation that is associated with negative behavioral outcomes in schools. Blitz et al. (2016) make the claim that students with mental health and trauma issues need, more than anything, a place where healing and resiliency can occur alongside academic growth. The first and foremost priority is working with children of trauma in an environment that will feel safe and secure (Bellis & Zisk, 2014). To move children to a place where they can have a sense of hope, feelings of control, and are able to see their actions as meaningful and valued, trust must be built, and safety is the key (NCTSN, 2019). School is that safe place, as Anda et al. (2006) report.

Understanding the brain is vulnerable to extreme, abnormal and recurrent patterns of trauma and toxic stress during childhood, which can impact the health and well-being of a person throughout life, is reason enough to put trauma-informed practices in place.

Trauma-informed interventions

Much emphasis has been placed on taking action to help children of trauma over the past 20 years. In 2001, The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provided funding to develop The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Pynoos et al., 2008). They were tasked with enhancing treatment, services, and access to care for kids and families of trauma (Pynoos et al., 2008). The mission was to raise awareness about the impact of trauma, develop and disseminate evidence-based assessments, interventions and treatments, promote trauma-informed practices across settings, and advance public policy (Pynoos et al., 2008).

Bellis and Zisk (2014) suggest efforts and resources be designated in schools for the purpose of prevention. They even go as far as citing financial advantages that can occur when we place the focus on an infrastructure of primary prevention (Bellis & Zisk, 2014). The NCSTN (2019) reports a conservative annual cost of child abuse and neglect as being an estimated \$103.8 billion, which breaks down to \$284.3 million per day. Factored into costs are direct services such as hospitalization, child welfare, and law enforcement (NCTSN, 2019). Indirect costs, such as special education in schools, juvenile detention, and loss of production to society at large, are also calculated (NCTSN, 2019). The NCTSN (2019) reports that integrating academically grounded best practices, stemming from research and backed by clinical wisdom, is a cost-effective approach.

According to Pawlo et al. (2019), initiating trauma-informed practices must happen through a lens of knowing and understanding. It is a necessity that teachers grasp the magnitude

of childhood trauma before interventions can truly be implemented effectively (Pawlo et al., 2019). Cavanaugh (2016) agrees that the best trauma-informed practices emerge from a deep understanding of a child's mental, personal, and relational distress and the impact this can have on learning and the overall human experience. Practices should be integrated into multi-tiered systems, allowing all students basic support, but providing the most needy with specific skills and strategies to bypass negative impacts of trauma (Cavanaugh, 2016).

Cavanaugh (2016) proposes key principles of successful trauma-informed interventions. The first, and most important as mentioned before, is safety (Cavanaugh, 2016). Feeling safe can result from something as simple as giving a child advanced warning of change. (Cavanaugh, 2016). Another principle would be that positive interactions consistently occur between the teacher and the child (Cavanaugh, 2016). An example of this would be when a teacher uses kindness, encouragement, tangible or intangible reinforcers during a lesson (Cavanaugh, 2016). Ensuring culturally responsive practices is also important, where diversity is appreciated and acceptance is the norm (Cavanaugh, 2016). According to Cavanaugh (2016), peer support is paramount to be able to develop the feelings of success and self-efficacy needed to succeed in school and in life. Checking-in-and-out with a safe and caring adult, being assessed for adverse childhood experiences, and participating in direct, one-on-one social skill instruction are other important practices (Cavanaugh, 2016). A focus on empowering children, giving them voice-and-choice, and providing wraparound support with other community resources, would strengthen trauma-informed practices in a school setting (Cavanaugh, 2016).

As reported by Shankland and Rosset (2016), teachers are the right people for the job of implementing lessons and interventions to help children of trauma. They have the capability of building strong relationships, not only for the moment when instruction is occurring, but

relationships that carry into the future (Shankland & Rosset, 2016). This will foster continued reinforcement of concepts that lead to healthy development beyond the intervention (Shankland & Rosset, 2016). As reported by Gallup (2019), educational settings provide the opportunity to proactively decrease negative behaviors by shifting from “what is wrong to what is strong.”

Considerations

There are many things to think through when it comes to implementing trauma-informed practices in schools. A big consideration is that teachers, themselves, need to be emotionally stable to conduct lessons effectively. It is essential to make sure that supports are in place for adults in the building, especially knowing that vicarious traumatization happens often (Cavanaugh, 2016). Pawlo et al. (2019) report that emotionally stable adults have a trickle-down effect on the well-being of their students. Pawlo et al. (2019) warn that school settings can, themselves, be high stressors for students and adults, and that a positive school climate must be the norm. Because trauma is unpredictable, trauma-informed lessons and interventions should be practiced at various times throughout the year (Pawlo et al., 2019). This leads me into important literature about ongoing SEL, as integrating social-emotional skill building into the everyday fabric of the school setting will have individual and collective benefits (Pawlo et al., 2019).

Social-Emotional Learning

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) leads to social-emotional competence (Heath et al., 2017). Heath et al. (2017, p. 550), define this competence based on Elias’s (1997) definition, as the ability “to understand, manage, and express social and emotional aspects of one’s life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks.” These tasks include learning, forming relationships, problem-solving, and being able to adapt to the complex demands of growing up (Heath et al., 2017). Durlak et al. (2011) state that the time is now for schools and families to pay

attention to SEL, as a historically non-addressed, but vitally important, component of the educational process.

Purpose and practice

The SEL movement allows families and communities to work together to foster “positive life opportunity and optimal development for young people” (Weissberg, 2019, p. 65).

Weissberg (2019) defines Social-Emotional Learning as the following:

Evidence based programs, practices, and policies through which children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (p. 65).

Coming together to practice evidence-based lessons and interventions is crucial to making a difference for all students (Weissberg, 2019). Durlak et al. (2011, p. 416) share information from the U.S. Public Health Service (2000), which states that “mental health is a critical component of children’s learning and general health,” and that fostering this is a national priority. Through SEL, skills can be taught, modeled, and practiced to benefit all developing young minds (Weissberg, 2019). Weissberg (2019) values the practitioner in SEL models as the person who can connect with children daily in classrooms and schools. As SEL programs are implemented, enhanced classrooms and school cultures and good climates for learning, develop in tandem with positive effects on students (Weissberg, 2019). Students become more cooperative and culturally responsive, and a feeling of safety and security surfaces, allowing students to feel comfortable in active participation (Weissberg, 2019).

The Committee for Children (2019) tasks schools with moving students toward maintaining cooperative relationships, making responsible decisions, managing strong emotions,

communicating clearly, and displaying empathy. The goal would be to nurture the development of competencies, strengths, agency, and a sense of purpose in the young people we work with daily, so they can better succeed and flourish (Weissberg, 2019). Bailey et al. (2019, p. 53) state that it is our job as educators to “figure out what works, for whom, and under what conditions,” and once we figure this out, to make sure it is implemented in a sustainable way.

Program Components

Bailey et al. (2019) discuss “big ideas” of SEL. Practices must be organized around developmental models that are age and skill appropriate (Bailey et al., 2019). These can be implemented beginning as young as kindergarten, as there is much growth in regulation, adjustment, and executive functioning in these “building block” years (Bailey et al., 2019, p. 55). The best SEL work is not scripted or prescribed, but rather, happens in the hallways and on the playgrounds, as well as being included in classroom instruction (Bailey et al., 2019). Programs must emphasize empathy, perspective taking, and conflict resolution, and there must be a clear-cut focus on building and maintaining healthy and positive relationships (Bailey et al., 2019). Bailey et al. (2019) report that SEL is most effective when teachers can work through lived-experiences, real or imagined, and when they can tap into the individual needs of each particular child.

Taylor et al. (2017) state that SEL lessons and interventions used in schools should promote behavioral competencies. Heath et al. (2017) recommend working on competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Heath et al. (2017) define self-awareness as how one's thoughts and emotions are connected to behaviors, with examples being optimism and confidence. Self-management is personal responsibility for thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, such as coping with adversity or

setting goals (Heath et al., 2017). Social awareness is taking others' perspectives into consideration despite differences of opinion (Heath et al., 2017). Relationship skills foster positive social interaction, where give-and-take and an understanding of boundaries is the norm (Heath et al., 2017). Finally, responsible decision-making, according to Heath et al. (2017), leads to making safe choices, being ethical in action, and exercising respect for social norms.

Durlak et al. (2011) say SEL programs should integrate youth social-emotional development frameworks for reducing risk factors and foster mechanisms for positive adjustment. Instruction in SEL should include opportunity for processing, integrating, and selectively applying skills in developmentally, contextually, and culturally appropriate ways (Durlak et al., 2011). Durlak et al. (2011) say lessons should be taught with modeling, practice, and application opportunities. Schools must establish safe and caring learning environments and directly involve parents and families in their endeavors (Durlak et al., 2011). When quality SEL programs exist in a school, more students are able to contribute in positive ways, to their class, to the school, and to the community, through their heightened sense of belonging and enhanced motivation (Durlak et al., 2011).

Pawlo et al. (2019) report that SEL components include a positive school climate for lessons to take place, a laser-focus on awareness of emotions, and an opportunity for students to build strategies to use during challenging situations. Before any programs or interventions begin, pre-planning to get collective buy-in should occur (Pawlo et al., 2019). Pawlo et al. (2019) mention school leaders play a crucial role in the SEL process, as their commitment to bringing this into practice, and their ability to clear away roadblocks or obstacles in the way, is important. The Committee for Children (2019) gives examples of specific work to accomplish with students in the area of SEL. Explaining theory and concepts with words and pictures helps students

understand the goals of activities (The Committee for Children, 2019). Student practices can include simulation and modeling activities, skill building instruction, use of scenarios to problem-solve, independent and collective writing, partner discussions, art and music lessons directly tied to SEL, and more (The Committee for Children, 2019). Keeping families informed and included, regular check-in with individual students, and revisiting and repeating lessons are also good ideas (The Committee for Children, 2019).

Implementation of SEL is happening effectively through Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), where all students initially receive tier one interventions (Briesch et al., 2014). As individual needs are revealed, students are placed into tier two or tier three categories, and receive additional help (Briesch et al., 2014). Briesch et al. (2014) identify multi-tiered SEL processes. First is to use a universal screening to identify risk level if at all possible (Briesch et al., 2014). This would be followed by research-based interventions and supports of increasing intensity that match the needs of each student (Briesch et al., 2014). Ongoing assessment and progress monitoring would inform decisions made throughout the MTSS process, and individualized help would be altered or changed as needed (Briesch et al., 2014). SEL work involves adult interaction where feedback can be given, as students work to establish specific behavior goals (Briesch et al., 2014). Social skill instruction in MTSS can occur one-on-one, but also in small groups (Briesch et al., 2014).

Benefits of SEL

Bailey et al. (2019) state that high-quality SEL programs can improve academics, mental health, and behavioral outcomes, as well as classroom climate and teacher practices. Often, SEL interventions see lasting effects of up to three years (Bailey et al., 2019). SEL is reported to be particularly important for students from low-income families, who are more likely to be at risk

for social, emotional, behavioral, and academic problems (Bailey et al., 2019). Research studies point to social-emotional skills as better predictors of school performance than IQ (The Committee for Children, 2019). SEL is associated with decreased depression and anxiety rates and lower rates of risky behaviors, such as drug use or teenage pregnancy (The Committee for Children, 2019). Reduced delinquency is noted during cycles of SEL intervention, and data shows that students are more likely to reach milestones, such as graduation and college acceptance, with social-emotional supports having been in place during school years (The Committee for Children, 2019). SEL work is reported to have created a decrease in student dropout rates between 5 and 12% (The Committee for Children, 2019).

Economic benefit exists as well, as the return on investment in SEL practices is estimated to be worth roughly \$11 for every \$1 spent (Belfield et al., 2015). Belfield et al. (2015) report that benefits of social-emotional programs far outweigh the costs, based on cost-analysis procedures conducted in school settings. In today's workforce, social-emotional strengths are required, and 79% of employers identify skills in this area as being the most important needed for overall success (The Committee for Children, 2019). They also report that these are the hardest to find in employees (The Committee for Children, 2019). Children who experience SEL, and promotion of particular skills and competencies, are more likely to take advantage of positive opportunities that come their way (Belfield et al., 2015). The shift to an internal locus of control, stemming from SEL practices, empowers young people and produces long-lasting effects that, in the end, benefit society as well (The Committee for Children, 2019). Education is "resource-constrained," and educational leaders must decide where money should be spent (Belfield et al., 2015). Belfield et al. (2015) report high returns from SEL, and suggest that the long-lasting impact of investment in SEL is worthy of consideration.

The effects of SEL have an opportunity for longevity. In a meta-analysis of 82 school-based SEL interventions with 97,406 kindergarten through high school students, Taylor et al., (2017) reported that eighteen months after the completion of the interventions, positive effects were still seen. Far removed from the actual interventions focused on building competencies, interpersonal skills, commitment to school, and more, participants who experienced these continued to fare better than the control group when it came to social-emotional skills, attitudes, and indicators of well-being (Taylor et al., 2017). These benefits were seen regardless of race, socio-economic background, or location (Taylor et al., 2017). Researchers found when additional post-intervention occurred, it was an even stronger predictor of well-being (Taylor et al., 2017). The findings by Taylor et al. (2017) cited positive outcomes still seen 56 to 195 weeks out from the intervention end, and participants self-reported continuation of a positive trajectory in life (Taylor et al., 2017).

Other research has shown that having mastery of social-emotional skills can help students shift from being controlled by the external factors in life, to having power and control within themselves (Durlak et al., 2011). Durlak et al. (2011) report in their study that SEL programs yielded significant positive effects on attitudes about self, others, and school. They found students are more likely to set goals and have the self-discipline to follow through and manage those goals (Durlak et al., 2011). Better behavioral adjustment, including increased prosocial behaviors, also occurred (Durlak et al., 2011).

Teachers or other school staff members can easily conduct SEL in effective ways (Durlak et al., 2011). Incorporating SEL into educational routines does not require the help of outside mental health professionals (Durlak et al., 2011). A caring teacher, who can build a good relationship with the student, has a better likelihood of success with SEL programs (Durlak et al.,

2011). Engaging teachers, who make learning fun and are readily accessible in schools, and using these educational professionals to support social-emotional learning can bring about needed change (Durlak et al., 2011).

According to Ho and Funk (2018) and The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), teachers can specifically promote children's social-emotional health by building trusting relationships and conducting intentional teaching of skills. In a hands-on environment, teachers can offer warmth, affection, and respect as they teach this type of lesson with intentionality (NAEYC, 2018). Ho and Funk (2018) share that using children's books, games, songs, and crafts increase the effectiveness of the lessons with young children. In kindergarten or pre-kindergarten, teachers can coach on the spot and help children understand how their actions affect others, and modeling and providing cues are essential to learning. (NAEYC, 2018).

Considerations

It takes effective leadership to incorporate successful SEL programs in schools (Durlak et al., 2011). Barriers can occur, as Bailey et al. (2019) report, in that there will be implementation challenges. Low use of strategies and interventions by teachers may result from limited local buy-in (Bailey et al., 2019). Leaders must assume the task of helping teachers truly understand the relevance and need for SEL (Bailey et al., 2019). Failing to leverage the expertise of teachers will cause SEL initiatives to fail, as teachers are the ones who can deliver instruction, build strong relationships, observe students, and provide feedback for growth (Bailey et al., 2019). Teachers face major difficulties with time constraints, and helping them to find ways to integrate SEL into academics is an important task for leaders (Durlak et al., 2011). Lack of financial and personal resources could cause difficulty (Bailey et al., 2019). School leaders can help programs

thrive by gaining the support of the community and outside resources (Durlak et al., 2011). For SEL to continue to advance, school leaders must fight for sound federal and state policies in this area (Durlak et al., 2011).

We must remember, as Bailey et al. (2019) report, growth and change in behavior do not happen in the same way, or along the same timeline, as academic growth (Briesch et al., 2014). It may seem like a challenge to work on social-emotional skills with students, especially with so many diverse needs appearing in classrooms daily (Durlak et al., 2011). The bottom line is SEL is good for all students, regardless of trauma and regardless of background (Durlak et al., 2011). According to Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2022), helping students develop core social-emotional competencies of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness will support future learning and development. Traditionally this was done at the family and caregiver level, and it has now shifted to where lessons are taught less at home and more at school (CASEL, 2020). In recent years, SEL has been in the middle of a cultural war and politicized by those who feel hidden agendas are part of the processes and these types of lessons are often termed something different, such as wellness, soft skill development, social skills or emotional intelligence (Kent, 2022). Regardless of what it is called, SEL is a powerful method of creating caring, just, inclusive, and healthy schools and societies (CASEL, 2020). Positive psychology lessons can connect children to skills they possess that will better prepare them for learning and life.

Positive Psychology

The use of positive psychology methods in schools is based on the assumption that human goodness and human excellence are very real qualities that can be developed in students

(Peterson & Park, 2003). They are as real as any disease or disorder young people may face as they advance into adulthood (Peterson & Park, 2003). There is no one way to well-being, a good life, human flourishing, or survival. However, it is our job as educational leaders to seek best practices that will empower students to reach high levels of future success (Peterson & Park, 2003). Students, who may come to school thinking they are alone, should be enveloped in collaborative efforts to show them the multitude of educators who believe in them (Saleebey, 2000). Lyrics from a song from my childhood church days said, “I am a promise, I am a possibility. I am a promise with a capital P. I am a great big bundle of potentiality” (Gaither, 2002). This should be the song in the hearts of all children, as we focus on the possibility that exists in everyone. If we can make that happen, we will be doing our job as educators. Saleebey (2000) says it is just as wrong to deny the possible as it is to deny the problem, and that though poverty, abuse, and other traumas still do, and will always exist, the focus has to be on the promise.

History and Practices

According to Peterson and Park (2003), positive psychology was the initiative of Martin Seligman, President of the American Psychological Association in 1996, who posited that efforts to better humanity should focus on strengths rather than weaknesses. Before this time, psychology was more of a “pathology” model, where the core of the work was treating problems after occurrence and was reactive rather than proactive (Peterson & Park, 2003, p. 143). Positive psychology was influenced by humanistic psychology, which, though aimed at discovering what drives a person to achieve fulfillment, focused more on avoidance of pain and unhappiness rather than well-being and the pursuit of happiness (Peterson & Park, 2003). Humanistic psychology also concentrated more on the individual, and not on the well-being of overall society (Seligman

& Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) discussed the aim of positive psychology as proactively discovering what actions lead to well-being under adverse circumstances. They honed in on positive traits, such as perseverance, forgiveness, and courage, as factors that strengthen a person to move toward futuristic success (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), true positive psychological adaptation is a lifetime learning process, as people take advantage of lessons from the past and grow in understanding of themselves and society. At the end of life, one ends up with the wisdom from previous experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Positive psychology takes interest in the subjective experiences that lead to well-being, personality traits of thriving individuals, and the institutions, such as schools, that can enhance and sustain strength characteristics in young people (Robbins, 2008; Peterson & Park, 2003). Shankland and Rosset (2016) emphasize moving toward positive psychology interventions in schools to develop and sustain well-being, alongside fostering traditional academic growth. Saleebey (2000) talks about the CPR Triangle of Support that would be arguably good for intervention programs in schools. This would include focusing on capacity, competence, and character of students, ensuring a feeling of promise and possibility within individuals and developing the resources, resilience, and reserves to make it through tough times (Saleebey, 2000).

When arriving at a problem or challenging moment during my youth, my dad would often say, “This will be so good for you.” He understood the importance of making sure I knew about my intrinsic and extrinsic CPR support, and that I would grow from adversity with him by my side. Though I didn’t realize it at the time, he was lifting me up with his own version of positive psychology strategies, as he helped me see negative experiences in a new light. Doing

this same thing for students is our job in education. Looking at positive psychology as the umbrella under which Hope interventions are situated, many advantages can be realized (Peterson & Park, 2003).

Positive Psychology in Schools

Everybody has internal and external assets, strengths, competencies, and resources that are accessible, but some lose sight of these during the foggy times of life (Saleebey, 2000). Teachers are seated in just the right place to help identify those assets in kids and lift that fog if strengths are simply covered up. This will happen more readily if teachers approach positive psychology with the right understanding and attitude. School personnel involved in interventions should assume a positive demeanor, have a resilient attitude, help bring out individuals' natural assets, affirm the possible, and have positive expectations (Saleebey, 2000). They should be engaging, likeable, credible, and flexible, and they must take time to celebrate success (Saleebey, 2000).

Strengths, as presented by Shankland and Rosset (2016), are intrinsically valuable ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling which promote well-being, positive relations, and successful goal attainment. When students operate from a strength's perspective, learning happens faster and they perform better, as they are more motivated and display increased confidence (Shankland & Rosset, 2016). Strength-building through school interventions results in empowerment, as students learn to utilize their capabilities, recognize options, understand barriers, set goals and aspirations, and align them with resources to achieve success (Saleebey, 2000). In a study by Wagner and Ruch (2015), a strong correlation was found between positive classroom interaction between the teacher and the students in relation to developing strengths of self-regulation, prudence, social intelligence, and Hope (Shankland & Rosset, 2016). The great

thing about positive psychology strength-building in school is that it can be a mutually crafted project, involving both the student and the teacher working together to achieve growth (Saleebey, 2000). A teacher who employs strengths-based practices believes in the child and also in themselves (Saleebey, 2000). They care enough to tap into the capacities, resources, assets, and supports of the child, and are methodical in raising the overall awareness of strengths to a level of wisdom (Saleebey, 2000).

Duckworth and Seligman (2005) state that developing self-discipline is another important result from positive psychology interventions in schools. In their study, Duckworth and Seligman (2005) found that levels of self-discipline measured in the fall predicted academic performance and GPA in the spring (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Highly self-disciplined adolescents were found to outperform their peers on grades and standardized tests, had better attendance, and they were more readily admitted to competitive schools (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Along these same lines, Durlak et al. (2011) reported in a meta-analysis of 213 studies, involving more than 250,000 students from kindergarten to high school, that students experiencing positive psychology interventions ranked 11 points higher than peers on standardized achievement tests.

Shankland and Rosset (2016) promote positive psychology in schools because it can easily be implemented and carried out in a school setting. It can be integrated into existing curriculum and put into place without administrative red tape (Shankland & Rosset, 2016). Interventions do not require extensive time on the part of the teacher, nor do they require broad or specialized training (Shankland & Rosset, 2016). No special materials are needed, interventions are adaptable to any age, and they are aimed at strengthening students rather than treating their weaknesses (Shankland & Rosset, 2016). Shankland and Rosset (2016) applaud the collaboration going on between psychology and education professionals. There is a shift in the

role of schools to educate outside the traditional academic boundaries, and give concerted effort toward increasing teacher knowledge about the advantages of soft skills that can lead to well-being (Shankland & Rosset, 2016). It is of utmost importance to remember that positive psychology can be beneficial to all students, and not just to a select few (Shankland & Rosset, 2016).

Theoretical Framework of Hope Theory

Why Hope?

Saleebey (2000) says Hope is about all that is possible in life, which places it at the top of my list of positive psychology interventions. According to Snyder (1995, p. 355), Hope is defined as “the process of thinking about one’s goals, along with the motivation to move toward and achieve those goals.” It is about “pathway,” which involves generating routes to goal attainment, and “agency,” which is the motivation component in Hope Theory (Snyder, 2002). Hope is a theory, as Snyder (1995) explains, based on cognition rather than emotion. That said, emotion does play an important role as reflection of a person’s perceived level of Hope, given particular situations or circumstances (Snyder, 1995). The Hope process works as a “feedback and feedforward loop,” where positive emotions reinforce the goal-pursuit process, and steps in goal attainment then result in favorable feelings (Snyder, 2002, p. 254). As perception is what drives the emotion, it is not surprising that negative goals or unsuccessful goal attempts can lead to destructive, depressed, or defeatist feelings (Snyder, 2002).

At the foundation of Hope Theory is the assumption that human beings are goal-directed (Snyder, 1995). Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, et al. (2003, p. 123) define a goal as, “Anything an individual desires to experience, create, get, do, or become.” A goal, according to Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, et al. (2003), can be a lifelong and time-consuming endeavor, or it can be quick and

momentary. Goals provide the targets for mental action, and the most effective results come from goals that belong to the individual, rather than goals based on outside standards or expectations (Snyder, 2002). Goals “capture our attention from morning to night, even when we sleep” (Snyder, 1995, p. 355). According to Snyder (2002, p. 250), positive goals are considered “approaching,” and reflect verbs like “reaching, increasing, attaining, and sustaining.” Negatives can also make effective goals, especially in the area of avoidance (Snyder, 2002). Stressors are part of the Hope cycle, and occur when a particular situation threatens the success of a goal (Snyder, 2002). Low Hope people often allow stressors to derail progress (Snyder, 2002).

Goals, by themselves, are not enough (Snyder, 2002). Pathway and agency are the key components of Hope Theory, and neither can stand alone to produce high Hope (Snyder, 1995). These two components of goal-directed thinking include the cognitive willpower to get moving, and the perceived ability to generate routes to get somewhere (Snyder, 1995). Dixon et al. (2017) definition of pathways as one’s perceived capacity to envision and produce a map to a better future regardless of circumstances. Agency is the ability to believe in oneself to accomplish goals, as well as the motivation to do the work to propel oneself forward (Dixon et al., 2017). Saleebey (2000) discusses agency, and the importance of thinking about self as a change agent, able to alter your own life or the life of someone else.

Becoming familiar with a student’s level of Hope at different times during the educational process can provide teachers, counselors, and administrators with valuable information for troubleshooting, differentiating instruction, and providing additional support (Snyder, 1995). Hope is not illusive, according to Snyder (1995), and is understandable as an essential coping strategy. Hope can be measured (Snyder, 1995). The Children’s Hope Scale was developed by Snyder to measure hopeful thinking in children and adolescents ages 8-18

(Marques et al., 2009). This self-rating scale looks at pathway and agency thinking in youth (Snyder, 2002). Hope scales developed by Snyder for adults and for children are proven to have internal consistency, and utilizing this measure with young people could be very revealing, and could ultimately inform the education setting in valuable ways (Marques et al., 2009).

Hope Research

Though not many studies have been conducted with children, successful research on Hope interventions and positive psychology can be found. The Health Intervention Plan (HIP), as described by Larson et al. (2007), was used effectively with cancer patients to strengthen inspiration and maintain a positive outlook during challenging health situations. Participants experienced cognitive, behavioral, emotional, spiritual, creative, and artistic intervention sessions with an emphasis on reflection (Larson et al., 2007). Goals of increasing willpower and waypower turned Hope into a “verb,” offering potential, direction, and motivation (Larson et al., 2007, p. 408).

Marques et al. (2009) investigated lessons at a middle-school level, where students learned about Hope and Hope Theory. They engaged in Hopeful talk, creative writing, the sharing of personal Hope stories, and collaborative planning with other students, parents, and staff (Marques et al., 2009). Results showed participants were able to learn to conceptualize clear goals and produce numerous pathways to those goals (Marques et al., 2009). It was also reported they were able to increase mental energy to reframe obstacles as challenges, which then could be successfully overcome (Marques et al., 2009).

Hellman and Gwinn (2016) reported findings from Camp HOPE from the Alliance for HOPE International. Camp HOPE is the first camping and mentoring initiative to focus on children of domestic violence (Hellman & Gwinn, 2016). Hope is presented as a cognitive-based

motivational theory, and children develop pathway and agency thinking through specific activities developed to strengthen these areas (Hellman & Gwinn, 2016). Key elements of the camp are inclusion in activities with perceived risk or danger, affirmation and praise for character traits, and large- and small-group discussions on goals and viable pathways (Hellman & Gwinn, 2016). The premise is that Hope can be learned, and that it should be nurtured and developed in such ways that it can become a resilience factor for stressful life events (Hellman & Gwinn, 2016). Data in this study revealed increased Hope scores in self-rating measures and in rating measures by counselors after participation in the program (Hellman & Gwinn, 2016). Camp HOPE has key elements that could be mirrored in educational institutions, and activities used with campers would be worthy of further investigation.

Akos and Kurz (2015), authored a study about the challenges of transitioning to middle school from elementary, and how Hope levels make a difference at this fragile time in the life of a child. The research showed that teaching students pathway and agency strategies can increase problem-solving ability and help-seeking strategies (Akos & Kurz, 2015). Examples of specific Hope-infused school curriculum were provided in this study, which is especially helpful for teachers looking for specific interventions to use in the classroom (Akos & Kurz, 2015).

Ciarrochi et al. (2007), presented a longitudinal study looking at self-esteem, Hope, and positive attributional style, and the effects these may have on various aspects of schooling. These three positive-thinking “variables” were tested to see how well they determined variance in academic achievement, psychological adjustment, and self-rated well-being (Ciarrochi et al., 2007). The research project looked at surveys and grades as quantitative data (Ciarrochi et al., 2007). Findings showed Hope to be the best predictor of both positive affect and grades

(Ciarrochi et al., 2007). Ciarrochi et al. (2007) also found that agency level within the Hope realm specifically predicted decreases in depression and anxiety in students.

Feldman and Dreher (2011), reported information on the malleability of Hope. In their study, a single 90-minute intervention session was tested to see whether there was significant impact on Hopeful and goal-directed thinking among college students (Feldman & Dreher, 2011). The short session involved participants selecting a personal goal, receiving a small amount of Hope education, completing a goal-mapping exercise, and visualizing Hope through a specific exercise (Feldman & Dreher, 2011). Students worked with a goal they desired to accomplish in the next six months (Feldman & Dreher, 2011). College students either received the short Hope intervention session, a relaxation intervention, or no intervention (Feldman & Dreher, 2011). Findings showed that, despite the fact that intervention time was only 90 minutes, one month later participants were still exhibiting increased measures of Hope and life purpose (Feldman & Dreher, 2011).

Kerret et al. (2020) explored positive spillover effects from Hope-infused environmental education of students. Hope infused, in this research, meant that students believe in their own capability to generate different workable routes leading to their goal of protecting the environment (Kerret et al., 2020). It also meant that individuals have the motivation to use these routes to achieve the goal (Kerret et al., 2020). Kerret et al. (2020) conducted tests in green and non-green schools, with students in green schools already reporting more pro-environmental behavior. Students who participated in Hope-infused programs, regardless of school type, reported higher pro-environmental behavior, as well as higher school satisfaction and positivity (Kerret et al., 2020). Kerret et al. (2020) recommended, based on their findings, that a school-based Hope approach be infused with environmental education involving resource management,

community involvement, and curriculum.

Gallagher et al. (2017) shared a study examining the role of Hope in predicting achievement outcomes and retention of college students. The experimental procedure involved 229 students who were recruited during their first semester of college (Gallagher et al., 2017). Gallagher et al. (2017) assessed Hope levels of these students using Snyder's Hope Scale, as well as measuring their self-efficacy and student engagement through other surveys. Findings revealed that Hope, self-efficacy, and engagement were all traits that positively correlated with enrollment and GPA for students, but Hope was found to be the strongest predictor of graduation rate and GPA across multiple years (Gallagher et al., 2017).

Marques, Lopez, Fontaine, et al. (2015), conducted a study over characteristics of high Hope students. Marques, Lopez, Fontaine, et al. (2015) divided students into three categories, including extremely low, average, and extremely high Hope. Extremely high Hope students were found to have greater school engagement, life satisfaction, self-worth, academic achievement, and mental health (Marques, Lopez, Fontaine, et al., 2015). Students of average Hope levels also reported higher mean scores on all school and intrapersonal measures than extremely low Hope students (Marques, Lopez, Fontaine, et al., 2015). Findings showed presence of average to high levels of Hope may buffer students from mental illness (Marques, Lopez, Fontaine, et al., 2015).

Kirschman et al. (2010) presented a study on changes in inner-city youth levels of Hope after a six-week summer camp. Interventions during the camp were devoted to strengthening dance ability and enhancing psychosocial competence skills (Kirschman et al., 2010). Rather than focusing on in-school interventions, the authors brought out the importance of utilizing summer as an opportunity to strengthen pathway and agency thinking in children (Kirschman et al., 2010). Through interviews, Kirschman et al. (2010) identified 11-to-14-year-old participants

who had large numbers of at-risk characteristics (e.g., low socioeconomic status, lack of adult role models, sibling or parent incarceration or teen parents). “Aileycamp,” as named for The Alvin Ailey American Dance Company, had goals to expose inner-city children to the art of dance (Kirschman et al., 2010). The camp also included activities emphasizing positive interactions and strength building (Kirschman et al., 2010). Participants in the camp had daily personal and psychological development classes on conflict management, decision-making, drug and alcohol use, sexual health, career goals, nutrition, and interpersonal violence prevention (Kirschman et al., 2010). Hopeful thinking, as measured by Snyder’s Hope Scale, increased over the six-week period and remained at high levels beyond four months following the end of the camp (Kirschman et al., 2010).

Hope in Schools

Specific actionable steps, instructional curriculum, and intervention strategies modeled after successful programs are just now being developed for use with younger children. Snyder, Irving, and Anderson (1999, p. 299) mention there are innumerable ways to help students build personal efficacy, and an “arsenal of strategies” to move students toward high Hope. Snyder et al. (2003) suggest utilizing school psychologists to help refine techniques for enhancing Hope in the classroom. Larson et al. (2007) state that outside factors, and outside people, influence levels of Hope. Co-construction of lessons and collaborative efforts, involving conversation and group processes among educators and mental health professionals, would be beneficial (Larson et al., 2007). A question that rises to the surface is whether teachers, who themselves may have low-Hope, can effectively maximize Hope in others (Snyder et al., 2003).

Snyder’s (1995) pathway and agency thinking have led to actionable interventions that incorporate positive self-talk, recalling past successes, cultivating friends with like goals, finding

role models, getting adequate rest and exercise, learning to re-goal, and practicing laughing at oneself. Including purposeful roadblocks in intervention allows children to practice rerouting their goals (Snyder et al., 2003). Other possible intervention ideas to consider include keeping a diary of ongoing self-talk, including activities drawing on positive memories, reading or hearing about stories of success in others, and participating in team-related activities. (Snyder et al., 2003). Groups of teachers are just beginning to take these intervention ideas and create actionable lessons that can be used with students.

Studies point to Hope as a positive psychology intervention that makes a difference in a variety of ways. Very few studies have been conducted in school settings, and virtually none are qualitative. Triangulating data through a case study of lived experiences of Hope lessons in classrooms provides new and enlightening information to add to Hope research. Snyder (2002) reports pathway and agency thinking develops steadily during early childhood years. This is such an important piece of information for educators. We are the community, the learning environment, and the institution of childhood, and we must realize the impact we can have on Hopefulness in our public school setting.

Summary

As Snyder (2002, p. 262) states, “I proposed that Hope and meaning should be companions, because it is through the self-reflections about personal goals, and the perceived progress in reaching those goals, that meaning is constructed in a person’s life.” Hope, and purposeful lessons utilizing this theoretical framework, has the potential to create meaning in the lives of students and should be investigated. Gwinn and Hellman (2019) reiterate that Hope is action to propel a person forward, and that this can be taught to a child, allowing that child to

understand that they have much control in making their life better. Studying Hope in schools is a worthwhile endeavor, and the literature reviewed above encourages further investigations.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how Hope lessons, specifically used in early childhood classrooms, impact students and teachers. My research was informed by the bodies of theoretical and empirical evidence highlighted in the previous chapter (Yin, 2016). Creswell and Creswell (2018) consider theory to be the framework that calls us to action, the lens that shapes research, and the foundation for decisions about data collection and analysis. To shape my research design, I gained expertise about the phenomenon of Hope, and found reasonable amounts of research-based evidence that my study is worthwhile to the field of education (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I approached this project with a sharper perspective and greater insight because of the literature (Yin, 2016).

Interventions have been developed, though few in number, by individuals and by companies, based on Hope Theory. My goal was to use case-study methodology to best understand how Hope is experienced in the instructional setting (Yin, 2018). The context of this study focused on how eight early childhood teachers reflected on the use of Hope lessons, and how these impacted both the teacher and their students. In addition, classroom observations and student artifacts provided rich data to triangulate for meaning. This chapter produces a rationale for the selected methodology and explains all aspects of the research project further and in greater detail.

Qualitative Research

Most previous Hope research has been conducted quantitatively using Snyder's Hope Scale as the measure of success (Snyder, 2002). Using this tool, participants in Hope studies can

complete self-assessments on Hope levels before and after interventions, allowing conclusions to be drawn from results (Snyder, 2002). My own background and worldview led me to research the topic a bit differently. To me, it was valuable to investigate the experiences of those working with Hope by spending time with them one-on-one and in whole-group classroom settings. Leading me to my study topic in the area of Hope was the problem in educational practice of learning how to provide social-emotional support in a way that benefits students' well-being, alongside the academic pieces of education. My project was the intersection of theory, philosophy, intervention, methodology, and research design, through a plan that involved human interaction. My desired effects, as described by Miles et al. (2020), were both scientific and active, as I deepened understanding of Hope for others, while also discovering the potential value of Hope in schools. Connecting any positive findings to existing problems of practice will enable educational improvements and empower educators with worthy tools (Miles et al., 2020).

My worldview approach, which led me to qualitative methods, is constructivist in nature (Yin, 2016). Constructivists, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), hold the belief that interpretation matters, and that individuals have their own subjective views of reality, and their own construction of meaning, as they engage with the world. As described by Yin (2018), this approach, along with my relativist perspective, allowed me to focus on multiple realities, different points of view, and different meanings to illuminate my Hope study. The importance of individuals constructing the reality of the world around them is the central characteristic of all qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Complexity of individual viewpoints always piques my interest, and framing these through the lens of Hope Theory provided for interesting interpretation of findings regarding classroom Hope lessons.

I approached this research with an original methodology and came to the table with fresh ideas of ways to draw conclusions about Hope. Interpretation of participant viewpoints through a “backdrop of shared understandings, practices, and language” was an exciting adventure (Schwandt, 2015, p. 36). Actively learning about experiences of those working closely with Hope in schools provided a wealth of data to sort and analyze. Though I approached work constructively, I was also pragmatic in the sense that what I took for meaning was open to interpretation and criticism from others (Schwandt, 2015). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) share, this type of inductive investigative strategy provided a richly descriptive end product. I approached this project wanting to understand one thing well: Hope in early childhood classrooms (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I was able to fully accomplish that goal.

The stories of Hope were important to document well, and getting the perspective of those involved in Hope lessons gave much insight into their effectiveness. Qualitative research allowed me to build the relationship between Hope theory and Hope practice to impact educational change (Schwandt, 2015). An open-ended approach to gathering data shed new light on information Snyder’s Hope scale might not be able to reveal as clearly. This is also true because measuring Hope levels with the current Hope scale for children is challenging when working with very young students, as it does not account well for their developmental level. Hope, in vivid and real context, will likely make a strong impression on educators who may read my study (Miles et al., 2020).

The basic procedures of qualitative research were utilized. These included posing significant questions that could be investigated empirically and linking research to relevant history (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I investigated Hope lessons through direct procedures, provided coherent and explicit chains of reasoning, and shared results that can be generalized

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As Eisner (1933-2014) mentions, inquiry is a matter of the perception of qualities of a concept, and through this inquiry one comes to recognize the value of the concept. Through my work of inductively building patterns, categories, and themes of understanding about Hope, others will be able to see for themselves the value of Hope lessons in schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Case Study Design

Efforts to mitigate the detrimental behaviors of students who have suffered adverse experiences in childhood are just recently taking shape and form as actual lessons and interventions. Hope lessons can be used with all students, as they are easy to implement within a school setting. This is something teachers have asked for, and now that these practices are beginning to appear in classrooms, it is important to analyze the data to discover the effects and outcomes. We do not know enough about the impact of Hope lessons used with students, as there are very few studies currently published. Even more rare is to find qualitative research, where “how” and “why” questions prompt responses from those immersed in the interventions (Yin, 2018). My intention, using case study, was to gain “emic” or insider perspectives to the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

In my search for meaning and understanding of the impact of Hope interventions on students, case study was a research design that matched my needs. According to Creswell (2007, p. 73), case study is an “approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.” Being able to look at a variety of evidence was an advantage of this type of methodology, as it allowed me,

as the researcher, to capture the complexity of the Hope lesson and intervention processes (Yin, 2018). I conducted a complex case study, relying on multiple sources of evidence, including interviews, observations, and artifacts (Yin, 2018).

The Hope lessons used within the setting of two early childhood centers by eight educators formed a bounded system to study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I investigated Hope lessons in-depth within the real-world context of the classroom, which led to being able to explain how students and teachers are affected by these practices (Yin, 2018). Though each teacher had their own instructional style and may have interpreted how to deliver district Hope lessons differently, I viewed this as an advantage, which led to being able to describe phenomenon in depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A variety of teachers using the lessons helped make my study more flexible, and new information consistently evolved and emerged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case study allowed me to use a heuristic approach to gather my data, which better equipped me to explain and evaluate Hope lessons fully for potential application in new educational scenarios (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Description of the Population

The setting of my study was in a district in a Midwestern state with approximately 8000 students enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). There are 52 pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers employed by the district, and guidance counselors are assigned to each building (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). 70% of students are white, 15% are Hispanic or Latino, 5% are Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 5% are Two or More races, 3% are Black, 2% are Native American, and 1% are Asian (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). 80% of the families speak only English at home, and 19% of the population is below the poverty level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). 68% of students live in two-parent

homes, 26% live in a single female parent household, and 6% live in a male parent household (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). 50% of these households are adults who have education beyond high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

My sampling of participants for interviews was theoretical and purposive in nature, in that I chose people based on their knowledge, understanding, and practice of Hope (Schwandt, 2015). Eight early childhood teachers from two schools were interviewed and observed for this research. Participants were selected from the typical early childhood setting in a nonrandom and purposeful way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They were all trained in Hope Theory as a common bond, though some participants were immersed in this more than others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Creswell (2007), before collecting research, it would be essential to know that all participants had experience and training with Hope. Training was provided through efforts by the school district for two full years prior to my data collection timeframe. Teachers in the district worked in collaborative groups to create lessons to use with students, and they held regular meetings during the two-year period. Many participants were named “Hope Navigators” once they were fully trained. The goal of the Hope Navigator was to provide leadership and consultation in creating a culture of Hope. This initially would be in the school setting, but carrying this over to the larger community would be a higher aspiration. The Hope Navigator, a certified local expert in Hope theory, was to eventually work beyond school walls to create awareness on the science and power of Hope through presentations to groups, organizations, and communities. In this case, several of the participants had training provided by Hope Navigators, as they were not on staff during the original district workshops.

These chosen participants were representative of Hope practices happening in the classroom in this district (Creswell, 2007). Like Miles et al. (2014) mention, having this small

group of people nested in their context allowed for in-depth study. Letters of introduction, both regarding the researcher and the research itself, were sent over the summer of 2022.

Relationships were built and strengthened during data collection in the fall of 2022 (Creswell, 2007).

Permissions for this study were obtained appropriately (Yin, 2018). Following proper protocol to protect participants, I obtained informed consent, shared how I would shield participants from any harm, revealed my process so there would be no deception, and exercised confidentiality throughout the duration of the project (Yin, 2018). Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained, participants were equitably selected, and specific students, as part of the most vulnerable group, were safeguarded completely (Yin, 2018). Anonymity was offered, and all participants were made aware of the purposes of this research (Creswell, 2007). Field notes were verified along the way, and participants knew their rights to withdraw from the study at any time (Yin, 2018).

Hope Lesson Specifics

Hope lessons were created by a group of district teachers who created lesson plans that encompassed five Hope statements. These include:

- My dreams can come true
- Good friends can help light my path
- I am resilient
- My future can be brighter than my past
- My light can inspire others

Using work by Lopez (2018), vocabulary of Hope and working definitions were established by training participants, as follows in Table 1.

Table 1

Hope Definitions for Lessons

Term	Definition
Hope	The belief that your future will be better than today, and you have the power to make it so
Agency (willpower)	Your ability to dedicate mental energy to begin and sustain the journey toward your goals.
Pathway (waypower)	The way we identify strategies or plans on how to achieve our goals
Goal	Something you want to do or achieve
Wish	A desire for something to happen
Collective Hope	The power of a group of people who all have rising Hope
Resilience	An individual can overcome and move past difficult things that have happened to them
Imagination	The instrument of Hope
Nexting	The continual process of predicting what is likely to happen next
Future Thinking	When rich with imagery, is a core ingredient of both hoping and wishing

Lesson design included using children's books to highlight Hope concepts. *Little Mole Finds Hope*, by Glenys Nellist, was used to teach children about finding Hope. In this story, Little Mole is sad in his underground home, and his mom encourages him to look for Hope in the signs of spring. Following the lesson, children go on a Hope hunt in the school, where teachers have hidden pictures of Hope. *The Carrot Seed*, by Ruth Krauss, teaches about goals, as a little boy plants a carrot seed surrounded by people who say it won't grow. In the story, the main character establishes a pathway to his goal. The students plant seeds and draw what they think their grown plant might look like. The classic folk tale, *The Little Red Hen*, is a story of hen wanting help with a task, but she finds she has to go it alone. It offers opportunity to discuss having your own mental energy to sustain hard work. The activity accompanying this story is for children to write a school goal and plan steps toward this goal, for example, counting to five.

My favorite lesson came from *The Itsy Bitsy Spider*, by Ira Trapani. Unlike the traditional song, in which the spider is simply trying to go up the waterspout, this story expands on the idea and shows the spider working hard at multiple tasks to eventually build his web. The spider tries and fails at many things, but he keeps going. Students act out the parts of this book with puppets. *Drum Dream Girl*, by Margarita Engle, tells the story of a girl who lives on an island where only boys are allowed to drum, and she must keep her dream quiet. Things eventually change because of her willpower and the support she found along the way. Activities included looking at pictures of different pathways, and also actively drumming simple patterns. Hallways of the school are equipped with painted pathways that have the kids twist, turn, hop, jump and more for this lesson. *The Little Butterfly that Could*, by Ross Burach, follows a butterfly through the challenges of migration, and encourages students to "fly, fly again," by using their willpower. Students play the Red Light/Green Light game and find their way through a dark tunnel by

following the light at the end.

My Magical Dreams, by Becky Cummings, is a story about visualizing dreams for the future. It poses many fun questions to get kids thinking, including “what do you want to be or do, what do you want to learn about, where do you want to go and explore, and how will you help the world someday?” At the end of this lesson, students revisit the Hope goals they set with their teacher at the beginning of the year and reflect on their progress. The book *Mae Among the Stars*, by Roda Ahmed, paints a picture of someone with a big dream and how their “eyes light up” with excitement. It is based off the life of the first African American woman to travel in space. *Giraffes Can’t Dance*, by Giles Andreae, teaches kids about overcoming obstacles like long crooked legs, and how friends can help. The dance party that happens after this story is fun and full of energy.

Other children’s literature used in Hope lessons includes *Binkle’s Time to Fly*, by Sharmilla Collins, *Bounce Back*, by Cheri Meiners, and *Because*, by Mo Willems. All lesson plans have essential question for students to think about. Examples include, “Think about a time you had a big problem, and how did this make you feel?” and “What does it mean to bounce back?” Book selections were carefully made to align with the elements of Hope.

Ethic of Care

Rauner (2000) states that many people see school as a place of being value-neutral, and that teachers and administrators should have no caregiving responsibilities. Over thirty years in the business has shown me that caregiving is, in fact, an important role of an educator. My research is situated within the care that teachers exercise daily to move students toward academic goals. It is important to note that my methodology was chosen with the Ethic of Care in mind, as education, to me, is a human enterprise (Frick, 2013). Teachers in the bounded case study

understood their relational responsibilities and noted the importance of listening to students, learning about their needs, developing trust, and reflecting as the individual instructor and also reflecting alongside the student (Frick, 2013). All teachers in the study had the goal of understanding motives behind behavior, as they proactively used Hope lessons to set the stage for more effective academic learning to take place. As Noddings (1995) expresses, coming to the intervention table to do this work is an act of caring. She argues that educators cannot achieve even the smallest amounts of academic success unless the children they work with believe they are valued and cared for (Noddings, 1995). Hope lessons were chosen by this school district with caring in mind, and the practices of teaching goal setting and pathway building are steps toward instilling self-respect and self-value in a way that will not harm others (Noddings, 1995).

According to Murphy (2008, p. 244), care in schools means that teachers equip students to “bring their A game” to all they do. Hope lessons teach students strategies to be able to do this in the various scenarios of life. Teachers who used Hope lessons in my study took time to reveal themselves as humans who struggle and make mistakes (Murphy, 2008). They formed relationships and authentic bonds as the caring adults in the classroom (Murphy, 2008). An important dimension to caring, according to Murphy (2008), is the ongoing desire by a teacher to really know students on a personal level, as well as know them as learners in a classroom. Participants saw their students as individuals with a history, and as people who will impact the future, and therefore, took their role seriously by thoroughly teaching all the components of Hope (Murphy, 2008). Teachers making Hope interventions a priority brought a message to students that they are valued and valuable (Murphy, 2008).

Instrumentation

I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, as I proceeded with an inductive investigative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My goal was to fully understand the overall case, and present the findings in a richly descriptive and holistic manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As Yin (2018) states, I followed a clear methodological path and designed a good case study, where I collected, presented, and analyzed data fairly. Tracing the operational processes of Hope lessons over time, case study methodology allowed me to explore, describe, and explain the phenomenon by looking at lived experiences (Yin, 2018). Types of questions that were used with participants included experience and behavior questions, opinion and value questions, knowledge questions, feeling questions, and background and demographic questions, to allow for full inquiry into more than just what was seen or heard (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Though I made sure to ask all questions I had established previously, I did allow interviews with participants to take a natural course (Yin, 2018).

Timeline of the Study

The research in the field was conducted from August of 2020 until January of 2023. Evaluation of data and theme development, in addition to the remainder of Chapters 4 and 5, continued beyond that point. The time spent interacting with Hope teachers and students was approximately seven months, as is shown in Table 2. The entire project took a little over three years to complete.

Table 2

Timeline of the Study

Research Task	Time
Exploration of Hope interventions as a study	October 2020-January 2022
Methodology design	October 2021-January 2022
Obtain IRB permission	January 2022, May 2023
Obtain district approval for study	February 2022-May 2022
Selection of participants	July 2022
Initial background questions sent	August 2022
Classroom and artifact observation with corresponding follow-up interviews	August 2022-January 2023
Transcription of interviews	January 2023-May 2023
Analysis of interviews, observations, and artifacts	August 2023-December 2023
Triangulation of emerging themes	August 2023-December 2023
Chapter 4 and 5 completion	October 2023-January 2024

Data Collection Protocol

According to Schwandt (2015), viewing meaning from different vantage points can give a researcher a genuine understanding of an action or event. My plan was to find meaning through interviews, onsite observations, and artifacts, and triangulate the data to increase understanding (Schwandt, 2015). Yin (2018) says that using multiple measures of the same phenomenon allows for intersection of ideas and helps strengthen the construct validity of the research. The case study protocol allowed me to examine and analyze transformations in students and teachers (Yin, 2018).

Before interviews, or even visits to the school sites, occurred, I prepared for my data collection by submitting my proposal for IRB approval (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approval was renewed in May 2023. Gatekeeper and local district administrator approval was obtained (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As discussed previously, participants in the study were informed of how the data were to be used (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). They knew I would be reporting all findings and include all emerging themes with unbiased language (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It was made clear that I would protect data, maintain a chain of evidence, and keep it for five years (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Interviews

Interviews took place at two pre-kindergarten centers. Center A had a “Safe Room” where students were able to go if they required a break in their day or needed to conference with an adult about behavior. This room had a small conference table, and it was the ideal setting for discussions of Hope lessons with teachers. The space was comfortable and private, as the door could be closed. At Center B, there was no private room except the principal’s office. There was a round table where I was able to set up and conduct interviews in an appropriate setting.

As van Manen (2017) suggests, there are two purposes for interviews. Interviews allow exploration and opportunity to gather data for an in-depth understanding of human phenomenon (van Manen, 2017). Also, an interview is a vehicle which helps develop a relationship with a participant while learning about experiences and making meaning (van Manen, 2017).

Relationships developed along the way were something I had looked forward to, as it is this aspect of education, the personal and human side, that keeps my feet moving ahead on my path.

Though I had talked briefly with educators from the district where my study occurred during

some of my coursework, I had not yet developed any significant relationships, and planned to let this happen naturally during the fall 2022 observation and interview processes.

As van Manen (2017) stated, the interviews brought about my conscious reality of how Hope impacts students and teachers. Conducting interviews in the natural setting of schools was important (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested, I created an interview protocol which included basic information about the interview, an introduction, the interview content questions with natural probes as needed, and closing instructions. My organization of questions was semi-structured, but using open-ended questions, I allowed participants to direct the conversation to their own destination (Yin, 2016). Guiding the conversation, rather than using a structured approach, I was afforded many opportunities for a higher level of comfort from the participant (Yin, 2018). I wanted to be able to discover the essence of all experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews consisted of six questions that were central to my understanding of Hope in schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

- What training or professional development did you have to prepare you to teach Hope lessons?
- What does a Hope lesson look like in your classroom?
- In your opinion, what are the goals for including this curriculum in the school day?
- What outcomes for students, positive or negative, can you tie to Hope lessons?
- In what ways, positive or negative, do Hope lessons impact your teaching?
- What are additional thoughts on Hope lessons, or is there anything else you would like to mention that we have not already discussed?

Excellent audiotaping quality was vital to establishing the dependability of the interview and inquiry (Schwandt, 2015). I utilized my iPhone technology and backed up all interview recordings to my computer. It was very important to preserve personal views of participants so that I could go back and reflect on attitudes and perceptions of those interviewed (Yin, 2018). I proactively thought through technology needs and came prepared for all interviews.

Creswell and Creswell (2018), in their book on research design, discuss advantages and limitations of the interview as a method of data collection. I chose face-to-face interviews to be able to read into non-verbal cues as well as verbal (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Controlling the line of questioning allowed me to make sure I asked the pertinent items that would best inform my research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I realize that my presence at the interview might have elicited biased responses from participants who may have tried to reflect on what they thought I wanted to hear (Creswell, & Creswell, 2018). I also know that there are variances in how participants accurately articulate their thoughts and feelings, and that not all people are able to convey meaning equally (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Several participants had to be prompted to expand on their thinking regarding the original six questions. Table 3, on the following page, shows exact interview times, which ranged from approximately 15 to 40 minutes.

Table 3

Duration of Interviews

Participant	Total Interview Time
Ms. Kelly	October 2020-January 2022
Ms. Lockwood	27.12 minutes
Ms. Simpson	31.30 minutes
Ms. Seldon	36.34 minutes
Ms. O'Connor	37.33 minutes
Ms. Lamont	20.11 minutes
Ms. Reynolds	32.52 minutes
Ms. Millard	15.28 minutes

Observations

Observations occurred in the two early childhood centers from August 2022 through January 2023. All pre-kindergarten classrooms were set up to provide both whole-group and small-group instruction. Observations of whole-group instruction of Hope lessons were conducted using only written notes. These consisted of lesson elements, actions and reactions of the teacher, actions and reactions of the student, environmental factors during the lesson, and any additional pertinent information that related directly to the lesson and the timeframe for which it was happening. All teachers had students sit on the floor in front of the whiteboard for the first portion of the lesson, and then they would move about the room, or into other areas, for the activities. Extensive and detailed notes were taken during the observation in real time, and no video recording was used (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The objective of focus was on the teachers' actions and the reactions of the students during the lessons. I did my best to schedule

observations to meet my research needs, realizing that interruptions do happen frequently in schools and that my timeline might have to be adjusted (Yin, 2018).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) support observations as a data collection type that allows firsthand encounters with phenomena. Advantages of observations include being able to record information as it occurs and note any unusual aspects that might not be included in verbal accounts through interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I functioned as a complete observer, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe, and observed without participating. I was able to determine the format and lesson layout, observe how students and teachers acted and interacted during lessons, listen for important Hope vocabulary, note statements that indicated student comprehension, hear stories that were selected regarding Hope topics, read non-verbal behaviors, and more. Limitations of observations included taking the chance of participants feeling like I was intruding, thus acting differently in the classroom than they normally would (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). There was no pertinent information left out of my study from observational data due to breaking privacy or confidentiality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I tried to approach observations in a way that prevented limitations and allowed me to utilize my excellent attending and observational skills (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Artifacts

According to Yin (2018), studying artifacts, along with the two other aspects of Hope in schools, added an element of insight into the research. They afforded a way to show how children's Hope levels evolved over time (Yin, 2018). Including student documents provided rich material to compare with emerging themes from interviews and observations. Documents were initially going to be collected exclusively from students, but as the project evolved, I realized lesson plans and other documentation from the teacher using the Hope interventions

would allow for better analysis. Photographs of artifacts were collected to be used in analysis of Hope lessons, and I was able to draw conclusions about the evolution of Hope understanding throughout the timeline of the case study (Yin, 2018). Capturing the Hope language being produced by students, and being able to look at this on my own time, were advantages of collecting pictures of artifacts in this case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The reality of the participant was captured in the artwork (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I was able to see students' understanding of lesson concepts, how these evolved over time, and analyze ways these reflect portions of the lesson that were not part of the book connections. Permission was gathered for taking pictures of all artifacts. Throughout Chapters 4 and 5, I have inserted examples of the artifacts that were used in the study, and they are also referenced in the writing of those chapters. This was to give the reader the opportunity to experience an element of the Hope lessons, as well as to show documents looked at for data collection.

Miles et al. (2014) point out that artifacts cannot speak for themselves, and this could lead to biased interpretation from the researcher. I did my best to match artifacts with emerging themes from a nonbiased perspective. When coding photos, I most often looked to an understanding of the Hope concepts that were taught in the lesson (Saldana, 2021, p. 74). Though I did not interview students, I did return to the adult participants to clarify and confirm my understanding of this type of qualitative document. Though it might be seen as a limitation that analysis of these additional artifact materials was tedious, I found the process to add character and life to the project (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

As Creswell and Creswell (2018) state, qualitative research is interpretive in nature. It is important to reveal my own relationship with Hope Theory, and use reflexivity to consciously

acknowledge my assumptions (C. Vaughn, personal communication, 2020). I have only a brief history with Hope as it relates to schools, but a long history with SEL. My desire to find answers for teachers did not overshadow the data that came from this study. W. Frick (personal communication, 2017) reiterated that just by entering the field, a researcher changes it somewhat (Schwandt, 2015). Throughout the process, I bracketed, or used “Epoche” processes so as to suspend my own assumptions (Schwandt, 2015, p. 22). I also, as Laverly (2003) suggested, utilized a reflective journal to note personal bias, pre-existing conditioning, or other individual assumptions during the research process. I remained detached and objective and grew my knowledge as an outside expert through the process (Schwandt, 2015). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) encourage, I did everything possible to focus on the perception of what was true for the participants rather than my own perspectives.

Approaching data collection ethically was crucial, and it was important to build trust (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I was non-disruptive of the classroom worlds of these teachers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Discussing the purpose of my study with participants, avoiding leading questions, and treating participants like collaborators was always at the forefront of my thinking (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Before any data collection occurred, I protected participants through the proper IRB processes to promote the integrity of the research and guard against misconduct (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Gathering voluntary informed consent, I protected my human subjects by assessing the harm, risks, and benefits of the research, minimizing any threat, acting equitably, and assuring confidentiality (Yin, 2016). Acting with reciprocity, and building trust along the way, I cultivated relationships and demonstrated genuine interest in the people I was studying (Schwandt, 2015). Rapport, as Glesne (2016) mentions, was an important research tool that I was careful to employ. This is one of my strengths as a

practitioner, so it made it easier in the research field. I made sure my data were, as Creswell & Creswell (2018) mention, trustworthy, through meticulous protocol and care.

The process of qualitative inquiry, according to Schwandt (2015), must meet criteria of trustworthiness to achieve validity. Specific criteria, developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which help define an authentically complete and rigorous study, include credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Schwandt, 2015). Credibility means taking what the participant is saying and representing it correctly in findings, so that the meaning is what was intended (Schwandt, 2015). With Hope interviews, I had to be careful not to make the mistake of looking too subjectively at the transcript and reading things into the wording that were simply not there. Triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and artifacts kept my own inferences in check and made for credible methodology (Schwandt, 2015). Miles et al. (2020) agree that corroboration of more than one source enhances the trustworthiness of conclusions drawn. My conclusions were from more than one vantage point, which made the study more authentic (Schwandt, 2015).

A dependable researcher conducts a study that has a logical format (Schwandt, 2015). I approached the research from a mindset of accuracy with no attempts to cut corners. I gave myself plenty of time for the project, taking care to check and recheck accuracy of procedures and findings. Multiple perspectives were reported, and all emerging themes were revealed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Fictitious names were used, and disclosure of anyone who may profit from my research occurred (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I cited all sources and avoided plagiarism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Findings were confirmable and shaped by participant information rather than by the researcher (Schwandt, 2015).

My intention was to be present in research physically, cognitively, and emotionally (Yin, 2016). I asked thoughtful questions that evolved into conversation about Hope to find deep meaning (Yin, 2016). I was familiar with my topic, cared about accurate data, was able to multitask, and demonstrated the strength needed to persevere when the research seemed overwhelming (Yin, 2016). The personal experiences and relationships made along the Hope research pathway, the opportunity to talk with others and look them in the eye, brought meaning to my own life, and I felt up close and personal with Hope (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Management

Miles et. al (2014) list issues important to consider regarding data management. Data must be of high quality, must be easily accessible, must document all analyses that occurred, and must be retained once the study is complete (Miles et. al, 2014). As Yin (2018) suggested, I created a formal database so as to easily access and inspect raw data. Notes, audio clips, documents, and narratives were saved to computer files and were stored in one Excel document. Using my own methods of tracking the data in Excel was helpful, as I was in control of the data, but it was also easy to manipulate. The structure of using the computer allowed me to look line by line and think about meaning in each phrase (Creswell, 2007). Along with all data, this document was backed up and saved in multiple ways. In addition, an annotated bibliography of all data was created to help maintain my chain of evidence (Yin, 2018). By looking at the Excel document, an outside observer would be able to trace the steps of my data collection and analysis (Yin, 2018). Hard copies of documents that could not be easily scanned were also categorized and securely stored.

Summary

I conducted this case study to discover how Hope Theory lessons during early childhood years make a difference for students and teachers. The methodology for my study itself actually contained elements of Hope Theory. As you have read, my pathway to achieving my goal was clear, and my conscious willpower allowed for momentum along the way. In the next chapter, I will use thick descriptions to convey meaning regarding my findings (Yin, 2018).

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

Introduction

This case study intended to provide information on how early childhood Hope lessons impact both students and teachers. I share the following results obtained through qualitative data collection, conducted in a mid-southwestern public school district using student artifacts, classroom observations, and teacher interviews. Participants for this study were chosen because of their knowledge of Hope Theory through specific district training, and because of their active use of Hope lessons in the pre-kindergarten setting. Eight pre-kindergarten teachers were observed for a total of 256 minutes. An additional observation occurred with one teacher who used Hope lessons in an intergenerational pre-kindergarten classroom, bringing the total to 301 minutes. Interviews with eight participants totaled 225 minutes and 26 seconds. A total of 39 photographs of artifacts were collected from the two school sites. All names used in Chapters 4 and 5 are pseudonyms, and anything that could positively identify a participant was not included in these findings. The findings are presented through the lens of emerging themes and subthemes, which are discussed one by one (Glesne, 2016). A constant comparative approach was used throughout the data analysis, and once categories were established, I spent much time looking for comments or examples that represented these (Creswell, 2007). During interviews, participants would expand on certain topics in similar ways, which provided saturation when I began to analyze the data (Creswell, 2007). Though this was not a grounded theory study, the constant comparative approach allowed me to look for patterns in this case (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative analysis and triangulation of data from interviews, classroom observations, and artifact photos provided supporting evidence for themes and subthemes.

Individual Case Information

In the following section, I highlighted information gathered from each individual participant. First, I shared background information on each teacher. Next, I provided rich description from specific observations from the Hope lesson I observed in their classroom. A few points from interviews excerpts were included in this individual participant section, however, most interview evidence can be found in the analysis of data section of this document.

Individual Case: Ms. Lockwood

Ms. Lockwood has experience in most elementary grades, and she has been in classrooms for over two decades. She is proud of her professional development opportunities in many areas, and she has received recognition from peers regarding her work. When asked, she revealed her favorite things about teaching pre-kindergarten. These included the friendly, warm, colorful environment of the building, the “organized chaos” as students make choices about their learning, the integration of play and academic and social-emotional learning, and the opportunity to influence future teachers by working with university practicum students. She expressed how she loves the way children are excited about everything, “From marveling at the spider we find on a web, to when we mix two colors together to make one.” Her goals for each child are different, because each child has different needs. The most important goal she has is for each child to learn how to be kind and work and play with others. She wants her students to be respectful to others, and love themselves and their friends. She wants her students to learn how to use their imaginations, be creative, and how to think and solve problems.

Ms. Lockwood began her Hope lesson by showing the students a bag of marshmallows to grab their attention, and asked, “Would you like a marshmallow?” which brought squeals of delight. She then increased the excitement level by saying there was actually a way they could

receive two, instead of one, at the end of the lesson. After piquing their interest, she shifted and moved to the book *The Very Impatient Caterpillar*. After previewing and investigating their background knowledge on caterpillars, butterflies, and more, she again brought up the bag of marshmallows. This time she passed one out to each student and said, “Today you have to have willpower, and if you have willpower and still have your one marshmallow at the end of the story, I will reward you with a second one.”

She began reading and discussing the book, but every now and then she would stop and say, “Whew, something smells so good.” “It’s the marshmallows,” the students said. The teacher inquired as to whether it was hard for them to do what she had asked, and the answer was many head nods. In the story, the caterpillar had to travel a very long way for a little creature, and the students were feeling empathy knowing that life can bring challenges. They were currently facing the challenge of keeping themselves from eating the marshmallow in their little hand.

Throughout the story, Ms. Lockwood paused to ask comprehension questions and to have students picture important Hope elements in their mind using different scenarios the caterpillar was facing. The story ended with the caterpillar achieving his goal of making the long-distance journey and saying, “There is nothing I can’t do if I believe in myself.” After the story, the teacher did a “marshmallow check,” and all the students were proud to show no nibbles. Ms. Lockwood praised the way they used their willpower and resisted the temptation to eat it, and she finally handed out the second marshmallow, much to the delight of the students. More conversations happened about how difficult this task was, and students shared strategies for making sure not to eat their marshmallow. They discussed feelings of being proud for not only keeping their marshmallow free of nibbles, but for listening to the story and the lesson.

Individual Case: Ms. Seldon

Ms. Seldon has degrees in Elementary Education, Early Childhood, and Special Education. She has taught pre-kindergarten and kindergarten for over 25 years. Her room follows a theme of “School family,” where everyone is safe, works through strong emotions, and uses their brains to solve problems. Progress is celebrated, and students grow to learn that making mistakes is okay. She enjoys working with students from the local college who are studying to be teachers. Her favorite thing is when parents say, “My child is upset because they can’t come to school on the weekend.” Her most important goals for the year are that students feel that they can learn anything, they are loved and safe, and they have the power to do anything they set out to do. She feels there are many extras that sometimes get in the way and sidetrack academic learning, but Hope lessons are important. She sees Hope as a tool, and she expresses that pre-kindergarten is not too early to learn this concept, in her opinion.

Ms. Seldon was observed beginning the Hope lesson by letting students know the objective was to read a book about Hope and learn about the importance of pathways when it comes to reaching a goal. She reviewed this key vocabulary word, and then shared a picture of a forest with the children. The picture was dark and ominous, and Ms. Seldon led a discussion about whether they would be willing to enter this particular forest to get somewhere. Students were unsure they would dare to do so, and they shared many reasons why this might not be a good idea.

Next, the teacher brought out a picture that showed similar trees, but this time there was a pathway through the forest (Fig.1.). When asked if having a pathway helped, the consensus was that the path would help them find their way, so it would not be as frightening to try. The

students were much more comfortable with the second picture and explained that this was because the pathway helped them know where to go without getting lost.

The book shared for Ms. Seldon's lesson was *Drum Dream Girl*, by Margarita Engle, and it was selected as the book to introduce pathways to goals. Students made predictions about the book before reading, and many feelings were discussed as students empathized with the girl in the story who was not allowed to drum because she was female. She paused during the story, and the students pretended to drum by tapping on their knees and on class

objects to keep them engaged. Ms. Seldon would tap a rhythm that students would then repeat. The end of the story, Ms. Seldon reviewed the character's goal, pathways, and agency of supports that helped her finally achieve her goal of drumming even though she was a girl.

Individual Case: Ms. Kelly

Ms. Kelly is Early Childhood and Elementary certified and has worked in both education and in mental health during her career. This is her first year working with the Hope curriculum at this site. Her classroom environment focuses on equity which she defines as, "Everyone gets what they need, and sometimes that means everyone gets the same thing, but usually it means that we get different things." She uses natural consequences, and you might hear her speak in terms like "green and red choices" to help sort and identify behaviors without shame. She has favorite aspects of her current job:

There seems to be more of an opportunity to have authentic, exploratory, and child-led learning in early childhood. I love the discovery of learning that is constant at this stage

Figure 1
Forest Pathway

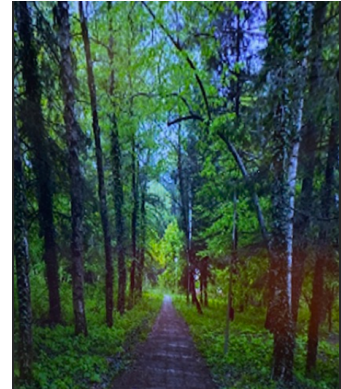


Fig. 1. Pathway through a forest shown during Hope lesson.

of cognitive development. I also deeply enjoy the emotional development that is so crucial during this stage of life and getting to foster understanding of emotions.

Ms. Kelly likes Hope instruction because students can risk being vulnerable while in a safe environment. They begin to conceptualize their own willpower and waypower, building strong self-images and confidence. She loves that Hope lessons bring deeper thinking regarding emotional awareness, and that the students learn about engaging in trusting relationships.

Students were observed in Ms. Kelly's class listening to the book, *The Itsy Bitsy Spider*. This was a different version, where the spider faces more challenges than just climbing up the waterspout. She gained their attention at the beginning of the lesson with a finger play activity, and students appeared ready. Her voice was animated, and she wore a microphone to ensure accessibility. There were symbols on the board, and she discussed one that looked like a target and one that was a pathway image. She had the word "willpower" written down, and I could tell by the discussion that students already had a background into what this word meant. She reviewed author, illustrator, and main character, and then pulled down a stuffed spider, which had been hanging on the board. The puppet was first used by the teacher, and when the story was reread, the students had the chance to act out the spider's part. For the initial reading, Ms. Kelly directed the students to look for the spider's willpower during the story. There were many questions posed such as, "Did he make it?" followed by discussion as to what got in the way of the spider accomplishing his goal. The students easily picked out the pattern of how the spider had to continue to try. Feelings about setbacks were discussed, and examples were given of how these can happen in life. At the end of the book the students discovered the ultimate goal of the spider was to build a web. This was his important and independent reason to continue to the climb, regardless of the challenges he faced. The spider rested in the sun after completing his

goal, and the importance of rest was discussed at that point. All the blocks on the spider's pathway to build the web were reviewed one more time before moving on to the next activity.

The activity was a balance beam task (Fig.2.), and students had to try to make it across. The what ifs were discussed, "What if someone pushes you? What if I fall off?" Once students were successful at the initial balance beam, Ms. Kelly blocked a portion of the beam. The teacher helped the students plan ahead as to what they would do.

Individual Case: Ms. Lamont

Ms. Lamont holds degrees in Special Education and Early Childhood Education. She has been with this district for many years, and she was part of the original Hope group. In her words, her environment is a place where students are, "Free to choose, free to express themselves, and free to grow and develop at their own pace." According to Ms.

Lamont, you may find her class to be a bit louder than some, and there are lots of wiggles. She says her goal for students is to see school as a safe place where people love them and want to see them grow.

Ms. Lamont was observed teaching Hope to a group of 18 students. The lesson began with a video presentation followed by an opportunity for students to make predictions about the book, *Little Mole Finds Hope*, by Glennis Nellis. As Ms. Lamont read the story, she used a mole puppet as a visual. The main idea of the story was mentioned several times as being, "You can find Hope even in the dark places," just as mole found Hope in the book. Several questions were asked at the end of the story, including, "Where are places you see Hope in your life?"

Figure 2
Balance Beam



Fig. 2 A similar balance beam activity showing a block in the pathway.

From the start of the lesson, students were distracted. As the video played, I noted three times where Ms. Lamont spoke over the voices of students. At one point, “Hope” was written on the board, and Ms. Lamont tried to discuss this word. Students were unclear of the meaning, as indicated by their silence. As Ms. Lamont read, interruptions continued, which made the read-aloud choppy. Ms. Lamont stopped frequently to address issues. During much of the story, only nine of the students had their eyes on the book. Four students were lying down and completely disengaged. One student was removed to work with the classroom teaching assistant. Ms. Lamont kept apologizing to the researcher for interruptions. The hands-on activity had to be postponed to a later date, as too much of the lesson time involved redirection of students.

Individual Case: Ms. O’Connor

Ms. O’Connor has been teaching in this district for over 30 years in kindergarten and pre-kindergarten. She has a developmentally appropriate classroom that is fun and inviting for the students. She strives to create “a place where they feel comfortable communicating and enjoy learning, and a place where they also feel safe.” Her favorite thing about her current position is the way early childhood students are eager to learn. Ms. O’Connor’s goals for students are to build independence and self-confidence and to develop problem-solving skills. Her most important goal as a teacher is to build trust with each individual student. She feels Hope lessons help students develop positive feelings about themselves and find positive ways to solve problems. “Hope lessons keep me positive and committed to staying connected to each individual student,” she states. This class has a volunteer Hope mentor who comes to the classroom once a week. He reads a Hope book to the class and then spends time working with small groups of children.

The classroom observation in Ms. O’Connor’s class began with her showing the students

a new puppet from the puppet stand, which brought about all kinds of happy responses from the students. They had been sitting in groups of four and taking turns getting up for a restroom break. The teacher called color tables to the carpet, and students moved in an organized fashion to the floor, appearing ready for the puppet explanation. The puppet for this lesson is a mole, and students shared their background knowledge of the animal, saying, “They live underground. They live in the dark. If it rained in their home, they would have to come out.” Ms. O’Connor let the students freely express their knowledge and did not correct errors in thinking. She then told the students they would all have a chance to feel the soft puppet on their own hand if they listened to the story.

She said, “Today we are reading about Hope,” and read the definition of Hope as being “the belief that your future will be better than today and that you have the power to make it that way.” As they went through the book, Ms. O’Connor asked how the mole was feeling with each event. In the story, the flowers have not bloomed, and the trees only have buds, so mole has a hard time. He finds a chrysalis, which is a hard word, but the kids seemed to know what was inside. “A butterfly will come out!” said one. “Does that give us Hope?” asked Ms. O’Connor. The students nodded. One student corrected the one who spoke, and said, “First it is a caterpillar, then it makes a chrysalis, then it’s a butterfly.” The student who was corrected was not upset. Ms. O’Connor reviewed what the flowers needed to help them grow, discussing sunshine and water, and making the point that sometimes it takes help to meet goals.

The activity that reinforced the story was a Hope hunt. Students looked for pictures around the school that depicted Hope and discussed these. Hope pictures from the lesson plans included a garden, a nest, a flower growing out of concrete (Fig. 3.), and a rainbow. Kids found

unintentional examples of Hope as well as what the teacher posted. One student found a clown and said, “Things that make us laugh can give us Hope.”

Individual Case: Ms. Simpson

Ms. Simpson started out in nursing but switched to become an Early Childhood teacher. Her classroom environment is a loving and safe place to learn, though sometimes she says it is “chaos.” Her favorite thing about working with young children is getting to start from the beginning and “plant seeds of knowledge into little minds.” Her most important goal this year for her students is for them to know they are loved. She also hopes that they will master the skills necessary to build their foundation for lifelong learning. She wants Hope lessons to connect students to thoughts and dreams that might not be realized yet. She knows that for pre-kindergarten, Hope is tough for them to understand. She feels that by teaching them what Hope really means, they can learn how to set and achieve long and short-term goals for themselves. She says her teaching style is somewhat fun, and she often uses silliness to get on their level and engage them.

During the observation Hope lesson, Ms. Simpson used a lapel microphone, as she showed the students the puppet, “Guaca-Mole.” They did not understand this name for the mole, but they did realize the puppet was an animal. She posed the question, “What does it mean to have Hope?” The students were already distracted by a child who had been kicking in the circle, but Ms. Simpson went on and read the definition of Hope. She explained that a Hope is different

Figure 3
Hope Hunt



Fig. 3 Teachers placed pictures of Hope around the school for students to find.

than a wish, and that you cannot control what happens when you wish for something.

The teacher read the book, but there were many interruptions, including the classroom doorbell ringing frequently. Ms. Simpson was particularly good at showing each picture that went along with the story. The students practiced faces showing the emotions mole was feeling throughout the story. The teacher then switched to the Hope Walk activity.

Individual Case: Ms. Reynolds

Ms. Reynolds received her Elementary Education degree from a state university. She was a teacher's assistant in pre-kindergarten first, and she loved it so much that she went back and added Early Childhood to her certification. She runs a safe and loving classroom and uses positive redirection if negative behaviors occur. She loves making connections with students, and says, "My favorite thing about early childhood education is the excitement for learning and all the love, and it warms my heart to see children engaged and excited as well as learning to control their emotions and care for one another." An important goal she has for the students are that they remain engaged, and she is very intentional about teaching in a way that engages everyone. She feels that Hope lessons help children understand and get hold of their emotions so they can be productive in school, and in life. She feels she is a better leader and role model to other teachers because of Hope lessons, and she uses the concept herself daily.

Ms. Reynolds is the only teacher that was observed twice, and this is because her class is part of an intergenerational program that pairs students with the elderly. The first observation was the actual Hope lesson in her classroom. She instructed the kids to sit on their pockets, as they had been "dancing the sillies out" right before, and were full of energy. She reminded students that a goal is something you want to get or to do. She mentioned goals they have been accomplishing, such as learning their alphabet, the letter sounds, and counting to 20. The book

for this lesson was *Drum Dream Girl*. 75% of the class was listening and looking at the teacher as she read about how only boys were allowed to play drums in this story. She stopped and had the boys drum on the carpet, and the girls were not allowed to join. Feelings were discussed, and the female main character's goal of being able to drum was emphasized.

The word "pathway" was on the board, and the teacher asked about how the girl might make her Hope happen. She defined pathway as the strategies and steps the drum dream girl needed to take. These included being brave, visualizing herself playing, taking music lessons from a teacher, showing she could do a part in a dance, and committing to practice rhythms. Ms. Reynolds helped the students see that Hope took a long time, but the drum dream girl kept going and didn't give up.

Just like the drumming practice, the Hope lesson activity started out only allowing the boys to do the amazing floor pathway games (Fig. 4.). Ms. Reynolds was very dramatic talking about fairness. One of the girls said, "This is unbearable!" Ms. Reynolds finally allowed the girls a turn, and they discussed whether they would have tried hard to get to their goal of getting to play these games if she had not done so.

The second observation was at the intergenerational pre-kindergarten classroom, located in a nursing home in town. This observation was conducted over a three-hour period, and it allowed me to see three different components of the day, looking for Hope lesson impact. The first period was a meet-and-greet. The kids wore matching shirts and had on name tags. This allowed the residents, or "grands," as they called them, to say each child's name. Students were walking up to the grands to show off

Figure 4
Floor Pathway Game



Fig. 4 One example of a pathway created on the tiles for children to follow.

their sparkly fingernails or to give out hugs. They sang a patriotic song, and this activity seemed to be something the elderly really enjoyed, as all were actively participating, either singing or listening and clapping.

The students went back to their classroom in the facility and did an art project where they made big, decorated hearts. Then they went to a second session with the grands, and they handed

Figure 5
Heart Card



Fig. 5 Heart card made for their grand which was shared during a connection activity.

out their creations (Fig. 5.). One resident, Barbara, said, "I'll keep this the rest of my life," and turned to me and shared that no one from her family ever visited her these days. One little girl came over and grabbed Barbara's hand, and she joined them in dancing in a circle. Young and old, everyone was having a joyful time as said they loved each other while marching and hugging.

Back in the classroom, the students did alphabet lessons where they used pool tubes to form letters with partners, and they also read a Thanksgiving story. The teacher mentioned Hope, pathway, and wellbeing during the story, though this was not a Hope lesson. The third visit with the grands that day had a theme of "jobs," and the students were to ask the grand what their job was and share a future career Hope for themselves. The kids listed the jobs of teacher, police officer, doctor, firefighter, pet helper, and purple football player.

Individual Case: Ms. Millard

Ms. Millard was a challenging participant, as she never would share about her background. I sent her basic written questions four separate times; she never responded. She

never requested to drop from the study, and I was able to conduct an observation and an interview, which I felt should be included.

The first scheduled classroom observation did not happen, as I went in at the agreed-upon time, and Ms. Millard said she had accidentally already done the Hope lesson for the day. A month later I returned for a rescheduled observation, and this time she said she forgot. We rescheduled again for later that same day, and I waited in town for several hours. When I walked into the observation, five minutes before the time the lesson was to begin, Ms. Millard was already halfway finished. I went ahead and observed from this point, regardless.

Ms. Millard was in the middle of a butterfly story, and students were discussing that they also say the words, “I got this,” when something is hard. That is a phrase the butterfly was using in the story. She moved an inattentive student closer to her side, and gently patted the student in a caring way. She reviewed the characters that helped the butterfly make it to the end of the long journey. One was Whale, who said, “Fly, Fly” to encourage the butterfly to keep going.

The activity involved stacking blocks (Fig.6.). The goal was to build a tower, and when it fell over, to try again and go a block higher. “What does this take?” asked Ms. Millard. “Willpower,” the students said without being prompted. “What does that mean?” asked Ms. Millard. “Keep trying,” said the students. This conversation back and forth which showed knowledge about Hope on the part of the students made me realize that this teacher was actively

Figure 6
Block Activity

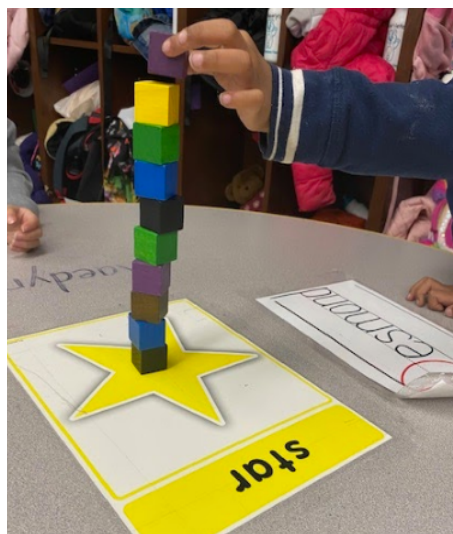


Fig. 6 Students built block towers with the goal of making them one block higher each time.

doing the Hope lessons. I concluded she probably was just nervous doing this in front of me, hence, all the issues. Most students were building towers and talking about how to get them higher. One student was distracted by a shiny object that she brought. The activity went on for about ten minutes, and the students were very engaged and continued to try without getting upset.

Analysis of Data

As Yin (2018) discusses, data analysis for this study occurred in phases. Compiling a formal database with the collected information was followed by disassembling the data and coding it for further scrutiny (Yin, 2018). According to Trochim, Donnelly and Arora (2016), thematic analysis involves identification of major ideas through a procedure by which one discovers patterns. Through the process of reduction, I reviewed interview transcription line by line and eliminated non-relevant information, leaving only the data that described the experiences related to Hope. As Miles et al. (2020) suggest, data chunks were pulled out for analysis and that could eventually tell a story.

Coding involved looking at short phrases in the interview transcripts to infer meaning (Yin, 2016). Miles et al. (2014, p. 71) define codes as “labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study.” Disaggregating the data into manageable segments happened through the coding process, with codes fully labeled to be manipulated for analysis (Schwandt, 2015). The style of coding fell along the lines of “Causation Coding,” as described by Saldana (2021). The goal was to pull out causal beliefs from the qualitative data to uncover what teachers felt about Hope lesson impact, and to investigate their rationale as to why they think something specific (Saldana, 2021). First cycle coding included, descriptive, in Vivo, process, emotion, values, causation, attribute, evaluation, and protocol

coding (Miles et al., 2014). It was essential to capture the language of the participants, so the in vivo coding was particularly important (Creswell, 2007).

Second cycle coding involved grouping the data into more categories, themes, and constructs (Miles et al., 2014). This pulled together the first cycle coding efforts in a more meaningful way, and patterns and themes began to surface as I evaluated and made comparisons to sharpen my understanding (Miles et al., 2020). The second coding cycle led to seeing a unified scheme among participants and among the data, and I was able to weave meaning and relationships among themes and concepts (Saldana, 2021) While coding, I asked the question “What is going on here” constantly, and did not approach the transcription too mechanically, keeping in mind the abstract meaning that was materializing (Schwandt, 2015, p. 33). I also looked at links between the codes, as an attribution of one outcome can lead to a cause for another outcome (Saldana, 2021). The whole process used was appropriate to determine the impact of Hope lessons on teachers and students (Saldana, 2021). Assertions and propositions acted as “bullet points” of major patterns, themes, trends, and findings that I felt could confidently convey data from my study (Miles et al., 2014, p. 100). I then moved on to analyze observation notes and artifacts I had collected. Written memos and field notes were captioned and sorted into themes and subthemes already established from interviews, and a few new subthemes were created.

The next phases of analysis involved reassembling the data with themes fully identified (Yin, 2018). I created a visual flow chart and matrix to examine the breakdown of codes into themes from interviews, observations, and artifacts (Miles et al., 2014). This visual display allowed me to manipulate and play with my data (Miles et al., 2014). Additional contact with teachers occurred alongside analysis of observations and documents to clarify my understanding

of emerging themes, if I was not clear (Yin, 2018).

As Saldana mentions (2021), though coding and analysis led to development of obvious themes, these are still open to my own interpretations and constructs. Analysis would not be complete without examining plausible rival explanations (Yin, 2018). I determined the level that Hope interventions caused desired outcomes with the consideration of outside explanations for what occurred (Yin, 2018). I thought carefully about each data point and considered other factors coming in to play. Saturation of data collection was complete when no new themes or subthemes emerged from any of the three data collection areas (Yin, 2018).

Emergent Theme Evidence

In interviews, all participants were asked the following questions about Hope lessons.

- What training or professional development did you have to prepare you to teach Hope lessons?
- What does a Hope lesson look like in your classroom?
- In your opinion, what are the goals for including this curriculum in the school day?
- What outcomes for students, positive or negative, can you tie to Hope lessons?
- In what ways, positive or negative, do Hope lessons impact your teaching?
- What are additional thoughts on Hope lessons, or is there anything else you would like to mention that we have not already discussed?

Each of the eight teachers spoke broadly about each question. As Glesne (2016) mentions, providing a semi-structured question format allows for “words to fly” (p. 96). Though I was specific in initial questions, the conversations led to a variety of places. My goal was to measure

experiences and attitudes about Hope lessons and to see their perspectives revealed (Glesne, 2016). I reformed and added to questions as needed (Glesne, 2016, p. 96). Overall themes began to emerge as the teachers shared their narratives, and subthemes were realized with careful data analysis. Only one teacher was vague with her answers, and this was the same staff member who avoided observation, not allowing me to see the full lesson. Regardless of her short interview, the themes that had previously emerged were still supported by her answers.

From the data captured, themes emerged regarding Hope lesson impact on students and teachers. Table 4, on the following four pages, highlights emergent themes and subthemes and cites evidence specific to teacher interviews, observations or to artifacts representing these.

Table 4

Emergent Themes and Subthemes

Themes and Subthemes	Noted in Interviews with Participants	Noted in Observations	Connected to Artifact
Theme 1: Hope Lessons Positively Impact Individual Social-Emotional Growth and Wellness	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	Kelly, Lockwood, Lamont, Seldon, Simpson	Figures 1,2,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,12,13,14,15,16,19,20
Subtheme 1a: Hope lessons have a positive impact on behavior	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	Kelly	Figures 2,7,11,13,14,15,16,19,20
Subtheme 1b: Hope lessons foster personal growth in teachers	Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson	Lockwood	Figures 7,9,12
Subtheme 1c: Hope lessons lead to an awareness of others	Lockwood, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds	Lockwood	Figures 2,4,5,16,20
Subtheme 1d: Hope lessons mix well with other SEL curriculum	Lamont, Lockwood, Kelly, Reynolds	Lockwood	Figures 1,2,5,7,9,13,14,15,16
Subtheme 1e: Hope lessons help to mitigate trauma	Lamont, Lockwood, Kelly, Simpson, Reynolds	Lamont	Figures 4,5,7,8,11,13,15
Subtheme 1f: Hope lessons reveal the need for helpers in life	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor	Seldon, Kelly, Simpson	Figures 2,5,6,8,15,16,20

Theme 2: Hope lessons positively impact individual academic growth	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	Lamont, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Reynolds, Millard, Simpson, Lockwood	Figures 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10, 11,12,13,14,15,16,17, 18,19,20
Subtheme 2a: Hope lessons motivate students to learn and encourage them to persevere	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	Lamont, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Reynolds, Millard	Figures 1,2,4,6,7,8,10,11,13, 14,15,16,17,20
Subtheme 2b: Hope lessons build confidence	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, Simpson, Millard	Seldon, Simpson, Reynolds	Figures 2,3,4,6,7,8,9,11,13, 15,16,20
Subtheme 2c: Hope lessons connect to core subjects in school and prep for academic learning	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	Reynolds, Millard	Figures 6,9,10,12,13,14,16, 17,18,19,20
Subtheme 2d: Hope lessons help students develop respect for their own learning and the learning of others	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	Lockwood, Kelly	Figures 2,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,13, 14,15,16,20
Subtheme 2e: Hope lessons prepare students for future learning	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds	Simpson, Reynolds	Figures 1,6,7,9,12,14,15,16, 19,20

Theme 3: Hope lessons build relationships	Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Lockwood, Lamont, Reynolds	Kelly, Simpson, Reynolds	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11, 12,13, 14,15,16,20
Subtheme 3a: Hope lessons strengthen student-to-student relationships	Kelly, Simpson	Kelly, Simpson	Figures 2,5,6,8,11,16,20
Subtheme 3b: Hope lessons strengthen student-to-teacher relationships	Lockwood, Simpson	Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Lockwood, Lamont, Reynolds	Figures 7,8,9,14,15,16,20
Subtheme 3c: Hope lessons strengthen student-to-parent relationships	Lamont, Lockwood, Kelly, O'Connor, Reynolds	Reynolds	Figures 3,7,9,11,13,15,16,20
Subtheme 3d: Hope lessons strengthen teacher-to-parent relationships	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Reynolds	Reynolds	Figures 7,8,9,11,12,15,16,20
Subtheme 3e: Hope lessons strengthen teacher-to-teacher relationships	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson	Lamont, Kelly	Figures 9,12,16,20
Subtheme 3f: Hope lessons strengthen relationships between school and community	O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds	Reynolds	Figures 3,4,5,10

Theme: Hope can be successfully taught and learned	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Reynolds, Millard, Simpson	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11, 12,13,15,16,17,18,19, 20
Subtheme 4a: Certain Hope lesson specifics make a difference in learning	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Reynolds	Figures 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,10,12, 15,16,17,18,19,20
Subtheme 4b: Roadblocks exist in teaching and learning Hope, but these can be overcome	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	Lamont, Millard	Figures 7,8,11,16,20
Subtheme 4c: Student school actions and behaviors show they are attaining important Hope concepts	Lamont, Lockwood, Seldon, Kelly, O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds, Millard	O'Connor, Simpson, Reynolds	Figures 2,3,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,1 3,15,16,19,20

Theme 1, Hope Lessons Positively Impact Individual Social-Emotional Growth and Wellness

The first theme that emerged from the interviews, classroom observations, and artifact analysis was that Hope lessons used in pre-kindergarten classrooms had a positive impact on social-emotional growth and wellness. Subthemes in this areas include the positive impacts on behaviors of students, the personal growth teachers of Hope experienced, and an increase in awareness of others on the part of the student. Also revealed as subthemes was that it was easy to combine Hope lessons successfully with other SEL curriculum, that students realized they need

outside, trusted supportive people along the way, and that Hope lessons helped to mitigate trauma. Each is discussed further below.

Subtheme 1a, Hope lessons have a positive impact on behavior

Teachers discussed the importance of students learning to talk about behavior. Through Hope lessons, the students learned vocabulary necessary for these conversations to occur. Ms. Simpson said it well:

Pre-kindergarten is learning about school procedures and guidelines for somewhere other than home. Hope allows us to reinforce good behaviors and teach them powerful words. It gives them positive vocabulary and helps them see how positive behavior benefits them more than negative.

Hope lessons allowed teachers to positively reinforce wanted behaviors through the use of specific vocabulary and through reminders and examples from the stories. This was reiterated by several teachers during their interviews. Ms. Lamont said, “Students are given vocabulary to help them deal with life.” Ms. Kelly said, “Kids have more words to use when sorting out their feelings.” Ms. Lockwood mentioned:

Hope helps with behaviors often, not always, but it always gives us positive words to use with kids. I like that if I set a goal with a child to ‘have a good day,’ that I can sit with that child and come up with what that looks like. What is the pathway to that good day? Ms. Lockwood said that it is an advantage they can work through behavior modification together, so that behavior is actually being taught, and emphasized students learn that there are steps or pathways to good behavior, and that it is okay to have to work on this.

Teachers said that good behavior inspires more good behavior. This is a powerful Hope Theory element, and it was interesting to hear this discussed. Ms. Lockwood said, “You can see

students catch on that positive actions lead to positive outcomes.” Ms. Seldon talked about how once one child starts using kind words or helping a friend, others join in quickly.

One of the biggest frustrations of this age group, according to Ms. Lockwood, is the challenge of not being able to do something. She loved that she could refer to a story the class had read together and facilitate discussions like:

Remember the butterfly who had to fly a long way. It was frustrated too. But what happened in the story? How did the butterfly feel? How did success happen? Was it okay in the end?

Another behavioral impact noted frequently by participants is that students started to encourage others with their goals. Many said this was surprising, because developmentally, at this age, things are all about the individual child. Thinking outside of themselves is unique, and Hope lessons led to this unusual behavior.

Teachers found students had shorter fits as the year progressed, and they could see students using Hope concepts in play and conversation in learning centers. The responses to problems the child is facing changed, according to Ms. Lamont. Ms. Lockwood shared how students began to choose to remove themselves to a safe place when they realized they needed something specific to get them turned around. Ms. Seldon said, “They realize there is a pathway to things like calming down. They learn breathing and going to safe place is helpful.” She mentioned they learn to say, “I need” and then they practice strategies. Ms. Seldon described this in detail:

There is a pathway if your goal is to stay on the carpet and learn from the story. First you need to sit, and there are certain positions that are comfortable and more appropriate for

learning that others. Then, you need to look at teacher. Then you need to think about the words and the pictures. I can help them see steps, and they use these.

Ms. Seldon talked about how easy it was to model things like delayed gratification. “First we work, then we play,” she said. She brought up the important point that her goals are not always their goals, but that a teacher’s job is to point a student to goals that will be helpful in school. Students at this age often get upset and don’t handle their emotions well. The teacher always wants them to handle their emotions well, but this is seldom a goal a child has for themselves. One of the pathways provided for students to help them regulate emotions is the safe room, and Ms. Seldon said this:

I love that I can teach about our student ‘safe place’ as a behavior pathway. When a child is using a strong emotion, they can go to the room. There are eight ‘emotion buddies’ and they can help a child identify what they are feeling. Angry, disappointed, frustrated ... they pick up the buddy and say, ‘I’m feeling upset because I wanted to do art and it wasn’t my day at the art center, and I really, really wanted to be there.’ There are things to do in the safe room like calming down by blowing a pinwheel or by using star or balloon breathing. There are things to squeeze and positive pictures on walls. Students learn to tell us when they are ready to come back and they actually will say, ‘I found my calm. I found my happy.’

In interviews, teachers mentioned that some students take longer than others when emotions are high, but all emphasized that kids get better and better at choosing positive pathways as the year moves on and more Hope lessons are taught. Ms. O’Connor was often surprised by their willingness to leave classroom for the safe area, and that they want and know to do this.

Several teachers mentioned that the “big” behaviors become less frequent, and Ms. Lockwood said, “Behaviors aren’t as big because children realize it is okay to feel and make mistakes. She stated:

Often in pre-kindergarten, it is literally the first time they have tried something. They begin to learn that you don’t just give up if you don’t get it, and they have examples to go by from the stories we read. I want them to know that things don’t always work out, and that disappointment is part of life, but that there is a ‘What can I do now’ question that can lead to positive outcomes even if it wasn’t what the original goal was.

Ms. Lamont felt behavior was a pathway to academics, so if Hope influenced this in a positive way, then that was an advantage for not just teachers, but for the students themselves. Ms. Kelly discussed how students learn to distinguish between good and bad behaviors and said:

There are many behaviors that get you attention, some positive and some negative. Many students at this age just want attention, and don’t care whether it is positive or negative.

They learn behaviors that need to happen in school ... ones that help us learn.

Ms. Reynolds and Ms. Millard also agreed that Hope lessons led to better choices in social situations and that the common language taught through Hope lessons was probably what is most helpful.

Subtheme 1b: Hope lessons foster personal growth in teachers

An interesting find was that Hope lessons used with students overlapped into the personal lives of teachers. Ideas often hit home as they learned something about themselves during experiences. For example, Ms. Simpson mentioned how hard it is to be a teacher. She, herself, must be reminded to keep trying when the job gets difficult, and reiterated that there is something challenging that happens literally every day in the classroom. Ms. Lockwood said that

she loved how these are more than just lessons, but “shared experiences” with the students. She has a personal goal to improve as a teacher and grow every year, and she also has set goals to create more of a work-life balance. Ms. Lockwood said, “It is easy to give everything to this job. Hope lessons remind me there are steps I have to take for my own healthy mental state.” Ms. Seldon said, “Personally learning about Hope has helped me in my own life. I have a situation, a child who has had a tragedy, and it has helped me to help her.” Ms. Kelly mentioned how students loved to hear the goals their teachers are setting as adults. She gave personal examples of how she has had to work hard.

Ms. O’Connor discussed how important the teacher book study of *Hope Rising* was to the adults responsible for teaching the curriculum. There was much self-realization during this collaborative time. Learning about goal setting themselves, teachers stated how they have grown to purposefully use this process in their lives. Ms. Simpson said:

My most important goal for myself this year is to be more relaxed and to learn to let things go. Often I like to achieve perfection. I am learning that If I am not so serious that sometimes I am better off.

Another piece of Hope that teachers mentioned as particularly helpful was finding their own Hope levels using Snyder’s Hope Scale. The realization of where their score landed provided food for thought about their own lives.

Subtheme 1c, Hope lessons lead to an awareness of others

Teachers found that Hope lessons provided a unique opportunity for students to collaborate and work together, that you don’t often find in pre-kindergarten. Students were given opportunities to cheer others on and to think outside of themselves and have an influence on one

another. Ms. Lockwood referred to the story where friends help fix the wings of a butterfly so he can fly:

All these other characters get involved because he needs help. The kids say things like ‘that is what we do for our friends, we help.’ They can identify with the character, empathize, and they know what it means to encourage.

Ms. O’Connor stated, “The children learn to see unique qualities in themselves and in others during lessons where we are talking about goals and pathways to get there.”

One of the ways students became aware of others is through the monthly recognition of a student who had exhibited a Hope word. Ms. Simpson mentioned that when students were chosen, much time was spent going over the actions the student exhibited and reviewing this with other children. Ms. Reynolds reflected:

They learn to encourage others and think outside of themselves, which is huge. At this age it is all about ‘me.’ To stretch them beyond that is a big impact of this curriculum. I hear them ask friends, ‘Are you okay?’ and when someone cries they show them compassion, but they don’t stop there. They also try to help them past their sadness ...

The pathway. It is powerful. In general, they seem to get Hope for others more than Hope for self first.

Ms. Reynolds talked about how students began to realize that there is collective power and individual power. “It is heartwarming,” she said, “to see young students realize they can work together to make a difference.”

Subtheme 1d, Hope lessons mix well with other types of Social-Emotional curriculum

The other specific curriculum used with pre-kindergarten in this district was “Great Expectations.” This is a program that helps teachers work with students to create harmony in the

classroom and includes important soft skills that allow students to pursue academic excellence more successfully (*Great Expectations – Transforming Lives through Education*, 2023). Ms. Lamont said both types of lessons have specific vocabulary that is essential to learn, and that the ideas are similar because they lead to establishing pathways to success.

Figure 7
The Power of Yet



Fig 7. Students learn the word “yet” is powerful as a motivator to keep going with a goal.

Many of the teachers used the concept of “yet.” Instead of students saying, “I can’t do this,” they are taught to say, “I can’t do this yet” (Fig. 7.). Ms. Lockwood said this shows children they don’t have to learn things at the same rate, and that it is okay not to know something and to make mistakes. The word was posted in classrooms and sent home so that parents could use this. Ms. Lockwood said, “Yet goes along with willpower in Hope.” She mentioned how powerful this word can be. A great example she

shared is student art (Fig. 8.), and that students often get upset if they “mess up” their project. By learning “yet,” students realized they were each capable of creating something special, but it didn’t have to be perfect. “All students are not at the same level of cutting and pasting, and they discover that this is okay through Hope lessons,” Ms.

Lockwood reiterated.

Ms. Kelly mentioned that it is easy to see the same Hope concepts in many of the SEL children’s books that are read that are not actually a part of the specific Hope lessons. She said this makes it easy to reinforce concepts since the overlap is there.

Figure 8
Evolving Owl Art skills



Fig. 8 The student was pointing out his artwork to the researcher because he was proud of his effort, regardless of what his peer, Addilynn, was able to accomplish.

“Children identify with book characters, and it is important to point out Hope elements exist in so many scenarios,” said Ms. Kelly.

Many of the interviews turned to the question of whether teachers felt taking time for SEL was important. They all made comments as to the challenges that face the classroom when state agencies and legislators, and even the community at large, don’t see this as a necessary part of the school day. Ms. Kelly said:

It is essential. We are teaching about feelings and socialization. We are teaching young people how to have behavior that is positive. It is the basis for everything else we want to teach in school, and it makes the other things like math and reading easier.

Ms. Reynolds agreed that SEL is important and said, “Any learning leads to more learning. It is a circle that continues to get bigger like a snowball rolling down a hill.” Many participants also talked about how much time teachers spend with children, and that they are in the right seat to help students navigate social-emotional challenges as well as academics. They voiced frustration about how they are professionals, yet they are often not trusted to know their business.

Subtheme 1e, Hope lessons help to mitigate trauma

In every interview, teachers mentioned that students come to school with trauma, and that it gets in the way of learning. Hope lessons, as mentioned previously, give students words to talk about their feelings and important actions. According to teachers, helping students to identify feelings and then to take appropriate action are the main ways to move forward so that academic learning can take place.

Many students are from homes where there are few celebrations and very little positive

feedback. Often, the communication between the parent and the child is negative, and this carries over to school. Ms. Lockwood discussed the issue:

A lot of kids come to school, and they don't always have the best home environment that they grow up in. Four-year-olds should not be that angry. They haven't been here that long. Some have so much anxiety and ADHD. Everything we do with Hope teaches kids skills that are positive in life.

According to participants, through acquisition of Hope concepts, students developed a self-awareness of what supports and skills they need to accomplish things in their own life. As teachers pointed out successes, the students learned to feel proud and worthy. Amidst acting out scenarios and other learning opportunities, students were complimented on their successes by a caring adult, and through this, they began to learn to recognize good things in themselves. Ms. Kelly stated:

Four-year-old kids are dealing with more of real life than you realize. They need to know about obstacles and how to overcome them ... that real people overcome them. I love that Hope gives them insight on how to maneuver around problems through hard times. It gives kids tools. Hope can be a safety net that catches if you are negative. Hope helps focus on positive things even if home is not positive.

Ms. Lamont commented on the same topic:

School is the only place kids can find Hope sometimes. I think about COVID. Kids have been home with limited interaction. These lessons bring kids together. Home was a place that was not Hopeful for many...isolation. Hope lessons lift depression with positive strategies, positive talk, and this combats negative messages and tones and words at home.

Ms. Reynolds also mentioned the connections made during lessons and about how isolated students were during COVID. Ms. Simpson talked about how students may not get a single positive word spoken to them at home. She felt Hope lessons help to ground a child if their home life was not good.

Ms. Lockwood shared that teachers in the district calculated their adult ACE scores during the training. She said just how eye-opening it was to see high scores from many adults in the room. She reflected that student numbers are likely similar, and how unfortunate it is that teachers just cannot know what children face. She emphasized that Hope lessons were good for all kids and using them in the classroom would catch those with unknown stories.

Subtheme 1f: Hope lessons reveal the need for helpers in life

Many points in the Hope lessons emphasize the fact that we cannot always accomplish all we set out to do without the help of others who care about us and our situations. One lesson in particular is described by Ms. Seldon, as follows:

Look what happens in *Drum Dream Girl*, when the main character’s father steps in once he realizes how serious she is about her dream. He offers to find her a teacher and with this gesture, he not only gives her a hand, but he shows her he believes in her dreams too. He helps establish a viable pathway to her goal.

Ms. Seldon also mentioned this act of a father. “We have people in our own lives who help us reach our goals too,” she stated. She talked about how sometimes helpers are family, like the father in the story, but sometimes it is a good friend or a caring adult not related to you. She liked having conversations with the students about who in life motivates them and helps them. “This leads into conversations about safe people and who to trust,” she said, and “the right people along the way are important finds in life.”

One of the lesson activities had students attempt to cross a balance beam that is lifted about six inches off the ground. Balance is an issue for young children, and most cannot make it across on their own. They realized through the lesson experience that a trusted friend who can hold your hand is important to achieving the goal of crossing the beam. Ms. Simpson talked about how other friends stand on at the end and say encouraging words, often without prompting. This concept carries over beyond the balance beam activity, to life, according to Ms. Simpson.

Ms. Lamont and Ms. Simpson both mentioned that stories and activities used in Hope lessons gave students a sense of the good that is out there, and helped students learn what to look for in helpers. Ms. O'Connor said, "Often others helping you keep you from giving up, when you might not have kept going without them." It is important to all the participants that school be seen as Ms. Lockwood mentioned, a "safe place," and Hope lessons offered up opportunities to talk about the role of a teacher, a counselor, a principal, and other adults accessible in school.

Theme 2, Hope Lessons Positively Impact Individual Academic Growth

Subtheme 2a, Hope lessons motivate students to learn and encourage them to persevere

An important outcome participants mentioned was that mastering goals leads to additional mastering of goals (Fig. 9.). This was a motivating factor. Attention and engagement is hard in pre-kindergarten. Students began to realize that effort matters throughout the duration of the year's Hope lessons. They began to desire positive academic goal attainment as they started to

Figure 9
Examples of Academic Goals



Fig. 9 Posted academic goals students have worked hard to accomplish are visually displayed. Student here are highlighted for knowing the letters in their name, being able to recognize numbers, recognizing shapes, and writing.

realize the importance of school and that learning leads to learning. Perseverance was practiced, and students grew to not give up on themselves as easily when it came to tasks in core subjects. Participants mentioned that students learned about the idea of willpower to see things through. They said that many even realized that hard work can be fun, and that effort is worth it in the end. Teachers mentioned that once the students care about goals, they are more likely to move toward them. Ms. Lamont spoke to this:

We help, through Hope lessons, students realize that a Hope and a wish are different. They learn they have the element of control when it comes to hoping. They learn to break down a goal into steps. We typically hear a lot of ‘I can’t,’ but as Hope lessons are taught, this lessens. We read *The Little Engine that Could*, and they see success after trying. They start to say, ‘I’ll try.’ They begin to realize things take time and you have tomorrow if it doesn’t happen for you today. This is learning to persevere.

Ms. Lockwood talked about how she likes that students learn not just about goals, but about taking necessary steps to get to goals. Ways to accomplish things can be different for each person, according to Ms. Lockwood, and as she said, “If this is where you want to go there are certain choices you have to make.” In the lesson observed in Ms. Seldon’s class, there was a perfect illustration of the importance of motivation and perseverance:

Hope is action kids. Hope is work. What did the drum girl do? First, she dreamed, then she practiced. ‘Practice, practice, practice,’ said the students. That is an important step that we all have to learn, right?

Ms. Seldon had the students use positive self-talk and had them find examples in the stories of this. Ms. Kelly also took examples from *The Itsy Bitsy Spider*, and said, “The spider had power

in his brains and heart to make him keep going and build his home,” during the lesson. Ms. O’Connor talked to students about challenging goals that would require them to persevere:

A Hope for someone like you might be to learn to write your name.

Could you do that? Would that make tomorrow better? How? If we don’t try, we won’t know. I’m so glad you are all learning to try.

Ms. Reynolds discussed how planting seeds and growing plants in science and Hope lessons helped students see that growth of any kind takes time and patience (Fig. 10.). They learned it is a process. She also gave examples from the intergenerational classes:

Often the elderly are not motivated, but the simple presence of the students gets them out and about to activity time.

One grand said, ‘My grandkids never come see me,’ and was overjoyed to participate in art with the young children.

It was nice to see that the students are actually Hope to the elderly.

Ms. Millard helped children to identify feelings and inner thoughts that might counteract motivation and perseverance. She

said to students, “How did you feel when your tower fell during the lesson?” and “How did you feel when you were in the middle of trying?” She had them identify how they felt at the end of their accomplishment as well. Revisiting the feelings with students allowed them to see that there can be negative feelings when something is difficult, but positive feelings come with big and small successes.

Figure 10
Growing Plants



Fig. 10 Hope lessons overlap into subjects like science. Students see that achieving growth takes time through these hands-on activities.

Subtheme 2b, Hope lessons build confidence

Interviews with participants revealed the subtheme that Hope lessons help build student confidence, empower individuals, and set them up for success. The books used in the lessons are challenging, according to the teachers, and the concepts are difficult. Ms. Kelly mentioned that they approach the lessons with high expectations for students to learn, regardless. Hope, according to teachers, is about having control and power, and that outside forces don't always dictate outcomes. Participants spoke about the importance of self talk and building others up, and many shared stories of Hope carrying over into other areas like completion of assignments and tasks. Students learn they have a voice during Hope lessons.

Ms. Lamont emphasized much of this by saying, "I notice kids starting to speak up and not be afraid they will be wrong." They begin to understand that mistakes are okay, she said, and

Figure 11
Tree Attempt



Fig. 11 A student confidently drew their version of a tree, regardless of their skill level.

they see that school is a safe place to be vulnerable. Ms.

Lockwood discussed how students seem to grow in their

independence, and that seeing students' confidence grow is her

favorite part about teaching Hope (Fig. 11.). She told the story of

a boy who would hide under furniture and not participate at first.

"I used stories and vocabulary with him, and it eventually

became where he would not only sit with the group, but he

would actively participate," she said. Ms. Lockwood also

brought up that Hope empowers students because they actually

know what to do or say when they see a friend discouraged. Ms.

Seldon spoke of the power of the individual as well:

Hope teaches kids they have power inside them. Someone else doesn't have all the control. They can change their future. I saw a light came on for one little boy. Suddenly, as he was participating, he realized he could be and do whatever because he has it in him. You could just see his 'I'm gonna be, I'm gonna do.' I loved watching him.

Ms. Seldon shared a moment from the lessons where this type of confidence built:

How would you feel if you saw this dark forest in front of you? I might be afraid to move forward. 'I would get blocked,' 'I be lost,' and 'I would be scared,' students added. There might be a beautiful waterfall in there, and I would want to get there. What would help? If I saw a path helping me along the way, I think I could do it.

Ms. Kelly sees herself as a vessel of Hope, and she wants to help provide the foundation for students to have self-confidence that will carry over into their lives:

We set up an environment where it is okay not to be perfect. There is a lot of academic perfection in pre-kindergarten ... one way to make a letter, one way to make a number.

We try to teach trying our best through Hope lessons, and it is a relief, I think, to students when they realize everything does not have to be exact and correct all the time.

Ms. Simpson described one of her students who said he wanted to be a firefighter when he grew up. He drew the picture of himself as this in the future, and she could tell he really was showing himself in this role. "When he believes it, it is power," Ms. Simpson said.

Another example Ms. Simpson mentioned, where students had to demonstrate confidence, was in the student-led conferences. "The kids have to push hard and beyond most of their comfort zones for the conference in general," she said, and "It is super challenging to get to a point where they can talk about school." Practicing the pathway for this over and over gave them confidence. Ms. Reynolds mentioned how brave students are when approaching the elderly

in the intergenerational class. Ms. Millard always said to students in class, “If you believe in yourself, you can go a million miles,” and reminded students of how characters in the stories had to be confident to keep moving forward.

Ms. Lockwood shared that worry is a part of life, but that Hope lessons help students learn how to deal with worry:

The caterpillar keeps moving forward but runs into barriers. There are clouds, and they make the caterpillar feel lost and alone. Have you ever felt like that? One student said, ‘When my mom is gone, and I have to stay with a babysitter.’ Yes, I can see how that would be something you might worry about.

Ms. Lockwood read about how the caterpillar faced many “what ifs” that made him worry:

What if something eats me on the journey, what if I get lost, what if a frog catches me ...

those are all things our main character worries about. How do you think this feels?

They talked about their own “what ifs” and things that made them worry, and they shared ideas of how to be confident and keep going regardless.

Participants shared that something that helped students worry less was to ensure that they know what to expect in academic lessons (Fig. 12.). Teachers take time to post learning goals and objectives so that students can see what they are expected to accomplish.

Subtheme 2c: Hope lessons connect to core subjects in school and prep for academic learning

Figure 12
Learning Goals and Objectives

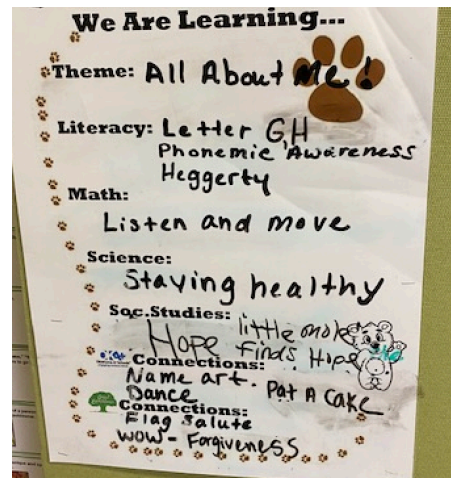


Fig. 12 Academic learning intentions are visually available to students, and teachers go over these frequently during lessons.

During interviews, many teachers highlighted ways that Hope lessons apply to other core subjects, and how they can carry concepts over to academics many times during the school day. It was interesting to see that, although there was a specific time to discuss Hope elements each week, opportunity arose over and over to provide children with modeling and examples. Hope concepts were easy to practice, as participants mentioned.

Ms. Reynolds was observed teaching a language lesson using pool tubes. In the introduction, she said, “Rainbows give us Hope after rain, we talked about that. Can we make a

Figure 13
Rainbows Symbolize Hope



Fig. 13 After using the pool tubes to create rainbows and letters, the students painted their own version of rainbows.

rainbow from these tubes?” Students worked together and figured out how to do this by moving tubes around the room and arranging them with different color sets. Ms. Reynolds said that rainbows symbolized a pathway to goals (Fig. 13.). She then connected this opening activity to the goal of forming letters out of the pool tubes.

Ms. Millard talked about how she taught rhyming lessons with the use of certain Hope books. She appreciated when Hope lessons accomplished multiple purposes. She would have students figure out what rhymed on a page and name matching letter patterns, while also discussing Hope vocabulary. Ms. Lockwood used the stories of Hope over and over, and she emphasized that it is important for students at this age to be exposed to literature more than one time. Each time books were used, more and more students caught on to Hope concepts or to comprehension in general because of the familiarity. She said:

I still consider HOPE as academic ... literature, vocabulary, activities that increase comprehension. We talk about the qualities of characters and asked different levels of comprehension questions. We measure as we draw pathways. We describe. We write. We do science alongside migration. You could read the book with an academic focus one time and another for Hope ideas in almost every situation.

Ms. Seldon described how they made “SMARTIE” goals in her class. These were academic related goals. Students had a little card and a Smartie pack. They picked a goal like “rhyme five words” or “count to fifty.” Ms. Seldon displayed these goals on the door. When students met a goal, they got to eat the Smarties and took the goal card home. She said:

Hope lessons are academics. We are writing, drawing, talking, and listening. Students set goals for letters or number sense; student data notebooks allow them to see accomplishments. Not all can do this, and most need the teacher to help.

Ms. Lamont described how conversations about academic topics included Hope elements. She said, “If you want to learn something, we can talk together about the steps to get there.” She likes helping students to see just where on the pathway they are, and says things to them like, “You’ve learned may of the important letters and only have 10 left.” This allows students to continue to be motivated because they see the success they are having, she said. Another important thing Ms. Lamont pointed out is the way she uses the Activating Prior Knowledge (APK) process with Hope lessons the same as with content lessons. With all things, she said students can grow their understanding better if they can connect the new with something they already know. With Hope lessons, this is often a memory they have of something they had to try hard to do.

Ms. Reynolds-emphasized that Hope concepts are taught throughout the day. She takes multiple opportunities to go deep into the vocabulary. Some concepts in Hope lessons are more difficult than others, like willpower, and Ms. Reynolds said it is important to use this over and over. She said, “Hope lessons allow us opportunity to intervene with students who are struggling in academics as we help them discover the pathways they need to learn something like shapes.” One of the pathways noted during observations was teaching students how to share in front of a group (Fig. 14.). The teachers provided pathway cues so that students could be successful in the use of this strategy for academic purposes.

Ms. O’Connor emphasized, “Hope ties to everything.” It is a positive concept that is helpful, and appears to only have positive benefits, according to her. Ms. Simpson reiterated one of the five district Hope statements and said, “Imagination is an instrument of Hope,” and we teach students to use their creativity in every part of their school day. She loves the way she can look at kids during Hope lesson book time and see their imagination working. They picture themselves as the character accomplishing great things.

Subtheme 2d: Hope lessons help students develop respect for their own learning and the learning of others

Ms. Lockwood said one of her favorite parts of Hope lessons was the way they impacted how students learn to respect not only themselves, but also their classmates:

Figure 14
Performance Pathway

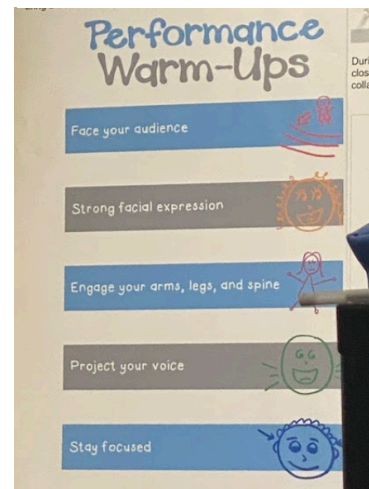


Fig. 14 Teachers help prepare students for academic opportunities such as speaking in public.

The more we read about people going through hard times, the more they will empathize. They will say, 'Aww, the poor butterfly,' and empathize with its situation. They don't have empathy in all situations yet, but this is a start.

She said, focusing on others seems like a bonus. "Kids this age are really all about themselves most of the time," she stated. She gave examples of how this respect for others carried over into academic lessons:

We are working on learning letters of the alphabet. Some of my kids have excelled and know all. They know sounds, yet we practice still, and they know it is their job to help others who are having trouble. They feel they have a special purpose to help others grow in their academic goals.

Ms. Lockwood continued and said, "We are a family who strives to work and learn together," and that makes this a very special place in her eyes.

Ms. Kelly discussed the way students support each other in activities and clapped when other students experienced success. "We take time to celebrate the accomplishment of other people's goals, and that is so important," she said. "We need people to root us on in life, and kids this age can learn that, and she mentioned, "I hear them say things like 'You can do it,' and 'You are strong.'" She brought up the point that her students understood equity at a basic level:

We all need different things. Every time someone gets something it does not mean we all need it. Each child understands that the goals differ among them, and also that what is needed to accomplish goals differs. The timing for accomplishing goals differs.

Ms. Lamont brought up growth mindset, and how this applies to the individual child, but that the kids care about how others are growing too. Ms. Simpson kept track of student goals, and they publicly talked about who has accomplished what as a class. This is pre-kindergarten

data about important achievement, and discussing it inspires even more growth. Ms. Reynolds said that students who experienced Hope lessons seemed to support one another more than in years past, and she noticed a greater level of encouragement during academic times. Ms. Millard added that she visibly saw the way students became more patient with taking turns with one another.

Subtheme 2e, Hope lessons prepare students for future learning

Participants mentioned that Hope helped shine light on the future and the work that will need to happen for students to learn. They know that so much goes into being successful, and they try and hit home with the point that having a goal is fine, but that you have to have a pathway. The growth mindset established in these lessons, according to teachers, is so important. Students see that dreams can become reality, but that this takes work. The communication practices that go along with these lessons are emphasized by participants as well. Getting students to have conversations with other students and to share their emotions with caring adults is valued.

Ms. Lamont said, “Hope lessons help them realize everything does not have to be as it is now.” She pointed out that as she thought about Hope and future learning. Ms. Lamont has actually had students return to visit with their parents, and they say they still use “Yet.” She thinks the fact that it carries over to home is amazing. Ms. Lockwood said, “Hope helps students learn school. They learn how to act and interact.” She referred to this as “tools for their school toolbox.” Ms. Lockwood said Hope lesson results reminded her that the mission of a teacher has changed dramatically over the years. “It isn’t just about the reading, math and science, but it is about giving the student whatever it takes so that Hope leads them on,” she elegantly stated.

Ms. Seldon said that by January about half her students realized that the future meant beyond today. They had a better sense of time. She showed them papers where they used to write their name with squiggles. “They can write their name, and we can talk about the pathway that got them there,” she said. She said that setting realistic goals that can be accomplished at this young age is important so that students see they “can do it.” Ms. Kelly hopes that these practices lead to a pattern of success that carries over to later grades. “Small successes add up to larger ones, and we get their momentum going,” she said. Ms. O’Connor said the whole purpose of including these lessons was for it to translate over to the lives of students beyond this school year. Ms. Simpson helped students see the future of school:

What will big school look like (Fig. 15.)? Draw what you will look like in kindergarten. How will things be different for you next year? What new things do you think you will learn?

She had them visualize themselves in these situations of being in older grades, which made it realistic. Ms. Simpson mentioned that starting at this age, with visualizing a positive future, sets students up for success. She likes helping them see what their future can look like. Sharing this vision with parents was important too, said Ms. Simpson.

Theme 3, Hope Lessons Build Relationships

One of the favorite parts of Hope lessons for several teachers was the fact that the lessons foster relationships in many ways. Ms. Seldon brought up that this can happen between teacher and student, student and student, student and parent, parent and teacher, and student, parent and

Figure 15
Visualizing the Future



Fig. 15 Teachers help students to see past the PreK year and into the future.

community. Ms. Kelly mentioned that barriers were broken down as Hope lessons occur, and Ms. O'Connor talked about how this was observable through talking, writing, and drawing.

Subtheme 3a, Hope lessons strengthen student-to-student relationships

Students discovered they have power to help others with Hope. They began to see past themselves and explored pathways other students are taking. Hope lessons, according to teachers, provided the opportunity for students to give and receive encouragement. They were able to successfully build and maintain relationships, and they learned how to deal with disagreements. According to participants, students found collective power and learned about the importance of working in a group. Ms. Kelly mentioned how they practiced taking turns and waiting on others. "Cheering on classmates is a regular part of the day," she said. Ms. Simpson said that the Hope vocabulary helped this pathway to friendship and playing well. She mentioned there are so many ways to get students talking to each other during lesson activities.

Subtheme 3b, Hope lessons strengthen student-to-teacher relationships

Teachers mentioned how the relationships that develop during the school day are the most essential piece in education. Without this, they felt learning would be jeopardized. During Hope lessons students learned they were in a classroom with a trusted adult, who also sets goals and must work hard, and they learned that this person was on their side. Participants liked that Hope lessons were a shared experience, and that almost every time they taught these, they learned something new about a student in their class. Ms. Lockwood appreciated purposeful one-on-one time with students, where she could listen to the needs of a child and help them feel heard. She discussed how strong relationships made kids want to come to school. Ms. Simpson felt that children knew they were in a caring environment when Hope was being taught.

Expressions of care happened multiple times during these lessons. Several teachers stated that the relationship between the teacher and the student is their favorite part about the job. Ms. Lockwood said, “Kids come back to visit us, and that is a great thing.” She emphasized the reason they do this is because the teachers truly got to know each individual kid and their needs. They felt cared for and loved.

Subtheme 3c, Hope lessons strengthen student-to-parent relationships

Parents were informed of student goals, and they were actively involved in student-led conferences where these were discussed. Teachers mentioned that this connection between the student and the parent was strengthened at these conferences, and that this also happened during Hope celebrations. Hope awards were something both the student and the parent took pride in, according to Ms. Lamont. She said that student agency increased when parents came to school for Hope awards, and that she tried to make parents realize they are part of the “waypower” for their own child:

Conferences happen twice, so parents can see their kids accomplishing goals evidenced in their work, and not just the written goal at the beginning of the year. I try to make the parent load lighter by showing them what to do to help their child accomplish their goals. Parents are help on the child’s pathway.

She discussed that if parents know the vocabulary of Hope, they can use this at home. She gave the example of kids trying to learn a specific letter. A parent could be involved by helping them to look for these at the mall or grocery store, or by watching road signs. She loves that this encourages positive conversation between parents and students.

Figure 16
Class Hope Goals

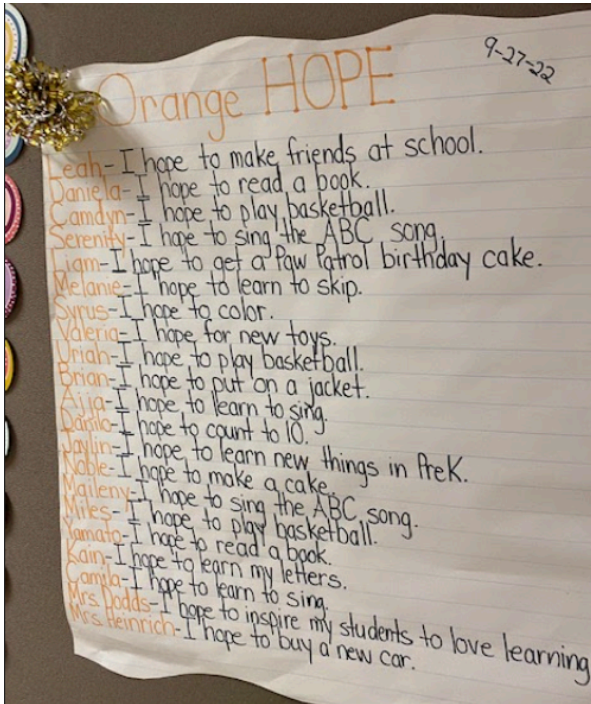


Fig. 16 Teachers share student Hope goals with parents who often have little experience with goals, pathways, and motivation.

Ms. Lockwood gave another

example:

One of my girls had a goal of baking a cake.

The mom was like, okay. That gave her mom and her something they can actually do together. I think they had fun with this.

Ms. Lockwood said it helps teachers to know what the parents' goals are for their students as well. It is funny, she said, that parents are often very unsure of goal setting (Fig. 16.). "It is like we teach them too," she said. "We talk about the pathway to parents

too, and how we have to do little things to get to a bigger goal," she explained. Ms. Kelly and

Ms. O'Connor reiterated that consistency from home to school is a desire for all teachers.

Subtheme 3d, Hope lessons strengthen teacher-to-parent relationships

According to teachers, one of the challenges is establishing a good relationship with the parents. Ms. Lockwood mentioned that they don't have much time with parents, but that the time in student-led conferences is valuable:

One of the things we do at conferences is set goals with the parents for their child. It shows them we want to know their desires in education for their child. It shows them we care when we have these conversations, and you can see the relief on their faces.

She mentioned how, through opportunities like this, a parent's perception of school changes. "They may have had a bad experience themselves in school that is causing a roadblock for their child and for us," Ms. Lockwood said. "When a parent learns their child is cared for, there is opportunity for great communication to take place," and she mentioned that teachers jump at this opportunity.

Ms. Lamont likes that there is common vocabulary between home and school which is established, in part, because of Hope lessons. She said at first parents are confused when you talk about Hope and goals at Parent Night, but soon everyone gets it. "They see kids' goals at the conferences, and they begin to understand," she says. Regardless of their understanding of Hope, Ms. Lamont said parents connect with her because they know she is on their child's side. Ms. Seldon mentioned that parents often have low expectations about what pre-kindergarten students can do, and that getting kids and parents together at conferences helps them to understand. Ms. Kelly stated she sends pictures home of kids doing the Hope activities, and parents can see that this learning is meaningful and fun.

Subtheme 3e, Hope lessons strengthen teacher-to-teacher relationships

Some teachers mentioned how Hope lessons made stronger connections among colleagues. There was collaboration in writing the curriculum, and although pre-kindergarten is one of the only grade levels who actively uses Hope lessons, many educators in the area were trained in the concepts. Bringing teachers together to discuss advantages of Hope lessons allowed them to share issues they saw regarding trauma in schools, behavior, and more. They were able to problem solve in a collegial way while creating this SEL curriculum.

Administrators and counselors, according to the teachers, were also involved in planning, and helped to teach Hope concepts by doing actual lessons. They also support the curriculum by

making it a priority to take time to recognize students who exhibit Hope characteristics.

Counselors helped any new teachers to the buildings to understand and be able to teach Hope lessons if they were not originally trained.

Ms. O'Connor spoke to the collaborative efforts that occurred when Hope lessons were developed:

It was a collaborative process, so lots of opportunity to problem-solve with others who know early childhood. Collaborating in the profession is the key to creating meaningful experiences for our students.

One other thing she mentioned was how much she enjoyed the few times when the pre-kindergarten teachers got together to discuss or review Hope lessons. She felt teacher relationships could grow even stronger if there was time provided for teachers to observe one another teaching the curriculum. She reiterated that one way for teachers to grow in their practice is to have the opportunity to learn from others.

Subtheme 3f, Hope lessons strengthen relationships between school and community

One of the great connections of Hope observed was the use with elderly in the intergenerational class. Agency was provided both ways, according to the teacher who led this class, as all ages realized we can all rely on one another. Ms. Reynolds shared how relationships are built in this unique situation:

Kids wore matching shirts on our visit, and they had on name tags. This allowed the grands to say each child's name. Lessons are purposeful in getting the kids to talk to the residents. The kids make things like giant hearts to give. The grands had a painted rock they passed back and forth with the student as they talked about jobs. This tool to helped

everyone not be nervous, and it was also something special made by the grand to share back since the kids gave them hearts.

She talked about how kids were always sharing artwork and pictures of the learning happening at various times of the year. “Hope looks different for a senior than for a Pre-K student,” Ms. Reynolds said, “but the elderly can see the kids setting goals and be the encourager.”

Some classes had Hope mentors, formally trained in community Hope workshops, who worked in classroom to help absent students or to help practice skills on the child’s pathway. Ms. O’Connor mentioned how valuable her Hope mentor was to the class, and how all students looked forward to this person coming. She said it was a wonderful way to bring caring community members into the classroom, and she loved how it was an additional adult students could count on for support. Several of the students developed particularly special relationships with the gentleman who shared his time in her class, and I observed him as very helpful and friendly when I would see him volunteering.

Theme 4, Hope Can Be Successfully Taught and Learned

Subtheme 4a, Certain Hope lesson specifics make a difference in learning

Figure 17
Lesson Book

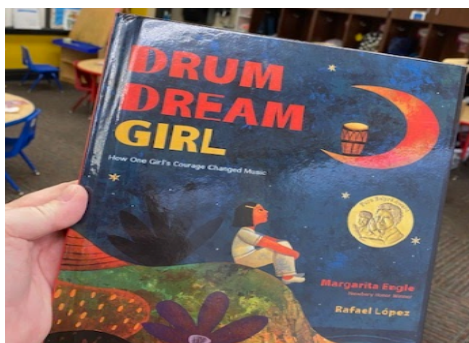


Fig. 17 Books chosen for Hope lessons are appropriate for early childhood learners.

In interviews, teachers gave countless examples of how easy it was to teach Hope. Lessons are engaging and they mentioned seeing lights come on for kids many times throughout the semester. Many loved the way it is simple to add visuals, like puppets, into lessons. Supplemental materials to emphasize concepts are easy to find, according to the teachers. Lessons were developed in a step-by-step format, so teachers with any level of

expertise could still find success. The vocabulary is important, and teachers mentioned the way the books and their characters easily connected to kids (Fig. 17). They lent themselves to practicing imaginary situations that could carry over to real situations, and teachers liked the way the hands-on activities reinforced concepts. The curriculum, though thorough, is flexible, and teachers said they could add their own style.

Ms. Lamont mentioned how teachers could activate prior knowledge at the beginning of a lesson. The Virginia Tech Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (2023) states that activating prior knowledge builds on what students already know, provides a framework for learners to better understand new information, and gives instructors formative assessment information to adapt instruction as necessary. Ms. Lamont shared an example of activating knowledge:

I had the kids close their eyes and picture the color of a butterfly as an engagement technique. If some have not seen a butterfly, then I have them tell me about a colorful flower.

She mentioned that being able to return to the ideas in books at later times is an important part of the process. “I can say, ‘Remember little mole and his goal?’ and the kids do remember.” Ms. Lockwood also had an example of activating prior knowledge:

I asked a few students initially what they thought migration meant. One guessed sleeping and another remembered that we had practiced migrating a few days before. To set them up for the story, I had them move from one place to the other. After making this connection, I asked kids where they like to move to, and many shared their favorite places. One student said, ‘I like to go where it is warm.’ So, I said, caterpillars might like that too. We will see where the impatient caterpillar wants to go soon.

Ms. Seldon shared that she talked to students about a pathway they had taken previously when they went on a field trip to the meadow, when she wanted to activate prior knowledge. “There was a trail to the bridge that made a path to help us get where we wanted,” she told the students. “Pathways are helpful in getting us where we want to go.”

Ms. Lockwood talked about an activity she included, and how it matters:

I had a student who got frustrated with blocks. It is easy to tell kids who know how to persevere, and easy to tell who will have trouble, when you give them chances like this.

Lessons help us pinpoint personalities.

She loves the way the kids identify with characters in the book and that lessons are flexible. “If something hard or difficult has happened to the class or to a class member, we can pull in a Hope lesson easily,” she said. “The books all have a happy ending, but kids can see it takes a pathway to get there.” Some of her favorite lessons she described by saying:

I enjoyed the lesson where they had to wait to eat their marshmallow. I was impressed with their willpower. They were in it to win it, and they really, really understood what the character was feeling and how it’s really, really hard to wait. I thought someone would for sure eat their marshmallow. They are so young and driven by what they want now.

But they didn’t. I think this brought the meaning of willpower to life for them. I can refer back to marshmallows when they are in a lesson and don’t want to keep going. It means something. This is one way the lessons are flexible. I thought if they could resist the urge to eat the marshmallow, they would better understand how the caterpillar in the story was feeling, so I added that. In another story, as the caterpillar makes progress toward his destination, the kids begin to say things like, ‘Keep trying.’ They chant ‘You can do it’

for the caterpillar. It is so cute. I'm able to ask, 'Is there something the caterpillar can say to himself to help?' and they tell me, 'I got this,' he can say.

She said activities help kids feel the necessary emotions they need to feel to understand the concepts. She loved the way it is easy to bring up past successes, and talked about this saying, "Yes, remember making trees, and some of you wanted to give up? Some of of you cut the wrong way, and we had to stop and solve problems when it was cut wrong." The kids remembered that they got tape and fixed it.

Ms. Seldon shared a fun way she kept kids active during Hope lessons:

I tell them, let's do some drumming and ask, do you need a drum to drum? We clap various rhythms which gets their body moving. Movement is important at this age. Hope lessons are open for changes like this.

Ms. Kelly emphasized that it takes time for understanding to evolve. The lessons are more intricate as the year moves forward, and harder vocabulary and more complex storytelling is used to teach the lessons. She said, "Kids like the razzle, dazzle of the lesson and the activities, like pretending to go through a tunnel to get to the end." She said with each opportunity like this, understanding developed more. Ms. Kelly appreciated that lessons are engaging and fun, and said she had kids predict, use context clues, and worked on many language concepts as she read (Fig. 18.). Ms. O'Connor said that lessons are easy to break into smaller parts if students are not

"getting it." Ms. Simpson appreciated how the program is laid out with specific dates and books, and said she followed lesson plans "to a T," because she is still learning about how to teach

Figure 18
Vocabulary

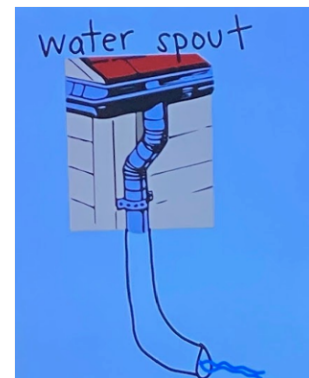


Fig. 18 Teachers can work on vocabulary and language concepts during Hope lessons.

Hope. Ms. Reynolds mentioned the Hope vocabulary power points that have been developed, and how these were helpful. Her favorite lesson included an activity that was meaningful to students and reinforced concepts:

The drum dream girl talks about pathways, and we did a pathway in the hall with a bear crawl and other fun ways to move. I only called on the boys at first ... like the book. It helped in understanding.

Ms. Millard said, “Kids are attentive if the teacher makes it fun and likes the books.” She emphasized the environment where the lesson was taught mattered in understanding. She said

Figure 19
Sample Hope Scale

Early Childhood Hope Scale

Child's name Aija Peter Date 9-15-22

Ask: How do you feel about school? (Agency)

Show students the school flipbook.

Student's choice from pictures shown

1 2 3 4

Problem Solving (Pathway)

Show student the picture of 2 students who want to ride the tricycle. Ask them what they would do to solve that problem.

1	2	3	4
No response at all	No solution	One way to solve the problem even if it's only good for one person.	More than one way to solve the problem.

Persistence Task (Resilience)

Give child ten Finch cubes to stack.

1	2	3	4
Went through ones, negative emotion	Tries, gives up quickly	Keeps trying	Starts again after falling, tries multiple times.

Child's Hope Score
9

she has had conversations with other teachers about how they all like and appreciate Hope lessons.

Participants discussed Hope scales, even though these were not a part of the qualitative study data (Fig. 19.). Ms.

Reynolds said, “We are working to make sure we have a developmentally appropriate pre and post assessment.” She hoped having this in place in future years would provide an easy way to get information on just how effective the lessons were for children.

Fig. 19 Teachers have developed Hope Scales for PreK, but they are still a work in progress.

Subtheme 4b, Roadblocks exist in teaching and learning Hope, but these can be overcome

Participants mentioned some of the roadblocks that do exist when it comes to Hope lessons. Many have to do with the fact that students are at different developmental levels and can comprehend concepts at a multitude of different times. Hope is a hard concept, and teaching

about goals and pathways is not hard, but students understanding does not all happen at the same time. Ms. Lamont discussed this:

Student understanding happens at all different times. That is because kids are at different developmental levels, so some are impacted faster than others.

She gave an example of adjusting the lesson to help meet the differentiated needs of individual students:

I can adjust if some students are not comprehending. For example, Mole found Hope in flowers and in butterflies in the stories. When I ask, where do you find Hope, some get this, but some yell, 'a pumpkin, a racecar, and a dog licking me.' It is obvious that sometimes only three to five students understand what is being asked based on these responses. I helped when one student answered 'Monsters,' and I said, does a monster make you scared or hopeful? The student then says, 'Scared,' and we can talk about that different feeling. Then I used his example and tried to make meaning by saying, 'What would help if there were a monster? Would your dad coming in and scaring away the monster make you hopeful?' Doing this might lead to more understanding. I think Hope lessons happening at other grade levels would be good for kids, since they comprehend differently during childhood ... talk about roadblocks!

Ms. Lockwood also discussed student comprehension of Hope:

Kids are at different developmental levels, and some grasp Hope faster than others. Still, it is rewarding to know I am preparing students to be successful in their school years and giving them a firm foundation. Each child comes to me with a different story. One may be a child who was read to every night and knows now to write their name, and another may be living in a foster home and spending their days in different daycare centers with

all different rules and expectations. Some may have learned to share with others and how to appropriately play with peers, or they may have learned to mistrust outsiders.

Ms. Reynolds mentioned many get the idea of not giving up, but that it doesn't carry over to all students. Teachers have to do their best to make lessons meaningful. She emphasized that kids take different things from each lesson that are individually based. Ms. O'Connor and Ms. Simpson talked about how some students are not as attentive as others, and that this can be a problem, as well. Ms. Millard shared a hard situation:

The ones that make me the most sad are the ones who set goals that they are not ready for. Like learning to tie their shoes ... it is a fine motor skill, and it often can't happen until a child is physically ready. They have to be with it to understand how the lace goes under here, and over here. It can be frustrating for a child.

The idea of Hope lessons continuing through grades, and even tracking goal data vertically is mentioned by participants as something that isn't happening yet. Many said it has a lot to do with time. Time was the most mentioned road block by teachers in this study. They talked about feeling overwhelmed with so much to do, and they are conflicted about where to spend time. They talked about how they are glad there is a set curriculum that is built into the week, because it is easy to bump non-academic lessons when they are short on time. Teachers are expected to be all things to all people, and participants mentioned how things get added to their day, but nothing gets removed. Ms. Lockwood verbalized her feelings on this topic:

We are often expected to be super humans, but rarely are we given the respect we deserve as professionals. The teacher shortage is evidence many teachers have lost Hope. We are asked to do so much, but I won't give up Hope lessons. By teaching these, I continue to inspire myself to have Hope while teaching others to have Hope. Each day I try to also

provide Hope to my colleagues by supporting and encouraging them. We have to stick together if we're going to make it!

She continues with important points:

I need reminders that Hope is important, so I keep a planbook to make sure it fits into the schedule. We have many scripted curriculums, and you have to do this and that in 30 minutes. It is like a puzzle to figure out how to get it all done, and I don't want to see Hope as just one more thing. It is a priority and important, so I make that piece fit. I think I could work every day after school until bedtime and spend my entire weekend working on school stuff too, but I would still find more to do. A teacher's work is never done, but I need to remember take care of myself too. As teachers, we often put the needs of others in front of our own.

Other roadblocks mentioned were that certain times of the day are better for student attention, and they don't always get the timing right. Behaviors of students sometimes get in the way. They mentioned that as a group, the Hope teachers have not taken much time to reflect on changes that may need to happen with the curriculum. A mid-year collaborative reflection time was mentioned by one participant as being a good idea. Teachers also voiced that they would love to have the chance to watch other teachers in their Hope lessons, as this would help them to improve.

Teachers also worry about kids, and that regardless of their Hope level, they may not have the support in life to succeed in what they want to accomplish. Ms. Kelly said:

The teacher and the lessons matter, but the world doesn't always allow for things to work out. Outcome has to do with access. We can build up Hope, but there is a balance of the reality a child or a family face. Is there anyone besides those of us in school who will

help this child move forward?

Teachers mentioned that Hope is a hard concept and that books chosen sometimes needed to be broken down for understanding. Many voiced that they wished lessons included technology or the arts. A big frustration was said well by Ms. Seldon when she stated, “Administration, and lawmakers who have little understanding of education in particular, continue to tell us what to teach and what not to teach.” She made the point that no one seems to ask the experts in the field what really matters for learning. Ms. Kelly worries that there is not enough attention given to making sure new staff members have as deep an understanding of Hope as the original trained group. She wants the momentum to stay alive.

Subtheme 4c, Student school actions and behaviors show they are attaining important Hope concepts

Teachers in the study were able to specifically give examples of proof that Hope concepts are transferring to students. Ms. Lamont mentioned how goals evolve over time. The beginning of the year a student may have a goal of being a unicorn and jumping over a rainbow, but she said this shifts mid-year for many:

I don't want to tell them they won't see a unicorn. I don't want to squelch their little imagination. But I do teach them that hoping to see a unicorn is really a wish. Wishes are always okay. I tell them it's okay to want to play Barbie or catch a ghost, but I also lead them to thinking about Hope and their goals differently. We need to read, write, work with others, color, count, and I help students to set more realistic goals like this.

Ms. Lamont said this leads to setting reading and math goals eventually (Fig. 20.).

Figure 20
Evolution of Hopes and Goals

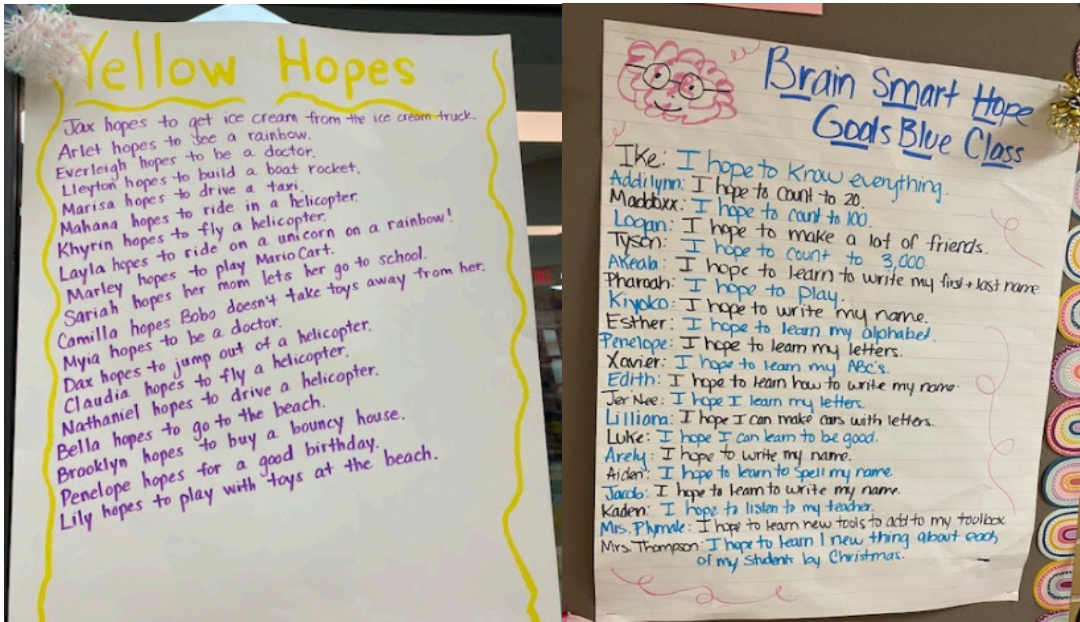


Fig. 20 Students often have silly and unrealistic goals at the beginning of the year, and these evolve over time with the help of Hope lessons and teacher guidance.

Ms. Lamont added, “We hear kids using Hope words over and over in their play. This is hard vocabulary that they are using in the right context.” Ms. Lockwood said that she sees confidence increase in students, and this is evidenced by the increased number of raised hands and the way she can see students really trying on assignments. Ms. Seldon also mentioned the evolution of goals:

At first kids say, ‘I Hope to play Barbie’ and ‘I Hope to color.’ They did not really know what they were saying. In January, they know. At that point in the year, I can have conversations about Hope attached to learning and to school.

Ms. Seldon described the success of one particular child:

I have one little girl who was trying to write her name. The word of the week was goal,

and before she had always picked silly goals. She set her goal to write her name, and she was one who worked on her name over and over. Now the kids associate goal with her because she achieved writing her name.

Ms. Kelly expressed seeing kids having Hope and encouraging others in real time as they played outside and in the classroom. Ms. O'Connor stated that children could find real examples of Hope to show to the teacher or to a parent. Ms. Simpson mentioned that progress was posted, and that makes it obvious to observers who visit the classroom that there is growth happening with students. Ms. Reynolds shared that she saw Hope concepts when her children were interacting with their grands, and Ms. Millard voiced that behaviors changed and there were fewer and fewer fits. All this evidence of Hope concepts being understood and retained were reiterated over and over in interviews with participants.

Summary

Themes and subthemes became evident as interview, observation and artifact data were analyzed. Students were impacted both social-emotionally and academically. Relationships of various kinds were strengthened in many ways. Hope was able to be taught in a way that students understood concepts and could apply these to their school and home lives.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations of the Study

Introduction

In his book *Visible Learning* (2014), Dr. John Hattie reveals exciting results regarding the effect size of goal setting. He states that productive goal setting happens when teachers create challenging goals that are developmentally appropriate and help structure situations so that students can attain these goals (Hattie, 2014). This structure that results in attainment of goals is the pathway, according to Hope Theory. Hattie's effect size for goal setting is 0.56, but he discusses how setting goals also contributes to self-efficacy and confidence, which can bump up the effect size for learning additional amounts (Hattie, 2014). Results of this study support that Hope lessons not only help students establish goals, but that the process of teaching goals, pathways, and motivation build other skills that boost learning outcomes in multiple ways. This is encouraging.

This case study aimed to explore how pre-kindergarten Hope lessons impacted both the student and the teacher. A qualitative approach provided the opportunity to observe classrooms, study artifacts, and interview teachers. This topic was important to me as an educational leader because I have continually witnessed teachers' need for strategies to help students move past barricades that block learning from trauma and emotional baggage accompanying students to the classroom each day. It was uplifting to see the positive impacts of Hope lessons in areas of social-emotional strengths, academics, and in various relationships. I came away from this research having reached the conclusion that Hope can be taught and should be taught.

Summary of Findings

Participants in this study were trained to teach Hope lessons in pre-kindergarten classrooms and were provided a specific lesson plan to accomplish this. The teachers were all

willing to be observed and interviewed. Artifacts that showed examples from Hope lessons or that were directly related to these lessons were collected. Through analysis, themes arose that were important to share with educators so that they may consider adding Hope lessons as a valuable component supporting social-emotional and academic growth.

Four themes and additional subthemes emerged, which were discussed in-depth in Chapter 4:

1. Hope Lessons Positively Impact Individual Social-Emotional Growth and Wellness

- 1a. Hope lessons have a positive impact on behavior
- 1b. Hope lessons foster personal growth in teachers
- 1c. Hope lessons lead to an awareness of others
- 1d. Hope lessons mix well with other types of Social-Emotional curriculum
- 1e. Hope lessons help to mitigate trauma
- 1f. Hope lessons reveal the need for helpers in life

2. Hope Lessons Positively Impact Academic Growth

- 2a. Hope lessons motivate students to learn and encourage them to persevere
- 2b. Hope lessons build confidence
- 2c. Hope lessons connect to core subjects in school and prep for academic learning
- 2d. Hope lessons help students develop respect for their own learning and the learning of others
- 2e. Hope lessons help prepare students for future learning

3. Hope Lessons Build Relationships

- 3a. Hope lessons strengthen student-to-student relationships

- 3b. Hope lessons strengthen student-to-teacher relationships
- 3c. Hope lessons strengthen student-to-parent relationships
- 3d. Hope lessons strengthen teacher-to-parent relationships
- 3e. Hope lessons strengthen teacher-to-teacher relationships
- 3f. Hope lessons strengthen relationships between school and community
- 4. Hope Can Be Successfully Taught and Learned
 - 4a. Certain Hope lesson specifics make a difference in learning
 - 4b. Roadblocks exist in teaching and learning Hope, but these can be overcome
 - 4c. Student school actions and behaviors show they are attaining important Hope concepts

These listed themes and subthemes represent the study's main findings, and they were supported with evidence from interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Thinking about the themes and subthemes took me back to some of the literature for comparison. Part of the inspiration for this study came from reading the book *Hope Rising* by Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman. I looked to this book once again to see if anything from my research overlapped. At the end of the book, they refer to "Lessons Learned from Two Old Guys," and I found several points that hit home after reflecting on my findings (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Gwinn and Hellman (2019) bring the focus of a book for adults back to children in this section, as they make suggestions to instill Hope in the young. They make the point that once you learn the language of Hope, you talk differently about your personal goals and future (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). I found this expressed in interviews about the stories of pre-kindergarten students using Hope language in their play, which was observable as a positive by

classroom teachers. Gwinn and Hellman (2019) emphasize the importance of affirming the young. Staying positive with children and helping them turn “I can’t” into hopeful statements such as “I can’t do this yet,” are significant steps in motivating young people to move forward. I love that they mention to listen more than you speak (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). One of the recommendations revealed in talking to teachers was to have teachers spend more one-on-one time with students. This will allow them to hear the stories and know the child well. Learning about positive role models can be added to this curriculum in many ways, but for the moment and the four-year-old, the teacher is that role model. That is powerful. One of the recommendations Gwinn and Hellman (2019) share is to develop partnerships, or Hope buddies, who will help lift a child to higher Hope. Other staff members in a school building could be used for this, and I love the idea of pairing a young student with an older student. We called ours “Reading Buddies” when I was in the classroom, and it seems we have moved away from critical purposeful connections such as this. Teaching students to focus on their strengths rather than weaknesses is a point made by these authors (Gwinn and Hellman, 2019). This skill of moving past the negative takes practice and encouragement, and the classroom teacher is in just the right position to impact this focus.

Part of the literature review included studies showing the importance of SEL in schools. I emphasize this again in my summary, as it appears society is more divided than ever about this topic. As Peterson and Park (2003) mentioned, we are tasked with preparing the young for success in their future. This does not just include academics, but also requires those who spend countless hours with children to focus on soft skills that lead to human flourishing (Peterson & Park, 2003). Though teachers in the study struggled with time as the most significant issue, they all felt the Hope lessons were worth their effort and positively impacted their students. The

middle school study by Marques et al. (2009) found that students could set attainable goals and establish their own pathways to these goals. I would argue that the pre-kindergarten students involved in these lessons would be able to do this as well, with help at this age. The mental energy to take on challenges, as Marques et al. (2019) discussed, could be seen in these little people as they built stamina and confidence to try again and again. Studies from Duckworth and Seligman (2005) mentioned that self-discipline development increases academic performance, and these teachers of Hope ensure this happens with young children. That same study stated this type of work impacted attendance, and teachers in my research discussed how much the students liked being a part of the Hope lessons, which encouraged them to be at school. Social awareness and being able to take on the perspectives of others, as discussed by Heath et al. (2017), was definitely something seen by teachers and brought up in interviews over and over.

This Hope study demonstrated how important it is to have an academic curriculum that integrates social-emotional learning strategies, similar to Domitrovich et al. (2017) research. Students in this study are on their way to learning social-emotional skills that will help them build healthy relationships, choose right and not wrong, make healthy choices, and grow academically (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

Implications and Recommendations

Creswell and Creswell (2018) say it is important to look at lessons learned by the study, and I will share these in this section of the research document. Ms. Lockwood verbalizes her general take on the implications of Hope lessons with early childhood students:

Our Hope lessons allow our students to dream, think about their futures, and realize they can achieve any goals they set for themselves. We are teaching young students how to set a goal and work towards that goal. We help these students

experience success so they know what that feels like. Our Hope lessons remind students that everyone has obstacles to overcome in life, but they get to choose how to respond to these obstacles. Hopefully, we inspire them to be problem solvers who can find ways to overcome them without losing Hope along the way.

I have divided implications and recommendations into categories to inform various groups of educators.

Administrator implications and recommendations

As a student of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and a former school administrator, it was important to include implications and recommendations of this study for this group. First, administrators must find a way to protect social-emotional learning time during the school day so that lessons in Hope can be taught with fidelity. According to study results, Hope skills are essential to acquire as a foundation for academic learning. They are often the first things to go when schedules get tight. As stated in the report, *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope* (2019), SEL should be treated as a source of rigor rather than a soft take on learning. It is an administrator's role to ensure this type of instruction is not seen as trivial, but rather, as essential. In addition to protecting time for lessons to take place during the day, educational leaders must speak up about the importance of SEL to legislators and those who make decisions. Unfortunately, these policymakers are often not the experienced educators in the schoolhouse. Due to misunderstanding and misinformation, there has been much negative publicity regarding SEL over the past several years. This is an unfortunate battle educators face, and social-emotional work with students is even more critical after the experiences with COVID-19. The stress associated with this pandemic still lives in students, teachers, and parents, and school leaders must address this if effective instruction and academic growth are to happen. As

mentioned in *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope* (2019), those in leadership positions must establish a clear vision of student success, and that it is more than the “back to basics” approach to education. People need to understand the importance of whole child development.

There are practical ways administrators can support Hope in schools, as implied through the results of this research. Leaders should walk into classrooms and participate in Hope lessons, even sharing their own experiences with goals, pathways, and motivation. In a non-evaluative manner, administrators can ask teachers to video themselves and the reactions of students in Hope lessons and create a targeted time for teachers to analyze these. Teachers need time to teach lessons, but they also need to be given time to reflect and collaborate regularly. This will allow for adjustments and improvements in lessons and make them even more meaningful. It also would be a good idea to schedule a protected time for teachers to observe other teachers and their lesson styles, as teachers can learn so much from each other. Ensuring teachers gather, document, and track data showing the specific impact of these programs is important as well. Administrators should make sure the positives of the program, the vocabulary, the activities, and the outcomes are shared with parents and the larger community. Hope is researched-based, and sharing this research, along with data that reveals positive results from Hope lessons and other SEL programs, should happen with stakeholders.

Administrators must work with faculty to ensure a safe learning environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and sharing about themselves. Hope lessons help build relationships, and according to *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope* (2019), when schools work to build relationships, along with offering mental health support and instruction of other social and emotional skills, safety becomes more prominent. Creating care teams, community resource partnerships, and calming spaces in buildings emphasizes the importance of mental

health, so leaders can work to establish these. For Hope lessons or other types of SEL to be effective, all staff must have buy-in, and the administrator plays a large role in ensuring this happens. Showing teachers how Hope lessons can easily overlap with academic lessons is a way to get additional naysayers on board. Including specific site goals related to Hope can make it a visible priority. If an administrator creates a climate of trust and respect among staff, this allows for autonomy for teachers to be creative in Hope implementation and in Hope discovery. Helping teachers and students celebrate social-emotional success through Hope recognitions is another way building leaders can get involved.

Teacher implications and recommendations

Teachers would benefit from the opportunity to see others and themselves teaching Hope curriculum. It is often a bit frightening to video oneself teaching, but realizing the benefit this could have would move teachers forward in their efforts to teach Hope well. The opportunity to collaborate frequently about Hope would afford teachers the chance to discuss particular issues, such as behavior, and to problem-solve with others. Most school staff participate in Professional Learning Communities, and this might be just the place for that type of collaboration. The district in this study, at one time, had pushed for this curriculum to be active in all schools. There is no evidence of active lessons being taught other than with pre-kindergarten students, which seems unfortunate. Vertical implementation of Hope lessons throughout multiple grade levels would allow tracking of students and their goals, and it would also bring about the opportunity for a different kind of collaboration among teachers. The whole education system within a district could be aware of the child, rather than a classroom teacher just year by year, if Hope and other social-emotional data moved with the student.

It was evident in talking with teachers that they were beaten down with massive expectations on their shoulders, and most felt very little societal support. Some are even fearful of implementing this type of curriculum with students, which they, as experts, know is what will matter for academics in the long run. A teacher-led publicity campaign, where it is communicated, especially to legislators and backed by data, would be a step toward these practices becoming more acceptable. Teachers must find their voice and communicate data, such as the findings of this study, which imply that student growth is positively impacted by Hope lessons and other types of SEL curriculum. People outside school walls need to know that negative behaviors can change, students can learn to become aware of others and appreciate differences, and that the effects of trauma can be counterbalanced. Small pockets of educators speak to this regularly, but a movement and a shift need to take place on a larger scale.

Teachers may be better equipped to teach Hope if they assess their own Hope levels at the beginning of each year. If they find they are at a low Hope point in their own lives, they may need to ask to team-teach with someone or bring in the school counselor to facilitate the lessons. Collaborating with colleagues to evaluate Hope lessons would allow fine-tuning of the curriculum. There are many opportunities for teachers to add books and activities that make Hope concepts more meaningful. Teachers are so creative, and just working with the eight in this study, it was amazing to see how differently they taught these lessons. One recommendation from a participant was to create a Hope library where students could refer to books read in the classroom or discover additional Hope stories. There are many types of non-fiction books teachers could include that reveal Hope in action in people's real lives. Creating a Hope toolkit for new teachers and for easy access to ideas was another recommendation. Many participants mentioned adding songs and music to Hope lessons as well.

Teachers must communicate the success of Hope lessons and other SEL programs to parents. Parents need to be aware of their own child's individual goals and the successes they are having. Sharing student goals with parents on a regular basis, and vice-versa, would be meaningful. Student-led conferences were a great way this happened in the study, but they only occurred two times a year. Two-way regular communication about goals and accomplishments would be meaningful for both the parent and the student. Making sure students share their goals with each other is important as well, so teachers should have small group discussions about individual progress. There is also an opportunity for teachers and students to establish whole class goals and track data on this. Students would see that great things can be accomplished with a group and that working together is productive. Providing family-strengthening experiences such as Parent Universities would be an excellent thing for teachers to do so that skills can be worked on at home. Many parents lack the resources and confidence to be successful in their role, and opportunities to give practical ideas and practice scenarios would make a big difference.

Other ideas for teachers include creating Hope center stations to go along with academic stations. This would provide other opportunities for students to practice. Teachers must make sure children experience the entirety of the Hope lessons, and that they are only removed from the situation if given the opportunity to make up the lesson later. A weekly check-in and check-out conversation about students' short-term goals would be another opportunity for communication and relationship building. Posting goals on desks and in hallways and pointing these out on a regular basis is a good idea. Figuring the best way to utilize the Children's Hope Scale with students would allow for quantitative data to be collected, which would be helpful in evaluating for changes and adaptations. The use of student data notebooks happens for math,

science, and language often, but having this for Hope goals and other social-emotional information would be good as well. Teachers need to look at the standards they are expected to teach and align goal setting with these. Posting goals and voicing standard goals can happen in a way that can make concepts attainable for students. It is important that teachers always keep a growth mindset on the frontline for students. Helping students to look at problems and challenges as opportunities to learn rather than obstacles that cannot be overcome is important.

Teacher preparation program implications and recommendations

College preparatory measures focus on teaching future teachers to instruct students for academic success. Along with ensuring new teachers are skilled to impart core learning, colleges and universities need to emphasize SEL preparation as well. Specific courses should be designed which provide future teachers experience with Hope lessons. These courses would be easy to add to teacher preparation programs and could be combined with other topics such as classroom management or child psychology if needed. There are minimal amounts of this instruction happening, but there needs to be much more.

A more significant issue is many teachers come to the profession with non-traditional training. This group likely needs more awareness of the importance of the other pieces of education that are crucial besides academics. Classroom management, relationship building, goal setting, trauma-informed practices, and more social-emotional training must happen in some way, so that these adjunct or emergency certified staff members have the experiences necessary to attend to the needs of the whole child. Providing professional development is essential at the beginning of each year, and this must be built into work week schedules. A purposeful focus throughout the year, like monthly discussion groups for new teachers, might help. Mentoring new teachers should happen in every circumstance, so that new teachers can discuss all aspects

of learning with someone with expertise. This study implies that Hope lessons matter, and yet, there are few opportunities for teachers to know and understand this.

Social-Emotional and academic learning implications and recommendations

The public needs to know how Hope lessons and other types of SEL matter. It takes trust for these types of programs to be implemented without pushback, and gaining parent support should be a top priority. There are many ways to build trust with parents, and many individual schools and districts accomplish this beautifully. Something gets lost in the messages to the greater public, so aiming for trust on a larger scale is essential.

A way to show parents and the community the effectiveness of Hope lessons would be to share student goals regularly and have students track success with those goals. Connections need to be made between the Hope goals and academic learning, which needs to be made visible to parents and stakeholders. Emphasizing the success of social-emotional lessons that directly relate to academics is what matters to the public. The first weeks of school are crucial when it comes to shoring up the SEL taking place and the reasoning behind it. Once trust is built, it may be possible for students to have ACE testing and SEL screenings. Parents have such a fear of this. Of course they do, as they may have personal responsibility for trauma in the student's past. There must be a way of finding out how fragile a child who comes into the learning environment is so that teachers can take action. This must trump blame and fear, but getting to this point will take legislative backing. It is a long road ahead, but nothing matters more. We cannot, as teachers, make our most significant impact on students without all the information, and the situation in schools and society is reactive. We need to shift to a more proactive approach.

Another recommendation related to SEL is to ensure that Hope lessons and other lessons can quickly transfer to academic lessons. Knowing that time in schools is spent on standards is

critical to stakeholders, and most types of SEL curricula, including Hope, are proven to align well. Teachers likely have many ideas for streamlining the processes, and they need to be trusted to develop curriculum and lessons that address the needs of the whole child. The “Back to Basics” plan that many state leaders, who are not educators, think is best would not, as Rose (2014) mentions, do things like spark student emotions, promote aesthetic responses, or allow a child to develop his true ability or identity fully. Programs like the intergenerational pre-kindergarten initiative in this study lend themselves well to support social-emotional learning, and not only for the young but also the old.

Recommendations from this study also include strategically inserting SEL into lesson plans daily and weekly, where they cannot be shifted aside, postponed, or overlooked. It would be advisable based on findings to add the language of Hope to instruction. For example, when posting goals and objectives on the board, the teacher would include the pathway to achieve these. The students need to see the steps. Using the same data notebooks for tracking academics to keep tabs on social-emotional goals is a smart plan that was mentioned several times by participants. Results found it easy for teachers to use Hope books for academic purposes. Bringing in speakers about careers would be an addition to Hope curriculum to consider, especially if there are some who have overcome adversity or have beat the odds to achieve success. Adding career studies in general would be a good idea as well. Expecting narrative answers during discussions, less lecturing, and more student voice will ensure students continue to adjust to communicating well with others.

Legislative implications and recommendations

As stated by Rose (2014, p. 74), “There is little deep understanding of the intricacies of teaching and learning involved in the formation of education policy.” There needs to be a

fundamental change when it comes to this, and the only way this can happen is if teachers stand up and get involved. Legislators must seek out education professionals and look to those who have both formal and practical knowledge about what is best for student learning. Teachers must write books, make speeches, appear in commercials, and do whatever it takes to get noticed. “Principal for a Day” programs are a great way to allow legislators inside the school building for more than just a photo op. Unfortunately, educators often fear showing anything but perfection, rather than allowing the reality of the school day to be revealed. If outside entities cannot see the problems that exist, it is hard to convince them that solutions are necessary. Focus groups with the specific purpose of engaging in conversation between politicians and educators need to become a priority. A targeted alignment of community resources for support of families in need must become a priority.

Discussion of Future Areas for Research

Much has happened in Hope research since I became interested in 2018. Bryce et al. (2020), conducted a study with 5th-12th grade students on contributions of cognitive and behavioral Hope interventions and the impact these may have on academic functioning and student well-being in adolescence. This study found quantitative evidence that suggested practice in schools involving goal setting, pathway construction, roadblock planning, and agency thinking would be empowering for students. Cognitive Hope levels were measured using Snyder’s Children’s Hope Scale, and behavioral Hope results came from an intentional self-regulation questionnaire from Gestsdóttir and Lerner (2007). Korkmaz (2022) conducted research to see if Hope levels impacted high school students and their ability to move closer to their individual career goals. Findings in this study showed that Hope served as a source of motivation, and that educational personnel, like counselors, can have a direct role in helping students with rising

Hope levels and career goal attainment (Korkmaz, 2022). Murphy (2023) reported that high Hope in students correlates positively with increased overall well-being and happiness. Based on his research, he concluded that when there are efforts to increase the capacity to achieve goals by teaching agency and pathway thinking, students' psychological, social, and subjective well-being improves (Murphy, 2023). There have also been studies conducted regarding Hope and COVID-19 in the past several years. Flesia et al. (2023) studied Hope and found it to be a protective factor mitigating psychological distress during the pandemic.

Despite movement forward with Hope studies, there are still many opportunities to discover how this concept might have a positive impact on young people. My recommendations for future research based on this study include the following:

- This study was conducted in pre-kindergarten classrooms. Similar research could be conducted in upper elementary, middle, and high school grades to see if the results align.
- Qualitative case study allowed the researcher to look at the outcomes of Hope lesson implementation through interviews, observations, and artifacts. Quantitative study, using Snyder's Hope Scale and measuring growth in Hope levels, would provide additional data. However, the early childhood scale needs additional fine-tuning, according to study participants.
- Other social-emotional lessons should continue to be studied alongside Hope to change public opinion regarding the education of the whole child. Data on positive results needs to be widely communicated.
- A study comparing grades and test scores to Hope levels could provide convincing evidence for implementing these types of programs in schools.

- A study conducted in a similar setting on a school with different demographics would be worthwhile. It would be interesting to see inner-city results.
- Discipline referral trends in schools using Hope lessons or other SEL would be interesting to study to see if these lessen when Hope rises in students.
- A fascinating study would be to use Hope scale assessment, alongside Hope lessons and activities, with intergenerational programs, and have the researcher track both older people and early childhood students to compare results. Just the small amount of time spent in this setting during my study revealed that valuable information could come from this educational scenario.

An additional exciting study to mention occurred during the time this research was conducted. The University of Oklahoma Hope Research Center conducted a study on the State of Oklahoma Individual Career and Academic Planning (ICAP) Program. This was published by Featherngill and Hellman (2020) and investigated the effect of ICAP programs in secondary education. These programs involve students establishing goals and pathways to possible careers during high school. ICAP goal setting is supposed to occur with a caring adult working alongside the student to help and advise them. In this study, ninth graders were surveyed regarding their Hope levels. 77% of students were found to be in slight and moderate Hope categories, which would be considered the lower end. Those students in the study who scored in the higher Hope range reported higher grades, and these students also missed less school. They were found to be more engaged with teachers and with their own future aspirations. Increases in Hope levels were associated with the experiences provided by the ICAP programs.

In the past three years, I have worked with the Oklahoma State Department of Education in the Office of School Support. My role involved working with underperforming schools to

create continuous plans for improvement. Our department had developed a tool called The Focused Improvement Plan, and I was pleased to see all the elements of Hope Theory within this plan. Schools set goals for student achievement and teacher implementation. Evidence-based practices were used as the pathway to achieve these goals. Motivation happened through building supportive relationships with these schools and providing professional development or resources that were aligned. This Focused Improvement Plan tool would make an exceptional Hope study.

Conclusion

Studies point to Hope as a positive psychology intervention that makes a difference. Very few studies have been conducted in school settings, and virtually none are qualitative. It was revealing to triangulate data through this case study of lived experiences of Hope lessons in classrooms. My goal was to provide new and enlightening information to add to Hope research, and this was achieved. Snyder (2002) reports pathway and agency thinking develop steadily during early childhood. This is such an essential piece of information for educators. We are the community, the learning environment, and the institution of childhood, and we must realize the impact we can have on Hopefulness in our public school setting.

In his book *Why School?* Mike Rose says helping students develop character qualities like perseverance and self-control, account for success in school and life. My Hope study reveals that helping to develop these character qualities alongside academic instruction in the school setting is a valuable effort. The question that keeps coming up in my mind is, “How do we make this okay?” and change the narrative that schools are trying to indoctrinate children. Educators are trying to build up social-emotional and academic skills so that each child will achieve their best self. We will have to continue promoting the success stories and backing this with data, and the “we” I mention is teachers. Rose (2014) mentions the importance of staying trauma-

informed, as this allows those in the business of education to be mindful of the barriers that exist regarding achievement while still nurturing possibility in children.

As the song says, “I am a promise with a capital P. I am a great big bundle of potentiality” (Gaither, 2002). This message should be the song in the hearts of all children as we focus on the possibility and potential that exists in everyone. Participant Ms. Millard said it best. “Teach them at a young age to dream and to set goals and provide a place for them to try and to fail. Be there for them and help them see their successes.” The *Hope Rising* book, by Gwinn and Hellman (2019) ends with the thought of leaving a legacy of Hope, and I particularly love the quote on page 236, “When we lose our way, Hope can give us back a roadmap for our lives.” Many times, during this University of Oklahoma Doctoral experience spanning six and a half years, I veered off the pathway and felt lost. Hope allowed me to finish the work, and I will be forever grateful for the discovery of this beautiful theory.

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