REFLECTING ON HOPE:
A HOPEFUL FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION

by

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my mother, Twyla. Throughout my life, she has always held the highest hopes for me and, in turn, has taught me to set lofty goals for myself and stay hopeful through the many challenges I have faced. I also want to dedicate this paper to my fiancé Katrina for her support through the many evenings and weekends that were required to complete this work.
Abstract

Hope has been associated with well-being for many millennia. From the early Greeks to contemporary researchers, hope has been identified with the human capacity to have a measure of control in our lives. This capstone will review the historical and contemporary literature on hope and present recommendations on how to incorporate hope within educational practice. It will do this by exploring the historical, philosophical, and psychological understanding of hope as well as contemporary research based on C. R. Snyder’s Hope Theory, which correlates measures of hope with well-being. Finally, this capstone will offer recommendations for school-based professionals and educators by advancing hope as both a core process of educational practice as well as a mitigating factor against reduced well-being. This new educational model is presented as three reflective questions and has been named Hope-Informed Educational Practice. Hope-Informed Educational Practice is explored as a potential means for fostering hope in all students and as well as a possible intervention for students experiencing life stressors that place them at risk for anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

Keywords: hope, hope theory, hopelessness theory, hope-informed educational practice
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HOPEFUL EDUCATION

“Modo liceat vivere, est spes.” – “While there's life, there's hope.”

Heauton Timorumenos (The Self-Tormentor) by Publius Terentius Afer

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Awareness surrounding student mental health issues has increased significantly over the last number of years (Gerrald & Raynaud, 2010; Mojtabai, Olfson, & Han, 2016). Discussions surrounding anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts have become more open and less stigmatized. However, beyond creating awareness, these discussions have not decreased the instances of anxiety or depression, but rather, there has been an increase in major mental health episodes over the last twelve years (Mojtabai et al., 2016).

Keyes (2002) suggests that mental well-being fits on a continuum that reflects “the presence or absence of positive feelings about life” (p. 208). Anxiety is a normal response to feelings of fear “when faced with threatening or stressful situations” (Dean, 2017, p. 15). Although anxiety is considered a normal human response to stress, the continued persistence, or the overwhelming nature of anxiety constitutes an anxiety disorder (Dean, 2017). It is this sustained anticipation of dire outcomes that correlate anxiety along the mental health continuum where individuals feel an absence of positive feelings in their lives, which leads an individual towards depression and suicidal thoughts (Beck, Brown, Berchick, Steward, & Steer, 1990). Without the presence of positive feelings, an individual may become vulnerable to feelings of hopelessness when experiencing negative life events (Hankin, Abramson, & Siler, 2001). Hopelessness Theory, as defined by Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale (1978), suggests that
individuals become susceptible to depression when they attribute the causes of negative life to “internal, stable and global causes” (Liu, Kleiman, Nestor & Cheek, 2015, p. 346). For example, they might become depressed if they interpreted an argument “as a product of their poor interpersonal ability (internal), which they believe will never change (stable) and will negatively influence all their other social interactions (global)” (Liu et al., 2015, p. 346). It is possible, this negative self-perception of how individuals interpret the circumstances surrounding their anxiety as intolerable may prevent them from seeing potential positive outcomes.

Despite the potential for individuals to develop a sense of hopelessness, many are not affected by these negative self-perceptions and, instead, can cope with their hardships in a positive way (Huen, Ip, Ho, & Yip, 2015). It is from observing these individuals who can weather negative situations that Snyder (1994) developed a theory of hope. The underlying assumption of *Hope Theory* is that “human actions are goal-directed” and that “goals provide the targets of mental action sequences.” (Snyder, 2002, p. 250). According to Snyder (2002), “Hope is defined as the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways” (p. 249). Snyder also posits that high-hope individuals are more likely to create pathways to move towards their goals, believe they can successfully carry out their plan, and that new obstacles can be overcome. Conversely, low-hope individuals have more difficulty creating potential pathways to move towards a goal and are more uncertain that they can carry out their plan. A low-hope individual may also find it difficult to generate alternative pathways when faced with obstacles. It is easy to view Snyder’s *Hope Theory*, as an antidote to hopelessness. Huen et al. (2015) recognized that “hope and hopelessness are two distinct but correlated constructs” and “hope can act as a resilience factor that buffers the impact of hopelessness on suicidal ideation (p. 1).” The potential of *Hope Theory* is its ability to help
individuals with the range of consequences of hopeless thinking, namely anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. Unfortunately, although there are many studies that support the assertions put forward in Hope Theory, there are fewer studies on how to improve the level of hope in individuals who are experiencing hopelessness. Consequently, the dilemma that arises from this research is how educators, and school-based mental health professionals, can encourage hope within students and in turn decrease feelings of hopelessness.

**Purpose**

The main objective of this paper is to address the dilemma of hope development both through proactive group instruction on goal-centred pathways and agency techniques, in conjunction with therapeutic strategies to foster hope in low-hope individuals. Furthermore, this paper will look at the variety of causal factors that are believed to lead to feelings of hopelessness in the first place. These include raised cognizance of global injustice through our media/news-rich culture, greater individual self-consciousness arising from social media, and existential crises such as global climate change. It will also consider racial, gender, and sexual-identity injustices as contributing factors to an individual’s feelings of hopelessness. The overall goal of the paper is to review research regarding these factors and explore strategies based on hope theory that could inform professional practice for educators and lead to implementable strategies to support students with low-hope perceptions. The paper will also explore ideas for evaluating curriculum that can help educators foster hope within the classroom setting.

**Professional Background and Influences**

On numerous occasions, I have reflected upon the factors in my own life’s journey that lead me to disengage almost completely from academic pursuits during grade school. I found myself at a crossroads where I felt little to no hope in my own academic capacity. Without hope
in my academic ability, I felt my only option was to drop out of university and work for many years in manual labour. During these years, I spent time slowly developing my own self-efficacy and eventually mastery within my field of work. This assurance in my ability to set goals and accomplish them fostered within me a sense of hope that I could succeed if I returned to university and pursued a career in teaching. As a teacher, I find many of the students I encounter seem to mirror the same patterns of avoidance and anxiety-related behaviours that I recall having. I have observed these behaviours in students who are only in kindergarten. Even more difficult is hearing other educational professionals claim they are seeing an upward trend in the number of students with these same behaviours, particularly over the last decade. I have also noticed more cases of crippling anxiety and increases in suicide ideation in adolescent students. These increases have left me thinking that simply teaching students coping strategies for stress and anxiety is not enough. I question what fundamental components in our teaching practices and approaches might be missing when dealing with adolescent stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. To understand this question more fully, this paper will explore the following questions:

- What is hope, how has it been understood through time, and how can it be utilized in improving individual well-being?
- What are some examples of contributing factors or stressors that increase the risk of low-hope and reduced well-being?
- Can hope help mitigate against anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation?
- Are there implementable strategies to foster hope within individuals and groups of students/children?
Theoretical Framework

This paper will attempt to draw from the historic, philosophic and psychological concepts regarding hope to develop an understanding of and ways to utilize hope as a safeguard for student well-being. Beyond the historical and philosophical conceptions of hope, the key theorists who form the foundation for understanding and utilizing hope in this paper are Adler (1925/1968), Abramson, Metalsky, and Alloy (1989), Snyder (1994) and Lopez, Floyd, Ulven and Snyder (2000). The psychoanalyst, Alfred Adler (1925/1968), introduced the concept of ‘style of life’ as a recognition that the beliefs a person holds about themselves, others and the world will engender their approach to the world. Furthermore, he expressed the importance goals play in how we ultimately “think, feel, will or act” (Adler, 1925/1968, p. 3). Abramson et al. (1989) describe a similar link in their Helplessness Theory by hypothesizing that when a person holds negative beliefs about themselves, specifically a belief that they cannot change negative life circumstances, it can create a feeling of hopelessness. This feeling of hopelessness Abramson et al. (1989) identified with a reduction of a person’s well-being, and increased risk of depression. Almost as a continuation of Adler’s insistence on the importance of goal setting, C. R. Snyder (1994) identified goal setting as the key to understanding hope and established it as the cornerstone of what he labelled Hope Theory. Snyder’s (1994) Hope Theory recognizes that hope is made up of three elements; setting meaningful goals, being able to plan a pathway in which to accomplish the goal and mustering the willpower, or agency, to pursue the goal. In summarizing these three elements of hope, Snyder (1994) defined hope as “the sum of the mental willpower and waypower that you have for your goals” (p. 5). With Snyder (1994) Establishing goal setting as the primary element of hope the secondary elements of willpower and waypower, are described in the following ways: ‘Willpower,’ also called ‘agency’ or ‘agency thinking,’ are
used interchangeably through literature to describe a person’s ability to encourage and generate motivation to pursue their goals. The terms ‘Waypower,’ ‘pathways’ and ‘pathway thinking’ are also used interchangeably to describe a person’s ability to plan out how they will accomplish their goal. Similar to Adler (1925/1968) and Abramson et al. (1989), Snyder, Rand and Sigmon (2018) recognized the role that a person’s beliefs or perceptions have on accomplishing their goals, and thereby a person’s feelings of hope are based on “the perception that one’s goals can be attained” (p. 257). Snyder’s (1994) Hope Theory thus provides researchers, therapists, and educators, the ability to explore and support improvement in these three areas in a person’s life and thus support a person’s level of hope. Stemming from Hope Theory, Lopez et al. (2000) outline practical principles on how to incorporate the key elements of Hope Theory into a therapeutic model called Hope Therapy. Hope Therapy is described as a therapeutic modality that brings the key elements of goal setting, pathway thinking, and agency thinking to the forefront of therapeutic practice. The work of each of these key theorists is described in more detail in the next chapter, the literature review. In the same manner, I conclude this paper by synthesizing the above theories into my recommendations on how to bring Hope Theory to school-based practice.

Significance

I believe this paper on hope and Hope Theory will be beneficial for anyone who is seeking to understand the connection between hope and well-being. However, I specifically see this as an opportunity to explore how hope and Hope Theory can be utilized in the school setting to improve student well-being. The rise in anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation within students calls educators and mental health professionals to develop educational practices that help reduce these negative influences on well-being. A Hope-Informed Educational Practice
could benefit all students, but specifically, students who are experiencing anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, a *Hope-Informed Educational Practice* could give strategies to educators on how to foster hope and well-being in their classrooms.

**Remaining Chapters**

The following chapters of this capstone will include a literature review (chapter 2) and a summary of the findings along with recommendations and a conclusion (chapter 3). Included within the literature review, there will be a historical overview of the metaphysical understanding of hope, the philosophical and psychological history of hope and a brief overview of factors and stressors that affect hope, such as social and news media, the marginalization of identity groups and the global climate crisis. It will also include an analysis of C. R. Snyder’s hope theory and a discussion on the recent and relevant research addressing the alleviating influence of hope on anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Finally, the literature review will look at possible theoretical and therapeutic methods for fostering hope. The final chapter will summarize the findings in this paper and provide recommendations on how to use the theoretical and therapeutic models derived from *Hope Theory* within a school setting. More specifically, it is to provide guidance to educators in the form of a *Hope-Informed Educational Practice* model that can be applied to curriculum development that can incorporate the fostering of hope in all students, and as a classroom-focused intervention for students who are experiencing low-hope.

**Definition of Terms**

The following are simple definitions that are intended to facilitate the communication and comprehension of the proceeding chapters.
Mental Health - A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (World Health Organization, 2004).

Well-being – Associated with mental health, well-being is described as the presence or absence of positive feelings about life” (Keyes, 2002, p. 208)

Hope – The positive feelings that arise from a person’s perceptions and belief that desired outcomes can be anticipated.

Hopelessness Theory – Developed by Abramson, Metalsky, and Alloy (1989), and defines helplessness as the feelings that arise when someone believes that they are responsible for the negative experience in their life, that it will always be this way, and there is nothing they can do to change it. In Hopelessness Theory, these are called internal, stable and global attributions for a negative life event. Hopelessness Theory hypothesizes that hopelessness is associated with reduced well-being and depression.

Hope Theory – Developed by C. R. Snyder (1994) and hypothesizes that the positive feelings experienced as hope are a result of setting goals, finding pathways to reach those goals, and having the will to pursue set goals and pathways. Snyder (1994) summarizes this as “the sum of the mental willpower and waypower that you have for your goals. (p. 5).

Goal – “Goals are any objects, experiences, or outcomes that we imagine and desire in our minds. Thus, a goal is something we want to obtain (such as an object) or attain (like an accomplishment).” (Snyder, 1994, p. 5).

Waypower, Pathways, and Pathway Thinking – Interchangeable terms used to describe a person’s thoughts regarding how they can reach their goal. Snyder (1994) describes this as “the
mental plans or road maps that guide hopeful thought” and “a mental capacity we can call on to find one or more effective ways to reach our goals” (p. 8)

**Willpower, Agency, and Agency Thinking** – Interchangeable terms used to describe a person’s mental energy and desire to accomplish their goal. Snyder (1994) calls this “the driving force in hopeful thinking” and a “reservoir of determination and commitment that we can call on to help move us in the direction of the goal to which we are attending at any given moment” (p. 6).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Hope, as a concept, is not as concrete as one might first assume. From Greek myths and philosophers, biblical writers and thinkers, and now to contemporary psychologists, hope has been defined as everything from potentially foolish, to religiously virtuous. However, it is modern theorists such as C. R. Snyder, and Abramson et al. who set the stage to study the psychological impact of hopelessness, and the therapeutic benefit of hope. The Greek philosopher Aristotle was one of the first to describe hope in both positive and negative terms by describing hopeful exuberance in battle as either courage or as foolish lack of fear (Rh. 2.12, 1389a21-28). Early biblical accounts described hope as the assurance of God’s divine will and plan while later biblical writers, such as St. Paul, describe hope as one of the three great virtues next to faith and love. Hope as a virtue was echoed in the writings of the early Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas who further outlined the virtue of hope as connected to Christ, the Christian church, and salvation. One of the earliest thinkers to directly connect hope’s relationship to anxiety was the renaissance philosopher Rene Descartes (1649/1985). Hope was later picked up and further explored by the existentialist philosophers Kierkegaard (1847/1995) and Nietzsche (1909) as they both accept the relationship hope has with seeking potentially reachable things a person sees as good. Alfred Adler (1925/1968) brought these existential ideas into the realm of psychoanalysis as he recognized the importance of goals in how people think, feel, will and act. More recently, Abramson et al. (1989) began to study the concept of hopelessness as a subtype of depression as a continuation of Seligman’s (1972) work on learned helplessness. Abramson et al. (1989) described helplessness as a person’s belief that uncontrollable adverse circumstances are inevitable, inescapable, and their fault. Around the
same time as Abramson et al. published their work on hopelessness, C. R. Snyder was beginning to develop a concept of *Positive Psychology*, eventually known as *Hope Theory*. Snyder (2002) contrasted his theory as an evolution from Seligman and Abramson, as based on a focus “on reaching future positive goal-related outcomes” rather than focusing on ‘negative outcomes as being the key for one’s attributional explanations” (p. 256). It is the study and application of this goal-oriented theory of hope and its potential to reduce anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts, which is the primary purpose of this literature review.

**The History of Hope: From Elpis to Existentialism**

One of the earliest literary examples of hope is found in the ancient Greek myth of “Pandora’s box.” Originally found in the ancient Greek poem *Works and Days* by the Greek poet Hesiod in the eighth century BCE. In it, Hesiod describes hope (in Greek: *elpis*) as the only spirit that did not escape Pandora’s box. The story of Pandora’s box is known by many of us, and Matyszak (2010) describes a brief version of this incident as follows:

> Zeus, however, gave to Pandora a ‘gift’ that would undo the work of his fellow gods: an unshakable curiosity. Hardly had Pandora arrived on earth when she opened the lid to see what the urn contained. Immediately the creatures in the container flew out and being as yet untrained to serve mankind they become instead despair, jealously and rage and the myriad diseases and infirmities that afflict humanity. All that remained was hope, which became trapped under the unbreakable rim of the urn, and which mankind was able to train and make a friend, as the other ‘gifts’ in the urn had been intended to be, though in ways which we cannot now imagine (p. 29).

Matyszak's account suggests that hope becomes a friend of humankind, while the other gifts are the origins of human suffering. However, other scholars challenge this depiction of hope being
the friend of humankind, as Bartlett (2006) describes the meaning of hope “has puzzled commentators from antiquity” (p. 185). He continues by highlighting that Hope “is included in Pandora’s jar of evils, but in what sense is it one of them?” (p. 185). Neils (2005) explores the negative interpretation of this story as Elpis (hope) represents false hope “serving to take away man’s industriousness, rendering him lazy and prone to evil” (p. 40). This puzzlement of meaning regarding the nature of hope as both potentially positive and negative is reflected in much of the ancient Greek philosophers’ exploration of hope and continued through to the existentialist philosophers.

For the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, the concept of hope had two sides. On the one hand, Plato described a negative conceptualization of hope in the *Timaeus*, where he describes it as one of the “terrible and irresistible affections,” which can “easily lead astray” (*Tim*, 69d). However, Plato seems to be a little more generous about hope in *Philebus* when he uses the feelings of emptiness and replenishment to contrast the positive nature of hope as having the ability to relieve a person’s distress of “feeling empty” by providing pleasure in “hoping for replenishment” (*Phileb*. 36b). Plato continues by presenting the pleasure of hope, or positive anticipation, as being able to reduce the suffering someone feels. He does this by comparing someone who is feeling both “empty” and “having no hope” as being in a worse state than someone who has hope (*Phileb*. 36b). In this early concept of hope, it is possible to see that Plato is indicating that hope can mitigate some level of suffering.

Aristotle digs even deeper into the topic of hope, exploring both the positives and negatives of hope as they relate to confidence and courage. Aristotle describes in *Rhetoric* the relationship between courage, confidence and hopefulness this way:
And they are more courageous, for they are full of passion and hope, and the former of these prevents them fearing, while the latter inspires them with confidence, for no one fears when angry, and hope of some advantage inspires confidence. [10] And they are bashful, for as yet they fail to conceive of other things that are noble, but have been educated solely by convention. [11] They are high-minded, for they have not yet been humbled by life nor have they experienced the force of necessity; further, there is high-mindedness in thinking oneself worthy of great things, a feeling which belongs to one who is full of hope. (Rh. 2.12, 1389a21-28).

Gravlee (2007) explains that Aristotle is connecting hope to courage because “being of good hope creates confidence, and confidence creates courage” (p. 466). It appears that Aristotle is building a syllogistic link between these three states of being. He connects his link between hope and courage through confidence. He defines confidence as being “inspired by the remoteness of fearful things, or by the nearness of things that justify it [having confidence] (Rh. 2.5, 1383a17-18). He continues by describing confidence arising from a person’s seeing “if remedies are possible, if there are means of help, either great or numerous, or both” (Rh. 2.5, 1383a19).

Gravlee (2007) adds some commentary to this line suggesting that “we feel this confidence when we can deliberate and act concerning our fate” (p. 467). The ability to deliberate and act concerning our fate would be echoed much later by C. R. Snyder (1994) as a person’s agency. It seems that Aristotle and his commentator Gravlee recognizes that hope puts people on the path of confidence that can affect their future, and courage in being able to handle the unexpected.

Arguably one of the most profound influences upon western thinking is the Bible, which has also influenced how we have understood and practiced hope. A survey of hope in the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, reveals a concept of placing one’s hope in the L ORD, namely
hope in God’s wisdom, strength, deliverance, love, or plan for one’s life (Isaiah 43:1-2, Jeremiah 29:1, Job 11:18-19, Joshua10:25, Psalms 3:2-6, Psalm 147:11). There is an interesting parallel between Plato’s concept that hope, as it reduces suffering and the Old Testament book of Isaiah, which states: “but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:31). Plato conceptualizes hope as a means to reduce the burden of suffering, where Isaiah points to hope, specifically hoping in God, as a way to increase one’s strength. These concepts of reducing burdens and increasing strength appear to align with Aristotle’s idea that hope builds confidence, and ultimately courage. However, the Old Testament writer sees hope as dependent on the benevolence of God, and less upon a person’s ability to change their fate.

Tracking the development of the concept of hope from the Old Testament to the New, we can see one of the clearest defining characteristics of hope emerges from Saint Paul, who wrote, “we can only hope for what is uncertain” (Romans 8:24). In Saint Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he also connects hope with faith and love as fundamentals for Christian believers to live by (1 Corinthians 13:13). Paul’s contemporary Peter, who is traditionally recognized as a disciple of Jesus, and the first Pope, appears to clarify the type of hope discussed in the New Testament as follows:

“hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Similar to the Old Testament writers, Christian authors define hope in terms of God’s greater plan, however, instead of hoping that God will help them in their current life, New Testament writers and later Christian theologians begin to think of hope in terms of their salvation, an after-
life, and being worthy to enter heaven. This focus on the hereafter becomes a major question for later Christian theologians as they wrestle with hope as virtue versus hope as a desire.

The thirteenth-century philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas specifically explored the nature of hope in his work *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas essentially defined two types of hope. Ordinary hope, which he describes as a passion or desire for “obtaining a future good,” is the first type of hope (ST I-II 40.1). The second type of hope that he explores is one a person desires the greatest good, which is only attainable by divine assistance, and “causes a human to act to be good” (ST II-II 17.1). It is this type of hope that Aquinas calls a virtue as it is not rooted in self-interest, but instead, hope is the acting out of a belief, or faith, that God is the source of perfect goodness (ST II-II 17.6). The defining characteristic between the two forms of hope described by Aquinas is self-interest. Hoping for a personal good is not always the same as hoping for a greater good. For Aquinas, there is a difference between a virtue to hope for the greatest-possible good, which he believed required relying on divine assistance, and a mere desire to obtain a future good for oneself.

Writing over one hundred and fifty years after Aquinas, the French philosopher René Descartes (1649/1985) appears to be the first to specifically describe the relationship between hope, confidence, anxiety and despair as part of a single continuum:

We are prompted to desire the acquisition of a good or the avoidance of evil simply if we think it is possible to acquire the good or avoid the evil. But when we go beyond this and consider whether there is much or little prospect of our getting what we desire, then whatever points to the former excites hope in us, and whatever points to the latter excites anxiety (of which jealousy is one variety). When hope is extreme, it changes its nature and is called
‘confidence’ or ‘assurance’ just as, on the other hand, extreme anxiety becomes despair. (p. 350-351)

Descartes draws a line between the two extremes of confidence and despair with hope and anxiety being associated together. Calling both hope and anxiety “dispositions of the soul” that either believes that the desired outcome will or will not come to pass depending on how easy or difficult we think it is to fulfill a desire (p. 389). He continues to describe hope “so strong that it entirely excludes anxiety” as confidence, whereas “anxiety so extreme that it leaves no room for hope” as despair (p. 389). It appears that Descartes has brought together the idea of hope as a prelude to confidence, while also recognizing its association with anxiety and despair. This proposal by Descartes is interesting as it is one of the earliest instances where a philosopher so clearly connects anxiety with despair, and the underlying difference between despair and anxiety is a lack of hope.

Descartes contemporary, enlightenment thinker, and described by Israel (2018) as the “foremost and most dangerous of the ‘atheists’” of his day, Baruch de Spinoza (1670/1891), outlines in his work *Theological-Political Treatise* that hope and fear are the foundation on which politics and superstition arise (p. 3). Spinoza (1670/1891) considered that politics and superstition are the results of human reaction to “fluctuating pitifully between hope and fear by the uncertainty of fortune’s greedily coveted favours” (p. 3). Agreeing with Aquinas and Descartes that faith arises from hope, but instead of seeing faith as a positive, Spinoza observes that people “are governed by hope and fear [which] makes them easy victims of superstition and false belief” (Bloeser & Stahl, 2017, p. 12). Like many of the later Existentialist philosophers, Spinoza rejects the existence of God and subsequently sees hope in a God as not a virtue but instead a superstition and fundamentally irrational. However irrational, Spinoza does see the
political significance of hope as it relates to the underlying social contract between people (Bloeser & Stahl, 2017, p. 12). It is “the hope of some greatly-desired good” that intrinsically motivates people to follow laws and do their “duty willingly” (Spinoza, 1670/1891, p. 74). Although Spinoza describes hope as irrational, he lays the philosophical groundwork for a rational explanation for hope as a pursuit of the greater good without the requirement of a religious belief.

The existential thinkers continued the ever-present struggle of understanding the nature and meaning of hope as either positive or negative, rational or irrational, an act of faith or of reason. This tension is reflected in the different approaches to hope that were taken by two of the heavyweights of existentialist thought, Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. For Kierkegaard, hope is primarily connected to religious faith, and a means to “overcome the limitations of ordinary experience,” whereas Nietzsche sees hope as a “misguided relationship to the world that is unable to face the demands of human existence” (Bloeser & Stahl, 2017, p.18-19). Kierkegaard (1847/1995) defines hope as “to relate oneself expectantly to the possibility of the good is to hope, which cannot be any temporal expectancy but is an eternal hope” and “since hope pertains to the possibility of the good, and [is] thereby… eternal” (p. 249), while Nietzsche (1883-85/2006) seems to criticize Kierkegaard by declaring, “do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes!” (p. 6). Nietzsche (1909) also returns us to the Greek myth of Pandora as he criticizes hope itself because “—in reality, it is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man” (p. 82). Despite Kierkegaard’s belief that hope is concerned with the possibility of the good, he concedes that eternal hope is commonly judged as irrational or “lunacy” because it exceeds the limits of understanding (1851/1990, p. 83) In contrast, Nietzsche (1909) describes in Human All Too Human, the possibility of a reasonable hope exists when “we
believe that we and our equals have more strength in heart and head than the representatives of the existing state of things” although he also deems that this, “as a rule… a presumption [and] an over-estimation” (p. 321). So, it appears that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche completely disagree on the reasonableness of hope; however, they both recognized that hope is dependent on the belief in the possibility of a favourable or good outcome that is perceived as being potentially reachable in the future. The discrepancy between these two philosophers is the question of whether belief which underlines hope is based on reason (evidence) or faith.

The Psychology of Hope

The concept of hope as a positive psychological state of mind recognized for its link to ameliorating stress, anxiety and depression does not emerge fully until the late twentieth century. However, it is possible to see the foundational elements of what would culminate in C. R. Snyder’s Hope Theory emerging out of the work of the existentialists and early psychoanalysts. At the turn of the twentieth century, modern psychology and psychoanalysts were heavily influenced by the ideas of modernist and existential philosophers (Mills, 2003, p. 2). With modernism and eventually existentialism emerged the concept that “people are responsible for and the sole judge of their actions,” as well as the notion that “individuals can grasp or intuit their own existence and freedoms” (“Existentialism,” 2018). One of the first accepted principles of existentialism, which was originally articulated by John Paul Sartre (1943) in his work Being and Nothingness, is that “existence precedes essence.” (p. 439). When a man grasps his existence and freedoms, and he understands himself as being responsible for his actions, then his “essence is what a man makes of his life through his lived subjective concrete acts” (Mills, 2003, p.1). Seeing people as free to act and responsible for their actions is an acceptance that they can make choices or changes in their lives. This belief that people can explore their actions and choices,
and that changes can be made with positive results in their lives, is the foundation on which the practice of psychoanalysis and therapy is built. Psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler build upon the existentialist assumptions that people can explore, understand, take responsibility for, and potentially change themselves and their lives, at least to some degree. The positive power of an individual who believes they can manifest constructive change within themselves and in their lives was eventually explored by Julian Rotter (1966) and developed into the concept of “internal locus of control” and later by C. R. Snyder as “agency thinking” (Lee & Davis, 2014, p. 481; Snyder, 2002, p. 251). The motivation that comes from a belief in oneself, or agency thinking, is called willpower by Snyder and is one of the key elements he identifies in his *Hope Theory*.

This concept of individual choice was essential to the emergence of psychoanalysis. Freud’s work, for example, “could be said to be an existential treatise on the scope, breadth, and limits to human freedom” (Mills, 2003, p. 5). Sartre and Freud held significantly different opinions on the limits of human freedom. Freud (1915/1957), in his work *The Unconscious*, suggested that human beings are heavily influenced by instincts, memories, and processes of which a person is not aware. Sartre (1943), on the other hand, flatly rejected the concept of the unconscious as a form of self-deception, or in his words “bad faith,” because he saw it as a form of biological determinism that undermines human freedom (p. 53). Even though Sartre and Freud disagreed on the limits of human freedom, there is an inherent assumption in psychotherapy and existentialism that a person can become aware of their behaviour, know themselves better, and because of this, they can “become more free through knowledge” (Mills, 2003, p. 11). Becoming “more free” is understood as having greater choice or control over one’s own life. Carl Jung (1968) echoed his contemporaries Freud and Sartre when describing his own “psychological rule
[which] says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate” (p. 71). Put another way, when a person lacks understanding of themselves and their behaviour, or if they are unconscious of their agency, it undermines their freedom, and their life seems fatalistic or deterministic. The eventual study of hopelessness by Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978) suggest there is a correlation between depression and when someone feels like they have very little control, or are helpless over their life.

No other contemporary of Sartre, Freud and Jung articulate the interactions between the unconscious, beliefs, goals, personal agency, and mental health more clearly than Alfred Adler. Adler (1956/1964), developed what is called Individual Psychology and with it a nuanced approach to an individual’s agency with his concept of ‘style of life.’ Adler (1932/1980; 1925/1968, 1956/1964) believed the root of all mental health problems are a lack of Gemeinschaftsgefühl, or social interest, and the remedy is to increase a person’s social interest. He also postulates that how a person approaches life or attributes meaning to past experiences, is “self-determined by the meaning we give to our experiences” (Adler, 1932/1980, p. 14).

Trippany-Simmons, Buckley, Meany-Walen, and Rush-Wilson (2014) paraphrase Adler’s (1956/1964) concepts as follows:

Starting in early childhood, people develop beliefs about themselves, others and the world based on early perceptions of their experiences in their environment. These beliefs help them understand, predict and control life. This is, in essence, their truth. That which is created based on these beliefs and the feelings and behaviors that result from them culminate into the individual’s style of life. (p. 114).

Adler’s theory recognizes that a person may be unconscious, or unaware, of their style of life and the resulting levels social interest but as they explore their beliefs about themselves, others and
the world, there is opportunity to recognize their level of social interest, challenge those beliefs and make changes to their style of life.

A person’s level of social interest and their style of life are developed in early childhood as a response to the degree in which they feel insecure or inferior (Adler, 1956/1964, p. 116). These feelings of inferiority are not considered by Adler (1956/1964) to be abnormal but are a recognition of one’s imperfection (p. 117). These feelings result in a person’s motivation to strive towards a subjectively perceived “ideal perfection” or superiority (Adler, 1956/1964, p. 117). For Adler (1925/1968), a person’s style of life is based upon a belief in a “fiction of a goal of superiority so ridiculous from the view-point of reality, it has become the principal conditioning factor of our life as hitherto known” (p.8). In fact, Adler (1925/1968) considered it a psychological law that “we cannot think, feel, will or act without a perception of some goal” (p. 3). Clarifying what he means by the fictional goal of superiority Adler writes the following:

“[T]hroughout the whole period of development, the child possesses a feeling of inferiority in its relations with both parents and the world at large. Because of the immaturity of his organs, his uncertainty and lack of independence, because of his need for dependence upon stronger natures and his frequent painful feeling of subordination to others, a sensation of inadequacy develops that betrays itself through life. This feeling of inferiority is the cause of his continual restlessness as a child, his craving for action, his playing of roles, the pitting of his strength against that of others, his anticipatory pictures of the future and his physical as well as mental preparations. The whole potential educability of the child depends upon this feeling of insufficiency. In this way, the future becomes transformed into the land that will bring him compensations… Thus, the child arrives at the positing of a goal, an imagined goal of superiority, whereby his poverty is transformed into wealth, his subordination into
domination, his suffering into happiness and pleasure, his ignorance into omniscience and his incapacity into artistic creation. (Adler, 1925/1968, p. 13-14)

As someone strives for superiority, they begin to develop what has been named fictional finalism, which is sometimes referred to as an imaginary aim or fictional goal (Trippany-Simmons et al., 2014, p. 115). This fictional finalism “influences an individual’s behaviour and is a manifestation of their beliefs about ‘how the world should be’ (Adler, 1925/1968)” (Trippany-Simmons et al., 2014, p. 115). Adler’s Individual Psychology supports the idea of personal freedom discussed by previous existentialists because it describes behaviour patterns, or style of life, arises from underlying beliefs. By providing someone with the opportunity to recognize that their underlying beliefs and assumptions may result in maladapted goals and styles of life, they can begin to unpack, challenge, and possibly change how they choose to give meaning to their experiences. Adler’s work provides a psychological framework around the importance and function of goal setting within peoples’ lives, which will be the foundation upon which Snyder (1994) builds his Hope Theory.

The beliefs that a person holds about themselves, others and the world become the psychological lens in which they view and approach life. What a person believes about an event is considered more important than the actual events (Adler, 1932/1980; Trippany-Simmons et al., 2014, p. 116). If a person’s belief, or fictional goal, is aimed towards the good of society and thus increasing their social interest, then their resulting behaviour will be considered well-adapted (Trippany-Simons et al., 2014, p. 116). However, if their belief results in a focus on self and ultimately contains hidden objectives for not complying with societal norms, which Alder called a private logic, then the resulting behaviour would likely be maladapted (Trippany-Simmons et al., 2014, p. 116). To summarize, Adler recognized that exploring an individual’s
style of life helps people understand their behaviour. Awareness of a person’s underlying fictional goal enables a capacity for agency because it is those “beliefs” that are the root of how we understand, predict and control life. Furthermore, beliefs are not static and can change. In other words, a person has as much freedom as they believe they have and are psychologically healthiest when they utilize their freedom toward the greater social interest.

The existentialist and psychoanalysis of the early twentieth century prepared the intellectual soil for what eventually emerges as Abramson, Metalysky and Alloy’s (1989) Hopelessness Theory of Depression, and C. R. Snyder’s (1994) Hope Theory. One of the clearest connections can be made between Individual Psychology and the more recent theories of Abramson et al. and Snyder are that Adler (1932/1980) was “examining the meaning which individuals give to the world and to themselves, their goals, the direction of their striving and the approaches they make to the problems of life” (p. 48). For Abramson et al. (1989), hopelessness is a subset of helplessness, and they hypothesized that depression exists when a person has an expectation or belief that negative life events will happen because they are “internal, stable and global” (p. 368). Liu et al. (2015) clarify internal, stable, and global, to mean that a person believes that negative life events are their fault (internal), can never change (stable), and will influence all areas of their life (global). Hopelessness Theory developed as a continuation of an earlier theory of depression called Learned Helplessness, where Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978) outlined that there was a link between depression and a person’s belief that they cannot change negative life circumstances. Abramson et al. (1989) recognized that feeling helpless about negative life circumstances does not necessitate feeling hopelessness and depression, but instead, hopelessness and depression arise when a person believes negative life circumstances are their fault, cannot change, and will affect much of their life. This assessment
of hopelessness and depression fits with Adler’s (1932/1980) concept that the meaning a person attributes to life circumstances will impact their well-being because hopelessness is associated with believing, or perceiving, that negative life circumstances are their fault, inevitable, and there is nothing they can do to change the circumstances.

The older philosophers Descartes (1649/1985) and Spinoza (1670/1891) appear to have predated both Adler (1932/1980) and Abramson et al. (1989) by many decades in recognizing the connections between belief, hope, anxiety, and depression. However, it is Snyder who explicitly highlights the positive psychological value of Adler’s psychological law that a person “cannot think, feel, will, or act without the perception of a goal” (Adler, as cited in Snyder, 1994, p. 4). Snyder, Rand and Sigmon (2018) classify Hope Theory as a member of the Positive Psychology family (p. 257). Positive Psychology emerged as a strengths-focused approach to psychology rather than a primary focus on a “disease model of human nature” and from the belief that both strengths and weaknesses can be studied scientifically. (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 4; Snyder et al., 2018, p. 263). Instead, Positive Psychology is based on the belief that “character strengths are the bedrock of the human condition and that strength-congruent activity represents an important route to the psychological good life” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 4).

Hope Theory fits into Positive Psychology as it outlines a research framework in which the positive characteristic of hope can be studied.

So far, this literature review has unpacked the defining characteristics of hope as portrayed through Greek myths, Christian authors, existential philosophers, psychologists and psychoanalysts. The underlying theme that has arisen through time is that hope is a person’s belief that they have a measure of control in their own lives. Snyder et al. (2018) describe this accepted view as “the perception that one’s goals can be attained” (p. 257). What eventually
emerged to become *Hope Theory* was that the process of goal attainment “involved two components of goal-directed thought—pathways and agency… [or] simply put, hopeful thought reflects the belief that one can find pathways to desired goals and become motivated to use those pathways” (p. 257). Another way Snyder (1994) defines hope is “the sum of the mental willpower and waypower that you have for your goals” (p. 5). For Snyder et al. (2018), hope is not an emotion in and of itself, but instead, positive emotions emerge from perceptions of successful goal pursuit, whereas negative emotions arise from unsuccessful goal pursuits (p. 258). This foundational proposition in *Hope Theory* can be summarized as “goal-pursuit cognitions cause emotions” (Snyder, 2018, p. 258). *Hope Theory* presumes that hope is learned in early life through the child’s social interaction with parents, peers, and close adults and that there is a correlation between high-hope individuals and interest in social connection with others (Snyder, 2018, p. 266). If hope can be learned during childhood through social interactions, then it would seem to reason positive social interactions may provide one avenue for low-hope individuals to learn to set goals and develop both pathway and agency thinking.

When contrasting *Hope Theory* with *Hopelessness Theory*, it is valuable to recognize that they are two separate but correlated concepts, and that hope can help mitigate the impact of hopelessness (Huen, Ip, Ho & Yip, 2015). *Hopelessness Theory* presents hopelessness as a person’s anticipation of negative life experiences that are their fault, unchangeable and will affect their life and future. Marchetti, Alloy, & Koster (2019) effectively summarizes the literature on hopelessness into its three components: “i) lack of positive expectations about the future (Abramson et al., 1989; A. T. Beck, Weissman, Lester & Trexler, 1974; MacLeod, Rose & Williams, 1993); ii) blocked goal-directed processing (A. T. Beck et al., 1974; Melges & Bowlby, 1969), and iii) helplessness (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; A. T. Beck et al.,
Snyder et al. (2018) suggest that when a person perceives a lack of progress toward their important goals, it causes a negative response to their well-being. However, Snyder (1994) also suggests that instead of focusing on what a person cannot do, he postulates that a person’s goals, pathways and agency are the areas that can be targeted and potentially strengthened to improve their well-being.

**Hope and Well-being**

This literature review has thus far been primarily focused on the philosophical and psychological foundations and frameworks of hope and *Hope Theory*. However, it is also constructive to give some space to the current literature that investigates how *Hope Theory* has been correlated with improved well-being and reducing the impact of stressors that influence well-being. There has been a growing body of research done on the mediating and moderating effect hope has on marginalized people such as members of the LGBTQ+ community, racialized individuals, and the literature also explores its effect on individuals who have experienced trauma from bullying, discrimination, and intimate-partner violence. The literature even includes the impact of social media and climate change as significant stressors. Social and existential threats, marginalization, discrimination, racism, bullying, violence, and trauma, are considerable stressors that can negatively affect a person’s well-being and are considered risk factors for anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. What is notable about the research conducted on the efficacy of *Hope Theory* is the common theme that hope acts as the mediating and moderating factor that reduces the impact of stressors as such on well-being. The following is a non-exhaustive sampling of the recent research regarding *Hope Theory* and the types of stressors that are identified in the research as influencing well-being and which are mediated and moderated by a person’s level of hope.
Many stressors can negatively impact well-being. Some are external stressors, such as the global existential threat of climate change, or the more individual threats of bullying or abuse. Some are internal stressors, such as feeling lonely or unhappy. Some are a combination of external and internal, such as the worry of being accepted or discriminated against that may be experienced by a member of the LGBTQ+ community as they come out to their family or friends. The literature on Hope Theory explores these topics and the relationship that hope plays in moderating and mediating well-being for many different stressors. For example, Sari, Aydin, Şahin and Oktan (2019) explore the correlation of hope and the likelihood of being negatively impacted by social media. Next, Chang et al. (2019) and Khahra et al. (2019) discuss hope as an important factor for positive psychological adjustment in mitigating the negative impacts of ethno-racial discrimination. Hollingsworth, Wingate, Tucker, O’Keef and Cole (2014) explore the moderating influence of hope in suicide and suicidal thinking among African Americans. Grey, Schrader, Isaacs, Smith and Bender (2019) and Shadlow, Boles, Roberts and Winston (2015) similarly explore the correlation between suicidal ideation and low-hope among American Indigenous youth. Numerous studies explore the protective role that hope plays for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals (Hirsch, Cohn, Rowe and Rimmer, 2017; Griffiths, 2014; Riley & McLaren, 2019). Geiger et al. (2019) and Li and Monroe (2017) even outline how fostering hope can help address the existential concerns that are arising due to climate change. Bryce, Alexander, Fraser and Fables (2019) outline the relationship between hope and academic functioning, indicating that higher hope is correlated with better academic performance. Carney, Kim, Duquette, Guo, and Hazler (2019) investigate how hope mediates levels of emotional difficulties in children who are involved in bullying. Muyan and Chang (2019) explore how hope can mediate well-being for women who have experienced
intimate partner violence, and Chang et al. (2019) describe the positive role of hope on loneliness and unhappy conditions. Finally, there is literature that unpacks the relationship between hope and well-being in connection with body image, health outcomes, end-of-life care and bereavement (Todorov, Sherman & Kilby, 2019; Zarzycka, Śliwak, Krok & Ciszek, 2019; Yucens et al., 2019; Michael & Snyder 2005; Michael, 2002; Lee, Ryu & Choi, 2019). The fact that a single variable, hope, is correlated with mitigating the negative influence of all these stressors, is astonishing. Each of these studies recognizes the power that hope has on maintaining well-being. However, few discuss how hope itself can be improved or weakened. Many of these above studies describe the connection between stressors on levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation, and describe findings that indicate higher-hope individuals are less likely to experience the negative impact of any stressor (Ong, Standiford & Deshpande, 2018; Gallagher et al., 2019; Yucens et al., 2019; Arnaud, Rosen, Finch, Rhudy & Fortunato, 2007; Snyder et al. 1991). Although many of these studies suggest potential ways to improve hopefulness based on Hope Theory, few provide concrete examples on how to improve or reduce levels of hope.

As it is with researching any statistical correlations, it is important to recognize that correlation does not prove causation. This principle holds true when exploring the relationships between hope, well-being and life stressors that increase the risk of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. This difficulty is likely the reason why many of the studies previously cited describe correlations between high-hope individuals and the reduced impact of life stressors on well-being but have stopped shy of hypothesizing how hope and well-being are connected. The limitations between correlation and causation also apply to the links between anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, as it is routinely described that there are many correlations between them, but there is difficulty in connecting linking underlying causes (Wilson & Deane, 2010; Thomson,
Mazza, Herting, Randell & Eggert, 2005; Siddaway, Taylor & Wood, 2018). This may be why the research is full of examples of hope levels being examined in connection with specific stressors, such as racism, bullying, climate change, social media, or any of the numerous negative life experiences addressed in the literature noted above. Even though the literature describes that hopefulness appears to correlate to higher reported levels of well-being and low-hope is correlated to reduced well-being, there is only an emerging understanding of the psychological mechanisms that are influenced by hope. When the broad body of literature is examined, a picture emerges of a wide range of stressors that can have a negative influence on well-being. However, only a few of these studies on hope attempt to hypothesize how these stressors negatively influence well-being, how high-hope nurtures well-being, or how to increase hope in low-hope individuals. Although current research has yet to uncover exactly how hope relates to well-being, it does recognize a strong correlation between them (Ong, Standiford & Deshpande, 2018). However, the question ahead is how hope can be nurtured and is it possible to generalize factors that may be affecting levels of hope? To answer this question, there are a few notable studies that have explored examples of increased and decreased levels of hope. One article by Sahranç, Çelik, and Turan (2018) describes how increased social support correlates to lower levels of anxiety and improved hope levels in children. Another important connection was made by Muñoz and Hanks (2019), who discuss the impact of adverse childhood experiences as predictors of increased rumination and lower hope. Rumination is identified as one of the primary commonalities between stressors, low-hope, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, and it may be valuable to explore the role of hope for reducing rumination.

As discussed in the above section, there are a multitude of stressors that can impact an individual’s well-being; however, research has been attempting to understand the psychological
mechanisms that predict how stressors lead to reduced well-being. There is a growing body of literature which identifies intrusive, repetitive negative thoughts, specifically described as worry and rumination, as a commonality between depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Muñoz & Hanks, 2019; Hughes & Cogswell, 2008; Merino, Senra & Ferreiro, 2016; Muris, Roelofs, Rassin, Franken & Mayer, 2005; Tucker et al., 2013). Merino et al. (2016) identify that “repetitive negative thoughts increase the vulnerability to suffering emotional disorders” (p. 2). Worry is defined as “repetitive and uncontrollable thoughts aimed at preparing for and preventing possible future threats,” and rumination as “a passive repetitive response to a depressive or dysphoric state related to past failures or errors” (Merino, Senra & Ferreiro, 2016, p. 2). Tucker et al. (2013) further clarifies rumination as “repetitive thought regarding one’s current distress, including the reasons for and the consequences of this distress” and identifies specifically “repetitively dwelling on negative consequences of distress,” or “brooding,” as correlated to an increase of depressive symptoms (p. 1). A study on anxiety and depression in adolescents conducted by Moriarty et al. (2018) identified rumination as the potential causal link between anxiety and depression. The study described that as rumination increased, it predicted an increased immune system response of inflammation and increased depressive symptoms (Moriarty et al., 2018, p. 2625). Grierson, Hickie, Naismith and Scott (2016) specifically identify rumination, or “toxic brooding” as potentially the trans-diagnostic process that links anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, while also recognizing its wider implications in alcohol and substance misuse, mental disorders and physical illness. Grierson et al. (2016) see the identification of rumination as a good candidate for intervention as it is both detectable and modifiable and thus potentially useful for helping improve well-being. Pössel and Pittard (2019) recently suggested the potential of combining the concept of rumination with Hopelessness
Theory as the substance of the repetitive negative thoughts are associated with an individual’s assumptions on the internal, stable and global causes of negative life events. This connection between hopelessness and rumination may need further study, but it does open the possibility that hope, specifically the belief that a person can influence their life towards a positive goal, may help manage and reduce intrusive, repetitive negative thoughts. C. R. Snyder (2002) suggests that higher-hope individuals “concentrate on the situation at hand to see what needs to be done” rather than “beginning to worry and ruminate about themselves” (p. 58). Although this is an area that needs more exploration and research, there appears to be a link between hope and well-being through hope’s reduction of the strength of negative stressors. Rumination, whether it is on global climate change, instances of discrimination due to race, gender or sexual orientation, or other traumatic life events, may be the mechanism that leads to feelings of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Hope may be the effective antidote to these repetitive negative thoughts, and with Hope Theory’s focus on and pursuit of goals, it takes hope out of the mystical and philosophical understanding of hope and establishes hope as a measurable, testable, and usable tool to improve well-being.

Hope Theory outlines a cognitive process and framework in which hopefulness emerges from an individual through goal setting (Snyder, 2002). Specifically, Hope Theory defines hope as arising from setting specific goals, and the willpower and waypower that a person has to reach those goals (Snyder, 2002). Ong, Standiford and Deshpande (2018) recognize that Hope Theory fits within many of the other Positive Psychology constructs such as Optimism and Self-Efficacy but shows its own unique variance in the prediction of well-being. Snyder et al. (2018) identify Optimism, Self-Efficacy as well as Self-Esteem and Problem-Solving Theory as Positive Psychology constructs that are similar to Hope Theory. The difference is that Hope Theory is
more explicit about, and puts greater emphasis on, goal-related thinking, perceived capacities for agency-related thinking, and perceived capacities for pathways-related thinking (Snyder et al., 2018). In many cases, the research suggests that a focus on improving agency-related thinking has a higher correlation on improving well-being (Arnau et al., 2007). Other researchers instead suggest that pathway-related thinking is a better target for improving hope and well-being (Geiger, Gasper, Swim & Fraser, 2019). Snyder (2002) himself emphasized the motivating nature of setting specific goals because “once people clarify their goals, they often are filled with active and empowering thoughts” and their willpower, or agency thinking, is “ignited more easily” (p. 7). Furthermore, he describes that goal-setting also sets the stage for pathway-thinking, or waypower, as a cognitive map begins to form by engaging in planful thoughts on finding “one or more effective ways to reach our goals” (Snyder, 2002, p. 8). For Snyder (2002), both pathway-thinking and agency-thinking for goals are important as individuals who have one, but not the other, would not be considered as having high-hope. Different stressors or life circumstances can influence the development of pathway-thinking and agency-thinking, as Snyder (2002) notes that both agency-thinking and pathway-thinking are developed or hindered through life experiences. In practical terms, Snyder (2002) describes the importance of providing opportunities for low-hope individuals to set goals and supporting them while they find ways to achieve their goals. Be it with children, or adults, Snyder (2002) believes that it is important to worry less about “present counterproductive thoughts,” but instead “focus on fostering hopeful thinking” (p. 211). It appears that fostering hopeful thinking in a low-hope individual arises from their awareness of setting specific and manageable goals, receiving support for blockages in agency or pathway-thinking, and cultivating agency through experiences of success.
Beyond goal-setting, pathways and personal agency is the role that supportive and caring people play in helping foster hopefulness. It is recognized that negative experiences in early childhood and insecure attachments are correlated with lower levels of hope and increased levels of psychological distress (Snyder, 2002; Demirtaş, 2019; Stanley & Hellman, 2019). However, as was suggested earlier by Muñoz and Hanks (2019), there is a correlation between receiving social support and improved levels of hope. This correlation was clearly exampled in Stanley and Hellman’s (2019) exploration on how Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) were able to nurture hope in children experiencing abuse and neglect based solely on the positive relationship created. The interpretations of their study were as follows:

- The child’s belief the CASA Volunteer cares about them is associated with higher hope.
- Having a CASA Volunteer the child can talk to is associated with higher hope.
- Believing the CASA Volunteer listens to the child is associated with higher hope.
- Having A CASA Volunteer that understands the child is associated with higher hope.

(Stanley & Hellman, 2019).

These findings suggest that one of the primary ways to help improve someone’s level of hope is through positive relationships. Snyder (2002) describes attachment as a critical force in the development of the hope process, as positive relationships help model goal setting, agency thinking and pathway thinking, and provide support when there is a roadblock due to lack of skill. Hopeful thinking starts through the examples and trust developed through positive relationships at home and is further helped by teachers and coaches (Snyder 2002). What Stanley and Hellman (2019) identify is that even in situations of abusive or neglectful relationships, a positive relationship can foster hope. Their article speaks directly to the importance and power of a caring professional within a school, such as a counsellor, or teacher, to develop a positive
relationship with a student as the first way to improve a student’s level of hope. This positive relationship begins by believing in someone’s ability to set goals and reach those goals. Whether it is a parent-child, student-teacher, or therapist-client relationship, establishing a positive relationship that models believing in, and having hope for, someone can help support them while they learn to believe in themselves and develop their hope.

A positive relationship can be recognized as a core element for fostering hope; however, this is also true for the therapeutic process. Gallagher et al. (2019) propose that the therapeutic process is an acting out of hope as defined by Hope Theory. The therapeutic relationship is established with the client based on the belief that the therapeutic process works, and that the client is capable of setting and working towards their goals. Furthermore, therapy actively engages in goal setting, pathway strategizing, and the encouragement of agency. Snyder and Taylor (2000) describe hope as common a theme across psychotherapeutic approaches because no matter the approach, there are still goals, pathways and personal agency that are being explored and developed. Recently, Gallagher et al. (2019) examined the idea that hope is a core therapeutic process and concluded that it appears to be a “transdiagnostic mechanism of change in psychotherapy” (p. 2). In Snyder’s (2000) Handbook of Hope, he compiles and coauthors many articles outlining how other therapeutic modalities such as Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SBT), and Feminist Therapy can complement, and be complemented by, the essential tenets of Hope Theory. Going a step further, Lopez, Floyd, Ulven and Snyder (2000) proposed a synthesis of multiple therapies and techniques with Hope Theory, which they called Hope Therapy. Based on Hope Theory, Hope Therapy is “designed to help clients in conceptualizing clearer goals, producing numerous pathways to attainment, summoning the mental energy to maintain the goal pursuit, and reframing insurmountable
obstacles as challenges to be overcome” (Lopez et al., 2000, p. 123) Hope Therapy also recognizes that it is the “hopeful therapeutic relationship [that] facilitates these hope components” (Lopez et al., 2000, p. 123). Hope Therapy is based on the following eight principles:

- Principle 1: Hope therapy is based on the theoretical tenets of Snyder’s conceptualization of hope, including its dispositional, state-like, and situational aspects.

- Principle 2: Hope therapy is a semi-structured, brief form of therapy in which the focus is on present goal clarifications and attainments. The therapist attends to historical patterns of hopeful thought and desired cognitive, behavioural, and emotional changes.

- Principle 3: Clients’ self-referential beliefs are enhanced by focusing on goals, possibilities, and past successes rather than problems or failures.

- Principle 4: A sound, trusting, and positive therapeutic alliance is formed so as to facilitate the client’s active participation.

- Principle 5: The hope therapist is active and directive in helping the client to develop a new framework for change while respecting that the client is the expert on his or her situation.

- Principle 6: Hope therapy is an educative process in which the aim is to teach the clients to handle the difficulties of goal pursuits on their own.

- Principle 7: Hope therapy mirrors the hope development process. The therapist and client clearly conceptualize feasible client goals, as well as how to help the client to summon the mental energy necessary for initiating and maintaining the pursuit of
therapy goals. In addition, the client is aided in developing multiple pathways to positive and desired therapy goals and in eliminating any barriers that may emerge.

- Principle 8: In hope therapy, change is initiated at the cognitive level, with a focus on enhancing clients’ self—referential agentic and pathway goal-directed thinking.
- Principle 9: By incorporating common therapeutic factors and narrative, solution-focused, and cognitive-behavioural techniques, hope therapy has evolved into a new therapeutic system in its own right.

(Lopez et al. 2000, p.126)

It is clearly outlined in these principles that fostering hope can be approached using multiple techniques and therapeutic models. This approach is made by setting goals and strengthening agency and pathway thinking through a positive therapeutic relationship. These principles of Hope Therapy will provide a valuable framework to approach the goal of the rest of this paper. Specifically, how can Hope Theory be utilized by caring professionals in a school with students to increase well-being and, in turn, be a protective factor against anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation?

**Summary**

Hope has been experienced and explored as a part of the human condition for many millennia. From early myths and religion to philosophy and psychology, human beings have been wrestling with the concept of hope for centuries as we try to understand how much influence we have in creating a positive future for ourselves. It appears that hope is rooted in our beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world. This belief is developed through our experiences, whether they are positive or negative, and are combined with our personality, which helps create our perceived expectations of the future. Low-hope individuals appear to be less resilient to
stresses and the accompanying persistent intrusive negative thoughts associated with anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. High-hope individuals appear able to better manage their reaction to stressors and their ruminations by setting their sight on the positive potentials they can set for their life. C. R. Snyder’s *Hope Theory* provides a framework for understanding the key components of hope by identifying the basic components of hopeful thinking. These basic parts of goals, pathways, and agency can then be explored and supported to help improve a person’s sense of hope.

According to *Hope Theory*, the feeling of hope arises from learning to set goals that we envision ourselves to be able to achieve. When we have a goal and can see the steps available to move towards that goal, then our motivation, or agency, can rise to match it. There are many stressors that we can experience in our life that can disrupt our belief that we can reach the goals we set for ourselves. Repeated experiences of insurmountable obstacles, failures, or even bad luck can push us to conclude that we do not have what it takes to accomplish our goals. Experiences of neglect, trauma, or abuse can lead to a belief that others think that we cannot reach our goals. Similarly, global stressors such as systemic injustices towards marginalized groups or the existential crisis of climate change can foster feelings of hopelessness as we feel that there is little to nothing that we can do about these massive challenges. When we ruminate on these types of stressors, or that we are a failure, or that we do not have others around to support us, or the world is both against working us and is unfixable, then what results is what is at the heart of hopelessness, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. *Hope Theory* stands as a model to approach these negative beliefs as it outlines the essential pattern of hope and the means to pinpoint how to develop hopefulness. It acknowledges that hope comes from the experience of setting goals and feeling a sense that the goals we have are something worth doing
and within our reach. It comes from formulating pathways to get there both on our own or by seeking support from others. It comes from the belief that “I can do it,” and the agency that arises when this belief exists. This motivation is fed by observing that progress towards a goal is being made. Each of these areas of hope, specifically goal setting, pathway thinking, and agency thinking, can be fostered through education, encouragement, and experience. In the next chapter, I will outline how educators and caring school professionals might utilize the framework of *Hope Theory* and *Hope Therapy* to educate, encourage, and craft experiences for students that can help foster hope.
Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

Summary

As I journeyed through the literature, what emerged throughout were some central and salient themes. The first central theme was how hope connects to our beliefs. Hope is tied to our belief that we have a measure of control over creating positive outcomes in our lives. Throughout the ancient literature, there was a recognition that hopefulness can reduce burdens, increase strength in overcoming adversity, and was a source of confidence and courage. For later theologians, modernists, and existential thinkers hope emerged as a belief that human beings can achieve or obtain good things. The psychoanalysis Alfred Adler identified a person’s beliefs about themselves, the others and the world, as foundational to how they perceive their experiences. He also identified the importance goal-setting plays in the human experience. From these two ideas, belief and goal-setting emerged Hopelessness Theory and Hope Theory. Hopelessness Theory identified that believing that negative life events are one’s fault, cannot change, and will negatively impact one’s whole life was associated with reduced feelings of well-being and a higher risk of depression. Hope Theory, on the other hand, described hope as the positive feelings that emerge from setting goals, finding pathways to achieve those goals, and having the agency to make them happen. Hope Theory gave researchers the ability to measure hope and much of the research that was surveyed for this paper correlated high levels of hope with high levels of well-being. Notable in the research was that regardless of the source of stress, negative life experiences such as systemic discrimination, violence, climate change, or loneliness, high hope was correlated with higher reported well-being despite the existence of stressors. What was also persistent in the literature was a lack of explanation as to why. However, because this relationship between hope and well-being is so strong, it begs the
question, how might a person’s hope be increased for them to benefit from its protective influence?

Many of the suggestions on how to improve hope came from C. R. Snyder, the author of *Hope Theory*, himself, but there has been recent research conducted that corroborated his recommendations. From this research, three key ideas emerged on how to foster hope, which was education, encouragement, and experience. Education means learning how to set a clear goal; more specifically, setting one that is meaningful, is one of the primary elements of developing hope. Furthermore, learning how to plan possible pathways to reach the goal is essential for someone to be able to recognize that they can do it, and it is within their reach. Learning to set meaningful goals, and divine pathways to those goals can encourage the agency they need to pursue their goals and amplifies their positive feelings of hopefulness. Encouragement means having supportive people in your life who believe in you and have hope for you. It is through positive relationships that hope is modelled, supported and encouraged. Finally, experiences of successfully achieving goals are essential to developing a sense of hope. Gallagher et al. (2019) recognized how the therapeutic process performs all three of these functions. The therapist works with the client to educate them on how to set meaningful goals, support them to develop pathways and encourages agency. The therapist does this through an encouraging and supportive relationship believing that the client can achieve their goals. Throughout their sessions, the client has opportunities to engage in successful goal setting experiences. It was with these three ideas in mind that I began to wonder how to bring *Hope Theory* into the classroom. The foundation on which I built my recommendations for a classroom-based practice built on the ideas of *Hope Theory* emerged from the recognition that therapists and educators provide similar support to students as therapists do with clients. After reading through the nine principles of *Hope Theory*
by Lopez et al. (2000), I recognized a connection between the three main ideas of education, encouragement, and experience imbedded in these principles. With this as a foundation, I decided to synthesize the nine principles into three reflective questions that I believe educators can use to guide them in their educational practice. This *Hope-Informed Educational Practice* and the reflective questions that make it up are described in the below recommendations.

**Recommendations**

After spending time to review the history, philosophy, and psychology of hope I have come to agree with Gallagher et al. (2019) that hope is a core therapeutic process and a “transdiagnostic mechanism of change in psychotherapy” (p. 2). With this assumption, I began to wonder how hope, as a “core process” and “mechanism for change,” can operate outside of the therapeutic space and in the school setting. It is easy to recognize how hope operates in the therapeutic process between therapist and client as the goal setting, willpower (agency thinking) and waypower (pathway thinking) are explicitly explored and practiced in therapy. In the school setting, many learning opportunities tacitly reflect the process of hope, as described by *Hope Theory*, such as classroom assignments are opportunities for students to set goals and find the ways and will to achieve them. Sometimes goal setting is even taught explicitly in career education where students are instructed on how to create specific and attainable goals. However, these goal-setting lessons are usually ancillary to lessons on mathematics or literacy and are treated as less important. Teaching students how to set goals is further complicated when we recognize that we, as educators and caring professionals in a school, are often the ones setting the educational and behavioural goals for the students because we presume our goals to be the most important. This type of imposed goal setting is problematic, as Snyder (1994) points out because the goal-setting that is associated with hopefulness is dependent on the goals being recognized as
important by the individual pursuing the goal. If the student does not find the goals set by educators as valuable, important, or meaningful, then fostering a sense of hope will be nearly impossible. Referencing a growing body of evidence, Snyder (1994) points out that “successful pursuit of important and meaningful goals plays a critical role in the development and maintenance of well-being” and that “perceived progress towards one’s important goals is the cause of well-being rather than vice-versa” (p. 325). To put it simply, students must see themselves in the driver seat of crafting and pursuing meaningful goals to develop and practice agency and pathway thinking. With this in mind, I recognized that my research into the history, philosophy, and psychology of hope, as well as my examination of Hope Theory, and Hope Therapy could be crafted into a new lens to look at teaching practice, curriculum development, and the relationship between educators and students. What emerged is described below.

My new framework emerged from a recognition that C. R. Snyder’s (1994) Hope Theory and the nine principles outlined by Lopez, Floyd, Ulven and Snyder’s (2000) Hope Therapy could be adapted into a purposeful educational practice. I realized that I could synthesize my research on hope, Hope Theory, and the nine principles of Hope Therapy into three reflective questions, which I describe in detail presently. These questions mirror the key themes of education, encouragement, and experience discussed above. I believe that this new framework, which I have named Hope-Informed Educational Practice (HIEP), can be used by teachers, school staff, and students to help them recognize hope as a core component of education. I believe that HIEP can be a lens through which educators can analyze, reflect upon, and adjust their educational practice. Furthermore, I have based the HIEP framework on the extensive research I have done on hope and Hope Theory, which recognizes the importance of goal setting on hopefulness and well-being. I have designed HIEP to encourage educators to reconsider their
educational practice as specifically connected to fostering hope by supporting student
development of goal-setting strategies, pathway thinking, and agency. I anticipate that educators
who choose to incorporate HIEP into their teaching practice will find improvement in student
well-being by the nurturing of hope and thereby potentially reduce levels of anxiety, depression,
and suicide ideation in vulnerable students. Finally, I hope that my HIEP framework can be
utilized for future research into *Hope Theory* based practices in education.

I built the framework for HIEP by consolidating and synthesizing the nine principles of
*Hope Therapy* described by Lopez et al. (2000) into three reflective questions, which I believe
can help educators consider how they foster hope among their students. These three hope-
informed educational questions are *How Do You Set Goals?*, *Who Believes in You?* and *What
Can You Do?* Appendix A charts the relationship between these three questions from HIEP and
the nine principles of *Hope Therapy*. These questions are intended to provoke reflective practice
both for the educator as well as the students, and it is my recommendation that educators explore
their educational practice through the HIEP lens. Each question will be unpacked and used to
explore strategies to incorporate HIEP into the classroom learning environment.

**Question 1: How Do You Set Goals?**

I designed the first question to help educators and students to focus on learning how to
develop their goal-setting patterns. If hopefulness arises from a person’s belief that they can set
and achieve meaningful goals, then exploring the student’s current beliefs about their ability to
set goals and explore the strategies they use is the foundation on which to support students' hope
development. Getting this information can take many forms depending on the age of the
students; however, I believe it is essential to do so explicitly with children at any age and with
their informed consent. For younger students, this may include asking students to show how they
can accomplish a task, or what their first steps of a task might be. It may also be explored by asking younger students to think about things they have done successfully and reflecting upon experiences of when they found something difficult but now find to be easier. Helping students of any age to develop personal narratives about their successes as well as recognizing what steps they took to achieve their successes provides them with personal evidence for hope. Personal narratives about their successes also reveal the goal-setting patterns that have already been established. High-hope individuals will likely have a personal narrative about specific goals they set, and how they achieved them, while lower-hope individuals may have more difficulty identifying past successes, and likely have fewer specific goals. This process of recognizing past accomplishments can take many forms depending on the age of the student, and it is up to the educator to see this as an opportunity to use HIEP to develop meaningful and reflective learning opportunities that are developmentally appropriate for the students to help educate them in how to set goals.

Snyder (1994) recognizes that we start developing rudimentary goals in infancy and that these goal-related patterns are nurtured as children become more specific with their goals. Being able to be specific in what they want brings vague desires into focus and gives children the ability to define clearer steps towards their goal. Bringing clarity to goals applies to older students as well. Many intermediate or high-school students can name future goals such as “do well in school” or “graduate,” but without specificity, there is little hope derived from these goals. Spending time with students to teach them how to clarify what they want is important for teaching goal-setting skills. Many lessons in school focus on what the teacher wants the students to accomplish during the day rather than fostering the specific goals of the student. It is obvious that an educator's goals are constrained by the curriculum, parent expectations, and academic
standards, and these are sometimes in conflict with a student’s own goals. Bridging the gap between student and educator goals becomes an important piece of HIEP as goals must be meaningful and important to the student for them to develop hope.

Children learn to question the purpose of their education quite early. I have observed children in Kindergarten respond to a teacher asking them to finish their work with “why?” and as students get older, they start wondering the purpose of many of the academic goals that have been set for them. Many are unsatisfied with the answer teachers and parents give. “You will need to know this for your future” lacks value and specificity to generate any agency. This challenge is likely the most difficult part of applying HIEP to the school environment as it pushes educators to recognize that our goals, although important, are not helpful if they are not the student’s goals. It requires educators to bridge the gap and explore how to bring student’s goals into the classroom. For this to happen, both the students and the educators must become clear on what the student’s goals are. For some students, getting all their work done so they do not have any homework can be a motivating goal, while other students fulfill the same goal by simply not doing the work now, or later. Both of these students have reached the goal of not doing schoolwork at home. This analogy pushes me to wonder why schoolwork, done or not, is the goal in the first place. It may be the teacher’s goal that work is completed to have proof that the student is learning. The student’s unspoken goal may be that they have things that they would rather do than homework. So, how might an educator use HIEP to bridge the gap? I suggest being transparent with students about the learning goals we have for them and educating them on how to clarify their own goals. Then you can explore their ideas and feelings about their goals and in relation to your goals. Students will develop their own goal setting patterns, but this can be supported by helping them explore the common ground between their goals and the teachers.
An opportunity also arises for students to start exploring how their goals fit into the school’s goals. Finally, giving students a chance to specify their own goals and how they can relate to the teacher’s goals is a practice in goal setting and pathway thinking. Clarifying goals and practicing pathway thinking may look different depending on grade level, but the core idea is to use goal-setting language with students, to give them opportunities to develop their own pathways to learning goals that they recognize as valuable and meaningful to them.

Helping students set specific and meaningful goals is a great step towards developing hopefulness, but HIEP recognizes the importance of understanding a student’s current level of hope. As stated above, lower-hope individuals may find it difficult to identify past goal achievements or minimize the value of those achievements. Lower hope also places them at risk for anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. To quickly assess a child’s level of hope, Snyder (1997) developed his *Children’s Hope Scale* (see Appendix B), which measures both agency and pathway thinking of students. The *Children's Hope Scale* is a quick measure to identify students who may need added support in developing hope. Once identified, intervention strategies can be explored to help foster hope in these lower hope students. Some of these interventions will be discussed in the upcoming sections. Beyond identifying low-hope individuals, the *Children's Hope Scale* is useful to provide all students with a measure of their pathway and agency thinking. This information can help identify strengths and challenges that students have regarding their goal-setting, pathway and agency thinking. As with any area of learning, identifying strengths and challenges can help support a student to develop clearer, more meaningful goals, or practice pathway and agency thinking.

I proposed the first question of HIEP as a guide to help educators recognize the importance of teaching students how to explore hope, and goal-setting, as described by Snyder,
within the school setting. This exploration is done explicitly with the students through the process of reflecting on past successful goals, present levels of hope, and teaching students how to identify and clarify specific and meaningful goals for the future. HIEP pushes educators to recognize that they must bridge the gap between the goals they have for their students and the student’s own goals. This bridging requires a teacher to understand what goals are meaningful to their students, as well as recognize the level of hope the student currently experiences. From there, the teacher can start working to support the student from a place where they are motivated and feel they have agency, rather than a place where they are shut down or feeling hopeless. One example of applying HIEP in the classroom was with a student I will call K. K was an intermediate student who started his year with me by saying that he was terrible at math, has always been terrible at math and will never be able to get better at math. Hopelessness caused considerable frustration for him whenever we tried to work together on math, and he would actively work against anyone who would try to help him. Specifically saying that he cannot understand math because he “is stupid.” This behaviour was a classic example of learned helplessness and hopelessness regarding anything to do with math. The impact hopelessness was having on his well-being went beyond math as he would often get frustrated with himself and retreat from other social activities. After working with this student for a while, we started exploring his past for areas of math that he remembered being successful. He identified that he was “okay at addition and subtraction but did not understand multiplication.” This helped clarify what was limiting his ability to reach the goal of division and to me that my intended goal of teaching the class division was nowhere near the student’s goal, and I realized that I needed to reevaluate my goal for this student. It was with this recognition that I was able to bridge the gap by focusing on the student’s identified strengths, which were addition and subtraction. Together,
we specifically set a goal that he found meaningful, which was that he would focus on improving his addition and subtraction for the next month. After a month of focusing on topics that were not too difficult, the student was feeling much more successful in his current goal, and we began to explore the new goal of using his current skills to start learning multiplication. We worked together to identify that the missing piece for him was understanding that multiplication is repeated addition. He was then able to see his skills of addition as a pathway to reach his new goal of multiplication. With this, he able to specify his goal of learning multiplication as could see it as a meaningful and reachable goal rather than burdensome, unattainable, and a hopeless waste of time. Furthermore, he was no longer calling himself stupid, which increased his well-being and positive self-esteem and even improved his interpersonal relationships with other students. His new goal is now closer to the goal I have set for the class, and I can continue to help him learn to connect his goal of learning multiplication to the greater class goal of learning division. This example highlights how HIEP and specifically the thematic question, How Do You Set Goals? can be integrated into classroom teaching practice.

**Question 2: Who Believes in You?**

Belief emerged early in this paper as an essential component of hope. What a person believes about themselves, others and the world become their ‘style of life’ (Adler, 1956/1964). Adler (1956/1964) describes ‘styles of life’ as beliefs built upon a person’s perceptions of their experiences. Hope reflects these beliefs as it connects us to things that have not happened yet. High-hope individuals appear to believe that they can accomplish their goals, that others in their life believe in them and can help and that their world is a place that they have some measure of control or influence over. Low-hope individuals will likely believe that they are unable to accomplish their goals, that others do not believe in them, or are preventing them from reaching
their goals, and that there is little they can do to make their world a better place. As stated in the
previous chapter, there are many experiences that people endure that can influence their well-
being and levels of hope. My intention with the question *Who Believes in You?* is to
acknowledge the value of believing in yourself, as well as the importance of having someone in
your life that believes in you. This question is meant to help an educator reflect upon their
disposition towards their students and to explore the student’s belief about themselves. Do you
believe that a student can accomplish their goals? What would happen if that student trusted that
you believed in them? What experiences has the student had that may be impacting their belief in
themselves. The question engenders the idea that an encouraging and positive relationship has
the potential to nurture trust and hope. The student-teacher relationship can be a place where
mentorship and apprenticeship in goal setting, believing in oneself, and overcoming obstacles
can be explored, encouraged, and internalized.

Like identifying a student’s level of hope, it is important to uncover whether they believe
in themselves. Belief in oneself appears to be linked to levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy,
optimism, and hope as each of these assume a certain level of agency in the world. How a person
engages with the world will depend on their belief that they can reach their goals and influence
the world. Many stressors in the world can impact how much a person believes in themselves,
and these experiences can become roadblocks for students in setting goals, and developing
pathway thinking and agency. Experiences such as poverty, trauma, systemic discrimination, or
existential crisis can skew a student’s belief in themselves. It is valuable for an educator to be
mindful of a student’s belief in themselves and the potential barriers that exist in their life. This
awareness is an opportunity for an educator to help minimize, as much as possible, these
stressors, and to represent an example of a positive belief in the student.
Working with students can be difficult and sometimes they can be difficult to get along with. There are many days that a teacher, counsellor, or principal ends up dealing with some form of antisocial, antagonistic, aggressive behaviour from students. At times this makes it difficult to see the best in students. The question *Who Believes in You?* is a call for educators to recognize the power that positive relationships have on students. It is through a positive relationship, one that believes in the student’s ability to learn, grow, set goals, and develop to be their best selves can influence the student’s belief in themselves, their style of life and hopefulness. If a student already struggles to believe in themselves and believes that others don’t believe in them, then it is much easier to believe that the world is a pretty hopeless place.

However, a caring teacher, coach, counsellor or principal at a school can challenge a student’s negative personal narrative by actively believing in them. At times this may be more difficult than it sounds, especially if a student is looking to challenge and test your belief in them. For some low-hope students, the simple act of stating “I believe in you” and “you can do it, don’t give up” and “I’m here to help” can weaken their hopeless narrative. I observed this during my experience with the previously mentioned student K as he struggled to do his math. At every turn, he was fighting to give up by putting his head on his desk or scratching out the work on his paper and stating, “I just can’t learn this math” and “I’m stupid.” Instead of focusing on his behaviour, I began to repeat to him while we worked together, “I believe you can do it” and “I’m here to help” and “I don’t believe that you are stupid.” This external affirmation took many days and a great deal of energy, but because I believed in him, even though he struggled to believe in himself, I started looking for and pointing out exceptions to his narrative that he is “just not good at math.” This belief in him led me to what I described earlier in this chapter, his recognition that he is not bad at addition and subtraction, and that we could work together towards a new more
meaningful specific goal. A teacher’s belief in a student can inspire a student’s belief in themselves and is a way to lead by example.

Believing in a student does not mean that you assume that a student can handle every challenge without support. It acknowledges that a student has the capacity to utilize their resources and supports to pursue their goals. An educator should recognize their role in helping students not only develop specific and meaningful goals but also as a resource to help students practice planning pathways, exploring different ways to overcome roadblocks and be a source of encouragement as students develop their agency. There are explicit educational opportunities that can arise from strategizing how to achieve goals and solving problems. When integrating a HIEP, all educational opportunities become chances to practice goal development and finding ways to overcome obstacles. Even when students consider their mistakes or failures, a HIEP lens recognizes these as only roadblocks that are new opportunities to practice finding ways around.

This question *Who Believes in You?* is a recognition that all people are more capable when they can rely on their support system, and that we are better when we work together. This means the final answer to the question *Who Believes in You?* is that it is better when we believe in and rely on each other.

**Question 3: What Can You Do?**

This final question is a call to reflect upon how educators can create experiences that encourage the capacity of people to set goals, plan pathways to those goals, and develop personal agency to reach those goals. This question assumes, as Snyder (1994) does, that by developing goal setting, as well as pathway and agency thinking that hope can be practiced. What this means for educators is that if hope can be practiced, then opportunities can be created to learn hope. There are ways to break down goal-setting, pathway thinking, and agency thinking into teachable
components. The previous HIEP questions have address teaching goal setting and supportive, positive relationships, but the question *What Can You Do?* invites the opportunity for preparation in facing challenges and overcoming obstacles. In other words, a student now has specific and meaningful goals, a belief they can accomplish their goal, and at least one person that believes in them. So now what? Just because the goals are clear does not mean that the pathways are. Without clear and manageable pathways, it is difficult for agency or motivation to arise. Alternately, just because there are clear and manageable pathways does not mean there is an abundance of motivation. Just like goal setting, pathway and agency thinking need practice. This understanding is relevant for any educator who has tried to encourage motivation in a student who is not interested in a specific subject or any student who cannot recognize any potential paths to their goals. These situations create an opportunity for an educator to review the previous HIEP questions for themselves. How do I set goals? Are the goals, or learning experiences, I have set for the students specific, realistic, or meaningful? Am I expecting every student to meet the goal or are there sub-goals that they need to focus on first? Who believes in me? Do I, as an educator, have anyone in my corner that I can rely on for help and support? Are there other teachers, counsellors, coaches, or principals that I can network with to develop my practice? Do I believe in myself and my own goals for the students? HIEP calls teachers to be reflective of their own goals, pathways and agency as well as being specific in developing educational experiences that can help students practice their own. Are the goals I have for myself as a teacher specific and meaningful, and how about the goals I have for the students? If not, then it may be time to reevaluate my own goals.

All educational experiences reflect the hope development process. Throughout any lesson, there is the primary educational goal, there are ways in which to approach the goal, and
there is the necessity to muster agency to accomplish the task. To apply the HIEP process to learning activities would recognize the importance of each of these pieces in the pursuit of the greater educational goals. There should be intentionality in designing lessons with more than one pathway to complete the goal. For example, a math worksheet has limited options on how to complete the learning goal whereas a math project, or problem-solving question, may have a variety of ways to reach the learning goal. Encouraging and explicitly teaching students to try and find multiple pathways to solve a given problem is a way for an educator to teach the processes behind pathway thinking. Agency thinking, or willpower, might be somewhat more difficult to develop, but a recommendation that can be helpful is to help students develop strategies to break down a given task into manageable pieces. This process actively practices seeing larger goals in their smaller, more manageable pieces. Once a goal is small enough, there is very little to prevent a student from summoning the energy, or agency, to do it. This strategy may be useful for educators to remember as they design educational opportunities for students based on the process of building educational layers, which Bruner (2006) called scaffolding. However, scaffolding in HIEP is purposefully designed with the goals and sub-goals in mind. HIEP calls educators to plan their teaching with the end in mind and for learning opportunities to fit within the bigger picture. Helping students understand the bigger picture also means that educators must work with students to actively break down their learning goals into manageable pieces that promote rather than reduce agency. However, beyond this, educators can utilize a range of psychological and educational strategies to support goal setting, pathway and agency thinking such as Mindfulness practices, teaching SMART Goals, as well as integrating constructivist and behaviourist approaches, developmental models, and even therapeutic theories into lessons and teaching practices.
By asking the students, *What Can You Do?* it encourages them to begin engaging in the active process of pathway and agency thinking. Lessons can be designed by educators to promote these cognitive structures, but it is the experience of successfully using their agency, exploring pathways and accomplishing goals that will help cultivate hope within a student. The question can be both a motivator as well as a personal assessment as to where they are at in their hopefulness journey. Asking *What Can You Do?* pushes a student to consider what pathways are available to them. It also doubles as a challenge to push themselves to try something that may be a stretch for their current ability. An educator can pose this question to the student, in the context of their goals and their belief in themselves, as a means of measuring their current ability to set goals and develop pathways. The information helps inform them as they continue to adjust their goals and explore new potential pathways. If achieving their goal is the end of a journey, the question *What Can You Do?* is the start. It is an honest understanding of where they currently are along their pathway to take informed future steps to reach their goal. The HIEP not only helps educators support students developing their goals, but it also helps them recognize how they will get there. However, to get there, they must know what they are capable of.

**Application of HIEP and Recommendations for Further Research**

In order to implement HIEP, it is recommended that educators, counsellors, and administrators reflect on the three questions, *How Do You Set Goals?, Who Believes in You?,* and *What Can You Do?,* as they examine their current and future practice. The questions explored in this capstone represents the first instance of a formal outline for *Hope-Informed Educational Practice.* I hope to continue to develop and explore HIEP, with its three primary questions, more formally within the school setting. My goal would be to provide professional development workshops for educators and caring school professionals on the HIEP framework and begin to
develop a qualitative action research plan based on the HIEP model. I also hope that other educators and researchers might be interested in the HIEP as a framework for their educational practice and to develop their own research based on it to test for possible correlations between HIEP and improved well-being in students. Most specifically, I see HIEP as potentially benefitting students who are experiencing anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. I see that there is potential for HIEP to be an effective classroom-based intervention or as part of a school-wide intervention for improved well-being. Furthermore, I believe that the current research supports the validity of each question in the HIEP and that future research can be done to study their benefits for improving well-being.

The concept of the *Hope-Informed Educational Practice* model emerged as the culmination of my detailed exploration of the mythological, philosophical, and psychological concepts of hope, C. R. Snyder’s (1994) *Hope Theory*, and *Hope Therapy* delineated by Lopez et al. (2000). I designed the questions of HIEP as a way to utilize the goal-setting nature of hope to improve well-being. I did this by uniting the nine principles of *Hope Therapy*, outline by Lopez et al. (2000), into the three reflective questions: *How Do You Set Goals? Who Believes in You?* and *What Can You Do?* The first question was designed to incorporate Snyder’s *Hope Theory* into an educational model and as a synthesis of the first three principles described by Lopez et al. (2000) in *Hope Therapy*. The first question, *How Do You Set Goals?*, leads both students and educators to learn about and understand hope as goal-setting, pathways and agency, emphasize the importance of setting specific and meaningful goals, and reflect upon past patterns of goal setting, pathway thinking and agency. My second question, *Who Believes in You?*, was based on a combination of the fourth, fifth and sixth principle of *Hope Therapy* as well as research which describes the power that an encouraging relationship can have on developing hopefulness (Lopez
et al., 2000; Snyder, 2002; Demirtaş, 2019; Stanley & Hellman, 2019). The final question I conceived, *What Can You Do?*, is based on the last three principles of *Hope Therapy* (Lopez et al., 2000). It is intended to direct students and educators to recognize the importance educational experiences play in cultivating hope because they provide opportunities to practice goal-setting strategies as well as pathway thinking and agency thinking. Furthermore, it recognizes that hope is a common theme of many educational or therapeutic strategies because educational and therapeutic strategies are designed to help a student explore goals, plan pathways and encourage agency. Lastly, the third question is intended to help provide a means of assessing the current abilities someone has for creating new goals, plan pathways, and to cultivate agency. These three questions form the basis of HIEP and a way for educators to incorporate *Hope Theory* based practice in the classroom. A classroom practice based on *Hope Theory* has the potential to act as a classroom or schoolwide intervention for anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation in students. Beyond a high-quality classroom intervention strategy, HIEP incorporates and acknowledges hope as a core process in students learning while integrating other educational and therapeutic theories and practices. HIEP would benefit from future research to test the veracity of the model.

**Conclusion**

The intended purpose of this paper was to explore the very meaning of hope, how hope is experienced, the defensive nature of hope on well-being, and ways it can be encouraged in people who are experiencing a paucity of hope. This exploration started with the myth of Pandora, then journeyed through the works of Greek philosophers, biblical writers, theologians, modernist and existentialist philosophers, up to the psychoanalysts, positive psychologists and current researchers. There have been many themes that have arisen about hope through this survey of the literature. One theme is hope’s deep connection to what we believe about
ourselves, others and the world. Furthermore, it has also been recognized for its ability to strengthen, encourage, and empower people by utilizing their belief that they have a measure of control in their lives to help them pursue desired outcomes. Psychoanalyst Alfred Adler (1925/1968) identified the power of these beliefs or perceptions, which he called ‘style of life.’ Hopelessness Theory emerged as a recognition that when a person's ‘style of life’ includes the beliefs that negative life circumstances are their fault, unchangeable, and will impact their whole life, then the result is a sense of hopelessness which negatively impacts a person’s well-being.

Most of the current research on hope recognizes the benefits it has on well-being. C. R. Snyder established Hope Theory as an explanation of the underlying thoughts and behaviours that are encapsulated in hope. Snyder identified goal-setting, pathway thinking and agency thinking as these underlying behaviours and thoughts. With these pieces identified, hope could then be measured and tested. This new understanding of hope has led to a wealth of research that has been done on the moderating and mediating effect that hope has on life stressors.

The types of stressors surveyed in this paper include, but are not limited to, the experiences of discrimination felt by LGBTQ+ individuals and racialized people and groups. Other stressors include the experiences of individuals who have been victims of bullying, violence, or trauma. The common theme throughout the research is that hope reduces the negative impact that these experiences have on well-being. However, there were very few examples of how hope is developed within someone who feels very little of it. Much of the prescriptions for how to foster hope come from Snyder himself and warrant further research. However, three key features of hope development have been explored in the above literature. First, is educating someone on how to set goals and plan pathways to reach those goals. Once they begin to set goals and see ways to achieve them, then their agency can be encouraged and
will result in the positive feelings associated with hope. The second is by encouragement through positive relationships. When someone, at any age, recognizes that someone else believes in them, and has hope for them, it can undermine their hopeless beliefs and help them develop hope for themselves. Finally, people learn hope through experience and practice. As they have opportunities to set meaningful goals, plan pathways to their goals, overcome obstacles along the way, and practice agency in times of difficulty, feelings of hope can grow. They will be able to look back at what they have accomplished and become more aware of what they are good at and where they struggle.

Educators and therapists are both in unique positions to support hopeful experiences for their clientele as well as provide the type of positive relationship that encourages hope. I identified this connection as I reviewed the nine principles of Hope Therapy and recognized the same three features of education, encouragement, and experience embedded within them. It was these features that I based my recommendations on and developed my own reflective questions, which form the basis of what I call *Hope-Informed Educational Practice*. The three questions, which are designed for, but not limited to, school-based use are: *How Do You Set Goals?*, *Who Believes in You?* and *What Can You Do?* These three questions ask educators to consider the importance of teaching goal-setting (education), believing in the students (encouragement) and providing opportunities for students to feel successful (experience). Although not directly tested, the principles on which HIEP is based are supported by the current literature. Since hope is observed to moderate and mediate the effects of stress on well-being is correlated with reduced risk for anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, I recommended that HIEP be implemented as a classroom-based intervention strategy. I hope further research can be done on HIEP to explore
its potential effectiveness in improving well-being and reducing the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation in schools.
References


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# Appendix A: HIEP and *Hope Therapy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hope-Informed Educational Practice: Questions and Proposals</th>
<th>Nine Principles of <em>Hope Therapy</em> (Lopez et al., 2000).</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Do You Set Goals?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Principle 1:</strong> Hope therapy is based on the theoretical tenets of Snyder’s conceptualization of hope, including its dispositional, state-like, and situational aspects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- HIEP is based on Snyder’s Hope theory.</td>
<td><strong>Principle 2:</strong> Hope therapy is a semistructured, brief form of therapy in which the focus is on present goal clarifications and attainments. The therapist attends to historical patterns of hopeful thought and desired cognitive, behavioural, and emotional changes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What is the student’s current level of hope and practices in goal setting?</td>
<td><strong>Principle 3:</strong> Clients’ self-referential beliefs are enhanced by focusing on goals, possibilities, and past successes rather than problems or failures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What are their historic practices around setting goals?</td>
<td><strong>Principle 4:</strong> A sound, trusting, and positive therapeutic alliance is formed so as to facilitate the client’s active participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Exploring student successes rather than failures.</td>
<td><strong>Principle 5:</strong> The hope therapist is active and directive in helping the client to develop a new framework for change while respecting that the client is the expert on his or her situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Helping students learn to create and clarify specific goals.</td>
<td><strong>Principle 6:</strong> Hope therapy is an educative process in which the aim is to teach the clients to handle the difficulties of goal pursuits on their own.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What specific goals or changes would they like to see in their life?</td>
<td><strong>Principle 7:</strong> Hope therapy mirrors the hope development process. The therapist and client clearly conceptualize feasible client goals, as well as how to help the client to summon the mental energy necessary for initiating and maintaining the pursuit of therapy goals. In addition, the client is aided in developing multiple pathways to positive and desired therapy goals and in eliminating any barriers that may emerge.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Who Believes in You?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Principle 8:</strong> In hope therapy, change is initiated at the cognitive level, with a focus on enhancing clients’ self—referential agentic and pathway goal-directed thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the student currently believe in themselves?</td>
<td><strong>Principle 9:</strong> By incorporating common therapeutic factors and narrative, solution-focused, and cognitive-behavioural techniques, hope therapy has evolved into a new therapeutic system in its own right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A positive relationship can build trust and hope.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Hope can be demonstrated by believing in the student.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The educator can help the student develop their goals, explore their pathways and encourage their agency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- An educator can help strategize around barriers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- An educator can provide educational opportunities that match the student’s ability and developmental level.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What Can You Do?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Hope can be taught.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Goal setting, pathway thinking and agency thinking can be practiced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Solutions to barriers and difficulties can be found.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- A wide range of educational and psychological techniques can be employed to support student goal setting, pathway thinking, and agency thinking.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Educational and Therapeutic strategies are analogous to Hope theory as they develop goals, explore pathways and encourage agency.</td>
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</table>
Appendix B: Snyder’s Children’s Hope Scale

Directions: The six sentences below describe how children think about themselves and how they do things in general. Read each sentence carefully. For each sentence, please think about how you are in most situations. Place a check inside the circle that describes YOU the best. For example, place a check (√) in the circle (O) above "None of the time," if this describes you. Or, if you are this way "All of the time," check this circle. Please answer every question by putting a check in one of the circles. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. I think I am doing pretty well.

   None of the time  A little of the time  Some of the time  A lot of the time  Most of the time  All of the time

2. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.

   None of the time  A little of the time  Some of the time  A lot of the time  Most of the time  All of the time

3. I am doing just as well as other kids my age.

   None of the time  A little of the time  Some of the time  A lot of the time  Most of the time  All of the time

4. When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.

   None of the time  A little of the time  Some of the time  A lot of the time  Most of the time  All of the time

5. I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.

   None of the time  A little of the time  Some of the time  A lot of the time  Most of the time  All of the time

6. Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.

   None of the time  A little of the time  Some of the time  A lot of the time  Most of the time  All of the time

Notes: When administered to children, this scale is not labeled "The Children's Hope Scale," but is called "Questions About Your Goals." The total Children's Hope Scale score is achieved by adding the responses to the six items, with "None of the time" = 1; "A little of the time" = 2; "Some of the time" = 3; "A lot of the time" = 4; "Most of the time" = 5; and, "All of the time" = 6. The three odd-numbered items tap agency, and the three even-numbered items tap pathways.