

AN EXPLORATION OF HOPE IN CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Hope is a valuable asset for children, adolescents, and adults. Individuals with high hope are better able to navigate around obstacles by using pathways and agency thoughts toward their goals. Studies with children and adults have demonstrated that hope is related to several positive constructs, including academic and athletic ability, problem solving and coping, physical health, and psychological adjustment. This study explores hope in Catholic school students. Because Catholic schools provide a unique faith community for their students, a better understanding of the characteristics of children in these settings is important. Analyses showed that Catholic school students' hope scores were significantly higher than the general mean of children's hope scores. Implications and suggestions for fostering hope in the classroom are provided.

Fostering humanity and helping students develop into positive members of society are goals for all schools, but these goals are particularly salient for Catholic schools. Catholic schools function in unique environments, providing faith communities for students, teachers, and families who are supportive and who have high academic and behavior standards. Indeed, these faith communities teach "religious and academic subjects in a value-oriented context" (Convey, 1992, p. 75). While researchers have studied the nature of Catholic schools and their effects on students academically, a smaller number of studies have explored psychosocial characteristics of Catholic students.

Hope is a valuable asset for children, adolescents, and adults. As conceptualized by Snyder, Harris, et al. (1991), hope is a cognitive set comprised

of goals, pathways, and agency. Individuals with high hope possess goals, find pathways to these goals, navigate around obstacles, and develop and maintain agency to reach their goals. Studies of hope over the past 20 years have demonstrated that this construct is related to positive outcomes in children and adults, including athletic and academic achievement, physical health, problem solving, and psychosocial constructs such as self-esteem, optimism, self-actualization, and well-being (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Snyder, Cheavens, & Michael, 1999; Sumerlin, 1997).

Researchers have begun to explore the role of hope in the lives of Catholic school students. Over the past six years, researchers at the University of Kansas have collected data from several Catholic schools in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Exploration of this sample will enhance understanding of hope in Catholic school students and will consider its implications for this unique population. The purpose of this article is to describe Snyder's hope model, summarize research relevant to this construct, and explore hope in a large sample of Catholic school students. Suggestions for fostering hope in the classroom and conducting future research are also provided.

CATHOLIC SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Catholic schools have existed for over 300 years in what is now the United States. While not without struggles, Catholic schools have managed to persist, continuing to offer a high standard of education for students from many backgrounds while providing a faith community for children and families. According to Curtin (1999), over 2.6 million students are now enrolled in over 8,200 Catholic elementary and secondary schools. In a recent survey of 210 urban Catholic elementary and secondary schools reviewed by Youniss and McLellan (1999), demographic estimates demonstrate a commitment to diversity with Catholic schools enrolling a growing number of ethnic minority students. In this same study, estimates suggest that 24% of Catholic students come from families below the federal poverty level, 18% of students receive tuition assistance, and 90% of schools employ a sliding scale for tuition. These socioeconomic statistics demonstrate that Catholic schools are not only for the elite but often provide education for those from less privileged backgrounds.

Convey (1992) compiled a comprehensive summary of research called *Catholic Schools Make a Difference*. He reviewed studies from 25 years of research suggesting that Catholic school students, teachers, and parents are associated with positive educational outcomes, particularly in the areas of academic achievement and values. In a general comparison of public and Catholic schools, Gothard (1983) suggested that there are five major differences between them: (a) Catholic schools are generally smaller, (b) public

schools tend to be more compulsory than Catholic schools (even though all children must receive some form of schooling until they reach the age of 16), (c) Catholic schools emphasize academics above nonacademic activities, (d) Catholic schools have greater control of discipline and lack the bureaucratic aspects of public schools (e.g., tenure, legislation, court action, and special interest groups), and (e) Catholic schools receive funding from gifts, fund-raising, and tuition instead of public taxes.

HOPE

Hope has been a topic in both the academic and popular literature for decades. From the story of Pandora's box to modern day conceptualizations, hope has long intrigued scholars and theologians. Many definitions of hope have been proffered over the years, placing this construct in various affective and cognitive models. Snyder, Harris, et al. (1991) have developed a conceptualization of hope that is relevant to the setting and achievement of goals in individuals.

Hope is defined by Snyder, Harris, et al. (1991) as a bidimensional construct that describes goal-oriented behavior. Hope is a cognitive set, by this definition, and includes two components: (a) agency (determination that sustains movement toward goals), and (b) pathways (the ability to generate numerous routes to one's goals). In this model, both components of hope are necessary for goal attainment. Possessing only agency might lead to motivation to move toward a goal, but an individual may lack ideas in regard to actually moving toward that goal. Conversely, an individual with many ideas of ways to reach a goal must also have the agency necessary to sustain movement toward that goal. Thus, hope is possessed only in the presence of both of these key components.

Snyder, Harris, et al. (1991) also describe the concept of barriers and obstacles to goals. All individuals face impassés at various times in their lives, finding their goals blocked by obstacles. A hopeful individual, according to Snyder, Harris, et al., would have the capacity to create pathways that would take them around these barriers. Continual blockage of goal pursuit leads to decreased levels of hope in individuals over time (Snyder, Hoza, et al., 1996); thus the ability to navigate around barriers plays an important role in this process.

MEASURING HOPE

Several instruments based on Snyder's conceptualization of hope have been developed to measure hope in adults and children. The Adults Goals Scale (Snyder, Harris, et al., 1991) is used to measure trait hope in adults, and the Domain Specific Hope Scale (Simpson, 1999) is used to assess levels of

hope in adults in six life arenas. The Children's Hope Scale (Snyder, Hoza, et al., 1996) was developed to assess hope in children ages 7 to 16. A Young Children's Hope Scale (McDermott, Snyder, et al., 1996) and Spanish translations of the Children's Hope Scale are currently in the process of validation (McDermott, Edwards, et al., 2000).

CORRELATES OF HOPE

Though hope has been distinguished as a separate construct through discriminant validity studies, it has been shown to correlate with a number of other positive constructs and abilities in both children and adults (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Snyder, Cheavens, et al., 1999).

Hope has not been associated with intelligence scores from standard IQ tests (Anderson, 1988; Irving, Crenshaw, Snyder, Francis, & Gentry, 1990; Snyder, Hoza, et al., 1996); however it has been linked with academic achievement in adults and children (Snyder, Hoza, et al.). Hope was found to be predictive of grade point averages in college students at a significant level, with high-hope individuals possessing averages almost half a point higher than lower-hope individuals (Snyder, Wiklund, & Cheavens, 1999). In addition, more higher-hope students graduated within the course of the study. Another study found higher hope to be linked with better study and test-taking skills in graduate students (Onwuegbuzie & Snyder, in press).

Hope can also be linked to athletic achievement. In a study by Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, and Rehm (1997), positive relationships were discovered between high hope and high athletic performance. This correlation was still present when natural ability and level of self-worth were held constant.

In addition, correlates of hope include such psychosocial constructs as optimism, self-esteem, and well-being (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Snyder, 1994; Snyder, Simpson, Michael, & Cheavens, 2001). Scheier and Carver (1985) defined optimism as a general expectation for positive outcomes in one's life. As this definition is quite close to the definition of the agency component of hope theory, this correlation is not surprising. Research shows that hope and optimism, however, are two distinct constructs with unique predictive qualities. It is certain, however, that these two constructs may both be instrumental in helping to maintain one another. In regard to self-worth and well-being, similar results have been found (Magaletta & Oliver; Snyder; Snyder, Simpson, et al.).

Negative correlations have also been found between hope and depression in several studies. In comparison to a reminiscence-based treatment for depressed older adults, an intervention that was designed to increase hope in these individuals was found to be significantly more effective in decreasing depressive symptoms (Klausner, Snyder, & Cheavens, in press). Additionally, scores on measures of hopelessness and depression have been found to be

inversely related to scores on measures of hope (Snyder, Harris, et al., 1991).

Hope has also been shown to be related to physical health (Elliot, Witty, Herrick, & Hoffman, 1991; Snyder, Cheavens, et al., 1999; Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991) and better problem-solving and coping techniques (McDermott, LaRue, et al., 2000; Snyder, Wiklund, et al., 1999; Snyder, Sympson, et al., 2001). In looking at all of these positive correlates, it seems obvious that hope is a construct that parents and teachers might wish to enhance in their children and students. Increasing hope in children is likely to make them healthier, happier, higher achieving, and better problem solvers, all of which are important components of success in life.

This study explores hope in Catholic school students by comparing mean hope scores for Catholic school students with the general mean scores of the Children's Hope Scale.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The study included 1,265 participants, but only 1,248 surveys were complete and thus included for the analyses. Females made up 48.2% of this sample; males, 43.6% (8.3% did not answer this question on the demographic survey). The sample was predominantly Caucasian (56.3%), with African American (8.9%), Hispanic (27.3%), Native American (0.3%), and Asian (1.2%) races represented as well. Multiracial and biracial individuals made up an additional 5.4% of this sample.

Participants were solicited from six Catholic schools in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Two were elementary schools, two were elementary-middle school combinations, and two were high schools. For the purpose of this study, grades 4 through 8 were labeled "elementary" and grades 9 through 12 as "high school." Elementary students made up 53.4% of the sample; high school, 46.6%. The average age of students was 13.7, with students as young as 9 and as old as 19. Table 1 presents a numeric breakdown for the demographic characteristics of this sample.

Table 1
Total Number of Observations by Various Demographic Features

	N
Gender	
Female	601
Male	544
Missing	103
Ethnicity	
Caucasian	702
African American	111

Hispanic-Hispanic American	341
Native American	4
Asian-Asian American	15
Multiracial-Biracial	68
Missing	7
School	
Elementary	666
High School	582

Although Snyder (1994) reports that socioeconomic background appears to have no effect on hope, an effort was made to obtain students who had similar socioeconomic circumstances. The surrounding areas of each of the schools are considered somewhat economically depressed and at least 50% of the elementary-middle school students qualified for an externally funded lunch program. The families of these students are primarily working class or lower middle class.

INSTRUMENTATION

The primary measure used in this study was the Children's Hope Scale (CHS) (Snyder, McDermott, Cook, & Rapoff, 1997). This self-report scale yields scores on the subscales, agency and pathways, in addition to a total score indicating the student's level of hope. The CHS has been given to over 3,000 children and consistently demonstrates Cronbach alphas of .82 or higher, indicating good internal consistency (Snyder, 1994). The scale has been administered to children and adolescents of all ethnicities and socioeconomic groups; however, before our study, Catholic school students have not been the subject of specific investigations.

The CHS is comprised of six items for which the respondent can choose one of six Likert scale categories. Three items measure agency and are concerned with how well the student believes he or she is doing generally in life. The other three items tap the pathways component and consist of statements about finding ways to solve problems. The student is asked to mark whether the item is true *None of the time*, *A little of the time*, *Some of the time*, *A lot of the time*, *Most of the time*, or *All of the time*. The responses are scored 1 through 6, with 1 indicating that the item is true *None of the time* and 6 indicating the item is true *All of the time*. The possible range of scores is from 6 to 36. A student who scores 21 or less is in the lower 15% of those who have completed the instrument. A student who scores 29 or higher is in the top 15%. The average score, based on over 200 previous studies, is 25 (Snyder, 1994).

Studies point to the concurrent validity of the CHS. Snyder, Hoza, et al. (1996) found that children's hope scores on the CHS correlated ($r = .38$) with parents' ratings of their children's hopeful thinking. In that same study,

Snyder, Hoza, et al. found that CHS scores were negatively correlated with the Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1982).

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Accompanying the Children's Hope Scale was a brief demographic questionnaire. This form asked for general identifying information as well as age, grade, ethnic group, and the number of people in the student's family.

PROCEDURE

All six schools readily agreed to participate in this investigation of hope. The elementary and middle school principals informed the students' parents of the hope testing through the school newsletter. A telephone number was provided for further questions. Principals of the two high schools included the CHS as part of the homeroom or religious education curriculum. The CHS and the brief demographic questionnaire were given to all students who were present on the testing date.

The testing procedure was different at the high school and elementary levels. At the high school level the individual responsible for teaching the religious education class or for supervising homeroom administered the scales and questionnaires. Complete written instructions were given to each teacher and to the principal who assumed responsibility for data collection in the school. In the elementary and middle schools, researchers administered the scale and questionnaire to each class. In all elementary grades, fourth through eighth, the items were read by one researcher while two other members of the research team monitored students who appeared to be having difficulty with the test items.

Although the CHS uses language that fourth graders and higher can easily understand, it should be noted that some of the students spoke Spanish as their first language. Reading the scale aloud helped to insure that all students were responding to the instrument with similar comprehension.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Three one-sample t-tests were performed to investigate differences between the average CHS (Snyder, Hoza, et al., 1996) scores for the general public in past research and the scores achieved by the Catholic students. Both total and subscale comparisons were conducted. The test value for the one-sample t-test used to determine differences for the total score was 25, and the test values for those used for the Agency and Pathways subscales were 12.5. These are means determined to be average scores by previous research with a large number of children (Snyder, Hoza, et al.).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for this Catholic sample are presented in Table 2. Total scores on the Children's Hope Scale (Snyder, Hoza, et al., 1996) were found to be significantly higher than average in this Catholic population (See Table 3). In addition, Catholic students scored significantly higher than average on the pathways and agency subscales (See Table 4).

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Total, Elementary, and High School Samples

	N	Total	Agency Subscale	Pathways Subscale
Total Sample	1248	26.27 (4.96)	13.48 (2.74)	12.79 (2.84)
Elementary Sample	666	26.77 (5.27)	13.54 (2.91)	12.83 (3.05)
High School Sample	582	26.16	13.41 (2.54)	12.75 (2.57)

Table 3
Summary Table for One-Sample T-Test (Total CHS Scores)
Test Value = 25

Source	df	t	Sig.	Std. Error Mean
Total CHS	1247	9.058	.000**	.140

**Result is significant at the .01 level.

Table 4
Summary Table for One-Sample T-Test (Agency and Pathways Subscales)
Test Value = 12.5

Source	df	t	Sig.	Std. Error Mean
Agency	1247	12.63	.000**	.08
Pathways	1247	3.64	.000**	.08

**Result is significant at the .01 level.

It is also important to note that these results were fairly consistent across school and ethnicity. Analyses demonstrated that five of the six schools had higher than average total hope scores, and no school had overall levels of hope that were more than .3 points below the average score of 25 for this population. Furthermore, all racial groups with 50 or more participants were found to possess total hope scores that were above this average.

DISCUSSION

The data from this exploration of hope in Catholic school students provide promising results. When compared to the general averages of hope levels, Catholic school students appear to possess significantly higher levels of hope

in reference to both the total hope score and the two subscales (agency and pathways). In light of the many positive correlates of the construct of hope, higher than average scores are beneficial across several domains.

Some limitations of this study should be taken into account when interpreting the results. The majority of the Catholic students who participated were primarily from lower socioeconomic status groups, and this may have confounded the results in some way. In addition, the sample was predominantly Caucasian in terms of ethnicity, with the next largest group (Hispanic) equaling less than half of the Caucasian sample in number. As hope levels have not been found to be significantly different across races (Snyder, Hoza, et al., 1996) this is acceptable, but research in this area is somewhat scant and further investigations of this topic must be conducted. It should also be noted that the entire sample was of midwestern origin. Further research with Catholic school students should be conducted in different areas of the country to see if these high hope scores are also present in other schools. The following implications of the results must be tempered with these limitations in mind.

Catholic schools offer unique faith communities for their students and can work to develop and maintain hope in all individuals. As teachers, administrators, and other school personnel consider how to support students in their educational and social development, fostering hope is a valuable goal that can be implemented with children and adolescents.

Several methods exist to identify and enhance hope in students, including teaching about the hope model, using literature to identify hopeful characters and stories, and telling and writing personal hope stories.

TEACHING ABOUT THE HOPE MODEL

The hope model is a clear and useful concept that should be shared with students. Through the use of posters and handouts, teachers can introduce the hope model at a developmentally-appropriate level and solicit examples of agency, pathways, goals, and obstacles. It is important to teach even young children how to apply the components of hope to their own lives. To achieve this, students are asked to set a specific goal and then plan what they will do to accomplish it. Teachers can record the goal for young children, but older children can keep track of their own goals and progress. An example of a first grader's goal was learning to keep his desk clean. One third grader set a goal of making a new friend each week. Other goals included learning to ride a bike and ice skate. There have been almost as many goals as there have been children with whom we have worked.

One important aspect of hope enhancement is the positive feedback given to children by teachers and parents. Children of all ages need to know that they are doing well, and they need constructive guidance when they are

floundering. A high-hope person knows when and to whom one can turn for advice and information. Teachers are in the best position to fill that role, and to see that it is done in such a way that the child's self-esteem is enhanced.

Using Literature

Stories that depict high-hope young people setting and accomplishing goals are useful for enhancing hope in both children and adolescents (McDermott & Snyder, 2000). For children in kindergarten through fourth grade, reading and then discussing these stories can illustrate the pathways and agency aspects of hope. For example, kindergartners may enjoy *The Little Engine That Could* (Piper, 1976), a story that clearly depicts high agency in the Little Engine's statements, "I think I can, I think I can." A plethora of high-hope books appropriate for all ages is readily available in school and public libraries.

Teachers who are considering implementing a hope-enhancing program using literature should first be certain that the books contain clear examples of goal setting and problem solving and that the protagonist works hard for the goal. It is of course important to explain the components of hope to students before embarking on such a reading program. Even very young children can understand that it is important to set goals, find ways to solve the problems they encounter, and work very hard to accomplish what they have set out to do.

Personal Hope Stories

For older children and adolescents, writing personal hope stories can be as important as reading them. Once the elements of hope are understood, older children can examine their lives for events in which they set goals, solved problems, and worked hard to succeed. Recognizing how past behaviors can inform future actions is an integral part of high hope, and for young people it is an empowering experience. Teachers can be helpful in clarifying the way students have used the elements of hope from the stories they write. Again, positive feedback is an important part of the student's ability to learn these positive ways of thinking and behaving.

These suggestions can help teachers bring hope into the classroom and teach students to use hope in their lives. For additional ideas and more complete descriptions of the suggestions given above, see *The Great Big Book of Hope* (McDermott & Snyder, 2000) or *Hope for the Journey* (Snyder, McDermott, et al., 1997). It is expected that as researchers continue to explore hope in various populations, more will be learned about how to enhance this valuable construct in children and adults. In turn, our children will be able to utilize hope as they develop and work toward goals in their lives.

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