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Teachers' Experience in Applying Hope Theory in Upper Elementary Educational Practice

By

Bibi Shameeza Khan

A dissertation in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Learning and Leading

University of Portland

School of Education

2020

Teachers' Experience in Applying Hope Theory in Upper Elementary Educational Practice

by

Bibi Shameeza Khan

This dissertation is completed as a partial requirement for the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon.

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Abstract

The prevalence of issues adversely affecting people's mental health has become a matter of growing concern in Canada. Unfortunately, only one in four young people affected with mental health problems receive professional help (Sawyer, et al., 2000). However, Gallagher and Lopez, (2009) found that being hopeful is favourably associated with the growth of positive mental well-being. In support, a more recent study found that hope has a unique value in schools that strive to promote their students' overall well-being (Idan & Margalit, 2013). Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to describe educators' experience on applying Snyder's tenets of hope theory: goals, pathways, and agency, within the context of their educational practice, at the elementary level of an Islamic school in Alberta.

A qualitative descriptive research methodology was most appropriate for the nature of this study through utilization of three research questions describing (1) the extent, and in what ways were educators able to apply hope theory in their education practice (2) what did educators observed as impactful on the students' learning and their teaching practice and, (3) what suggestions do educators have for other educators or for themselves for applying the hope theory approach in their educational practices. Eighteen educators voluntarily participated in this study during the 12-week application period. For orientation on the construct of hope theory and how it relates to their educational, the educators were invited to participate in professional learning at the initial stage, followed by ongoing support throughout the 12-week period.

Data collection for this qualitative descriptive study was directed toward understanding educators' experience in applying hope theory in their educational practice based on how the theory was applied, what impact educators observed and what suggestions they proposed. A bi-weekly memo was used to annotate unstructured, reciprocal dialogue in addition to responses

from the three structured open-ended questions after the 12 weeks of application by way of a Google form. All data were aggregated to reflect a holistic description of the phenomenon.

The first question that explored the extent, and in what ways were educators able to apply hope theory in their educational practice found that (a) there was variation in the extent to which hope theory was applied, (b) hope theory was applied for positive reframing, (c) as a construct to appreciate barriers and (c) as a framework for proactive thinking. The second question sought to describe what educators observed as impactful on students' learning and their own professional learning. Educators described that hope theory (a) influenced students' self-confidence, (b) engaged parents' support in their children education and (c) inspired their students and themselves to be reflective in thinking. The third question described the suggestions proposed upon the completion of their 12-week implementation of hope theory. The first general suggestion is professional learning on hope theory should be an ongoing process. In their suggestion of ongoing professional learning, educators emphasize the need to have more resources to support their understanding of hope within an Islamic context, to observe how their colleagues in other grade level apply hope theory and to have extended time to consult with others who have experience in applying hope theory in their classrooms. In their second suggestion, educators observed that hope theory hope theory can cultivate positive changes in education if educators are ready to rethink instructional practices. By this suggestion, educators explained the need for themselves and other educators to model hopeful thinking for students. Additionally, educators explained the hope theory should be taught in stages introducing goal setting, followed by pathways thinking and finally, teach students how to develop agencies to overcome barriers. An important point that derived from the second suggestion is for educators

to complement hope theory with another mindfulness theory such as growth mindset or literature form the faith (Islam) to help students to make the connections.

This study was just one step toward exploring the impact of hope theory in the context of Islamic schools through the lens of elementary educators. The implications of this study for educational practice include (a) educating students on the inevitability of challenges to life, (b) coaching students to build resilience in the face of challenges (c) teaching students positivity (d) investing time to apply educational theories in pedagogical practices and (e) strengthening theories (for example hope theory) with other philosophies and literature for more effective results.

It is important to point out that applying hope theory within educational practice will not resolve mental illness. However, cultivating habits of hope through the application of hope theory may support the three out of four affected students navigate through obstacles and secure the desired goods through alternative means (Shade, 2006), benefiting themselves and their communities.

Acknowledgement

All praise and thanks to God, the almighty, who have blessed me with unimaginable support through the following people:

Dr James Carroll

I would like to express sincere gratitude to you for accepting the request to chair my committee. Your constructive feedback and expert advice were always reassuring. Throughout this dissertation study you kept me focused and confident.

Dr Jacqueline Waggoner and Dr Rebecca Smith

I am very grateful to have had you both as members of my committee. Your guidance, kind words and attention to details have been invaluable throughout my dissertation study.

Dr Mona Nashman-Smith

Thank you for cheering me along. I honour the time and effort you have invested as an external reader to provide the many insightful observations and recommendations.

My Participants and Colleagues

You input was invaluable to the success of this study. I greatly benefitted from your participation and eager discussions. Your valuable feedback has shaped the successful realization of this study.

My Ed. D professors and Cohort Friends

An abundance of thanks for always being supportive, motivating and making feel on top of the world.

My Family and Friends

Your unwavering support have been my anchor and my pillar. Thank you for your profound belief in my ability, your patience, positivity and always, for your keen interests on my wellbeing throughout this process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Mental health, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is a state in which every individual can effectively manage their functioning when confronted with typical challenges or faced with normal stressful situations (WHO, 2014). To clarify, Nordqvist (2017) added that mental health includes the stability of people's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affecting how they think, feel, and respond in any given circumstance. The mental wellness of Canadians is of particular concern in the education, health, and business sectors. Malla, Shah, Iyer, Boksa, Joober, Andersson, and Fuhrer (2018) have identified depression and anxiety as the two most common mental disorders in Canada.

Statement of the Problem

The prevalence of issues adversely affecting people's mental health and performance has become a matter of growing concern in Canada. For example, Blatchford (2019) has reported that the prevalence of mental health problems is reaching the scale of a crisis in Canada's agricultural sector. Extrapolating from the findings of a new national survey of colleges and universities, Chiose (2016) reported that an estimated 20% of postsecondary students are either depressed, suffering from anxiety, or battling other mental issues. It is predicted that by age 40, almost 50% of Canada's population will suffer or have suffered from mental illness, with anxiety disorders affecting 5% of families. An estimated 10-20% of Canadian youth are suffering from a mental disorder, with approximately 5% of males and 12% of females having already endured a major depressive experience. The number of Canadian youth at risk of developing depression is close to 3.2 million (Mental Health Commission of Canada [MHCC], 2013). Since it began to gather evidence in late 2018, the Calgary Board of Education is still trying to determine the magnitude of this challenge, and how it is affecting teaching and learning (Ferguson, 2018).

With consent from school leaders, Ferguson (2018) disclosed that many students are struggling with stress, anxiety, and depressive feelings. Chiose (2016) pinpointed that reports of depression and suicidal thoughts increased by 3.5% between 2013 and 2016. While Alberta Health offers programs and services to address mental health issues, it is evident that there is a need for more to be done (Alberta Health, 2015).

In 2018, Alberta's Minister of Health stated publicly that the government is aware that there is an increasing need for counselling services and other mental health programs and resources (Alberta School Councils Association, 2018). The Chairman of the Edmonton Public School Board announced that the rise of depression and anxiety interfering with children's education had prompted the Board to make mental health one of its top three priorities (French, 2018). Notably, the two most common disorders, depression and anxiety, most often have their onset in the stage of childhood or adolescence (Malla et al., 2018). Ferguson (2018) reported that Kelly Schwartz, a mental-health expert from the University of Calgary, urged public school systems to do better in training and educating stakeholders to stem the alarming rise of mental illness in Alberta.

Curbing the Rise of Anxiety and Depression in Schools

Considering that Gallagher and Lopez (2009) have found hope to be associated with the growth of positive, flourishing mental well-being, a proposed strategy to curb the growing problem of depression and anxiety in Canada is to start with schools by applying the hope theory in educational practices. As supported by Shorey and Snyder (2002), a high level of hope is positively related to critical thinking and feeling confident. Further, the authors observed that people with a sense of hopefulness have an exceptional ability to generate pathways to goals and to solve problems relating to academic performance. In contrast, people who have low hope,

show lower willpower, and once they encounter setbacks or obstacles, they tend to give up. This hopelessness, according to Alloy, Abramson, Metalsky, and Hartlage (1989), is viewed as a sufficient proximal cause of depressive thinking. The hopelessness theory of depression claims that a proximal cause of depression stems from the perceived unlikelihood of the desired outcome or even its replacement with a negative outcome, neither of which sufferers cannot prevent. The theory emphasizes that hopelessness is a proximal cause but not dependently the cause of depression, noting that genetic vulnerability and norepinephrine depletion can be vital influential factors (Alloy et al., 1989). The hopelessness theory of depression describes the line of events that may lead up to or contribute to the likelihood of the proximal cause of depression, or a buildup of depressive symptoms. Hopelessness theory posits that the more a person remains in a negative environment and is affected by negative stimuli, the more likely it is that they will develop feelings of hopelessness, which can lead to depression. Depression caused by hopelessness sometimes overlaps with other forms of the disorder (Liu, Kleiman, Nestor, & Cheek, 2015). The application of hope theory can serve either as a preventive measure to feeling depressive and anxious or as resistant to feeling afflicted during depression and anxiety (Michael, Taylor & Cheavens, 2000). When children are frustrated, they become demotivated. This can lead to anxiety and loss of courage. Consequently, children with low hope struggle to navigate through the challenges and risks that stand between them and success (Snyder & Shorey, 2002a). However, cultivating habits of hope through the application of hope theory can help students navigate through obstacles and secure the desired goods through alternative means (Shade, 2006), benefiting themselves and their communities.

Hope Theory Cultivates a Culture of Hope

Hope is described as a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals). The trilogy of the tenets of hope theory is goals, pathways, and agency. Hope theory is defined as goal-driven thinking in which a person has the perceived ability to establish routes that lead to goals, with increased determination to accomplish those goals (Snyder, 2002). When students are guided to apply the construct of hope theory, they can conceptualize their goals, develop approaches, and initiate strategies to sustain the motivation to achieve these goals (Sheehan & Rall, 2011). Teachers who apply hope theory in their classrooms accommodate hopeful behaviour for their students by engaging them in cooperative learning activities that extend agency and foster trust. The class thus becomes a community that reinforces habits of hope. In addition, stories which are skillfully selected, cultivate hope by providing concrete illustrations of the complex steps of hopeful thinking. This approach prompts students to be self-reflective and can inspire them to generate creative alternative means for accomplishing their goals despite obstacles or setbacks (Shade, 2006).

Research Gap

In investigating the effect of anxiety on learning, Owens, Stevenson, Hadwin and Norgate (2012) found that such issues can negatively affect students' learning and their academic success. Hence, it is unfortunate that the importance of hope theory is given little attention in the field of education in Canada. A contribution to the field of education is professional learning on applying the construct of hope theory in educational practice with the intent to strengthen perseverance (Idan & Margalit, 2013) while reducing feelings of anxiety.

In the context of Canada, a guiding framework will be particularly useful for supporting educators and students in prioritizing and achieving their goals. Educators across Canada will benefit from professional learning that increases their understanding that barriers are inevitable, but with guidance, perseverance, belief, and a plan, success can be achieved. Through practice, this concept will be modelled to students. With increased knowledge and support on how to apply hope theory to achieve desired outcomes, educators will gain the confidence to model this construct to their students. Transference of the knowledge of hope theory to themselves will lead children to become competent in devising strategies that will support them in establishing pathways to navigate the barriers that stand between them and their goals.

Purpose of the Study

Recent studies have found that hope has a unique value in schools that strive to promote their students' success, including academic goals and overall well-being (Idan & Margalit, 2013). In support, Canada Mental Health Association (2019) considers mental wellness essential to enjoying life, people, the environment, being creative, taking risks, and responding to stress. Noting that students' mental well-being is a concern in schools across Canada, this qualitative study described educators' experience on applying hope theory within the context of their educational practice at an upper-elementary Islamic school in Alberta, Canada.

Research Questions

1. To what extent, and in what ways were educators able to apply hope theory in their education practice?
2. In applying hope theory, what did educators observe as impactful on the students' learning and their teaching practice?

3. What suggestions do educators have for other educators or for themselves for applying the hope theory approach in their educational practices?

Summary of Research Design

A qualitative descriptive research methodology was most appropriate for the nature of this study that set out to explore, understand, and describe educators' experiences in applying hope theory in their educational practices. Qualitative descriptive studies presents facts of the phenomenon. Such studies seek descriptive validity, or an accurate account of the experience participants encountered. The descriptions are draws from the tenets of naturalistic inquiry (Sandelowski, 2000). The central phenomenon was educators' experiences in the application of hope theory. The unit of analysis was one educator in one classroom.

Significance of the Study

The contribution of this study will be invaluable to educators, school counsellors, and social workers, considering Goldenberg (2015) has emphasized that learning to nurture hope is foundational in maintaining people's mental well-being. Noting that Alberta Health (2019) reported a rise in mental illness amongst youths and adults, the need is urgent for all human-concerns organizations and communities to revisit their approaches and services, with the intent to address this concerning rise in mental illness. Snyder, Rand and Sigmon (2002) conveyed that hope is fundamental to peoples' emotions and well-being. In examining the concern of students' mental well-being, it is imperative for educators to reflect that their educational practices and learning experiences to create a culture of hope for themselves and their students.

Importance of Hope in Islamic Schools

Religious education is a core component of Islamic schools. The idea of religion and the construct of hope are closely connected. For this reason, applying hope theory in an Islamic context was an almost natural process. Mercer (2017) compared the teaching of religious education to an invitation for learners to practice hope by being more fully aware of transcendence, and be engaged in communities of justice in the world. For many, their faith grows stronger at the phase in life when they are most hopeful. In the field of medicine, researchers observed that when a situation is out of control, cardiac patients become hopeful and more able to cope with their crises through reliance on prayer and a higher power (Peterson, Tice, Bolling, & Koenig, 2004). In contrast with teachers in the public education system, educators of Islamic schools have opportunities to connect hope to religion and faith without crossing the boundaries of secularism. Educators can approach the construct of hope directly within the framework of religious education. From a theological perspective, Roebben (2017) stated that to hope means to make the effort even though the outcome is unknown.

In the Islamic faith, hope is described as reliance on God (Bonab & Koohsar, 2011) combined with the effort to achieve the desired outcome. The construct of hope is implied or referenced in several chapters of the Quran. Thus, chapter four, verse 29, serves as a reminder to readers that God is Most Merciful, implying one should not lose hope. The story of the Prophet Yusuf highlights hopefulness through the advice of Prophet Yusuf's father urging his other sons to go find their brothers but not to despair, regardless of the outcome (Quran 12:87, Darussalam Edition). The Quran teaches people that adversity in life is inevitable, but unquestionably, the help from God is always near (Quran 22:214). The words from the Quran speak to those who experience difficulties in life, reminding them to be mindful of their responsibilities and continue

their duties justly. In recompense for fulfilling their obligations sincerely, God will bring ease to the hardship they experience (Quran 65:2). To be hopeful is encouraged through the repeated promises made in the Quran that indeed, after hardship comes ease (94:5-6). This promise strengthens a person's agentic thinking (Snyder, 2002) not to give up when encountering barriers in life. Rather, according to Snyder, people should develop the attitude of perseverance, knowing that success awaits the effort. In a spiritual aspect, hope is often accompanied by physical and spiritual health, and is related to the concept and value of a better life. Hope is considered an important element of human development and enables people to cope with stressful situations and maintain their quality of life (Stephenson, 1991). Religious beliefs are one of the factors that affect levels of hope. In a study by Herth (1990), dying patients said that their religious beliefs facilitated meaningful feelings about the disease and a change in their understanding, thereby fostering hope.

Bernardo (2015) found that young people's well-being can be predicted based on their level of hopeful thinking. The findings and organization of literature from this qualitative research will be of value to educators and school counsellors, particularly of Islamic schools in Canada. This dissertation will support the initiation of conversations to connect education, faith, hope, and mental well-being. In addition, this study aims to make key contributions to the existing literature on mental health in the area of positive psychology. Those who have chosen to enrich the lives of others, either through mentoring, coaching, or counselling, understand that they are undertaking an important mission. Health care workers, counsellors, and professionals in the field of social work can make use of the findings and recommendations of this study to enhance their practices.

It was my intention that this descriptive qualitative study effects a paradigm shift in communities of practice, particularly in the context of Islamic schools, in Canada. This shift will support educators in promoting education as a source of hope, designing learning experiences that inspire purpose and goal attainment. For learners, their learning experience will shape a perspective of hopefulness, understanding that there are means of navigating through the challenges that stand in their way to success.

Theoretical Framework

Hope Theory. The main theoretical construct that informs the inquiry of this study is Snyder's (2002) hope theory. This concept of hope theory emerged in 1964 with the work of Erikson, who defined hope as a form of cognition and described it as, "the enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes, in spite of dark urges and rages" (Erikson, 1964, p. 118). The use of the word *wishes* lends to the understanding of goal-directed cognition. Three decades later in 1994, after research-based observations of people through interactions and interviews, and on the premise that people are constantly navigating from one point to another, Snyder (2002) defined hope as "the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways" (p. 249).

Social Learning Theory. In a social system, behaviours can be learned by observing the attitudes, responses, and actions of those in the environment. A specific behaviour is adopted based on how favourable a reward it gains. Social learning theory involves being observant to behaviours, being able to retain the actions of the behaviours, being capable to reproduce the behaviours accurately and contextually, and paying attention to the outcome or reward of the behaviours. Learning begins with organizing, rehearsing, and retaining the observed behaviour if valued. Behaviour is learned if the model has similarities to the observer, is well-admired, and

the behaviour is functional (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Humans have advanced in their development of knowledge and skills through observational learning from modelling influences. Observational learning is achieved when the observer pays close attention to the behaviour that is modelled and the consequences for the specific behaviour. Human learning is influenced deliberately or inadvertently by ideas, conduct, and values from modelled behaviours (Bandura, 1999).

The Relationship between the Theories and the Nature of this Study

Hope theory guided this study to foster the understanding that students experiencing high levels of hope perceive themselves as more effective in achieving their goals and are driven to navigate life's challenges to accomplish them.

Social learning theory was referred to in this study to support the notion that adults can model the expected behaviour to their students. Educators who strive to support their students' overall well-being, to inspire positivity and hope, will understand their importance of the roles as models for their students. Educators can deliberately model hopefulness to their students.

Summary and Transition

This study explored and described educators' experience in applying hope theory using a qualitative descriptive research design. It provided a description of educators' experience of applying hope theory in their educational practice. While the construct of hope has been extensively studied in the field of medical sciences, there is a deficit in the bank of empirical studies on how to apply hope theory in educational practices.

This first chapter presented a background of the problem with a proposition to address the problem. The purpose and significance of this research, followed by the research questions are

components of this first chapter. The main theoretical framework in addition to related theories concluded Chapter 1.

Four more chapters follow. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the literature relatable to hope theory, other referenced theories, and their connection to overall well-being. Chapter 3 outlines the stages of the methodology, adding relevant details of the approach used to engage educators' interests in exploring hope theory in their educational practice. Chapter 4, provides the findings shared by the educators in response to three questions on the application of hope theory. The descriptions of educators' experience are organized under corresponding themes. The last chapter focuses on an analytical discussion on the research findings of this study.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Mental Health

Mental health, as defined by the WHO (2014), is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community. Mental health is not fixed, rather it is continually shaped by a range of factors, including life experiences, learning, work environments, and the social and economic conditions that shape and influence our lives.

Mental Illness: A Growing Concern

Mental illness is an alteration in thinking, mood, or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning in one or more areas such as school, work, social or family interactions, or the ability to live independently (WHO, 2013). The Canadian Community Health Survey-Mental Health (Statistics Canada, 2004) has revealed a high incidence and prevalence of mental health problems among youth, as well as among the poor or those with late access to care.

Depression in adolescence is the second most common cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds in Canada, which is the third-highest youth suicide rate in the industrialized world (Malla et al., 2018). According to mental health experts, between 10% and 20% of Canadian youth may be affected with a mental health illness or disorder. While the prevalence of mental disorders among youth has remained stable since 2007, fewer than one in five affected young people receive appropriate treatment (Norris, 2018). Primary health care is a suitable avenue to address youth mental health in theory, but in practice, it largely caters to physical illness for young children and older adults, offering an inadequate structure and resources to deal with mental health problems in youths. Malla et al. (2018) state that it is time to rethink our response to the warning signs of mental issues and the need for early intervention. The global prevalence of mental health

problems affecting children and adolescents is 10–20%. These problems include anxiety disorders, depression, conduct disorders, and hyperkinetic disorder (Kieling, Baker-Henningham, Belfer, Conti, Ertem, Omigbodun, & Rahman, 2011).

Hyperkinetic disorder (HKD) is one of the most common mental health problems, with a prevalence of 1–6%. The key symptoms include pronounced hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, and increased impulsivity. Children with HKD are easily distracted in class, jump up, shout out, and are unable to focus their attention for a length of time, miss important information, disrupt their fellow students, drop materials, or topple their chairs (Whitfield, 1993).

Depression is a debilitating condition that is increasingly recognized among youth, with nearly a third of adolescents experiencing a depressive episode by age 19. School connectedness, the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, cared for, close to, and supported by others in the school environment, has been associated with depressive symptoms in preadolescents and adolescents. Studies have indicated that students with higher levels of school connectedness exhibit lower levels of depression, while lower levels of school connectedness may be a predictive factor of future depressive symptoms (Joyce & Early, 2014).

The experience of emotional states such as anxiety and depression are reported internationally in children and adolescents. Schoolchildren and adolescents experiencing high levels of anxiety or depression are at risk of poor academic performance (Owens, Stevenson, Hadwin, & Norgate, 2012). The main symptoms of the depressive disorder include difficulties in concentrating, lack of self-worth, low mood, joylessness, loss of activities and interests, social withdrawal, giving up leisure activities, changes in appetite, sleep disruption, and—in moderate to severe forms—suicidal thoughts and acts (Schulte-Körne, 2016).

Mental well-being in schools. Recognizing that many children in today's classrooms face a range of issues (Farrell & Barrett, 2007), schools continue to grapple with their role in addressing mental well-being. Psychosocial aspects such as resilience, and emotional and social intelligence are considered to be essential in children's learning experience. While family doctors, school-based counsellors, and pediatricians provide important services, only one in four young people affected with mental health problems receive professional help (Sawyer, et al., 2000).

Teachers' Role in Promoting the Mental Well-Being of Students. Although teachers are burdened with diverse challenges, both personally and professionally, they are well-placed to detect and respond to students' mental health problems and many experts in the field have argued that school is still the best venue for health promotion among children and adolescents (Konu & Lintonen, 2006; Raphael, 2000; Rowling, 2003). Educators have themselves become increasingly aware of the importance of mental well-being in academic success and child development and are supporting the design and implementation of mental health interventions. Atkinson and Hornby (2002) observed that teachers are recognized to have a significant advantage in detecting issues affecting the mental health of children, in providing mental health support and in shaping the learning environment to support children's emotional well-being. For example, mental well-being can be bolstered by teachers' deliberate actions aimed to optimize the social and emotional intelligence of individuals (Graham, Phelps, Maddison, & Fitzgerald, 2011).

Teachers' Role in Strengthening Students' Resilience. Resilience refers to the capacity to cope effectively in stressful situations or adversity. It may involve the ability to experience emotions matching the demands of environmental circumstances. This concept of resilience has received considerable attention in schools (Chessor, 2007; Johnson & Howard, 2006; Russo & Boman, 2007). Teachers do play a critically important role in building the resilience of their students by supporting their social and emotional well-being. Aviles, Anderson, and Davila (2006) found that others reasoned that this is a respectable expectation since schools are the primary environment in which all students must negotiate and function. Denham and Weissberg (2004) agreed that adults and teachers have an important role in managing children's emotional development. There is a perception that a teacher's role as a gatekeeper of emotional development has become more prevalent in recent years, as evidenced by several studies concerning teachers' knowledge and ability to develop and enhance various aspects of children's resilience and mental well-being (Aviles, et al., 2006; Russo & Boman, 2007). This, in turn, has brought about increased demands on teacher self-efficacy. Their expected role in children's mental well-being has expanded significantly, which has raised concerns for teachers in terms of confidence, skills, and knowledge (Graham, Phelps, Maddison, & Fitzgerald, 2011).

The Connection between Hope and Education. Hopefulness can be deeply personal, or interpersonal, reflecting the qualities of the environment and significant others such as parents and teachers. Hope may be nurtured in different social contexts, such as the school or the home, both of which are protective environments necessary for a healthy upbringing. Comparable to the expectations of high-quality education in any context, Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, Hockemeyer, and Feldman (2003) show that hope enables children to set-valued goals, devise the means to achieve these goals, and muster the drive to make these goals happen. Throughout

their school years, students are faced with an array of increasingly difficult choices and challenges, but, Ciarrochi, Heaven, and Davies (2007) found hope to be an excellent predictor of success among a sample of 784 high school students.

During adolescence, with the transition to higher education, academic challenges become increasingly important. Research by Onwurgbuzie, Snyder, Idan, and Margalit (2000) revealed that there is a positive relationship between a high level of hope and effective coping strategies in addressing these challenges. Adelabu (2008) further added that young people with high levels of hope reported high levels of motivation towards academic achievements. In a two-year longitudinal study comprised of 367 secondary school students that examined the constancy of hope and satisfaction and their relation to academic achievements, they found that hope, self-esteem, and life satisfaction were stable and constant protective factors that predicted academic success.

Mental Health and Hopeful Thinking. Hopeful thinking has a positive impact on mental health. Psychologists have been evaluating the relationship between hope and psychological health (Cheavens et al., 2005) and have evidence showing that hope is a strong predictor of mental health. In fact, hope predicts better overall adjustment, positive affect, life satisfaction, and self-worth (Bailey, Eng, Frisch, & Snyder, 2007). High levels of hope are also related to lower rates of self-deprecatory thinking and depression (Gilman, Dooley, & Florell, 2006; Snyder, 1999).

Conceptualization of Hope. Each conceptualization of hope has contributed to the advancement of hope research. Snyder's hope theory (2002) model surmised that in the face of obstacles, through the interactions of agency and pathways to accomplish the goal, hope is realized.

The Components of Hope Theory. Snyder (1994) broke down the concept of hope into three mental components referred to as tenets: goal, agency, and pathways.

The goal is described as the first tenet of his hope theory. Snyder (1994) explained that the goal is the desired outcome a person mentally set out to achieve. A person's goal can be in the form of kind, feeling, or accomplishment. A goal that is desired to be achieved, is meaningful to the individual, of significant magnitude, and attainable.

The second tenet of hope theory is pathways (Snyder, 1994), which is the mental road map that provides direction to the goal. When a goal is well-defined, pathways serve as an efficacious navigator to negotiate unexpected turns, twists, and obstacles along the route to achieving the desired goal.

The third tenet of the hope theory is the agency, which is the mental exertion that is fueled with determination and commitment to accomplish the goal. Agency taps into the perception and ignites a spark that sustains the movement toward realizing the desired goals. Agentic thinking is easily activated when goals are precise, clearly understood, and meaningful (Snyder, 1994).

Hopeful Thinking. To have hope is to acquire the belief that you have some control over your circumstances and that you are no longer entirely at the mercy of forces outside yourself (Groopman, 2004). The construct of hope proposed that children build pathways and agentic thoughts almost from the time of their birth (Snyder, 2002). In relation to pathway thinking, infants form perceptions of their environment and learn that certain events co-occur temporally. Thence, the infants begin to distinguish between their needs and focus on goals in order to satisfy these needs. Gradually they acquire the basic skills necessary for pathway thinking through learning and experimenting with various linked actions to achieve their goals. In his findings, Snyder (2000) discussed the agentic thinking, as composed of (a) self-recognition, (b) the

perception of the self as the originator of actions, and (c) the forming of goals. Snyder (1994) observed that barriers along the paths produce negative emotions, especially when children encounter profound blockages while the successful pursuit of goals tends to produce positive emotions, especially when barriers are overcome. Realizing that these barriers are an inevitable part of life that cannot be avoided leads to the construction of hopeful approaches and resilience. Struggling with barriers, identifying alternative paths to reach desired goals and celebrating success enhance personal strength. Relationships with others are vital to this process: through the encouragement of role models (e.g., parents, teachers, or friends), high-hope children learn to find and maintain pathway and agentic thoughts for their goals even when they face barriers.

Hopeful thinking requires the imagination of flexible and effective pathways for reaching the desired target (pathways thinking). This involves thoughts about effective strategies to pursue different means of obtaining goals. High hope individuals (compared to low hope individuals) may identify routes that they are confident in, have a decisive nature, are good at producing alternative routes, and maybe more effective in reaching their goals. These individuals have a generalized expectation of success and thus any blockage of their objectives is viewed as temporary because new paths to achieve goals are frequently developed (Cheavens, 2000). Furthermore, high-hope individuals have the skills to cope more effectively with barriers to achievement and demonstrate high levels of competence across a wide range of activities and attempts (Snyder, Rand & Sigmon, 2002).

Hope as a Relational Process. Although admittedly the weakest conceptualization of hope, the construct has been defined as a relational process, inspired by love, which occurs among people (Farran et al., 1991; Gaskin & Forte, 1995; Marcel, 1962). In earlier literature, Erikson (1964, 1982) asserted that hope is a relational process, first developed by early caregiver

relationships and then molded by later life experiences with others. In essence, relational conceptualizations of hope represent the attributes of others that help people to successfully navigate crises (Farran et al., 1991). An elderly population identified relationships with family members as important aspects of their hope development and maintenance (Westburg, 2001). In fact, Westburg observed the lowest hope in elderly women who had experienced disconnect in caregiver-attachment due to death or separation (2001). The author concluded that the failure of initial caregiver relationships to foster hope suppressed the individual's later capacity for hope development.

Farran, Keane-Hagerty, Salloway, Kupferer, and Wilken (1991) noted that the caregivers of terminally ill patients reported that their relationships with family members and their experience of the ill person's love gave them hope and contributed to their persistence. Similarly, Farran et al. (1991) suggested that relational attributes of hope enable healthy people to successfully navigate traumatic life events. Research by Carvajal, Clair, Nash, and Evans (1998) demonstrated that social experiences with family and peers mediate the relationship between hope and adolescent substance abuse, further supporting the association between hope and interpersonal relationships.

More recently, hope being conceptualized as a relational process has occurred within the context of a therapeutic relationship. The use of such a relationship to increase hope was first proposed by Stotland (1969) in which he cited three means by which a person can influence another's level of hope: (1) the gift of presence, (2) communicating positive expectations for the target person, and (3) exhibiting a confidence in the other's likelihood to overcome difficulties. A model of bereavement counselling, as stated by Cutcliffe (2006) purports that hope is increased through the implicit projection of hope within the therapeutic connection with the

client. He further explained that the implicit projection of hope is accomplished through the experience of human care and connection, countering the projection of hopelessness from others, unwavering commitment from the therapist, and the re-discovery of trust. Similarly, Flaskas (2007) reported a bidirectional association between the therapeutic relationship and the client's experience of hope, such that client's hope influences the alliance, and the alliance influences the client's hope.

Despite these assertions, others (Averill, Catlin & Chon, 1990; Shorey et al., 2003; Snyder, 1994, 2000a; Snyder, 1991) have concluded that hope is either a cognitive or an affective construct which is developed and maintained in part by interpersonal relationships. Supporting this claim, correlational research by Snyder (1991) measured hope cognitively and found that compared to people low in hope, hopeful people describe themselves as being more effective at establishing interpersonal relationships and more likely to function in the independent role within the relationship. These associations were attributed to cognitive components such as shared goals, exposure to a greater number of goals directed pathways, and role modelling (Snyder, 1994; Snyder, 1991).

Hope as Cognition. Erikson (1964) defined hope as a cognition, stating that it is an enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes, despite any dark urges and rages. This definition clearly emphasizes goal-directed cognition. Stotland (1969) expanded this definition, using a cognitive-behavioural framework to include the perceived probability of goal attainment. In this definition, hope is an expectation greater than zero in achieving a goal. Further, the author asserted that hope is incorporated into a person's schemas based on previous learning and experiences. Stotland further added that the importance of the goal under consideration was related to a person's subjective judgment of hope.

Breznitz (1986) suggested that hope can take five forms: intention, performance, protected area, bridge, and as an end in itself. Farran et al. (1991) similarly described hope as a rational thought process comprising of five components. First, hope requires goals and the ability to articulate your goals. Second, hope necessitates resources including social connections, physical and emotional energy. Third, hope is active, such that actions are taken to attempt in reaching your goals. Fourth, hope requires a sense of control over internal states, the future, past, and present. Finally, hope requires the ability to imagine the future. As stated by Farran et al., high scores on each component comprise hope.

Building on previous cognitive theorists, Snyder (1994) offered a well-developed and supported theory of hope. According to Snyder, hope is a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals). This definition involves three distinct components—goals (the foundational assumption to hopeful thinking), agency thinking, and pathway thinking.

The common guiding assumption of hope theory is that goals, the first tenet of hope theory, are the cognitive anchors of hopeful thinking (Snyder, 1994; Snyder, 2000a; Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997; Snyder, Sympson, Michael & Cheavens, 2000). In his 1994 studies, Snyder established that goals are defined as any object, experience, or outcome that one imagines and desires. His position is goals can vary according to the time frame (i.e. short and long-term goals) and importance. He further added that goals of significant magnitude or importance can serve as the cognitive anchors of hope. However, he pointed out that since goals are created under varying degrees of perceived attainment, they must include a level of attainment uncertainty. More recently, in 2002, Snyder et al. found that goals with the greatest perceived

importance are the most prominent in individuals' thoughts. Under optimal conditions, goals set within intermediate degrees of goal attainment are stretch goals.

Snyder, Feldman, Taylor, Schroeder, and Adams (2000) explicated two general types of goals. Approach goals include maintenance goals, goals imagined for the first time, and continued progress goals. In contrast, avoidance goals are the prevention or delay of an unwanted situation or outcome. Either approach or avoidance goals can serve as a cognitive anchor for hope (Snyder et al., 2005).

The second component of Snyder's (1994) hope theory—pathway thinking—is the mental capacity to create effective strategies for goal attainment and produce alternative goal attainment strategies when initial attempts are blocked. For example, the statement, *There are lots of ways around any problem, represents pathway thinking*. Clearly, pathway thinking reflects the evaluation and refinement of plans in light of any impeding circumstances that are encountered (Snyder, Cheavens & Michael, 2005). Pathway thinking is based, in part, on a previous history of finding one or more successful goal attainment strategies (Snyder, 1994). Compared to those low in hope, people high in hope perceive themselves as being—and actually are—more effective in creating goal attainment. They are also adept at altering their routes to goal attainment to maximize the effectiveness of their goal pursuits (Snyder, 1991; Snyder, Sympson, et al., 1996).

The third component of Snyder's (1994) hope theory—agency thinking—represents a person's perceived motivation to enact goal attainment strategies. These thoughts reflect the mental energy to begin enacting goal attainment strategies as well as the appraisal of the capability to persevere in the pursuit of goals despite obstacles (Snyder, 2000a). Agentic thinking is encompassed in the statement, *I energetically pursue my goals*. Agentic thinking is always necessary for hope but is most significant when impediments in the pursuit of goals are

encountered (Snyder et al., 2005). During these instances, agentic thinking enables the focusing of requisite motivation to the best alternative pathways. Agentic thinking is not derived from goal pursuits that are easily obtained without hindrances. Instead, the agency is based on previous learning during times that the individual was able to exert mental effort to overcome obstacles inhibiting goal pursuits (Snyder, 1994).

Pathway and agency thoughts are both additive and iterative over the course of a given sequence of goal-directed cognitions (Snyder, 1991). Thus, pathway and agentic thinking build upon each other. In fact, because of the bidirectional and additive relationship, hope necessitates both (Snyder, 1994). As such, many measures arrive at total hope by summing pathway and agentic thinking (Snyder, 1991; Snyder et al., 1996).

Many theorists have examined the development of hope as a means to gain further insight into the mechanisms that enable its profound effects. Researchers agree that the development of hope occurs early (Erikson, 1964; Snyder, 1994, 2002; Shorey et al., 2003). They found that the cognitive development of infants greatly impacts the development of hope, while others add that interpersonal relationships, language usage, experience with goal pursuits, and the academic environment have a profound effect. Snyder (1994, 2000) observed that infants' exploration of their environment at birth facilitates the processing and encoding of new sensory information. These new sensations and the meaning assigned to them-perceptions, provide the infant with early schemas about the world around them. Snyder (2000) found that by attending to schematic linkages between goals and behaviours, infants and toddlers begin to understand the chronology of events. Often by 3-months, and certainly by 12-months, anticipatory thoughts and linkages evolve into pointing, the initial expression of goal identification. His research explained that with the continued development of the prefrontal cortex, the toddler becomes more adept at sustaining

attention, which maintains goal representation despite distractions, and planning, which facilitates the imagination of various goal pursuit pathways. Thus, pathway thinking develops as infants form schemas and perceptions about their immediate environment, gain a chronological understanding of events, learn subsequent associations between events and goals, and experience cognitive advancements in attention and planning (Snyder, 1994, 2000).

Agency thinking develops after pathway thinking because it requires the infant to have awareness of self and insight into the self as the instigator (Snyder, 2000b). Still, Kaplan (1978) demonstrated that toddlers recognize themselves in a mirror by 12-21 months and use the pronoun *I* by 18-21 months. Within the first 2-years, the development of self, causes the recognition that one is making a move toward the desired goal that forms the basis of agency thinking (Snyder, 2000b).

Erikson's (1964) epigenetic developmental model offers an additional explanation of hope development. According to Erikson, the child's premier question or concern, between birth and 2-years, is whether to trust the world. Hope results as the child acquires a sense of trust rather than mistrust during this critical stage. As a result, hopeful thinking relies on a person's sense of connection with the larger universe.

Likewise, Bandura's (1997) social learning theory suggested that people learn through observing others' behaviours, attitudes, and the outcomes of those behaviours. Thus, interpersonal relationships that model high agency and pathway thinking, and subsequent behaviour teach hopeful thinking to the child (Snyder, 1994). Although most research in this area has been theoretical in nature, Shorey et al. (2003) provide empirical support for a model in which parenting contributes to the formation of attachment styles, thereby facilitating the development of hopeful thinking. They have found that secure attachment leads to higher levels

of the agency and pathway thinking, while both anxious and avoidant attachment leads to lower levels of hope. Furthermore, attachment to caregivers with high levels of hope increases the likelihood that the child will form strong attachments with others, and their goals will involve the goals of other people—*we/me* type of goal (Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997).

Interpersonal connections are especially important for the development of hope when obstacles are encountered (Shorey et al., 2003; Snyder, 1994). Impediments to goal pursuits produce negative emotions, especially if the blockage is sizable (Snyder, 1993, 1994). However, social connections with caregivers provide a resource for children in these situations to learn frustration tolerance and be assisted in discovering alternative routes to avoid the impediment and reach the goal (Shorey et al., 2003; Snyder, 2000b). On the contrary, the successful pursuit of goals produces positive emotions, especially if obstacles have been overcome in the process (Snyder, 1993, 1994). These positive emotions increase agency thinking, especially when reinforced by interpersonal relationships (Snyder, 2000b). Thus, interpersonal connections and attachment build an environment where goal impediments become opportunities for children to learn tolerance for frustration, how to devise alternative goal pursuit pathways, and gain the perception that they are successful in the pursuit of their goals.

Like interpersonal interactions, language plays a critical role in the development of both pathway and agency thinking. The language provides children with the opportunity to reference their own capacitates and volitions; in turn, children's rumination on successful goal completion builds agency thinking (Snyder, 2000b). Furthermore, language provides a system of symbols for building mental maps of the world, which facilitates pathway thinking. The more scripts children have for a variety of situations, the better prepared they are to reach their goals in those situations

(Snyder, 1994). In addition, the more similarities children recognize across situations, the more general principles they acquire about goal-directed thinking.

Academic subjects, especially in elementary and middle school, provide a mechanism to further the development of hope (Snyder, 1994). Reading expands a person’s information base, providing the foundation for hopeful thoughts and goals (Snyder, 1994, 2000). Secondly, the goal pursuit activity of reading itself models pathway thinking (Snyder, 2000a). Mathematics also facilitates the development of hope because math terminology is similar to hope terminology (Snyder, 1994). Questions are posed as problems, similar to goal blockages, for which math calls for solutions or pathway thinking. Math symbols also indicate the hopeful thought process—pathways with inherent agentic properties. Overall, academic subjects increase opportunities for goal development, model pathway thinking, and even model the thought processes of hope.

Increasingly complex thinking, interpersonal relationships, experience with goal impediments, language development, and academic lessons all provide opportunities for children to consolidate earlier gains in hopeful thinking. Over time, children's thoughts about themselves and their goal pursuits become more refined and complex (Snyder, 2000b). Hope theory stresses that in late adolescence, a more coherent sense of personal identity offers a platform for goal-directed thinking and a stable sense of hope (Snyder 1994, 2000). A highly valuable finding from Snyder (2000) illustrated that early hope development and stabilization in late adolescence enable individuals to benefit from the powerfully positive effects of hopeful thinking. Noteworthy, the robust impact of a fully developed sense of hope has been demonstrated on academic achievement, school dropout, mental health, and physical health.

The Importance of Hopeful Thinking

Hopeful thinking greatly impacts on academic performance. Students with high hopefulness demonstrate superior academic performance when compared to students with low hopefulness across elementary, junior high school, high school, and college (Cheavens, Michael & Snyder, 2005). Snyder et al. found that elementary school students with high levels of hope set challenging goals for themselves and perceived that the achievement of these goals would lead to positive outcomes. To a similar extent, high hopefulness has been associated with high grade-point averages in junior high school students (Gilman, Dooley & Florell, 2006), high school students (Snyder,1991), and college students (Chang, 1998; Snyder,1991; Snyder, Shorey, et al., 2002). In similar studies, Ciarrochi et al. (2007) demonstrated that hope predicted a greater amount of variance in school grades than self-esteem or positive attributional style.

Hopeful thinking is also inversely related to student dropout. Worrell and Hale (2001) predicted from their findings that adolescent students who were at risk of dropping out of school but possessed high levels of hope were significantly less likely to drop out than their low hope counterparts. Similarly, Snyder et al. (2002) found that over a six-year period, students with higher levels of hope were likewise less likely to drop out of college and also less likely to be dismissed for poor academic performance than students with low levels of hope.

Some research has also found that the school community and environment, not just academics, affect retention. Ong, Edwards, and Bergeman (2006) suggest that a state of hope serves as a protective mechanism to keep negative emotions low, allow the recovery from stress, and enable students to focus on new strategies for academic success. The relationship between hope and social competence may suggest an additional explanation for students with high hope to have lower levels of dropout. Students with high levels of hope are more satisfied with their

academic progress and school environment, increasing their willingness to attend school (Chang, 1998). Notably, individuals with high hope have also been shown to exhibit better social competence (Barnum, Snyder, Rapoff, Mani & Thompson, 1998), find more pleasure in forming relationships and experience higher levels of school connectedness (Snyder, Hoza, et al., 1997).

Hope theory explains the relationship between hopefulness and academic achievement. Greater school connectedness reduces negative emotional responses from stress and greater satisfaction with academic achievement explain the reduced likelihood of high hope students dropping out of school. Academic achievement requires students to set concrete goals and then create and enact strategies to complete those goals (Cheavens et al., 2005), therefore academic tasks require agency and pathway thinking to be successful. Gilman, Dooley, and Florell (2006) assert that low hope youths are more likely to employ ineffective or inflexible goal-directed cognitive strategies. Ineffective cognitive strategies may result in lower agentic thinking, and hence less motivation to reach academic goals. Hopeful students have more agency thoughts, and when difficulties are encountered, they rely on their reservoirs of determination (Snyder et al., 2002). Hopefulness is also related to lower psychological distress, school maladjustment, and self-deprecatory thinking (Snyder, 1999), which may enable hopeful students to engage in more rational problem solving than low hope students (Chang, 1998; Cheavens et al., 2005).

Students with high hopefulness are also more likely to be academically successful and less likely to drop out because of greater feelings of control over their environment (Chang, 1998; Snyder et al., 2002). This is supported by the findings of Snyder (1999), who concluded that because hopeful people perceive test-taking situations as challenges, not barriers, they experience less general anxiety and less anxiety related to test-taking. Furthermore, students with low levels of hope tend to use avoidance and disengagement thinking as opposed to problem-

focused thought (Chang, 1998; Gillman, Dooley & Florell, 2006; Snyder et al., 2002). Likely, because of their greater levels of anxiety and ineffective and inflexible goal-directed strategies, low hope students are less able to use feedback from their experiences of failure in an adaptive manner to improve their future performances (Snyder, 1999). Instead, low hope students are prone to self-doubt and rumination, which leads to a perceived lack of control and passivity (Chang, 1998; Snyder et al., 2002). Hopeful students, on the other hand, make adaptive attributions when they fail. These students believe that the feedback from failure relates only to their given effort or goal-directed strategy on a task, not to their self-worth (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand & Feldman, 2003). These attributions reinforce future perceptions regarding personal control over academic success in hopeful students.

The relationship between hopeful thinking and goal orientation provides yet another explanation for greater academic success in hopeful students. Because mastery-oriented goals focus on the process of learning and use outcomes as feedback to enhance future learning, goal-related theory suggests that mastery-oriented goals produce greater academic achievement than performance-oriented goals (Covington, 2000; Lackaye et al., 2006). Likewise, hope theory holds that hopeful students are able to conceive many strategies to reach goals and plan contingencies in the event of goal impediments (Snyder, 1991). As a result, obstacles to goals are viewed as challenges to be overcome, rather than failures, thereby leading to the implementation of an alternative goal-directed strategy (Snyder et al., 2002). Chang (1998) found that students with high levels of hope employed fewer disengagement coping strategies following a goal blockage. Instead, hopeful students use problem-solving to adjust their goal attainment strategies, which further encourages goal pursuits. Perceiving that the goal will be met, despite obstacles, hopeful students focus on success, minimizing distress and maximizing positive effect (Snyder,

1991). These deep-strategic processes (engaged coping, advanced problem-solving, perceived obstacles as barriers but not failures, and minimized stress) are found in both hopeful students and students with mastery-oriented goals; thus, Snyder et al. (2002) concludes that the cognitive strategies employed by both hopeful students and mastery-oriented goal seekers facilitate academic achievement. This association between hope and mastery-oriented goals further explains the link between hope and academic achievement.

Cheavens et al. (2005) realized that the impact of hope on academic achievement is not merely due to higher levels of intelligence. Snyder et al. (2002) earlier found that even after controlling for entrance examination scores, the level of hope predicted college students' grade point averages, attrition rates, and graduation rates. Similarly, hope predicted final grades in a college course after controlling for previous academic performance (Snyder, 1991). At this time, studies have not yet examined the role of intelligence as a moderator between hope and academic achievement. Nevertheless, research has repeatedly demonstrated the predictive power of hope on academic achievement, due in part to its psychological benefits.

Hopeful Thinking Supports Mental-Wellness

Sometimes the brightest students fail to achieve in school or realize their potential, whereas less talented individuals thrive and even excel in the face of adversity. The difference between these two kinds of students may lie in their levels of hope. People with a high level of hope are confident of having control over their environment. This assumption is supported by findings that high-hope people experience less anxiety overall, specifically in test-taking situations. In contrast, low-hope people experience more anxiety and are more likely to experience blank-out or goal-blocking thoughts when taking tests (Burke, 2002).

Low-hope people may consider quitting when encountering barriers to goals because they cannot think of other pathways to surmount the obstacles. This often results in frustration, a loss of confidence, and lowered self-esteem. In order to sustain the movement toward your goals, a sense of agency and a sense of pathways must be operative. The ability to generate multiple pathways to goals can inoculate students from experiencing negative outcomes when they encounter obstacles (Snyder & Shorey, 2002b).

Emotional Intelligence: Social and Emotional Learning. The shift in focus of mental well-being support into schools has been driven by a recognition that the affective domain is a critical component of educational practice (Burke, 2002; Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Qualter, Gardner & Whiteley, 2007). Based on Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, together with brain research, and reviews of successful programs promoting emotional health, the study of emotional intelligence has been described as triggering a revolution in mental health promotion (Elias & Weissberg, 2000).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has gained considerable momentum as schools have sought to locate notions of mental well-being within their cultures, curricula and pedagogies. SEL is defined as the process through which children enhance their interpersonal and small group skills (for example, recognizing, managing and appropriately expressing your emotions) and the internalization of prosocial attitudes and values needed to achieve goals, solve problems, become emotionally involved in learning, in work, and succeed in school and throughout life (Zins & Elias, 2007).

There is a considerable body of evidence that SEL skills are integral prerequisites to success in life (Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Lopes & Salovey, 2004; Romaz, et al., 2004). SEL can also be understood in terms of a set of competencies, learning skills and

human qualities, which are, in turn, underpinned by a set of ethical and moral values (Faupel, 2003). In this sense, including SEL in classrooms means valuing and prioritizing activities, which build social and emotional competencies. Its inclusion also recognizes the crucial importance of the affective aspect of our being, and how it integrates with cognitive and behavioural development (Denham & Weissberg, 2004). There is currently little evidence demonstrating how teachers engage with SEL as a means of understanding more about children's cognitive and behavioural development, associated with children's mental well-being.

Interventions. Weare and Nind (2011), list a number of interventions for the prevention of mental health problems in school context which includes the following: teaching skills, multi-level intervention targeted at the whole school community, improvement of school climate, training of teachers, and cooperation with parents, parent education and collaboration with community-based mental health services. Early research findings suggest that the universal interventions that are implemented for a longer period of time (one year) and are aimed at the prevention of mental health are quite effective (Wells, Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2003). This prevention is directly linked to strengthening protective factors.

Protective factors reduce the possibilities of adverse effects on child development. The first category of protective factors includes cognitive skills, socio-cognitive and social skills as well as temperament traits (Luthar & Zigler, 1992). The second category refers to the quality of children's interactions with the environment. The third category refers to the relationship between the school and family and the quality of the school environment. Prevention is associated with enhancing protective factors and the modification of risk factors. Factors associated with the contexts in which children are embedded include family, neighbourhood, school and its influences on child development (Severson, Walker, Hope-Doolittle, Kratochwill,

& Gresham, 2007). Moreover, prevention is directly linked to the development of psychological resilience, which is associated with children's capacity of adaptation to their environment despite the adverse conditions (Luthar, Cichetti & Becker, 2000). The development of psychological resilience is a gradual process. Individual factors, such as adaptation skills and external factors, such as the supportive environment, can be cultivated particularly during the first years of life, with the aim of minimizing the impact of negative events in life (Friedman & Chase-Lansdale, 2002).

In their research, Nikolaou and Markogiannakis (2017) outlined the following protective factors associated with the development of psychological resilience are the following: the formation of an emotionally safe and supportive relationship with family and peers, the development of the sense of belonging, good communication skills, problem-solving skills, social skills, and the ability of self-regulation of behaviour and emotion. Environmental factors include a positive school climate, warmth, security, stability (consistent limits), and the opportunities for participation in school, family and community activities. The recognition of the factors that have an effect on mental health is taken into account in designing early intervention, which reduces the adverse effects of the disorders. Teachers collaborate with their students, their family, and mental health professionals in the design and implementation of interventions for targeted groups of children and provide ongoing support to their students and families. Furthermore, they can detect the children who are exposed to risk factors and enhance protective factors for all children with the aim of cultivating psychological resilience and well-being. The empowerment of skills associated with psychological resilience can reduce the risk of developing a mental disorder.

The relationship between hope and wellbeing. The literature brought forth a list of insightful findings supporting the relationship between hope and wellbeing as noted in the work of Gallagher and Lopez (2009) who found hope to be associated with the growth of positive, flourishing mental well-being. In support, Shorey and Snyder (2002), added that a high level of hope is positively related to critical thinking and feeling confident. In approval, Stevenson (1991) supported that hope is considered an important element of human development and enables people to cope with stressful situations and maintain their quality of life (Stephenson, 1991). Cultivating habits of hope can help students navigate through obstacles and secure the desired goods through alternative means (Shade, 2006). In contrast, low hope or hopelessness, according to Alloy, Abramson, Metalsky, and Hartlage (1989), is viewed as a proximal sufficient cause of depressive thinking. Children with low or no hope struggle to navigate through the challenges and risks that stand between them and success (Snyder & Shorey, 2002a).

Spirituality, Religion and Mental Wellness. The integration of spirituality and religion into psychotherapy has become a significant area of interest in the mental health field (Kelly, 1995). In recent years, there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the importance of religious and spiritual issues and concerns in clinical practice (Richards & Bergin, 1997; Dein & Loewenthal, 1998). Research has shown that religious commitment and spirituality are associated with many positive outcomes including, but not limited to, improved ability to cope with stress, reduced incidence of depression and anxiety, reduced risk for suicide and criminal behavior, and decreased usage of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol (McCullough & Larson, 1999). There has been a commensurate recognition of the role of religion and spirituality in the psychotherapeutic process, and that it can be an important part of the solution to psychological problems (Pargament, Murray-Swank & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

In recent years, efforts have been made to integrate religiously-based concepts and beliefs in the context of a cognitive-behavioural therapy approach. This involves replacing damaging beliefs and attributions about the self, others, and the world with more positive religiously-based beliefs and attributions, as well as utilizing various other cognitive approaches. Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of these approaches for several different populations (Propst, Olstrom, Watkins, Dean & Mashburn, 1992). In comparing religious and nonreligious cognitive-behavioural therapy Propst et al. (1992) observed that in the religious cognitive therapy group, the therapist provided Christian religious rationales for their procedures, used religious arguments to counter irrational thoughts, and used religious imagery in their procedures. It should be added that research suggests that most clients express an interest in incorporating spiritual issues and resources into the counselling or psychotherapeutic setting (Arnold, Avants, Margolin, & Marcotte, 2002; Hodge, 2006; Rose, Westefeld & Ansley, 2001). Clients view their spiritual and religious strengths as vital assets in coping with problems and for enhancing healing and growth (Hodge, 2006). This further supports the rationale for the integration of spiritual and religious components.

Because spirituality and religious practices are often pervasive and central in the lives of many Muslims, it would be valuable to integrate their experiences into the studying of the process of psychotherapy. Several studies have found that a form of religious psychotherapy may be effective with Muslim clients who suffer from anxiety, depression, and bereavement (Azhar, Varma & Dharap, 1994; Razali et al., 1998). In each of these studies, clients in the religious psychotherapy groups responded significantly faster than those receiving standard treatment. In this approach, unproductive beliefs are identified and modified or replaced with beliefs derived

from Islam. This is actually a variation of cognitive therapy making use of religious themes (Azhar, Varma & Dharap, 1994).

In treating patients with anxiety and depression through religious psychotherapy, Razali et al. (1998) identified negative or harmful thoughts in patients and modified them using cognitive techniques guided by the Qur'an and Hadith (sayings and customs of the Prophet Muhammad). They also discussed religious issues and cultural beliefs related to the illness and based advice on the teachings of the Prophet of Islam. Azhar, Varma and Dharap (1994) used a similar approach. Patients were encouraged to recognize ideal religious values, adopt, and cultivate these in their thoughts, actions, and emotions.

The goal of searching for ideal values was seen to be a key factor essential to success in therapy. An additional aspect of the work by Azhar, Varma and Dharap (1994) in the treatment of depressed patients was the concept of repentance and forgiveness. Patients were encouraged to repent if they felt a sense of guilt from having strayed from the value system. Once they were convinced that God had accepted their repentance and that they had chosen the right values, symptoms began to reduce. Additionally, religious psychotherapy contributed to reviving spiritual strength as a way of coping with the illness or situation. During the counselling process, the client may be reminded to rely on God, The Almighty, in times of difficulties, in supplication, in times of need, in repentance and when in error, and to focus on the five daily prayers and reading of Qur'an. Prayer, in particular, is viewed as a form of meditation that promotes relaxation and a general sense of well-being (Azhar, Varma & Dharap, 1994).

Impact of the School Climate on Hope

The climate of a school can impact the level of hope in its education system. The school can be considered a source for protective factors. In examining the relations between classroom

climate, dispositional optimism, hope, depression, and perceived quality of life in early adolescent students (grades 6-8), hope was found to be a psychological strength that mediated relations between classroom climate, emotional well-being and life satisfaction (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont, 2010). In a longitudinal study of 423 adolescents, the reciprocal relations among their perceptions of the school environment, engagement in learning, hope, and academic achievement were evaluated. Students' perceptions of the school environment were linked to engagement in learning, which, in turn, was linked to change in academic achievement and hope over the span of one year. Reciprocal links have been documented between earlier levels of engagement and hope and later perceptions of the school climate (Van Ryzin, 2011).

The Construct of Hope Positioned in Educational and Pedagogical Practices. Although a body of research supports that hope is a foundational motivation for education, the role of hope in teaching has not drawn much academic attention. Even in the current dialogue about dispositions, it is surprising that hope in teaching remains largely unexplored given its close relationship to goal-setting. In the English Language Arts K to Grade 9 Program of Studies, goal setting is mentioned more than 40 times in relation to language learning, problem-solving, collaboration, taking responsibility and personal accomplishment (Alberta Education, 2000). Similarly, goal-setting can be interpreted as a mathematical concept. Being effective in setting goals is an expectation mentioned several times in the Mathematics Program of Studies, in relation to self-assessment, communication and reasoning (Alberta Education, 2016).
Current understanding of hope is still more intuitive rather than explicit. Hope is a motivation that plays in the background of morals, ways of being and accompanying actions. Like the air we breathe for life, hope is essential for teaching. We tend not to notice it until it is stirred up or its quality is diminished (Birmingham, 2009).

One of the tasks of schools is to support children's mental health development while growing up. The school is where children and adolescents spend a large part of their time coping with social challenges, learning demands, and experiencing mental overload and psychological stress. It remains unknown which school-related factors increase the risk of developing mental health problems versus which factors are protective, and help children grow up mentally healthy. Fundamental to this study is the role and means for pedagogical practices to lower the risk of developing mental health problems while supporting children and adolescents who are already affected by mental issues. In view of the high rates of mental health problems, using preventive methods in school to reduce the risk of developing mental illness or its recurrence is an interdisciplinary challenge that cannot be met without rethinking the current pedagogical practices (Schulte-Körne, 2016).

Hopeful thinking, in both students and teachers, is correlated to active problem solving and information seeking. Students are only half of the academic performance dyad, but teachers are the second vital half. High-hope and low-hope teachers can themselves establish classroom atmospheres that either promote or discourage students' hopeful thinking (Burke, 2002). When hopeful individuals encounter failure or obstacles on the path to achieving a goal, rather than place blame on personal, innate inadequacies or global, immutable obstacles, they fault their chosen pathway or lack of effort. Likewise, the aspect of agency in hopeful thinking promotes the belief in individuals that they may employ different pathways in future similar endeavours to achieve success. Given the emerging evidence on the benefits of hopeful thinking, hope theory offers students an opportunity to set and work toward goals for success.

In addition to providing targeted interventions focused overtly on the school transition, middle-level educators may take a larger systemic approach. One method is to integrate hope

theory into school curricula and instruction. This approach includes presenting students with information about goal-oriented thinking, pathways, and agency, then exploring these concepts in stories. Language arts teachers can utilize texts with characters that demonstrate successful use of pathways and agency and use hope language in discussing these characters. Creative writing assignments may challenge students to construct their own personal stories of hope in their lives. Social studies teachers might highlight hopeful thinking in historical figures. Students identify characters with high hope in short narratives, analyzing how the characters exhibited pathway and agenda thinking in pursuit of their goals. Students then set goals for themselves and consider how they might apply the lessons demonstrated by the characters in their own lives (Marques, Lopez & Pais-Ribeiro, 2011). Furthermore, in math and science, students may learn multiple different ways to analyze and solve problems. When students find one method to be ineffective, they can identify and employ other methods until they find one that works (McDermott & Hastings, 2000).

It is important to emphasize that in order to give hope to others; teachers must first have hope. Teachers may be particularly vulnerable to burnout and loss of hope. When efforts to help students learn seem to fail, and pathways to facilitate learning seem to have been exhausted, there always will be the temptation to give up hope and surrender students to their fate. It is at these times that it is particularly important to ascertain whether the teachers are pursuing their goals and dreams or whether they have given them up in trying to help others.

Professional Learning. If teachers are supported and professionally coached to be goal oriented, they will remain engaged and invested in pursuing their own goals, and more likely to retain the vitality and sense of personal integrity to model hope for their students (Snyder et al., 1997). Teachers need opportunities to share what they know, discuss what they want to learn and

connect new concepts and strategies to their own unique contexts. School authority and leadership must encourage and sustain schools as reflective communities. The authors argue that in today's climate of reform, teachers need to rethink their own practice and teach in ways they have never contemplated before. Success depends on how teachers are able to learn new skills and un-learn previous beliefs. Professional development today should focus on engaging teachers in practical tasks, be collaborative, directly connect to the work of teachers and their students, and be sustained, on-going and intensive. Professional learning should support teachers to need to integrate theory with classroom practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Because hope theory's constructs of pathways and agency are teachable skills; educators, being more knowledgeable, have an opportunity to instill hopeful thinking in their students through guidance and support.

Vygotsky's theories on cognitive development proposed two main principles: the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Drawing from Vygotsky's perspective, the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) refers to someone who has a higher level of understanding of a concept and is capable of safely guiding the learner to internalize and apply the concept independently. The Zone of Proximal Development indicates the comparison of what the child currently achieves independently to what the child could potentially achieve with the support of the More Knowledgeable Other (McLeod, 2014). With relevance to hope theory, the teacher assuming the role of the MKO, guides students in forming realistic goals, and supports them along their pathway to gain self-efficacy and skills in meeting their goals.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Purpose of the Study

A recent study found that hope has a unique value in schools that strive to promote their students' success, including academic goals and overall well-being (Idan & Margalit, 2013). Canada Mental Health Association (2019), in support, considers mental wellness essentially important to the enjoyment of life, people, the environment, being creative, being confident to take risks, and responding to stressful situations. Noting that students' mental well-being is a concern in schools across Canada, the purpose of this qualitative study was to describe educators' experience on applying hope theory within the context of their educational practice at an upper-elementary Islamic school in Alberta, Canada. A qualitative descriptive research design was applicable to achieve the purpose of this study. The research plan, including the data collection instruments, study participants, procedures, analysis methods, ethical concerns, and limitations are the primary components of this chapter.

The goal of this study was achieved through two objectives. As it relates to education and its application in the classroom, the first objective was, engaging, orienting, and supporting educators in gaining a thorough understanding of hope theory through comprehensive professional learning. After applying practices of the hope theory for twelve weeks from the initial professional learning presentation and with continuous professional support, the second objective was providing a descriptive analysis of educators' experiences. One key outcome of this study is the development of professional learning that will support educators in the application of hope theory within their educational practices; an approach to shaping hopeful thinking. The professional learning was developed using a thorough literature review (see Chapter 2) and revised iteratively through educators' feedback in Phase II.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent, and in what ways were educators able to apply hope theory in their education practice?
2. In applying hope theory, what did educators observe as impactful on the students' learning and their teaching practice?
3. What suggestions do educators have for other educators or for themselves for applying the hope theory approach in their educational practices?

Research Design

Qualitative descriptive designs are eclectic but a well-considered blend of sampling, data collection, and analysis (Sandelowski, 2000). This qualitative descriptive study describes educators' experiences in the application of hope theory in their educational practices. I identified a qualitative descriptive research design (Sandelowski, 2000) as most suitable for the nature of this study, on the basis that describing the experience allowed for insightful understanding of educators' genuine beliefs of applying principles of hope theory. In this context, the qualitative descriptive research design allowed the opportunity to fulfil the intended purpose of documenting thorough descriptions of educators' experience during and following the 12-week application of hope theory. This research design was appropriate for describing the perceptions and experiences of the participants, sequentially, accurately, and with validity (Sandelowski, 2000). Developing a comprehensive descriptive summary based on the experiences of educators who applied hope theory over a twelve-week period (Lambert & Lambert, 2012) was the overarching goal of this qualitative descriptive study.

Data Collection

Obtaining data for this qualitative study was a five-step process. First, participants and the site for this study were identified. Second, a plan was drafted to meet with the participants based on availability and convenience. Third, protocols were developed for collecting the data from the participants within a specific time frame. Fourth and final, the process of supporting the application of hope theory and gathering feedback was conducted in an ethical manner (Creswell, 2012).

Sampling Methods, Research Participants and Setting

A combination of purposive sampling (Welman & Kruger, 1999) and convenience sampling method (Patton, 1991) was used to identify the participants for this study. Having convenience sample was intended to control the resources and time required for conducting this descriptive study. In any qualitative study, it is very important that the researcher carefully selects the right participants. The research phenomenon, questions and the evidence informing the study (Sargeant, 2012) guided this decision. Identifying the participants for this qualitative descriptive research was purposefully done based on their role to experience the phenomenon and how best they will inform the research questions and add meaning to purpose of the research (Creswell, 2012). In purposive sampling, the researcher deliberately seeks out participants from a specific context to learn more about the central phenomenon (Patton, 1991).

To conduct this study on site, permission was sought from the head of this Islamic in Canada. Approval was granted to conduct this study, along with the opportunity to facilitate professional learning with teachers in support of applying hope theory in their educational practices. Through personalized email, educators who teach or work with students in the upper elementary level (grades 4 to 6) were invited to participate in professional learning on hope

theory. To attract the interest and attention of the educators, the email invitation was personalized, addressing each educator by name, outlining details inclusive of the purpose of this study, the value of their input to this study and the field of education, and how the information will be shared and utilized (Fowler, 2014). Each email invitation included the date, time and place, was individually sent to more than twenty educators. Creswell (2012) commented that for in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, twenty is consistent with qualitative sampling size. The criteria included that educators are currently teaching or supporting students between ages of eight and twelve years old.

There were 18 educators, five males and 13 females, who voluntarily participated in this study over a 12-week period. Fourteen educators have identified themselves as Muslims and four have identified themselves as non- Muslims. Both Muslim and Non-Muslim educators' knowledge of Islam vary from an emerging level to an advancing level. The educators' qualifications range from a four-year bachelor degree with one year teaching experience to a six-year master's degree with over 10 year teaching experience. Each educator currently teaches students between the age of nine and 12 at an Islamic private school in Canada. Because this age group of students is the onset of adolescence, the educators who have current experience working with this group of students were purposely identified to participate in this study.

Whilst most adolescents have stable mental health, multiple physical, emotional, and social changes can make adolescents vulnerable in a manner that affects their mental and social well-being. Adolescence is a period for students to start developing social and emotional habits pivotal to their mental well-being. The WHO (2012) advised that it is of utmost importance for their well-being to promote strategies for adolescents to protect themselves from adverse experiences and risk factors which may impact their potential to thrive during adolescence and

transitions during young adulthood. Paulson, Rothlisberg, and Marchant (1998) observed that educators are aware of their role to address concepts according to developmental readiness, dealing with cognitive, social, emotional and psychological issues, but, lack the expertise of how to do this through their instructional practice.

The Context

Located in an urban city in Alberta, Canada, the research site is an Islamic private school that is ethnically, racially, and economically diverse. Its current enrolment exceeds 1400 students with over 100 academic and non-academic staff members. The school's population includes students ranging from five to 18 years of age. More than 50 percent of the student population can be categorized as second-generation Canadians whose parents migrated to Canada as economic immigrants, skilled workers, or refugees.

The academic operation of the school is structured under four department levels. A principal leads the overall faculty, while four assistant principals work collaboratively to overlook the day-to-day operations and supervision of the four departments, on matters regarding teaching and learning. These four departments are recognized as early childhood (KG), lower elementary (Grades 1, 2, 3), upper elementary (Grades 4, 5, 6), junior high (Grades 7, 8, 9), and high school (Grades 10, 11, 12).

Three general reasons influenced the decision for selecting this school setting as the context for this study. Most notably, the convenience of the setting allowed for easy access to gather data combined with my interests in contributing to the professional growth of this organization and the social capital earned by the researcher over the fourteen-year period. As an instructional leader of the faculty, it was convenient for me to facilitate the professional learning presentation at a time convenient for the educators, visit classrooms to support educators during the

application of hope theory, provide ongoing feedback, and record daily notes about educators' insights throughout the twelve-week period. Time and distance were two important factors considering the duration of this dissertation. Marshall and Rossman (1989) reminded researchers that the research setting should be selected based on the following four issues: (a) physical access to the site, (b) variety of data sources available within the site, (c) amount of access to the participants and data, and (d) quality and credibility of the data provided within the site. More important than the convenience of the setting and social capital that contributed to the attainability of this study, this setting was chosen because of my position in this organization.

George (2010) urged leaders to make their organizations better by stepping up, taking initiative, and being the one to take leadership challenges. Having benefited from more than a decade of teaching experience with this organization, and having been blessed with an instructional leadership role, I am the first educator to explore the construct of hope in this intuition. It is my educational journey, from where I came to where I am, that has inspired my interest in the notion of hope. In addition, being a Muslim with an advancing level of understanding the concept hope in the Islamic faith, is what intrigued my interest to investigate hope in an Islamic educational institution. As a member of the leadership team of this institution, I have vested interest not only contributed to the field of education, but to support and promote the vision and mission of this institution.

Ethical Concerns

Ethical issues in research command increased attention today. The ethical considerations are extensive, and they are reflected through the research process. These issues apply to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research, through all stages. All concerns were actively addressed throughout the research process (Creswell, 2012). This study was conducted with the

cooperation of participants willingly agreeing to provide the data to address the research questions. Understanding the complexities when dealing with humans, it is important to consider a number of ethical concerns and responsibilities to the participants (Sales & Folkman, 2000). Because of my role as an assistant principal, I was highly aware of the impact this would have on the participants, all of whom are teachers. Through casual after-school conversations and at informal community gatherings, a keen effort was made to ensure educators understood that in no way they were obligated to participate in this research. No promises were made nor rewards given to participants of this study.

Several reasons were considered for not identifying participants during this study. For confidentiality, and the protection of educators' privacy, no names nor indicators of the classes in which the hope strategies were applied were mentioned in the documentation of data, the recording of findings, nor the discussions section. General descriptions were used to discuss the participants as a group. The anonymity of educators was intended for the purpose of open and honest responses. There were no indications to point out which educators were less engaged in the application process as compared to the educators who were more engaged and enthusiastic about the application of hope theory. All educators reassured the researcher that they were comfortable with what was expected of them for the application of hope theory and were at ease knowing that the level and choice of application were to their discretion.

Instrumentation

For this qualitative study, a Google Form was used for written feedback from educators. In addition, notes were taken continuously annotating observations and conversations. A qualitative researcher does not necessarily use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers (Creswell, 2014). Rather, the qualitative researcher gathers multiple forms of data,

such as written responses, observations, discussions, documented feedback, and audiovisual information rather than relying one single data source. After data collection, all of the data were reviewed, made sense of, and organized into categories and themes that span across all of the data sources.

Open-Ended Survey Questions.

When designing questions, it is imperative to ask questions that are likely to yield as much information about the study phenomenon as possible, and be able to address the aims and objectives of the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These open-ended questions allowed an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through the lens of the participants (Patton, 2002).

1. To what extent, and in what ways were you able to apply hope theory in your educational practice?
2. In applying hope theory, what did you observe as impactful on the students' learning and your teaching practice?
3. What suggestions do you have for other educators or self for applying a hope theory approach in educational practices?

Creswell (2012) explained that the purpose of open-ended questions is to allow the participants to express their thoughts on the experience with ease. For this study, the data were obtained through an interactive process (Polit & Beck, 2014) with the participants, involving reciprocal dialogue and written responses from the educators. The advantage of using written responses for this study provided extensive, in-depth information since it was not practical to equally observe or engaged in discourse with all the participants at the same time (Creswell, 2012). In addition to reciprocal dialogue on the phenomenon, this approach allowed each educator to express an honest description of their experience. This process involved educators

typing up their responses individually responding to three questions emailed to them on a Google form. Using a Google form made allowance for the comfort of their personal space without the influence of other educators, hence, accommodating objectivity and sincerity in their responses. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that familiarity may help the respondent to relax, resulting in more productive responses. As an extended feature of Google form, the descriptive responses were organized on a Google spreadsheet under the headings of the three questions. This process ensured that all participants had the opportunity to state their points of view (Gay, 2012).

Procedure to Obtain Data

Data collection for this qualitative descriptive study was directed toward understanding educators' experience in applying hope theory in their educational practice. A bi-weekly memo was used to annotate unstructured, reciprocal dialogue between the participants and me while structured open-ended questions (Sandelowski, 2000) were responded to after the 12 weeks of application by way of a Google form. All data were aggregated to reflect a holistic description of the phenomenon.

First, to introduce hope theory, educators were invited to participate in a professional learning workshop to deepen their understanding of the concept, and to share their insights of how this this theory can be applied in educational practice. The duration of this professional learning workshop was two hours and it was held in late August, just at the beginning of the school year. At this initial stage, a folder was created in Google Drive for the researcher and educators to collectively bank and share resources, including ideas on the application process. During this first meeting, the three research questions were shared with the educators and placed in the shared folder for reference. Sharing the research questions at the initial stage was intentionally done for clarity on what was expected from educators, while setting their minds at

ease with the simplicity of the task. From the 22 educators who attended the workshop, 18 participated in this research study over the 12-week period from September to November.

Second, to apply hope theory, educators varied in their introductory approach of the concept to their students. From the bank of resources, educators used either videos, discussions, or text to engage students' interest on the topic of hope. On a bi-weekly basis I informally met with the educators in small groups, pairs or individually. In appreciation for educators' ongoing interests invested in this process, these discussions were short, to the points of the questions and occurred most of the times in the educators' classrooms after school. During these informal meetings, participants shared their progress on hope theory application, provided feedback on their observations of its impact, and/or made suggestions to improve the application process. Hence, all dialogue focused on the three inquiry questions were documented in summary form within the hour of the meeting on a Google document, dated and served as a digital log. Educators were referred to by their initials for statistical purpose to tracking number of occurrences of similar responses.

Third, with the 12-week period was coming to an end, and as a reminder to educators, the three research questions were recommunicated via emailed on week 10 by the way of a Google form. A message accompanied this form informing educators that this data was not needed until the completion of week 12. At the end of week 12, the Google form was resent to educators requesting their support in completing the three questions on the form. Over a period of five days, all 18 educators anonymously responded to the three questions describing the ways they applied hope theory, noting their observations of its impact and providing feedback that would be useful to educators. Recipients' responses from the Google forms are automatically organized on a spreadsheet in columns under each question.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data commenced immediately after all 18 educators anonymously submitted their responses to the three inquiry questions. The data obtained were automatically documented on a Google spreadsheet organized in three columns representing the three questions, and an additional three columns for ongoing dialogue. Educators' identities were protected throughout this process. Creswell (2014) advised that in qualitative research, the researcher uses pseudonyms for individuals to protect the identities of educators. The first column of the excel sheet by default contained the timestamp while a second column was inserted for the pseudonyms to represent the responders. Columns C, D and E recorded the responses for questions 2, 3 and 4 aligned to the educators' pseudonyms.

The first step of data analysis began with organizing all data systematically on one document for accessing, coding, and analyzing (Saldana, 2015). Thus, using the same spreadsheet, columns were added under different labeled tabs accordingly. From the Google questionnaire, each question with corresponding responses was copied and pasted in a new tab labelled Q1 Application, Q2 Impact and Q3 Suggestions. Next, all annotated data from the digital log were copied and respectively pasted under three new tabs labelled Q1 Bi-Weekly Conference, Q2 Bi-Weekly Conference, and Q3 Bi-Weekly Conference. The columns beside the data were used to add notes, patterns and emerging themes.

After organizing the responses on the Google sheet, the data were reviewed using a generic coding styles (Saldana, 2015) to analyze each response, looking for identicalness.
For first cycle coding, recurring descriptions were coded and clustered under relevant, specific codes. This approach is referred to as descriptive coding. Ideas were summarized, using keywords or a short phrases, to reference the responses from the educators. The second cycle of

coding involved looking for patterns and organizing those patterns under relevant headings. This process of first and second cycle coding (Saldana, 2015) took approximately two weeks. Each level of coding was done on a new tab of the spreadsheet. After its completion, similar ideas under headings were combined to shape emerging themes. The themes were systematically organized to reflect the inquiry of each question.

Unit of Analysis: Professional Learning Workshop on Hope Theory

I applied the tenets of hope theory (Snyder, 1994a) in planning the professional learning workshop for teachers. Three questions guided my thinking in the planning process:

Goal

1. What is the goal of the professional learning workshop?
    a. Think about the desired outcome.
    b. Reflect on what educators should value, know and be able to do.
    c. Consider the impact this professional learning has on students.

Pathway

2. How will the goal be achieved?
    a. Think of incorporating complementary learning constructs such as social learning theory, zone of proximal development and neuroplasticity.
    b. Reflect on the successes of previous professional learning workshops.
    c. Consider checking-in with educators on their perspective of effective practice.

Agency

3. What challenges can potentially impede on successfully achieving the desired goal?
    a. Think about potential barriers that can/may impede on success.
    b. Review multiples strategies to navigate through the predicted barriers.

c. Consider running a practice session with a small audience before the actual professional learning workshop.

To create a climate of respect and support for adult learning, Knowles (1985) assumptions and principles of andragogy were used. Knowles assumes that adult learners are:

- internally motivated and to some extent self-directed
- bring life experiences and knowledge to professional learning
- goal-oriented
- relevancy oriented
- practical
- like to be involved

Steps for Planning Professional Learning Workshop on Hope theory

Step 1. Identifying the Goal of the Professional Learning. The goal of the professional learning was to orient educators in hope theory as it relates to educational practice and its applications in schools. Considering that teachers need time and opportunities to apply theories in classroom practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), the professional learning on hope theory was introduced with a two-hour workshop and continued for 12 weeks with differentiated support during the application period. By the end of a 12-week professional learning experience, it was envisioned that all educators would develop applied knowledge of hope theory and its application to educational practices at their class level.

Step 2. Pathways to Achieving the Goal. The strategy was to connect the approach of hope theory to educators' current, past, personal and professional experiences. Knowles and his colleagues (1985) suggested that adults are the richest sources of experience for each other, noting there is a great variety of experiences among adults as compared to children. The

objective of the introductory stage of the professional learning was to connect the principles of hope theory to self, using think-pair-shared discussion protocol. Three open-ended questions employing a think-pair-shared discussion protocol, were used to engage educators' attention in the introduction of hope theory.

I. How often in your lives do you make plans to accomplish something?

II. When aiming to accomplish an objective, what questions guide your thinking?

III. Have you ever fail to accomplish the objective that you set out for? Why do you think?

After the discussion, recognizing the assumption that adults bring vast experience to their learning (Knowles, 1985), the educators' were guided to connect their experience to the tenets of hope theory. This connection helped educators to realize that components of hope theory exist in their thinking and experience.

I. A goal is what you hope to accomplish or the endpoint of what you hoped for.

II. Pathways are the perceived routes you will take to achieve your desired goals.

III. The barriers are the predicted circumstances that may prevent the attainment of your goals.

IV. Agency is the perseverance to overcome or navigate through the barriers blocking your goal attainment (Snyder, 1994).

This phase of the discussion concluded with a short video presentation summarizing hope theory.

As the professional learning progressed, the next object was to connect the principles of hope theory educational practices and religious traditions. The educators were encouraged to purposefully participate in group discussions. Through shared insights, educators recognized the relevance of this concept (Knowles, 1985) by creating concept maps to intentionally trace the

relationship between hope theory, religious traditions and current teaching practices. The many insightful connections derived from group discussions through the concept webbing include:

I. Prophet Noah devised an ingenious plan in readiness for the flood.
II. Prophet Moses employed a strategic plan for confidence in his preparation to approach the Pharaoh.
III. Prophet Muhammad organized a well thought-out plan for safety when he migrated from Mecca to Medina.
IV. Educators apply components of hope theory when creating lesson plans and unit plans.

Why hope theory?

Mindful that adult learners deserve to be highly respected for their intellect and knowledge, the researcher at this stage, presented a summary of research findings suggesting that hope is a predictive factor for positive mental health (Gallagher & Lopez, 2009) and a high level of hope is positively related to critical thinking, and social confidence (Snyder & Shorey, 2002a). Subsequently, to engage educators' interest, the statistics on mental illness in Canada were shared, allowing educators to ponder on the current state of Canada's mental health. Many educators were able to identify with the knowledge that twenty per cent or more Canadian youths are experiencing mental illness in the form of depression or anxiety. The data further showed that by age 40, more than 50 per cent of Canadians are predicted to be affected with mental illness.

Exploring Constructs to Complement Hope Theory

Presented with short readings on printed handouts, educators were invited to refresh their understanding of (1) Badura's social learning theory, (2) Vygotsky social interaction theory and, (3) neuroplasticity as it relates to learning. Bandura' social learning theory was chosen as a

reminder to teachers on the importance of modelling the learning they teach. Social learning theories propose that new behaviour can be learnt by observing other. For the same reason, Vygotsky social interaction theory was useful to reiterate that teachers can take the role of the More Knowledgeable Other in supporting students to achieve their goals and successes. The thinking on integrating the concept of neuroplasticity was to enlighten teachers that the brain is capable of learning new behaviours that can become habits regardless what was learnt previously. An anchor-chart protocol was used to make thinking visible. Considering the above constructs, educators paired their ideas to visibly share on chart paper how hope theory can be applied to inspire hopeful thinking.

Step 3. Predicting Potential Barriers to Achieving the Goal of Professional Learning. To successfully achieve the goal for the professional learning, I anticipated barriers that would impede on the achievement of the goal while predicting possible strategies to navigate through the barriers. The following barriers were identified before the initial professional learning presentation:

I. The proposed time of the year is a hectic period for educators.

II. Communication Gap: Reading emails is not the most reliable form of communication at the beginning of the school year for many teachers.

III. Static Manner of Thinking: Some teachers may see this as an add-on to their current responsibilities.

IV. Limited Resources: Finding the place and audio/visual resources and room can be a challenge in the school.

V. Time Constraints: At the beginning of the year, educators are swamped with their ‘to do’ list to have their classroom ready for students.

VI. Lack of Confidence: Engaging the collective interests amongst all on the need to develop a hopeful attitude and expectations for students can be daunting.

VII. Curriculum Alignment Issues: Skepticism can be expected, due to the uncertainty of how and when.

Strategies to Address Barriers

Time, communication, work-load, resources and attitude of the educators were factors considered to overcome the challenges related to goal attainment of the professional learning. The social capital of my position in the school was pivotal in facilitating and addressing these challenges. With humility, I approached each educator, explaining the intended purpose of the professional learning to the completion of this dissertation. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) implied that trust is increased when others know of your reliance on them.

A personalized email followed this conversation, inviting each educator to participate in the professional learning of applying hope theory. The email communicated that it was optional to attend, to apply hope theory and to receive further communication on this topic.

Following the recommendation from Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) to develop and employ distributive leadership, the advice of level leaders on place, time, and how to best to accommodate the teachers as professional learners was sought. Based on the assumption of andragogy, adults engaged in learning that is of immediate use and relevance to them (Corley, 2011). Regarding this professional learning on hope theory, the hook that connected positive attitude, and inspired vested interests, is relevance to current professional practice. Educators present at the workshop realized that the fundamental idea of hope theory complements the interdisciplinary approach to curriculum implementation in a faith-based context.

Lopes and Cunha (2017) concluded that self-directed professional development (SD-PD) can enhance teaching practices through collaborative work with colleagues and with the researcher. The approach to SD professional learning accommodates sustained dialogue between and among professionals. Focusing on effective teaching practices and cultivating authentic learning experiences are essential to SD-PD. AT the end of the 2-hour workshop presentation, the three questions on (a) level of application, (b) observed impact on students' learning and (c) suggestions to educators, were shared with educators. The researchers reassured educators that participating in the research process, applying hope theory and describing their experience after 12 weeks, was voluntary. Reflecting on the advice of Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), teachers need time and opportunities for exploring new learning, educators were also given the reassurance that they had the option to decide on and what pace they can apply hope theory with the support they requested.

Open to the idea of SD-PD, the research participants, after engaging in the hope theory orientation workshop, pursued learning more on application of hope theory beyond the boundaries of the workshop. For twelve weeks, educators explored hope theory to gain a deeper understanding of how and where to apply this concept at their grade level. Ideas were shared, borrowed and experimented with. Throughout this period, educators met with the researcher formally and informally, sought advice and requested resources to support their application of hope theory.

On Google Drive, a shared folder was created for the researcher and educators to pool any resources that were useful. The resources that were uploaded to the folder included short motivational videos on perseverance, digital stories on pursuing goals, short lectures following through on plans, reflecting on previous experiences and seeking help. Educators also shared

lesson plans on how they are applying hope theory to their current novel study. Educators who combined hope theory with other learning theories added posters and relevant resources to the folder. I designed a hope theory poster as a visual for educators who desired, to post in their classrooms. This was accompanied by a hope theory template that students used a reflection sheet for positive growth.

The pool of ideas was not the only sharing that occurred throughout the 12 weeks. Educators were very open to visiting their colleagues' classrooms or inviting their colleagues and the researcher to observe lessons that incorporated hope theory. However, at the end of the 12-week application period, each educator responded to the three questions individually and anonymously using the Google form. The responses summarized descriptions of educators' experience as they applied hope theory in their educational practice.

Table 1 is an overview the professional learning framework to orient educators in hope theory.

Table 1

Professional learning framework

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Professional Learning Framework</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Goal
The goal of the professional learning was to orient educators in hope theory as it relates to educational practice and application in schools. Educators were invited to participate in the application of hope theory. All educators joined the study voluntarily.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Pathway to Achieve Goal
• invite educators to participate
• engage educators’ interest through researched literature on hope theory
• connect hope theory to educators' personal and professional experiences
• relate hope theory to current educational practices, religious traditions and other learning theories
• associate hope to mental health wellness
• explore different ideas for applying hope theory to educational practice</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Agentic Thinking</td></tr>
<tr><td>Predicted Barriers
• communication gap
• fixed manner of thinking
• time constraints
• limited resources
• curriculum alignment conflicts
• lack of confidence</td><td>Overcoming Barriers
• use formal and informal communication strategies
• avoid assumptions and check for understanding
• respect feedback and give choices
• be flexible with time
• pool resources
• provide ongoing support
• recognize efforts
• encourage discretions</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Overview
Hope theory (Snyder, 2002) was applied as a framework for the professional learning workshop, with consideration of Knowles’ (1985) assumptions and principles of andragogy. From the total of 22 educators who attended the 2-hour formal professional learning on hope</td></tr>
</table>

theory in August, 18 indicated interest to increase their understanding of hope theory as it relates to educational practice and its application in their classroom.

Hope theory was applied within educational practices by 18 educators for a period of 12 weeks from September to November. During the period of application, educators were consistently supported by the researcher and their colleagues. Educators utilized a bank of pooled resources, visited classrooms to observe successful practices and engaged in professional shared conversations with the researcher.

At the end of the 12-week application period of hope theory, educators described their experience with suggested feedback to the researcher. The descriptive experience was communicated by email, responding to a Google form questionnaire.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe educators' experience on applying hope theory within the context of their educational practice at an upper-elementary Islamic school in Alberta, Canada. The study explored hope theory experience in educational practice through the lens of educators. Utilizing three open-ended descriptive-inquiry questions to gather data, the results provided descriptions of educators' experience of hope theory in their educational practice with suggestions for further application. A total number of 18 elementary school educators volunteered as participants for this study. Before applying hope theory to their educational practice, each educator engaged in a structured two-hour workshop on hope theory. This workshop was an opportunity for educators to gain a sound understanding of how hope theory can be applied in an Islamic context in Canada. All educators responded to the three research questions using a Google form emailed from the researcher.

Chapter four is organized according to the ascending order of each question. Under each question, the emerging themes are briefly summarized in short sentences. Following the summary sentences supporting each question, individual themes will be developed based on educators' responses.

Application of Hope Theory

1. To what extent, and in what ways were educators able to apply hope theory in their educational practice?
    a. There was variation in the extent to which hope theory was applied.
    b. Hope theory was applied for positive reframing.
    c. Hope theory was applied as a construct to appreciate barriers.
    d. Hope theory was applied as a framework for thinking.

There was variation in the extent to which hope theory was applied.

On the premise of educators' responses, there was considerable variation in the extent to which educators were able to apply hope theory in their educational practice. There were 14 educators who confirmed that they were able to "apply hope theory in numerous ways," while three educators shared that they were able to apply hope theory "almost daily." Having had the opportunity to apply hope theory "only in limited amount" came from one of the participating educators.

In describing how educators applied hope theory in their educational practice, three significant themes emerged from the responses of educators. The three themes stated that hope theory was used for positive reframing, appreciating barriers, and developing framework thinking.

Hope theory was applied for positive reframing.

Under the second part of the first question, 14 educators expressed that they have used hope theory as a drive for positively reframing theirs and students' thinking, in response to "... what ways were you able to apply hope theory in your education practice?" Positive reframing in this regard occurred differently according to subject discipline, attitude and skill focus. For example, one educator responded,

> My primary application of hope theory in the classroom related to goal setting in terms of the different traits of writing. Students were encouraged to take a positive outlook on writing goals, focusing on growth rather than perceived deficits… I have also made an effort to reframe conversations with parents and students in a more positive light, providing encouragement and motivation, rather than just focusing on areas for improvement.

Approximately nine educators described applying hope theory for positive reframing through a goal-setting approach "not only in health education class but integrated throughout the curriculum and day as it is appropriate." Amongst these educators, one redirected their students to reflect when "setting goals, asking yourself the significance of why you are doing what you are doing, to give you an opportunity to attach your soul to the goal." In addition to reflecting on the importance of the goal, another educator mentioned:

> When students find having to complete tasks independently or collaboratively a challenge, I direct them to think ahead about what they want to accomplish and state their desired outcome in the form of a goal. Further, I taught them that a goal without action is highly uncertain. Thus, they must set pathways of how they will achieve their goals. With practice, they were able to articulate their why and how.

Three educators highlighted that they integrated hope theory to complement growth mindset learning theory since they have "done much reading on growth mindset." One of the educators who integrated hope theory with growth mindset theory, inspired their students to imagine that, "'Bubble gum' brains can be expanded rather than just 'brick brains' which are fixed in ideas and cannot see a solution to a problem. Combining the tenets of hope theory with the belief of growth mindset, the same educator explained that, "Through team-building activities, students who are struggling with friendships are guided with suggestions to help them reset 'their story' about the situation."

Six educators applied hope theory using the template provided at the professional learning workshop. One educator explained that the template served as a guide for students to reflect on their actions, rethink their choices and "set short and long term academic and non-academic goals." While another educator shared:

> I used hope theory to teach the students on how to take steps (for being hopeful) to resolve conflicts independently and safely. After recess, students knew that if they were having problems getting along socially, they need to reflect, set goals, and have clear pathways on how to achieve those goals. The hope theory template was used as a reflection tool to engage students in being reflective and independent in finding solutions to conflicts.

Another educator added that sometimes their students make choices that affect their learning and their friendship with others. In such cases, the hope theory template is used “as a reflection sheet for students to rethink how to make better choices in the future.”

Hope theory was applied as a construct to appreciate barriers.

Corresponding to their responses, eight educators explained applying the principles of hope theory alongside religious references to appreciate barriers in life. This was a consistent theme deriving from ways educators applied hope theory in educational practice. Educators mentioned referencing stories of the prophets of God who endured many challenges on their mission but never gave up. One educator reminded students, “When setting goals we must not fail to recognize the challenges we will be facing on our journey... recognizing challenges and setting pathways to navigate through… can enable us to achieve success.” On the same note, another educator suggested that small-group conferencing with students was convenient to “explore and plan for potential barriers to a specific task… appreciating this will help them grow to achieve bigger goals.” All eight educators in their descriptive responses have shared that they used hope theory as a construct to cultivate the understanding that “life is not without its challenges. Likewise, learning and friendships come with challenges.”

Educators observed that students were more intrigued to plan for overcoming barriers once they understood why the goal was important to them. Students were taught to set short term

goals for group projects, assessments, team sports during recesses, daily readings, daily prayers and friendships. Educators intended that this approach will shape students' belief to embrace barriers as opportunities to grow, hence "when challenges arise in life, do not give up, rather, try a different strategy."

Hope theory was applied as a framework for thinking.

Several educators indicated using the hope theory template as a framework for organizing thoughts when planning learning experiences for example, hope theory shaped "a framework to set and achieve goals for myself, as well as my students." The three tenets of hope theory (goal setting, pathway thinking, and agentic thinking) were applied by five educators to plan professional learning sessions. Overall, the educators found that it was an efficient strategy to stay focused on planning with the purpose in mind as directly mentioned by one of the educators:

> It was straightforward to use the stages of hope theory as a framework for planning by asking myself what I need my colleagues to learn, how will I engage them in this learning and what might prevent this learning experience from being effective. Answering each question provided a step to get to the next level of the planning. Having multiple strategies to deal with challenges put you ahead of the game.

Four educators shared that they also used the hope theory template as a framework to guide their thinking in developing their professional growth plan for the year. This is captured by the response of one who realized that, "I did not accomplish my professional goals in the past probably because I did not predict barriers nor planned for barriers. This gap led me to give up too easily on my goals."

Ten of the responses added that this framework was useful, to some extent, during the student-led conference as a goal-setting template for parents, students and teachers to conference

in "supporting the child with setting goals and determining pathways to overcome barriers and achieve their goals."

Another context mentioned in support of framework thinking by 12 educators, is the lesson plan template that was designed using the tenets of hope theory. Educators observed that the template served as a structure that guided their planning of successful lessons for their formal observations noting that being able to "predict and visualize the barriers helped to put plans in place for an uninterrupted and effective lesson." One teacher mentioned sharing the lesson plan with students before the lesson commenced, using hope theory tenets to model "strategic thinking and perseverance" to the students, particularly when they have to complete tasks in groups. Another teacher added, "Prior to using hope theory, they were frustrated faster and would just isolated themselves, not getting the work done. Now they spend more planning time discussing before starting on their tasks." However, one educator pointed out being able to "implement goal setting, pathways, barriers, and strategies for overcoming barriers in limited amounts. Time was a factor and so was situational usefulness. In some situations hope theory was useful and in other situations, traditional methods were more appropriate."

Impact of Hope Theory

2. In applying hope theory, what did educators observe as impactful on students' learning and their own professional learning?
    a. The application of hope theory influenced students' self-confidence.
    b. The application of hope theory engaged parents' support.
    c. The application of hope theory inspired reflective thinking.

a. Hope theory influenced students' self-confidence.

Students developing confidence in creating personal goals was consistently mentioned, as one educator expressed:

> I am encouraged to see students who are more hopeful about their abilities within all subject areas. Probably the most profound impact has been for some students in math. They have dropped the attitude of I can't do it and are now trying and seeing success.

In support, another educator commented on students' social skills out of the classroom:

> As far as friendships go I have also seen some new relationships developing as kids open themselves up to new friend opportunities and I have fewer students flagging me at recess because their confidence in interacting with others is improving.

The same educator also noted changes in students' attitudes in the classroom, "Students are more open to a variety of seating and group work options than they were at the beginning of the year." In another response, the educator stated that in the months of application so far, "it has been effective…. I am seeing students are intrinsically motivated... accepting their classroom as a community... there is a shared understanding of mindfulness."

Three educators shared how differently some students demonstrated improved self-confidence. One noticed, "Brightness with the students... they are beginning to believe in themselves … they will come and let me know if they've overcome their barriers. Their parents are aware of this and very supportive." Another remarked while "time was too short to really see growth, hope theory was one approach to use in organizing thoughts to get tasks done as a framework." The third educator made some progress with getting students "to make responsible choices when not being watched by teachers or supervisors."

Educators mentioned the usefulness of hope theory in project-based learning. Notably, when students are placed in groups to collaborate, the tenets were used to guide the steps and distribution of tasks. Many responses indicated that students' self-confidence grew stronger through the refinement of problem solving skills. Educators described this approach as a "structured and logical way to hold themselves accountable for their actions." One educator pointed out that students were trusting themselves to be independent.

> It was a bit of a slower process but it really made them think about what they have to do before doing it... now rather than me telling them what to do, they are forcing themselves to think how the will do what they want to do.

b. Hope theory engaged parents' support.

The theme of engaged parental support emerged from several references made by three educators. A hope theory goal-setting template was used for student-led conference during the 12-week application of hope theory. Parents were involved in the goal setting process with their children. This process of reflection, setting goals, and making plans to overcome barriers, was well received by parents who "seemed more encouraged and motivated to help their child, rather than becoming emotionally deflated after a meeting with the teacher." The responses indicated that many parents were surprised and requested copies to either use the language at home or apply to themselves. Educators explained the process of their application of hope theory with relevance to parental involvement. One educator described their approach:

> I am communicating with parents through a weekly email which keeps them informed of the progress we are making and how they can assist their children. From student-led conferences, I have received a lot of positive feedback around this practice. It does take me about an hour a week to get the email written but I think it is being impactful.

Another educator shared an experience using hope theory in:

> Two weeks ago, a parent met with me after school, visibly upset with her child, seeking advice on how to be more involved at home in supporting his education and behaviour. At one point she expressed feeling hopeless because of added stress at home. I took the opportunity to use the hope theory approach, redirecting her attention to focus rather than being frustrated. After walking her through the planning stage, using the religious references from the PD and discuss possible strategies to overcome challenges, the mother left feeling confident of her ability. The following day the parent called to thank me and letting me know she felt more empowered to provide the right support.

c. Hope theory inspired reflective thinking.

The predominant idea forming this theme recognized that many students struggled initially to understand that barriers in life are inevitable but it is possible to overcome them. Educators discussed how guiding students to reflect on the lives of many prophets of Islam and how they overcome barriers gradually changed students' thinking. Having students ponder on the lives of their luminaries helped them reflect on their own life journey. This connection, according to educators, deepen students' understanding that plans do not always go in your favour. With lots of coaching on studying the lives of others, educators were noticing their students becoming more reflective when encountered with challenges rather than giving up too soon. Among the responses, one educator commented:

> I have not had to send many students to visit the AP for discipline so far this year.... I am finding limited drama between my students. I am impressed to see how they are improving in goal writing and even more in assessing whether or not they were successful.

Another educator observed:

> After the introduction on the importance of having hope and a positive mindset for everyday life, my students recognized that the protagonist in the novel *Sadako and One Thousand Paper Cranes* represented hope. They compared and contrasted her and Kenjo and concluded why it is important to never give up in life. Students understood this connection quite well when we discussed the theme.

Educators recognized that some students were putting more effort into their thinking. They were taking time to reflect before concluding. "Many students who would rush their thinking without putting the extra effort, now have to ponder and come up with different ways… this is challenging their thinking."

Suggestions for Educators

3. What suggestions do you have for other educators or self, for applying hope theory approach in educational practice?
    a. Professional learning on hope theory should be an ongoing process.
    b. Hope theory can cultivate positive changes in education if educators are ready to rethink instructional practices.

a. Professional learning on hope theory should be an ongoing process, first with application to self before applying practices.

The first theme "professional learning for educators should be ongoing," emerged from multiple responses in support of this notion. In summarizing teachers' thoughts, many shared the view that the more their understandings of hope theory develop, their realization increased that the theory is highly adaptable. Applying hope theory, according to educators, can be done across the curriculum indirectly and directly. The hope theory approach "lends itself well to integrating

Islamic and academic concepts." Moving forward educators suggested that, "professional learning cannot be done as a one-stop workshop but must be ongoing." Many educators generally felt that, "Teachers' understanding of hope theory must continue to grow in ways that it can become a part of our system." In support, a number of responses advised that "classroom visitations and bi-weekly meetings" should be considered as part of the professional learning experience.

Relevance to their profession learning, nine educators implied or indicated directly that they felt "it was necessary" to apply hope theory to themselves before applying it with their students. Some of the direct responses included, "I feel hope theory gives educators a hope that nothing is unachievable" while another noted that, "being able to recognize your challenges helps you to think of strategies to push through to achieve your goal." One educator realized that:

> Prior to being exposed to hope theory, I would feel frustrated when something didn't work at the moment. I knew I can refer to previous experiences, look at others, or plan for my challenges but I didn't. I didn't know this was actually a theory. Now I am reflecting, it was due to lack of planning and not having the framework of knowing how to achieve goals.

Eight educators indicated that they applied hope theory to themselves when planning long and short term curriculum goals. This proved beneficial to understanding of hope theory. However, in transferring this experience to their students, they modified either the language or added a step. Educators advised in favour of "learning how to apply these concepts to your classroom and life" noting, "it makes for a calmer, more in-tune teacher who can then share the same with his or her students."

b. Hope theory can cultivate positive changes in education if educators are ready to rethink their instructional practices.

In relation to the theme of "rethinking instructional practices…" two suggestions were proposed by educators: (a) teaching the tenets of hope theory in stages and (b) consider complementing hope theory with growth mindset theory and religious education. Both advice will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first advice for educators is not to assume that students know how to engage in this process independently. One educator expressed:

> I assumed that my students knew how to set goals, pathways, recognize barriers and how to overcome them. They did not. I had to teach every step of hope theory over several lessons. I recommend that teachers first model hope theory practice in their classrooms, then teach it to their students.

From four responses, educators advised teaching each tenet (goals, pathways thought, agency thought) individually, then move to teaching the theory as a whole. Noting that, as students grasp the idea, the vocabulary will become a part of their language and their thinking will be reflected by their actions. Several educators emphasized that the most tedious part is "ensuring accountability on the part of the students." In this regard, the recommendation of "developing intrinsic motivation" was identified as a key factor in ensuring student accountability. Another educator mentioned, "With a large number of students, it can sometimes feel daunting to keep track of individualized pathways, so I think that teaching and modelling accountability and self-regulation is a key part of this process." Three responses supported the idea that this does not have to be a one on one process, but rather a whole class approach, "where all students are directed to evaluate their progress, revise or update goals, and identify new potential barriers."

Reflecting on the 12-week application of hope theory, one educator noted, “In hindsight, I would have directed them to be more clearly with the pathways for moving forward… a focus on pathways and barriers would make this process more meaningful and long-lasting.”

Five educators suggested that, “this theory is applicable to life,” hence, if the concept is introduced in early elementary, students’ agentic thinking will be developmentally shaped.

Many educators indicated that students need this mentality since, “they give up too easily on minute challenges… they do not want to solve their own problems rather they want a teacher, an admin, parent or older sibling to solve problems for them.” A general thought reassured fellow educators that after you have created a community of hopeful thinkers in your classroom, most likely those who understand, will help those who are working toward understanding. It is a good life skill for students to strengthen agentic thinking with previous experiences to others’ experiences.

The second advice proposed by educators was on the theme of “rethinking instructional practice.” Educators should consider exploring the concept of hope theory alongside the theory of growth mindset and religious education. Using this approach, one educator reported:

> It helps us reset our own minds and internal voices. Everyone has a story—what is yours and do you want to continue writing it as it is going? Knowing that you have the option to close the book or end the chapter and choose a new direction, empowers and enables us to develop as more enlightened beings.

Educators envisage this mode of thinking being more impactful on students if collective effort is made by all stakeholders to “provide meaningful feedback, teach students to embrace challenges and celebrate effort and process.” One educator observed that students were motivated to overcome barriers after being taught that “mistakes are part of learning.” Hence, advices fellow

educators to help students recognize that "barriers in life are temporary but should be taken as opportunities to grow." Educators commented that the religious education is a strong support to students since the teachings of their faith reassures repeatedly "after hardship comes ease." Another educator mentioned doing this indirectly, but realized it should be taught consistently just as math or science or other concepts within these disciplines.

> It is noticeable that students are more focused when they have a plan to follow. With support and consistency, they are learning that failure is part of life. Referring to the resilience of many luminaries in Islam, students are beginning to understand that keep trying even after failures, is important to succeed in life.

Aligning with other responses, one educator remarked:

> Students are becoming more and more used to clicking off, deleting, and unchecking as ways to shut off from achieving goals. Hopeful thinking is a good plan to get them to see that real-life problems cannot always be solved with a click or delete. Real-life involves challenges that need a plan to overcome. If incorporated in several subjects, hope theory will force students to be more critical in their thinking. It just has to be a bigger push to get all stakeholders (teachers, students, parents) to speak the same language.

Because time was a factor for observing the impact of hope theory, several educators used readily available resources from growth mindset theory to "teach students that bridging the gap between the prediction and the barriers starts with changing their language and attitude from can't to can."

Chapter 4 Summary

The study provided a forum for educators to share their experiences on the application of hope theory in educational practices. Chapter four presented the results of the study. In this chapter, all 18 educators described their overall experience of applying hope theory in their practice during a 12-week timeline. Three open-ended questions facilitated educators to describe the full depth of their experiences. The description detailed the extent of the application, observed impact on students and suggestions to educators. Each question is presented through emerged themes. Based on the findings of this study, implications for applying hope theory in educational practice will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusions

With the rise of anxiety and depression (Chiose, 2016) affecting children's learning (French, 2018), some measures are in place by the Alberta Government to address this concern (Alberta School Councils Association, 2018). However, the magnitude of this problem is beyond the sufficiency of the support currently in place. Relevant to this issue of mental wellness, a recent study found that hope has a unique value in schools that strive to promote students' success and overall wellbeing (Idan & Margalit, 2013). Taking this concern into account, the purpose of this qualitative study was to describe educators' experience on applying hope theory within the context of their educational practice at an upper-elementary Islamic school in Alberta, Canada.

With the central phenomenon being educators' experience on applying the construct of hope, Snyder's (1994) hope theory served as the main theoretical framework for this study. Hope theory involves setting meaningful goals, determining pathways to serve as directions to the goals and developing agentic thinking as determination to accomplish the goals (Snyder, 1994).

This study utilized three questions to explore the application of hope theory through the lens of educators. The 18 elementary school educators who volunteered as participants for this study, participated in two-hour introductory professional learning on hope theory. The professional learning served to engage, orient, and support educators in gaining a thorough understanding of hope theory. Thereon, educators applied the tenets of the hope theory for 12 weeks from the initial professional learning presentation. Throughout the 12 weeks, professional learning was ongoing, sustained, and with continuous opportunities for educators to be coached (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Upon the 12-week application hope theory, the following questions were used to facilitate educators in providing an in-depth description of their experience on applying hope theory:

1. To what extent, and in what ways were you able to apply hope theory in your educational practice? Educators responded that hope theory was applied *(a) for positive reframing, (b) to appreciate barriers and (c) for proactive thinking.*

2. In applying hope theory, what did you observe as impactful on students' learning and your professional learning? Educators observed that the application of hope theory *(a) influenced students' self-confidence, (b) engaged parents' support and (c) inspired reflective-thinking.*

3. What suggestions do you have for other educators or self, for applying hope theory in educational practice? *Educators suggested (a) ongoing professional learning and (b) rethinking instructional practice*.

First, all data gathered were reviewed, organized by questions and aggregated into broad categories. Second, using generic, first, and second cycle coding (Saldana, 2015), emerged themes were identified and systematically organized to describe educators' experience on applying to their educational practice. The following paragraphs discussed the themes derived from each question to contribute to the description of educators' experience.

Q1. (a) To what extent were you able to apply hope theory in your educational practice?

Perusing the diverse responses that described the extent to which hope theory was applied, this study found variations in describing the extent that hope theory was applied in educational practice. Perhaps, this variation was a result of educators having full autonomy on how hope theory should be applied to their educational practice. Moreover, educators' vested interests and experience are factors to be considered. However, their varying approaches have contributed to the vast array of experiences described by educators. Fourteen educators confirmed that they were able to "apply hope theory in numerous ways," while three educators shared that they were able to apply hope theory "almost daily." Having had the opportunity to apply hope theory, "only

in limited amount" came forth from one educator. The findings indicated that educators applied hope theory age-appropriately to their educational practice, and in accordance with the developmental readiness of learners in their late childhood-early adolescence stage. The variations describing the extent to which hope theory was applied by educators of different grade level, corresponded with Bastable's (2013) proposal that, understanding the developmental stage of learners is essential. When designing a pedagogical approach, educators must consider the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial maturation within each developmental stage of their learners.

Q1. (b) In what ways were you able to apply hope theory in your educational practice?

This second half of the first question explored and described ways educators were able to apply hope theory in their educational practice. Deducing from educators' feedback and responses, three themes emerged to summarize the description of how hope theory was applied: *positive reframing, appreciate barriers and proactive thinking*. Noticeably, all three themes refer to cognitive processing. In addition to Snyder's (1994), several other researchers have concluded that hope is either a cognitive or an affective construct, which is developed and maintained in part by interpersonal relationships (Averill, Catlin & Chon, 1990; Shorey et al., 2003; Erickson, 1964).

Positive Reframing

Positive reframing is to perceive a previously viewed adverse circumstance in a positive light. Possibly, learners might come to view a negative experience as an opportunity to learn something new or to challenge themselves to re-strategize their approach. This habit of thinking leads to a state of gratefulness. Perceiving the positive aspects of a negative situation, like failing a test, may likely lead students to perceive this circumstance in a new light. Adding meaning to

this experience can elicit a grateful state, thus reducing depressive symptoms (Graham, Phelps, Maddison, & Fitzgerald, 2011).

From the analysis of their responses, 14 educators expressed that they have used hope theory as a drive for positively reframing theirs and their students' thinking, in response to "... what ways were you able to apply hope theory in your educational practice?" Positive reframing occurred differently according to subject discipline, attitude and skills focus. For instance, one educator stated, "Students were encouraged to take a positive outlook on writing goals, focusing on growth rather than perceived deficits." Approximately nine educators described applying hope theory for *positive reframing* through a goal-oriented approach. Whereas another educator added that goal setting was "integrated throughout the curriculum and day, as it is appropriate." One educator shaped positive reframing by redirecting their students to reflect on "the significance of why you are doing what you are doing." Using hope theory for positive reframing is consistent with Snyder's (2000) findings that positive emotions increase agency thinking, especially when reinforced by interpersonal relationships (Snyder, 2000b). Positive reframing in an Islamic school ideally connects to prayer, a reliance on God in times of difficulties, guidance, needs and repentance. Students are made aware of their Islamic teachings, "Unquestionably, the help of God is near" (Quran 2:214). Prayer, in particular, is viewed as a form of meditation that promotes positive thoughts (Azhar, Varma & Dharap, 1994).

To engage the process of positive reframing in an Islamic school context, nine educators found that hope theory was more effective when complemented with a similar theory or doctrine. Thereby, a hope reflection template was designed as a resource to support educators in applying hope theory to their educational practice. This template combined the tenets of hope theory, goal setting, pathway thinking and agentic thinking with the Islamic concept, Tawwakul, which

means to have trust in God. Educators' descriptions indicated that positive reframing was applicable in situations where intended outcomes differed. In such situations, students maintained positivity because they were able to connect the outcomes of their effort to their Islamic belief that, "They will plan and God will plan, But God is the best of planner" (Quran 8:30) and accepting that "God is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower" (Quran 26: 220). The findings also indicated that three educators included principles of growth mindset (Dweck, 2015) to hope theory to strengthen agentic thinking. One educator encouraged their students to "use *bubble-gum brain*, which allowed expandable thinking rather than *brick brains* which are fixed in ideas." It appeared that educators who are more familiar with the Islamic Faith complemented hope theory with verses from the Quran, while educators who were less familiar or confident with Islamic literature used a growth mindset (Dweck, 2015) alongside hope theory.

Appreciate Barriers

Snyder (1994) observed that barriers along pathways produced negative emotions, especially when children encountered profound blockages while in pursuit of goals. During the professional learning on hope theory, Snyder's observation paved the way for discussions on the impact of barriers on students and educators. Those discussions from the professional learning concluded with the perception that challenges are an inevitable part of life's journey. This was the established and accepted understanding by all educators just prior to applying hope theory to their educational practice. To impart this understanding to their students, educators applied the construct of hope theory to create the awareness *that barriers should be appreciated* as opportunities to develop resilience and strengthen competence.

In their application of hope theory, eight educators recalled referencing Islamic stories on the prophets of God to illustrate the many challenges the prophets endured on their mission, still

never gave up. This connection was used to motivate their students to embrace barriers as opportunities to grow, thus, "when challenges arise in life, do not give up, rather, try a different strategy." Similarly, these findings corresponded with Snyder, Rand, and Sigmon (2002) that high-hope individuals have the skills to cope more effectively with barriers to achievement and demonstrate high levels of competence across a wide range of activities and attempts. This claim was intended to strengthen students' agentic thinking not to give up when encountering barriers in life. This approach fitted well with Snyder and his colleagues' (2002) advice that obstacles in the way of goals should be viewed as challenges to be overcome, thereby leading to the implementation of an alternative goal-directed strategy.

Proactive Thinking

In affiliation with appreciating barriers, several educators indicated using the hope theory template that was developed during the professional learning, as a framework to engage *proactive thinking*. For instance, one educator stated that hope theory shaped "a framework to set and achieve goals for myself, as well as my students." Grant and Ashford (2008) point out that proactive behaviour involves acting in advance of future situations. Individuals consider future events in their current decisions with foresight, i.e. before they occur. Educators expressed a belief that it seemed like students were more intrigued to plan for anticipated barriers once they understood why their goal was important to them. Noting from one educator, "Prior to using hope theory, they were frustrated faster and would just isolate themselves, not getting the work done." This observation is in consonance that low-hope people may consider quitting when encountering barriers to goals because they cannot think of other pathways to surmount the obstacles, which often resulted in frustration and loss of confidence

(Snyder & Shorey, 2002b). Considering this attribution, educators facilitated students to "spend more planning time and discussing before starting on their tasks."

Educators stated that they promoted proactive thinking through a pre-planning process of determining the goal and its purpose, establishing pathways or approaches for achieving the goal, and anticipating possible challenges with strategies to navigate those challenges. Overall, the educators felt that it was an efficient strategy to drown out the distractions and stay focused on the purpose. This finding is consistent with earlier research that stated proactive individuals have a vision and a clear perception of what they want to achieve. They derive goals that conformed to their vision and took the initiative in pursuing their goals (Frese & Fay, 2001). Using the hope theory template with reference to themselves, educators exercised proactive thinking when planning professional learning sessions for designing lesson plans, developing professional growth plans and preparing goal setting templates for students during student-led conferences. It appeared that having the hope theory template as a guide to follow increased competence for thinking ahead.

Q 2. What did you observe as impactful on students' learning and your professional learning?

The second question explored and described what educators observed as impactful on the students' learning and their teaching practice. After interpreting the results, three themes emerged to describe how hope theory impacted learning and teaching practices: *influenced students' self-confidence, engaged parents' support, inspired reflective-thinking.*

Students' Self-Confidence

The most obvious observation shared by many educators was *the confidence students demonstrated* in writing their own goals and working toward achieving their goals. One educator

affirmed that their students dropped the '*I can't'* attitude, taking a more progressive approach to their situations, noting "the most profound impact has been for some students in math." This finding is in agreement with Groopman's (2004) postulation that to have hope is to acquire the belief that you have some control over your circumstances. Along with their intellectual skills, the findings indicated what looked like an improvement of students' self-confidence in the area of social skills both in and out of the classrooms. In this regard, one educator stated, "as far as friendships go, I have also seen some new relationships developing as kids open themselves up to new friend opportunities." Another educator added, "Students are more open to a variety of seating and group work options than they were at the beginning of the year." These findings corresponded closely with earlier research that individuals with high hope have also been shown to exhibit better social competence (Barnum et al., 1998) and find more pleasure in forming relationships (Snyder, Hoza, et al., 1997). In support of the theme of self-confidence, educators observed that students "are beginning to believe in themselves … they will come and let me know if they've overcome their barriers. Several educators indicated that students' self-confidence grew stronger through the refinement of problem-solving skills, and by holding themselves accountable for their actions." Prior research findings well supported these observations. Bailey, Eng, Frisch and Snyder (2007) found a strong relationship between hope and better self-worth. Similarly, Gilman, Dooley and Florell (2006), in agreement with Snyder (1999), concurred with their findings that high levels of hope are also related to lower rates of self-deprecatory thinking and depression.

Engaged Parents' Support

Pursuant to the findings, educators related that using hope theory to lead the conversations during student-led conferences, *engaged parents' involvement and support* in the goal setting

process. One educator observed that the process of reflection, setting goals, and making plans to overcome barriers was well received by parents who "seemed more encouraged and motivated to help their child, rather than becoming emotionally deflated after a meeting with the teacher." Other educators added that hope theory was impactful on students' learning subsequent to consistent communication with parents. For example, individualized weekly emails were sent out to parents, keeping them informed of their child's progress, and with recommended strategies to help their child overcome challenges. Thereupon, this communication initiated channels for parents to seek advice on how to be more involved at home in supporting their child's education. This involvement and relationship with parents to increase hope correlated with possibilities first proposed by Stotland (1969) that a person can influence another's level of hope with (1) the gift of presence, (2) by communicating positive expectations and (3) by exhibiting confidence in the other's likelihood to overcome difficulties. Along the same line that there is a connection between hope theory and parents' support, Shorey et al. (2003) concurred with empirical evidence that parenting contributes to the formation of attachment style, thereby facilitating the development of hopeful thinking.

Reflective Thinking

Educators found that applying hope theory within the context of their educational practice possibly inspired students to become *reflective in their thinking*. Reflective thinking begins with what may be called a *forked road situation*, which involves the act of investigating further facts to bring light to resolving the perplexity (Dewey, 1933). Evaluating the findings of this study, it appeared that prior to their knowledge of hope theory, students struggled to perceive that challenges are inevitable but resolvable. Several educators shared that a strategy they found effective was guiding students to reflect on the experiences of luminaries of Islam, or studying

the main characters in novels, and how they overcome barriers. This pedagogical practice gradually activated a process of reflective thinking. Teaching students to recognize how the experience of others can lead to the solution sought, educators found that students became more aware of employing problem-solving strategies when encountered with challenges or dilemmas. For example, one educator observed that their students were adopting hopeful thinking from Sadako, the main character of the novel *Sadako and One Thousand Paper Cranes.* A possible explanation for this impact corresponded with the assertion that hope is incorporated into students' schemas on the premise of previous learning and experiences (Stotland, 1969).

Q 3.What suggestions do you have for other educators or self, for applying hope theory in educational practice?

The third question sought to find out what suggestions educators have to offer for applying hope theory in educational practice. After reviewing all the suggestions, two broad themes emerged to summarize the suggestions educators shared for applying hope theory in educational practice: *(a) Professional learning on hope theory should be an ongoing process and, (b) hope theory can cultivate positive changes in education if educators are ready to rethink their instructional practices.*

Professional Learning on Hope Theory Should be an Ongoing Process

Educators suggested that professional learning on hope theory should be an ongoing process to strengthen educators' understanding of this relevantly new concept in Islamic schools. Research has shown that a professional learning experience should incorporate: (I) becoming more aware of the pedagogical beliefs ; (ii) forming relationships that give rise to collegial and critical discussion about pedagogy; (iii) using the classroom as a site for pedagogical investigation; and (IV) reflecting on changes in beliefs (Prestridge, 2010). Alongside the

professional learning experience, educators supported themselves through self-directed professional development to gain a more comprehensive understanding of integrating hope theory into the existing curriculum. This initiative is supported by Lopes and Cunha (2017), who explained that self-directed professional development (SD-PD) could enrich teaching practices through collaborative work with colleagues. Self-directed professional learning allowed for sustained dialogue between and among educators. According to the results, educators pointed out that time was an essential and necessary resource to observe and assess the impact of hope theory on students' learning. With a longer timeline, educators felt they would have grasped a deeper and more genuine understanding of formative and consistent feedback to students. In agreement, both Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) emphasized that teachers need time and opportunities when exploring new learning.

In addition to time, educators alluded to the need for more opportunities to observe their colleagues regularly, and during structured classroom visitations. The effectiveness of such practice is in alignment with Bandura's (1997) social learning theory that people learn through observing others. Several educators generally felt that "Teachers' understanding of hope theory must continue to grow in ways that it can become a part of our system." This desire to collaborate with colleagues in support of ongoing professional learning is supported in the literature of Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos (2009), who highlighted that professional learning can have a powerful impact on student learning if it is sustained over time and embedded in teachers' practice. Educators also suggested bi-weekly meetings to be considered as part of the professional learning experience and sharing of resources for cross-curricular connections and Islamic integration. The power of such practice is reiterated by research that found when schools are strategic in fostering professional working relationships

among teachers; the benefits can include greater consistency in instruction and a willingness to share practices (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos, 2009).

Hope Theory can Cultivate Positive Changes in Education if Educators are ready to Rethink Instructional Practices

Educators suggested that hope theory can cultivate positive changes in education if educators are ready to rethink instructional practices. The three specific pieces of advice derived from the recommendations are: (a) model hopeful thinking, (b) teach the tenets of hope theory in stages, and (c) consider complementing hope theory with growth mindset theory and religious education.

Nine educators indicated that they felt it was necessary to apply hope theory to themselves before applying it, noting that hope theory inspired the impression that "nothing is unachievable." This necessity of applying hope theory to the self-propelled educators to model the thinking process that they were imparting to their students. In support of modelling hopeful thinking, Bandura (1999) reminded educators on the importance of being role models for their students. Hence, educators who attempted to motivate students to be hopeful, probably start with themselves by modelling hopefulness to their students.

Educators cautioned on forming assumptions that students understand and can apply hope theory using a holistic approach. This paragraph summed up the age-appropriate approach to applying hope theory, as suggested by participating educators. First, they advised that while a holistic approach may be appropriate for older students, the younger students need closer, careful support. Therefore, it is advisable that educators break the tenets into three manageable stages. Perceptibly, students already have a working understanding of goals from earlier years. Moving forward, educators' next step is to teach students how to refine goals to be measurable and

realistic. Upon establishing this understanding, this should be practiced daily wherever applicable across the curriculum. Pathway thinking and agency thinking should be taught with emphasis since both terms are relatively new concepts to elementary students. Reflecting on their 12-week application, one educator noted, “In hindsight, I would have directed them to be clearer with the pathways for moving forward… a focus on pathways and barriers would make this process more meaningful and long-lasting.” This can be integrated in the English curriculum with ease, particularly because of the close connection between hope and goal-setting. This concept, setting-goals is mentioned more than 40 times in relation to language learning, problem-solving, collaboration, taking responsibility and personal accomplishment (Alberta Education, 2000). Educators found that integrating these tenets into existing curriculum outcomes is advantageous as educators will not feel hope theory is an add-on to their current responsibilities. If students are taught in Math how to achieve goals through pathway thinking and how to solve problems through agency thinking, then hope theory will gradually be an embedded approach in the curriculum. Goal-setting is a mathematical expectation mentioned several times in the curriculum in relation to self-assessment, communication and reasoning (Alberta Education, 2016).

Educators who used Islamic literature to support hope theory noticed apparent success, particularly alongside the verses from the Quran “after hardship comes ease” (94:5), and “God will make way for him to get out from every difficulty. And God will provide for him from sources he never could imagine” (65:2-3). The consensus from educators is that hope theory is more effective when supported with Islamic literature or with a mindfulness approach. To reassure students, educators referred to the resilience of the many luminaries in Islam and their struggles to achieve their goals. Spiritual references have found to be applicable in the field of

medical science where a body of research suggested that most clients expressed interests in incorporating spiritual issues and resources into the counselling setting (Arnold, Avants, Margolin & Marcotte, 2002; Hodge, 2006; Rose, Westefeld & Ansley, 2001). However, educators observed that students were generally intrigued and engaged when hope theory was positioned within an Islamic context or positive thinking context.

Based on the overall findings, one educator found that hope theory is not always applicable to all cases for achieving success or goals. Instead, hope theory is situational. This educator, who applied hope theory in a limited amount, expressed that it was not always the most practical approach to engage students to achieve their goals. "Sometimes, you have to go back to the traditional way of achieving your goals."

This final section will serve two functions. First, commentary will be provided on the limitations of this study. The second section will address some implications for practice and further research in this area.

Limitations

This research is subject to several limitations.

Time. The 12-week duration assigned for professional learning, inclusive of the workshop on hope theory, was relatively short for educators to apply their conceptualization of hope theory to their practice thoroughly. Despite the systematic application, this constraint restricted educators from exploring hope theory in breadth and depth, with keen eyes for the slightest impact.

This study was conducted at the beginning of the school year from August to November. This timing was an important limitation of the study. Educators had other priorities, which included getting to know their students, conducting diagnostic assessments, and for the new teachers, becoming familiar with the culture of the school. Timing would have affected the extent to which all educators applied hope theory.

Rigour. Observations, ongoing and final feedback indicated that educators applied hope theory and provided a different degree of support, or exhibited varying levels of enthusiasm.

Replication. The scope of this study included a sample of convenience of eighteen educators. This, in addition to the unique setting of urban, private, Islamic school, should be considered regarding the generalizability of findings to different settings.

Concerning the limitations discussed and the results of this study, several areas of future research can be identified.

Implications and Recommendations

With mental illness increasingly threatening the lives of our children (YMHC, 2020), it was interesting to find a plethora of studies on the positive impact of hope on students' well-being, yet very little existed on ***how*** to apply this construct of hope in educational practices. The gap in the literature is even wider with relevance to teachers applying hope theory in the context of Islamic schools in Canada. This study was just one step toward exploring hope theory in the context of Islamic schools through the lens of elementary educators. The discussion in the following paragraphs stemmed from the findings of this study that unveiled some promising practices in relation to educators' experience on applying hope theory within the context of their educational practice at an upper-elementary Islamic school in Alberta, Canada.

Teach students the inevitability of challenges to life. Many experts in the field have argued that school is still the best venue for health promotion among children and adolescents (Konu & Lintonen, 2006; Raphael, 2000; Rowling, 2003). The school is also a safe place to impart that challenges are an inevitable part of life's journey. This strategy can be well supported through the many stories of prophets who endured hardships in life, studying character development in novel studies, exploring Canada's past and present through the struggles of its people, and from the many verses of the Quran, for example: "Be sure We shall test you" (2:155) and "Verily, with every difficulty there is relief" (94:5). Teachers are capable of creating awareness that challenges should be appreciated as opportunities to develop resilience and strengthen competence.

Invest time to apply educational theories in schools. Instructional should invest time and effort to start putting theories into practice. Education leaders and stakeholders must start being more action-oriented with evidence-based practices. If students' well-being is an increasingly

major concern, then current educational practices need revisiting and revamping. Applying theories such as hope theory in educational practice can be a demanding, time-consuming practice that requires a great deal of professional learning. In contrast, however, the adverse effect due to the lack of hopeful thinking can lead to distressing outcomes. Based on the findings of this study, hope theory does not have to be an all-at-once application. Preferably, it can be applied in stages with opportunities for continuous reflection.

Create meaningful professional learning opportunities. Professional learning on hope theory for teachers should be focused, consistent and ongoing. Atkinson and Hornby (2002) observed that teachers are recognized to have a significant advantage in detecting issues affecting the mental health of children, in providing mental health support and in shaping the learning environment to support children's emotional well-being. The findings of the study predict that hope theory can cultivate positive changes in education if educators are engaged in their professional learning. This should include more opportunities to observe their colleagues regularly and collaborative time to reflect on best practices.

Teach positivity. Students should be taught how to perceive the positive aspects of a negative situation. Being positive has proven to elicit a state of gratefulness while reducing depressive symptoms (Graham, Phelps, Maddison, & Fitzgerald, 2011). This is not beyond the scope of teachers since they are well-placed to influence such attitude either through modelling or direct instructions. There is a close connection between Islam and positive reframing. Support this strategy with Islamic literature. This is not new but rather a natural integration to Islamic schools. Positive reframing in an Islamic school ideally connects to the pillar of prayer, a reliance on God in times of difficulties, guidance, thankfulness, needs and repentance. Positive

reframing is also connected to a state of belief in God, according to Islam. For the Quran mentioned several reassuring verses that encourage positivity:

And whoever relies upon God – then God is sufficient for him (65:3).

God's mercy encompasses all things (7:156).

God does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear (Quran 2:286)

So verily, with the hardship, there is relief (Quran 94:5)

Teacher-parent partnership. The education of the child can be more effective when the teacher and the parent work in partnership to support the child's learning. Both can work alongside the child to set goals and derived pathways to achieve their goals. This involvement and relationship with parents to increase hope correlated with possibilities first proposed by Stotland (1969) that a person can influence another's level of hope with the gift of presence and by communicating positive expectations.

Strengthen hope theory with other philosophies. Educators who are more familiar with the Islamic Faith found it more effective to complement hope theory with verses from the Quran, while educators who were less familiar or confident with Islamic literature used growth mindset alongside hope theory. Directed specifically to Islamic schools, both students and parents are more intrigued by a practice that fits well with their belief system. Making the connection to what hope theory posits in relation to what Islam advocates, can be more engaging and effective. For educators who are not confident with Islamic literature, the alternative is to use a theory that work well alongside hope theory.

Continuous research. More research can delve deeper into how to apply hope theory into different yet related contexts or how to complement hope theory with principles of other religions or mindfulness theories. A principal purpose of education is to support every child to

effectively manage their functioning when confronted with typical challenges or faced with normal stressful situations (WHO, 2014). It is imperative that educators are equipped with the knowledge and resources to support students' well-being, which includes their emotions, psychological stability and social well-being, all of which affect how students think, feel, and respond to given circumstances (Nordqvist, 2017).

Conclusion

This qualitative descriptive study described upper elementary educators' experience on applying hope theory within the context of their educational practice at an Islamic school in Alberta, Canada. The qualitative descriptive study was suitable because the nature of its design allowed educators to explore hope theory to the extent, and in ways, suitable to them and relevant to their classroom culture. Hope theory was explored in the practice of education because of its relationship between mental wellness. In Canadian classrooms, many children are affected by a range of issues (Farrell & Barrett, 2007), including anxiety and depression; but the schools continue to grapple with their role in addressing mental related issues.

First, educators found several similarities between the concepts of hope theory and Islamic teachings. That means, both concepts can work hand-in-hand to support students' mental intelligence. Second, professional learning has to be considered as an essential for educators to gain a sound understanding of hope theory, and what this looks like in an Islamic school. The professional learning cannot be a one-size-fits all and a one-time training. It must be considered that within any school, the teaching staff consists of educators who (a) bring many years of experience as compared to others, (b) are more open to making small changes to their pedagogy, (c) have different degree of acceptance that students need differentiated support and (d) feel more confident than others to use Islamic traditions within the academic context. After their

orientation to hope theory, it will be more effective if teachers are continuously supported through coaching. Third, for varying reasons, not all teachers will apply hope theory as enthusiastically as their colleagues. Relatedly, hope theory will impact students differently. While some educators will find it more meaningful to model a sense of hopefulness to engage their students, others may teach it but behave otherwise. Because hope is also a relational process, the people who an integral part of the child's live may affect the impact of hope on that child. Fourth, time and consistency are very important factors to influence hopeful thinkers. To develop attitudes of positive reframing, proactive thinking, and reflective thinking to influence self-confidence and being able to appreciate barriers, will require significant support. This change of attitude will not happen within a short period. Rather, continuous reminders, directions, routine, patience and Islamic references have to be sustained over an extended period for students to develop positive manners. Reassuringly, the commitment and time to apply hope theory in educational practice within the context of an Islamic school are worth the effort. The small impact observed from the findings of this study is promising to the bigger picture-supporting students' mental wellbeing.

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