

Chapter 7

Practical Strategies for Higher Hope Learning Spaces: Reducing Childhood Trauma in a Post-Pandemic Era

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ABSTRACT

Childhood trauma was found to increase the risk of aggression and disruptive behavior in classrooms. The disruptive behavior risks exposure to the school-to-prison nexus, a result of inequities in zero tolerance and exclusionary policies. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic disrupted the world's learning systems leaving in its wake feelings of anxiety, depression, fear, uncertainty, and hopelessness. This exacerbated the existing trauma experienced by students. Thousands of studies involving hope theory advanced to a science with predictable outcomes and progressively more benefits for dealing with childhood trauma. The eight recommended practical strategies for higher hope include acknowledging that hope takes work, understanding the tenets of hope theory, emphasizing a personal approach to student needs, protecting educators from vicarious trauma, listening more and talking less, developing ambassadors of hope, and creating partnerships of hope focused on positive experiences, effective communication, and resilience to reduce the effects of childhood trauma.

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*Practical Strategies for Higher Hope Learning Spaces***INTRODUCTION**

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic created a massive disruption to the world's educational systems affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners and more than 190 countries (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). This highly infectious disease resulted in global contamination, elevated mortality rates, and widespread uncertainty about the future (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). In its aftermath, students, their families, and educators were left feeling anxious, depressed, scared, and overwhelmed. This exacerbated the existing trauma experienced by students and their teachers. While not caused by the pandemic, childhood trauma was found to increase the risk of violent and aggressive behavior in adulthood that often leads to criminality (Kalmuss, 1984; Straus et al., 1980; Widom, 1989). The rates of childhood and adult trauma are high among the incarcerated (Wolff & Shi, 2012), resulting in a need to reduce childhood trauma within the education system and disciplinary referrals that increase exposure to the school-to-prison pipeline or recently referred to as the school-to-prison nexus.

Racial disparities resulting from inequities in discipline and exclusionary policies in the education system have left poor and disadvantaged students, especially Black and Brown students, exposed to the school-to-prison nexus (Basford et al., 2020). Because similar patterns exist within both the educational and criminal justice systems, their linkages are difficult to ignore (Wald & Losen, 2003). Understanding the earlier points within the educational system where positive impact could be made, existing trauma with elementary students became the focus of the chapter. The author explored the question of how to create higher hope for a brighter future in the post-pandemic learning space using practical strategies. Hope offered more than a positive attitude, wishful thinking or optimism. The science of hope is an evidence-based life strategy or plan of action with predictable outcomes. This chapter outlines eight strategies for implementing higher hope in an elementary learning space based on the tenets of hope theory developed by Snyder (1996, 1998) and Snyder et.al. (2002), focusing on positive experiences, effective communication, and resilience to reduce the effects of childhood trauma.

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON NEXUS

A fair and just criminal justice system must provide due process, protect the rights of the innocent, and provide those protections equally to all people (Hayes, 2020). A well-functioning criminal justice system may be characterized by low or declining crime rates, low recidivism rates, and victims compensated for the wrongs committed against them (Hayes, 2020). This is a balanced system that responds to the needs of the population by protecting, restoring and holding responsible parties

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accountable, while not erroneously representing itself as perfection for everyone within the system. Ultimately, the criminal justice system is a work in progress that should engage in continuously striving for equity as well as equality for all. When the system is wholly out of balance, a portion of society including those within the criminal justice and educational systems may be disproportionately impacted resulting in negative outcomes for generations to come.

Research has shown that putting a high percentage of a nation's population in prison has a negative impact on society as a whole, perpetuating a cycle of crime and violence that may extend to future generations (Simpson, 2020). Because incarceration has not resulted in society feeling safer or declining crime, more is needed to respond to the needs of all youth while balancing inequities. Minorities are heavily overrepresented among those most harshly sanctioned in the education system (Wald & Losen, 2003) and many of those impacted have experienced trauma that follows them into adulthood. Their behavioral responses to trauma have exposed them to the criminal justice system. Additionally, educators who are ill equipped to deal with this trauma have inadvertently ushered trauma victims into the criminal justice system. This has become a cycle of trauma, negative responses to trauma, transition to juvenile justice programs, and at adulthood to the prison system. This cycle has resulted in increased mass incarceration and the existence of the original problem of unaddressed trauma.

While similar data patterns exist in the global incarcerated population, the United States has a significantly higher prison population that disproportionately impacts Black and Brown youth and adults. The United States has the highest incarceration rate with well over 2 million prisoners and China comes in second with 1.5 million. However, China's incarceration rate is only 118 per 100,000 people and the United States has 655 per 100,000 people (Simpson, 2020). In 2015, the United States had 5% of the world's population, but 22% of the incarcerated population (Simpson, 2020). The high correlation between trauma and contact with the criminal justice system experienced by impoverished and minority populations in the United States points to the fact that victims (especially victims of violent trauma) and perpetrators of crime often share the same physical environment (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1994). These commonalities are opportunities to prevent and reduce trauma, which subsequently reduces the number of perpetrators in the juvenile or criminal justice systems. This is not an easy fix, but each perpetrator that is eliminated reduces their sphere of victims and the associated cost of care or incarceration.

The racial disparities within the educational and judicial systems are so similar that it becomes impossible not to recognize the linkages between the two (Wald & Losen, 2003). Terms such as prison track and school-to-prison nexus have been used to describe the trends contributing to mass incarceration (Wald & Losen, 2003). Childhood trauma is associated with risk for emotional disorders (e.g., depression and

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anxiety) and co-morbid conditions such as substance abuse and antisocial behaviors in adulthood (Wolff & Shi, 2012). Subsequently, reducing trauma and the risk to the school-to-prison pipeline also reduces these health conditions. Intentionally equipping educators with strategies to reduce trauma and restrict the flow of students into the school-to-prison nexus enhances the health of young people within the educational system which positively impacts incarceration rates.

The school-to-prison nexus is a theoretical construct that results from inequities in discipline and exclusionary policies in the educational system that leaves poor and disadvantaged students, especially Black and Brown students, outside the confines of school ushering them into the criminal justice system (Basford et al., 2020). This is important because research demonstrates a correlation between the societal trend of mass incarceration and the school-to-prison nexus (Heitzeg, 2009; Nocella et al., 2014). Understanding the school-to-prison nexus broadens understanding of mass incarceration, its ties to childhood trauma, and the education system's role in increasing the overall well-being of society.

Those exposed to the school-to-prison nexus carry trauma into adulthood. For this reason, it is not surprising to find elevated rates of trauma among the incarcerated especially men (Wolff & Shi, 2012). Being in prison is difficult to live through (Simpson, 2020), but it also impacts the children and families left behind. In 2015, there were more than 10.3 million people imprisoned worldwide (Baranyi et al., 2017). Women constitute 6.8% of the total prison population, and their proportion is rising in most countries (Walmsley, 2016). However, the overwhelming majority of the prison population at 93.2% are men. Many studies have focused on men because of this disproportionality.

Learning conditions tend to be worst for the poor or disadvantaged, and the pattern continues for their learning outcomes (The World Bank, 2018). Without an equitable learning process, youth may become locked into systems of poverty and exclusion when the education system fails those most in need of a good education (The World Bank, 2018). While equality encourages everyone to be treated the same, equity specifically provides the resources the individual needs to be successful (Horner, 2019). Focused attention from educators and researchers may appropriately assess the needs of each student through the lens of both equity and equality for the success of all students.

For example, every student may be provided a computer for their homework. While this is good, it may be of no value for a child without access to the Internet. Equity takes into account individual needs (Horner, 2019), which are very different from treating everyone the same. This gives rise to the notion of privilege, which is when decisions are made to benefit enough people, but not all people (Horner, 2019). The issues of equity, equality, and privilege are complex issues that have caused disparities in the educational system requiring a shift in thinking to a more

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personalized approach and resolution. Because of the pandemic, this personalized approach intensified the need to reshape the educational system to include strategies to address trauma and inequities.

The Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente (1995) conducted one of the largest studies of childhood abuse, neglect, and household challenges that negatively impacted their well-being. Collectively, the traumatic events that occur in childhood were referred to as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 1995). ACEs have both personal and environmental factors. For example, personal ACEs may include violence, abuse, neglect, witnessed violence, or exposure to suicide. Environmental factors contribute to childhood trauma undermining feelings of safety, stability and bonding. While not an all-inclusive list of factors, these were accentuated by the disruption of educational system and social stability during the pandemic.

Mental disorders associated with childhood trauma include depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative disorders and psychosis (Chapman et al., 2004; Stein et al., 1988; Springer et al., 2007). In learning spaces, students who have experienced trauma may elicit a multitude of responses. For example, responses to trauma may include anger, aggression towards others, and self-destructive and suicidal behaviors (Brodsky et al., 2001; Dube et al, 2001; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Educators that understand these responses to trauma may be better equipped to respond to the behavior and alter the trajectory of their student's lives. Childhood abuse also has been found to significantly predict adult arrests for substance abuse related offenses (Ireland & Widom, 1989).

With the prevalence of ACEs in homes and the community, children experience increased levels of trauma and exposure to the school-to-prison nexus. If this increased level of trauma is not addressed, the economic and social costs to families, community, and society may translate into hundreds of billions of dollars each year (CDC, 1995). ACEs have long-term negative effects on health, well-being, educational and employment opportunities (CDC, 1995). For these reasons, it is imperative that solutions and alternatives be offered to reduce its financial, economic and social costs.

With more than 22 years working in the federal probation system, the author conducted hundreds of interviews gaining an understanding of the depth of traumatic experiences, their impact and the importance of hope. Many releasees interviewed during that time self-reported the presence of childhood trauma or posttraumatic stress disorder. Consistent with the interviewees, the research indicated that over half the male releasees (56%) reported experiencing childhood physical trauma (Wolff & Shi, 2012). This connection to the releasing population made the author keenly aware of the plight of formerly incarcerated people, who were often from poor, disadvantaged, underrepresented, and especially vulnerable to trauma during the pandemic. For these reasons, the author focused on preventive measures that

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circumvented the flow of students into the school-to-prison nexus and reduced or prevented trauma.

Elementary students were primary targets for higher hope spaces in this chapter because the development of hope becomes more refined as youth mature (Snyder et al., 2002). This natural progression of expanding vocabulary, memorization skills, development of writing, and collaborative team building makes hope a productive starting place for building skills for more complex future strategies. By developing and becoming more familiar with the tenets of hope earlier, students may apply the principles to life applications, as they build on their sense of identity and peer relationships when difficulties occur (Snyder et al., 2002). The constructivist learning theory offered support for the underpinnings of hopeful thinking.

CONSTRUCTIVIST LEARNING THEORY

The constructivist learning theory is an approach where learners use prior knowledge and experiences in pursuing learning objectives and problem solving (Brown & King, 2000). Learners work together sharing their ideas, processing new information and previous knowledge to achieve their learning objectives while assessing alternatives. Similarly, the theory of hope is a goal-directed thinking strategy that creates pathways to objectives and uses motivation (agency) to maintain momentum on that path (Snyder, 1996). Because learners share in the goal-directed team building, they share lessons learned and gain a deeper understanding of one another while building transferable skills for the future.

The constructivist learning theory is especially important because practices and strategies used in the tenets of hope to reduce trauma and mitigate exposure to the school-to-prison nexus. Learners are required to methodically process information, prove or disprove misconceptions and construct solutions from current and previous knowledge to build a better future. This process is unique to each learner based on a continuum of processing current and past information while constructing new ideas and solutions. As students mature and broaden their understanding of themselves and their environment, the tools learned can be used to problem solve with others and may be transferred to more complex circumstances. The constructivist learning theory provides the structure needed in learning and applying the tenets of hope.

THE SCIENCE OF HOPE

Hope is commonly understood to mean “desire accompanied by expectation” or “to want something to happen or be true” (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1). If the desire

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of that anticipation or expectation has not yet manifested, the outcome is slated for some point in the future. If there is no expectation or envisioning for the desire in the future, there may be a sense of hopelessness or despair. Generally, hopelessness occurs when the outcome has already been determined and nothing can be done to alter the results (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Not everyone believes that hopelessness is an option. Hopper (2020b) asserts “there’s always hope, no matter how difficult or dire a situation may seem” (p. 5). In any case, as more focus is placed on the individual’s inability to alter the outcome, negativity, anger, and frustration manifest reducing the level of hope. Intentionality, choices, and forward looking are required to achieve higher hope. Hope filled adolescents are mentally healthier than those filled with hopelessness (Afzal et al., 2014).

Supported by more than 2,000 studies that produced predictive outcomes, hope has transitioned from a simple theory to a science of hope (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). The science of hope is defined as goal-directed thinking based on two tenets including developing workable alternatives to achieving goals and the sustained momentum to achieve it (Snyder, 1996). In short, an individual must have the capacity to set clear goals for the future, map alternative route(s) to those goals, and be sufficiently motivated to follow them through to achievement. However, there are instances when an anticipated goal is not achieved or there is an inevitable loss.

Snyder (1996) identifies two types of losses, those anticipated and those that are the result of an unattainable goal. In the first type, it is accepted that hopeful thinking characteristically reflects the 50% probability that success will be attained (Snyder, 1996). This may mean preparing several possibilities in anticipation that one or more may not result in the desired results. For example, a 100-meter competitive race will only result in one winner although two or more athletes may compete. The second type of loss or failure is unanticipated and may be painful to process (Snyder, 1996). For example, children may experience the death of a beloved pet which may cause an emotional deflation or mental draining of energy. One of the characteristics of higher hope people when confronted with loss is that they are hopeful during the loss and bounce back to a more hopeful state following the natural grieving process (Snyder, 1996). The idea is not to replace or make light of the loss, but allow the child to experience the process and flow to other goal pursuits.

Learning to process loss is similar to managing through trauma. Some degree of trauma is inevitable to everyone at one time or another. At its core, hope is the innate introspective cognitive ability that each individual possesses to achieve a future outcome. This is within each person’s purview to journey to a state of higher hope with guidance and an expectation that better future outcomes are available even when confronted with loss and trauma. In short, the science of hope is accessible to everyone with the capacity for goal-directed thinking. While striving for hope may accompany feelings of stress or being overwhelmed, building hope may start

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with small manageable steps to building a hopeful state (Hopper, 2020b). Research indicates that hope is positively correlated with life satisfaction (Telef, 2020). The constructivist learning theory is helpful in creating the structure for processing past information to set new goals or alternative ones with pathways to achieve the unique goals of the learner.

The science of hope is a holistic approach to initiating a higher hope learning space that involves multiple active roles and pathways to achievable outcomes. A methodical approach is critical to students exposed to ACEs in creating positive experiences and effective communication that reduce childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.). This is an ongoing process where teachers recognize the value and benefits of a higher hope learning space while serving as curriculum drivers. Teachers who establish a safe environment where expectations are outlined clearly psychologically support children who have experienced trauma (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). To prepare educators, they must be supported with resources and training including trauma-informed practices that not only protect students, but protect educators from vicarious trauma. Compassion fatigue also known as vicarious trauma can lead to emotional exhaustion and disengagement or burnout which is especially hazardous to teachers (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Since the pandemic began, teachers leaving the profession have accelerated to a rate of 44% (Jagannathan, 2021). If we are to address this exodus, more has to be done to address the inequities within the educational system.

Because children live and learn in multiple environments, family and support systems are important to maintain the positive progress reflected in a higher hope learning space. Although a personalized journey for the student, many supports have to be in place for higher hope to exist and thrive. When children and educators are protected, nurtured, and given a platform to voice their concerns, celebrate achievements, and pursue their goals, everyone benefits. Having sufficient goal-oriented energy enables people to have life satisfaction (Wong & Lim, 2009). The eight strategies outlined provide a practical starting place for a higher hope learning space consistent with the introspective, strategic, intentional, and predictive nature of higher hope focused on positive experiences, effective communication and resilience to reduce the effects of childhood trauma and exposure to the school-to-prison nexus.

Strategy 1: Acknowledge That Hope Takes Work

While the hope concepts are straight forward, the routes to the goals may require detours and alternative paths as life changes to achieve desired outcomes. Using hope strategies in a higher hope learning space requires planning, motivation, and work (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). The science of hope may be used as a tool to achieve healthier relationships, higher daily attendance, higher grades, better test

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scores, health, mental health, recovery from trauma, and reduced behavioral issues (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Learning about the value of hope's long-term benefits may be leveraged into transferrable skills applicable to more complex achievements in the future.

Recentering is not meant to disregard feelings of frustration and despair that inevitably occur as a part of human nature. Being hope-centered means making a decision to remain focused on hopeful thinking and recentering when necessary to receive the benefits of goal-directed thoughts (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Although important to acknowledge that hope takes work, there is also an equally important ever hopeful strategy that may be pursued. Hopper (2020b) asserts that "perhaps the first step is to acknowledge that there is always hope, no matter how difficult or dire a situation may seem" (p. 5). This simple assertion helps to reframe any negative situation and refocus on the fact that there is a future and it comes with hope. Again, each person is unique and may require their own time and space to process through pain, grief and difficulties to position themselves to move toward a more hopeful state.

For example, a child may find it hard to concentrate and recenter on a cause-and-effect relationship, when their family environment is chaotic (Snyder et al., 2002). As a result, the child may relinquish a goal of achieving a perfect score in each class and choose an alternative path or invest their energies elsewhere. Alternative routing and motivation to recenter on a hope-centered life offers benefits and life lessons such as overcoming and reimagining what success looks like. However, success may sometimes come after time and space to grieve and recenter on more hopeful goals. The important thing is to have a process available when the person is ready to move on to other goal pursuits. Hopeful thinking is not an excuse to not engage in life and/or with others. Success is more than achieving a goal, but applying practices and principles to life circumstances that enhance outcomes. In addition, being hopeful and managing emotions reduces the effects of traumatic events by decreasing outbursts or disruptive behaviors that may result in fewer disciplinary actions and increasing life satisfaction (Valle et al., 2006).

Incorporating the language of hope into school projects and assignments increases familiarity and normalizes hope theory as a tool. For example, a school assignment may include a written report on the impact of COVID-19 on their personal lives. Teachers may provide guidance designing the assignment with the final outcome of a personal presentation in mind. Guidance may be given on how students should develop steps or pathways to their envisioned report or presentation and how they plan to maintain their motivation toward this goal. Predictable routines and expectations help children who have experienced trauma heal (Bartlett & Smith, 2019). For some, motivation may be in the form of favorable grades, rewards or satisfaction with

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achieving the outcome. Each student is different and may be motivated by different incentives prompting a personalized approach to incentives.

Teaching the language of hope helps students recognize and model the language and affiliated behavior encourages a shift in thinking (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Routine in the classroom and clear expectations reduce the risk of additional trauma (Bartlett & Smith, 2019). Normalizing the language of hope in the classroom reduces negative emotions and experiences such as fear and hostility with the added benefit of mitigating the risk of trauma and exposure to the school-to-prison nexus. After completing the assignment, students may share their approaches with their classmates while engaging in authentic discussions. Shared learning from other classmates is important to gain insight and perspective. When children are encouraged to pursue the broader goal of life satisfaction by discovering and exploring their world and life around them, they strive for personal development and are more equipped to face difficulties (Park, 2004).

Best elementary classroom practices include creating a safe, secure space where students' physical and emotional needs are met (Education Staffing Space [ESS], n.d.). To achieve this goal, educators may establish a caring and supportive classroom experience by promoting open honest sharing without judgement. No judgement is not the same as accepting misinformation, bullying or teasing. Educators may provide guided learning and correction when needed in a healthy exchange as a model for class behavior based on respect. Helping children heal from trauma by ensuring that they have predictable routines, safe learning spaces, and setting expectations appropriate for their level of functioning is paramount (Bartlett & Smith, 2019). In this context, working to foster feelings of hope in uncertainty increases feelings of well-being and empowerment toward a better future (Hopper, 2020b).

Strategy 2: Understand the Tenets of Hope Theory and Its Benefits

The pandemic created not only educational challenges, but opportunities as well. Because of the inequities exacerbated by the pandemic, favorable circumstances exist to change the educational process to include higher hope strategies. The benefits include encouraging healthier relationships, optimistic thinking, reduced trauma, empowerment of students, fewer mental health issues (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019), and teachers and students united as curriculum drivers. The strategies recommended are foundational steps that are transferrable to other aspects of life that benefit the whole person. Assisting students to think critically and generate solutions offers opportunities to develop additional skills (ESS, n.d.).

Psychologist Rick Snyder, known as the original "hope scientist," and his colleagues developed a hope theory based on two concepts: pathways and agentic

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thinking (Snyder, 1996, 1998). In achieving desired goals, pathways or routes were developed to reach each goal and willpower served as the fuel for motivation to complete it. Currently, there are more than 2,000 published studies of hope theory demonstrating its power in the areas of education, employment, health, mental health, social relationships, family, and trauma resulting in an evidentiary base including predictive positive outcomes (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). These positive outcomes reduce the imprint of unpleasant experiences related to childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

Hope can predict academic achievement for school-aged children to graduate level students (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Because of its applicability to a wide range of youth and adults, the author focused on younger elementary students to serve as a foundation of transferrable skills in building student confidence as they matured and progressed in school. The higher the hope of a child, the higher the daily attendance, the lower the tardiness rate, the higher the grades, and better the test scores (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). However, additional research is required to expand the field of study to include specific grade levels, ages, classroom subjects, and genders among others.

The science of hope encourages powerful goal-directed thinking (Snyder, 1996) to offset the effects of childhood trauma by strategically providing tools needed to manage behavioral responses to trauma. Students experiencing negative emotions have fewer streams of thought and actions and, thus, may have restricted pathways to goal achievement (Franke et al., 2017). Understanding how students who have experienced trauma respond helps equip teachers with tools that reduce exposure to disproportionate disciplinary actions. Educators are encouraged to use project-based and/or problem-based activities that engage the student in active learning as a part of best practices (ESS, n.d.). For these reasons, the science of hope is recommended to navigate the negative results of trauma along with its disruptive behaviors by managing emotional responses and reducing the risk of exposure to the school-to-prison nexus.

In a study published by Katelyn Long of Harvard University, researchers found that more hopeful participants reported higher levels of positive emotions, lower levels of depression, a stronger sense of purpose and meaning, and less loneliness (Hopper, 2020b). Psychologists have found that people who score higher on measures of hope also tend to have a higher level of well-being (Hopper, 2020b). This hopeful mindset makes setting clearly defined goals possible, even when facing significant trauma and adversity (Hopper, 2020b). The decision to focus on a higher hope learning spaces provides scaffolding from an impossible future to one with possibilities. Positive lifestyle reduces the effects of childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

A higher hope learning space offers an opportunity to reshape the educational system. By weaving opportunities for students to problem solving, they learn to think

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critically and generate unique solutions that follow them into adulthood. It is also important to develop assignments and projects that encourage students to regularly set goals, develop pathways to reaching their goals, and provide motivation to continue their pursuit to its desired conclusion. The focus in a higher hope learning space is on the process and not necessarily about the destination and/or detours in the beginning. Table 1 summarizes the benefits of a higher hope learning space and uses the acronym “Hopeful” to serve as a reminder of the benefits.

Table 1. Benefits of a higher hope learning space

Designation	Benefits
H	Healthier relationships.
O	Optimistic thinking.
P	Power of hope.
E	Empowerment.
F	Fewer mental health problems.
U	Unites students, teachers, and school staff as curriculum drivers.
L	Less exposure to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Strategy 3: Emphasize a Personalized Approach to Student Needs

In a higher hope learning space, the psychological strengths of hope are nurtured by encouraging strategic thinking when adversity comes. Undoubtedly, no life is without adversity at one time or another. The focus should be on resilience, overcoming pain, and recentering when necessary (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). By nurturing the unique characteristics of each child, they are celebrated and valued as individuals with the ability to choose the direction for their future. Sustaining motivation to achieve goals is essential to gaining higher hope. Consideration may be required in meeting the student’s basic needs before they can be sufficiently motivated to complete higher level thinking.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs provides a basis for motivating students to maximize their potential (McLeod, 2022). Physiological needs required for human survival such as food and water, safety and stability ensure personal and financial security, social belonging such as being a part of a family or group of friends, and self-esteem needs (McLeod, 2022). If these basic needs are met, students may be motivated by higher level thinking such as cognitive (curiosity), self-esteem (respect), and self-actualization, a need to realize one’s own potential (Basford et al., 2020). These

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motivations may occur simultaneously, based on the underlying needs. A personalized approach is required to identify the needs of each student and define a plan of how best to address them.

Understanding these basic motivations outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs assists in understanding what may be motivating the student's behavior. For example, when a student misbehaves or acts out of character, a caring trauma-informed adult may ask narrative questions requiring more than single word answers. As students learn to navigate problems and create solutions, they simulate real world applications that better prepare them for the future (ESS, n.d.). Learning in a variety of ways and being encouraged to develop their own unique positive solutions may make the difference whether students feel supported or are referred to the judicial system risking exposure to the school-to-prison nexus. Positive experiences reduce childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

If a student becomes combative because of a subject discussed in class, a more trauma-informed follow up question may be appropriate. The teacher may ask "What has happened that caused this behavior?" instead of "How do I deal with the misbehavior?" Many children display disruptive behavior as a result of trauma (e.g., sexualized or aggressive acts, and withdrawal) and are at risk of being stigmatized and isolated (Pynoos et al., 1996). Oftentimes, student misbehavior leads to a student being labeled as a "bad student" or "incorrigible." These labels travel with the student and can taint their relationship with other teachers or adults in the future. Effective communication strategies reduce the effects of childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

Because teaching and learning are dynamic endeavors, teachers must remain open-minded and willing to learn themselves (ESS, n.d.). Teachers cannot be expected to know how to respond to trauma without proper training. The child's fears, frustrations, and trauma should be priority even when the schedule is hectic. Misbehavior and outbursts never seem to occur at the most convenient time, but placing a priority on the health and well-being of each student reinforces to the child that they are valued and their frustrations taken seriously. Because of these caring adults, teachers become experts on their students while helping the child manage their emotional responses which reduce exposure to the student-to-prison nexus. Creating an environment with clear expectations, positive experiences and effective communications reduces childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

Strategy 4: Protect Teachers and School Staff from Vicarious Trauma

Bartlett and Smith (2019) report that early childhood trauma is a major public health problem with severe consequences for children, families, and society as a whole.

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Trauma can be defined broadly as “an event or series of events or set of circumstances experienced that are physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening” (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 7). When exposed to traumatic experiences of their students, teachers and school staff may become victims of vicarious trauma by simply doing the critical work of caring adults. Therefore, teachers and school staff must be protected from vicarious trauma. A safe learning environment includes all those within the educational system and preparation is key.

An estimated 17% of public-school teachers reported leaving the teaching profession before their fifth year, often as a result of low salary and insufficient school resources as major reasons for their departure (Gray & Taie, 2015). Since the pandemic began, teachers leaving the educational field increased to 44% (Jagannathan, 2021). For many of these teachers, the pandemic added to the stress and despair of the teaching profession. Serving as caring adults in the lives of their students, teachers were exposed to trauma oftentimes without the support to adequately serve their students’ needs. This must be considered in reshaping the teaching profession and halting the exodus.

Educators are not able to give what they do not have or do not know (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). By establishing comforting and predictable routines, teachers set the stage for cognitive development (ESS, n.d.). These supportive caring adults deserve the investment of resources to obtain care for themselves, so that they do not become victims of vicarious trauma. A psychologically supportive learning space celebrates each child, respects and listens to their concerns, and encourages them to share their vulnerabilities and fears (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). It is critical that the voice of the student, teacher, and other educational professionals are not overlooked.

When educators are afforded an opportunity for trauma-informed training that highlights best practices, they are less likely to become distracted by disruptive behavior focusing instead on the underlying trauma (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Professional development for educators and parents provides a symbiotic relationship with the student while surrounding each with the skilled, caring people necessary to support a higher hope learning space. Educating the school district, community leaders, and government officials ensures that the resources required to provide trauma-informed care is accessible to all those who engage with students. This partnership is important to the community’s long-term success. Focusing on the goal of arming students and teachers with the tools necessary to prevent or minimize childhood trauma provides the potential for successful futures using the science of hope.

*Practical Strategies for Higher Hope Learning Spaces***Strategy 5: Surround Students with Caring Adults**

Teachers, parents, family members, and school staff influence student behavior and expose them to an array of factors. For example, caring adults that recognize needs such as food, clothing or other essentials are critical to satisfying their student's basic needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs assists with identifying multiple levels of needs (Hopper, 2020a). Additionally, empowering teachers that have their higher order needs met may be more equipped to engage students and their families on a personal level. The messages communicated by teachers, verbally and nonverbally, about expectations contribute to a psychologically safe environment, providing a foundation for a trauma-informed learning environment (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). Given that today's student are tomorrow's global citizens, leaders, and workforce, a good education is an investment with enduring benefits (The World Bank, 2018).

The educational system involves many contributors including students, parents, guardians, teachers, administrative staff, cafeteria works, assistants, technical staff, and bus drivers, among others. For the system to work properly, all facets of the system must be valued for the contributions made in fulfilling the needs of the student. Oftentimes, cafeteria works are overlooked because they do not teach. However, cafeteria staff are responsible for fulfilling the basic nutritional needs of the students. Without their services or contributions, many students may be unfocused and distracted because they are hungry. Bus drivers, too, are often overlooked for their contributions of transporting students to and from school and/or other activities. If students are unable to attend class, the system breaks down. Therefore, it is imperative to celebrate all the everyday heroes.

Best practices for teachers necessitate that they create a safe, secure environment where students' physical and emotional needs are met (ESS, n.d.). In reshaping the educational system, it must be acknowledged that teachers, too, have needs that must be met. Communications must include the voices of those directly and indirectly impacting the student. They must not be forgotten in the process and provided a voice and platform to shape the educational system of the future. Otherwise, the exodus from the teaching profession that began before the pandemic will continue on its accelerated course following the pandemic. Communication and compassion will be important in modeling the priority that should be placed on the teaching and educational community.

Strategy 6: More Listening, Less Talking

Trauma-informed adults provide the caring voices that encourage a young person's sharing and further safe development. Creating a higher hope learning space requires that teachers and school staff listen to the student, ask narrative questions that prompt

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explanation (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019), process this information before responding, and listen more. In short, caring adults should be listening more than they are talking and asking questions that require a narrative answer. For example, a teacher might ask a student “What did you most like about today?” In response, children need to be able to tell their story without interruptions or anyone trying to fix them. They want to be validated, heard, and not judged (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019).

A student’s closest social circle of peers, partners, and family members influences their behavior, contributing to their magnitude of experiences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Negative people and their behavior can influence others. Helping students to be critical thinkers in controlling who and what influences their behavior increases their self-confidence and self-actualization. Prevention strategies may include parenting or family focused prevention programs, and mentoring and peer programs designed to reduce conflict, foster problem-solving skills, and promote healthy relationships (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Building these aspects into the school strategies drives curriculum building to a higher-level reinforcing well-being and constructive thinking.

It is important that students feel comfortable sharing among their peers, learning the tenets of hope, and continuing to look to taking an active role in preparing for a brighter future. Effective discipline begins with setting expectations and providing consistent reinforcement of expected behaviors (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). The ultimate goal for discipline is to ensure young people choose a better set of actions to reach their desired goals in the future or self-regulate to delay achieving that goal (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). Surrounding learners with other excited hope-filled learners equipped with strategies to building a better future builds excitement. This helps learners to manage the controllable parts of their future, while accepting that there are always unexpected variables. In addition, learning to manage emotions, communicate effectively and build rapport reduces childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.). As a result, young people learn to detour, take alternative routes to meeting goals, and reset when the process becomes derailed. Learning in authentic contexts anchor students learning to familiar people, places and things (ESS, n.d.).

Strategy 7: Develop Students and Educators as Ambassadors of Hope

By creating a hopeful learning space and arming students with these strategies, they become empowered ambassadors of hope. Maintaining meaningful connections involves creating routines that promote healthy coping strategies and improved self-regulation skills, while integrating them into learning expectations, rules, and lessons (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). Improved self-regulation and coping skills reduces the risk of trauma and mitigates the need for referral to the school-to-prison pipeline.

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Once students and teachers understand and can benefit from the higher hope learning space, it breeds interest from others. This fueled interest expands to others seeking the benefits of a higher hope environment. Those successfully using hopeful thinking provide the sparks that generate hope in the community encouraging partnerships.

Ambassadors of hope are important to creating enthusiasm, interest, excitement, and funding opportunities that support educational professionals. Members of the community and local leaders are more supportive when they see measurable outcomes and positive results. Hope scales, worksheets, surveys, and research are available to assist in providing funders with output for justification of financial supports. For example, Rick Snyder developed the hope scale to measure both agency and pathways thinking toward goals (Snyder, 1996, 1998). The hope scale reflects four measures for willpower for past, present, and future goals and four items reflecting mental roadmaps toward goal attainment (Snyder, 1996, 1998). Active roles and strategic planning are crucial to establishing, maintaining and funding a higher hope learning space. Raising awareness of the needs for trauma-informed training increases positive responses to childhood trauma reducing the risk of additional trauma and further restricting flow into the school-to-prison pipeline.

Newsletters, podcasts or social media events highlighting the long-term benefits and measurable outcomes may serve to generate excitement about the progressive work done in the hopeful learning space. When student families and community supporters see the benefit in individual students, they are more likely to talk about it with others and inspire additional support. Allowing educators and young people to create platforms surrounding the higher hope learning environment creates a voice for the teaching profession to share their concerns and contribute to their field of expertise.

While each school district is different, it is important to focus on the strengths of the school and collaborate with local leaders to support the higher hope learning space. Giving students, teachers, and school staff the opportunity to add their voices may contribute to the overall support needed to bring a higher hope learning space to fruition. The ability of students to learn in a variety of ways and experience content through multiple modalities strengthens communication and neural connections in multiple centers of the brain (ESS, n.d.). These positive experiences, rapport building and effectively learning to manage communication reduces childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

Strategy 8: Create Partnerships of Hope

Implementing trauma-informed care curricula and establishing partnerships with early childhood education programs, mental health programs, and trauma-informed services create a holistic higher hope support system (Bartlett & Smith, 2019). The

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resources and training made available to educators reduces and prevents future trauma and places educators in a better position to execute their important jobs. Education is not restricted to the classroom or school district boundaries. Global education and social platforms link academic subjects with students around the globe by emphasizing how their lives are inextricably connected to one another (Mokuria et al., 2020). Sharing knowledge and problem-solving skills creates invaluable partnerships by eliminating duplication of resources, research, and funding sources. For example, the research involved in the developing children's vaccines for COVID-19 saved countless lives globally. Creating partnerships as a regular practice before emergencies occur is a preventative strategy for maintaining global health in a learning environment.

Allotting time in the class schedule for creative team building activities focused on topics related to the pandemic and stressful situations offers many benefits. For example, students may be asked to paint a picture related to COVID-19 pandemic. During guided instruction, students may be taught to look to the future picture that they desire, develop steps to painting the picture, and verbalize how they will motivate themselves to complete it. The steps are the process which helps each student to visualize the outcome from their perspective and build steps while remaining motivated through to its completion. Afterward, students present their picture to their classmates and describe the steps that led to its completion. Teachers and classmates listen and encourage during the discussion of why and how the student came to their conclusions. If there are inaccuracies about COVID-19, the teacher provides support and facts to reassure and comfort. This is an opportunity for the student to voice concerns and share thoughts that exist in their reality. Additionally, movement in an around the learning space between different modalities helps students reduce stress and bring oxygen to the brain, priming them to create and innovate (ESS, n.d.). Building hopeful partnerships are valuable for empowerment for students and those that support them.

CONCLUSION

It would be disingenuous to pretend that building higher hope learning spaces that reduce trauma, build confidence, encourage empathy, and mitigate the school-to-prison pipeline is without challenges. No amount of money alone can resolve this issue. There is no panacea or quick fix for managing trauma and existing inequities in school discipline and exclusionary policies that impact Black and Brown students disproportionately. However, there is hope for a more inclusive school system that benefits all students, including those with special challenges. Interjecting a diverse representation of students, teachers, parents, educational staff, and supporters allows for new perspectives to be heard and exchanged. It is important to understand that the

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systemic nature of the educational system has existed for many, many years and will require a commitment from caring adults and informed partnerships to begin healing. The science of hope provides goal-directed thinking that focuses on students and families, and advocates pathways and motivations for a more personalized approach to a better future that benefits the entire educational system one student at a time.

The complexities and interconnectedness of the higher hope learning spaces are unquestionably worth the investment to future students. Each person that engages with a child has a role in contributing to a higher hope learning space. The student and educator must be open and moved toward developing and building a new future while acknowledging the challenges presented by the pandemic or other stressful events. Educators and parents or guardians must be equipped with the appropriate training to become trauma-informed care givers. Additionally, community leaders educated in trauma-informed care may introduce beneficial legislation in reshaping the educational community. It will take the combined efforts at all levels to reshape the existing educational system that responds to student and teacher needs while reducing trauma and flow into the school-to-prison nexus.

Phillip Zimbardo and Rosemary Sword suggest that one way to become more hopeful is to help others and lobby for social change (Hopper, 2020b). Focusing on the future, the benefits for both individuals and society become clearer. Education promotes employment, earnings, and health (The World Bank, 2018). The probability for a healthy future with the potential and capacity to provide sustainable earnings is life changing for most. A quality education encourages confidence, self-trust, and self-actualization in reaching the highest potential.

Additionally, more research with the science of hope is needed in diverse environments involving multiple age groups and cultures to further expand the body of research. When faced with pressing social issues, embracing hope can be beneficial to bring about change in a broader community (Hopper, 2020b). The science of hope process is complex requiring work, but is achievable if caring adults commit to responding to what children and adults have gone through (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019).

As teachers continue to leave the teaching profession, much must be done to hear their concerns and challenges if the exodus is to halted. This will require reshaping the educational system to be more inclusive of their ideas and their voice in shaping the future. Other large societal factors include the health, economic, educational, and social policies that help to reduce economic or social inequalities between groups in society (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). While recognizing the monumental task of reshaping the education system, it is achievable if all contribute at their level of influence. Every voice is important at every level of influence. Everyone counts.

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There are eight practical strategies recommended to encourage a higher hope learning space. They are not meant to be all-inclusive because each learning space and school district are different. They are simply a starting place to increase equity and establish a thoughtful, intentional, and hope-centered environment consistent with best practices for elementary schools. First, acknowledge that an authentic higher hope learning space takes work, but is worth the investment. Second, understanding the tenets of hope including goals, pathways, and agency provide an evidence-based strategic foundation from which to measure progress. Third, emphasize a personalized approach to student needs. Fourth, protect teachers and school staff from vicarious trauma. Fifth, surround students with caring adults to encourage and build confidence. Sixth, listen to everyone, ask narrative questions, process information before responding, and, after responding, be willing to listen more. This requires keeping an open mind. In short, more listening and less talking. Seventh, develop students and teachers as ambassadors of hope. Finally, create partnerships of hope with local communities as part of a larger society supporting the educational system. Table 2 summarizes these practical strategies for higher hope learning spaces.

Table 2. Strategies for higher hope learning spaces

Strategies for Higher Hope Learning Spaces
1. Acknowledge that hope takes work.
2. Understand the tenets of hope theory and its benefits.
3. Emphasize a personalized approach to student needs.
4. Protect teachers and school staff from vicarious trauma.
5. Surround students with caring adults.
6. More listening, less talking.
7. Develop student and teachers as ambassadors of hope.
8. Create partnerships of hope.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Constructivist Learning Theory: It is an approach to learning based on building from knowledge and previous experiences.

Equality: It means being equal or treated the same.

Equity: It means a quality of fairness and taking into account individual needs.

Higher Hope: It is the capacity to envision a better future or outcome.

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Hope: It means to desire or want something to be true.

Hopelessness: It means that there is no hope and/or the outcome has already been determined.

School-to-Prison Pipeline: It is the result of educational system inequities in discipline and exclusionary policies that place some students at a disadvantage ushering them into the criminal justice system.

Science of Hope: It is goal-directed thinking focusing on developing clear goals and sustainable momentum to achieve them.

Trauma: It is broadly defined as any event or series of events that are physically, emotionally, or spiritually harmful or life threatening.