



The Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum

CULTIVATING HOPE





What is something you are hoping for right now?

We may not always realize it, but hope plays an important role in our daily lives, including in the classroom. As educators, we may have hopes and goals for our students that we strive for each day. Students need hope to set social, emotional, and academic goals. Hope is a practice that is correlated with stronger friendships, increased creativity and problem-solving abilities, and greater overall academic success (Zakrzewski, 2012). Hope is also associated with increased happiness and is thought to be a necessary tool for overcoming everyday challenges and completing tasks both small and large (Weir, 2013). Hope is directly related to goal setting and involves personal agency and carving pathways to feasibly achieve one's goals, which contribute to lower levels of stress (Huebner, 2009). Hope also typically flourishes with social support, as social connections are fundamental to cultivating and sustaining hope (Weir, 2013).



Showing hope is much more than just wishing for a brighter future. Hope is defined as “the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways” (Snyder, 2002, p. 249). In other words, hope is something we can cultivate in ourselves. When we have hope, we believe in our own agency to shape the course of our lives and believe in our ability to discover or carve out the pathways necessary to achieve our goals. When thought of this way, hope becomes personal and actionable. It is a tool for perseverance that can help get us through long days of online teaching and learning in the short-term while planning for success in the long-term. And when we cultivate hope in ourselves, we can pass it on to our students, colleagues, and families.



When nurturing hope in ourselves, it's important to focus on what we can control (Taitz, 2020).



What aspects of your teaching can you control, and what goals can you set to give yourself hope for tomorrow, next week, and next year? This is not to say you need to be working on achieving those goals every day, but outlining tangible things you'd like to accomplish can remind us that things will change. The future will come. Focusing on what we can control can help us break through big emotions and keep going each day.

To cultivate hope in yourself and your students, try implementing the following strategies:

- **Remind yourself and students of past successes** (Weir, 2013). When you notice an emotion surfacing, identify it and think about a time you've felt it before. How did you persevere through it then? Do the same with your students. Remind them of all of the challenges they've overcome in the past. Have them think about themselves in the future; what will they hope to have learned during this time? What will they be proud of that they've accomplished?
- **Adopt a growth mindset.** A key component of hope is problem-solving and finding ways to achieve your goals when obstacles arise; plan for challenges and focus on moving forward even when stressors come up (Taitz, 2020). When we can see multiple avenues to get where we want to go, setbacks don't feel as heavy, and we can stave off hopelessness. Help students with their growth mindset by reminding them that if something doesn't go their way, it simply means it hasn't gone their way yet. Guide them to see alternative ways of achieving their goals, and, for students (and adults) who tend to have low hope, help them achieve smaller goals (Huebner, 2009). Weave affirmations into the classroom and into your routine, such as "I am capable" or "I have what it takes," and "I can get through this."



- **Make a tangible visual of your goal** (Weir, 2013). Try “futurecasting,” where you envision a goal for the future and brainstorm ways to make it happen. Make a collage or a mood board with students to help them envision a bright future. Whether your goals and your students’ goals are large or small, visualizing them in a fun, creative way cultivates hope and joy. When making your hopes and goals visual, focus on agency thinking, which means that we perceive ourselves as capable of reaching our goals (Snyder, 2002). Reminding ourselves that we have agency in our life while making a physical representation of what we want can spark new ideas and empower us to feel hopeful no matter what challenges we may face.
- **Outline your pathways to a goal, then outline alternative pathways!** Considering one path to a goal while also recognizing there are many other paths is essential for developing hope. It’s important to remember that life and progress are not linear, and there is no absolute direction to take as we move toward the future (Snyder, 2002). Outlining multiple paths to the future we want gives us many opportunities to reach our goals, so when one option doesn’t work, we know we have another! With students, you can do this by having them draw out actual roads toward a goal.
- **Ask yourself, “what is still working?”** Reminding yourself of what’s going well and what is still familiar and true can give you hope (Taitz, 2020). Ask your students the same question. In the midst of great changes, focusing on your values, remembering that the future is always uncertain, and continuing to nurture your strengths and hobbies are important to remain grounded. This doesn’t mean ignoring the challenges or avoiding what isn’t working, but it’s easy to get caught up in the negative. Reflect on the parts of your teaching, your routine, and your life that are fulfilling, which can illuminate other potential means of cultivating hope for the future.

Showing hope and perseverance can be challenging at times, but it’s important to remember that it helps us to reach our goals. It’s important to remember that hope is neither wishful thinking nor naive optimism. Hope is a commitment to building a brighter future, with a deep trust in yourself that you are capable of making that happen. As you continue providing high-quality education to your students, remind them (and yourself!) that a commitment to hope shows strength, resilience, and a steadfast belief in our ability to create a bright future together.

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References

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