To my father, who gave so many hope

To Dustin, who gives me hope
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This study investigates the relationship between children’s hope and their educational and occupational aspirations. Two questions were asked: Do children’s hope levels have a relationship to future educational and occupational goals? Do children have pathways formed for the attainment of future educational and occupational goals? The Children’s Hope Scale was administered to 28 third graders. Of these, twelve were identified as having either extremely high hope or extremely low hope according to the Children’s Hope Scale. These twelve were interviewed using a structured interview protocol. Children’s responses did not indicate a relationship between hope scores and pathways thinking. However, their hope levels did suggest connections to their future educational and occupational goals. The most striking difference between low hope and high hope participants was found in their agency. Low hope children could not think of anything they could do in the present to obtain their future goals. If hope is learned and hope affects agency and future outcomes, then hope should be taught. Longitudinal studies would indicate whether early indications of hope and agency impact career outcomes.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The hallways and classrooms of our nation’s schools are plastered with motivational phrases. Children in some low performing schools chant mantras every morning proclaiming they can succeed. We ask them to dream; we implore them to give education their all. We ask them to hope. We do not, however, show them how to hope or what to hope for. We make them proclaim their worth when other children just take that fact for granted. We tell them they are valued as in some schools the ceilings fall in, the books disappear and the teachers give up. (Kozol, 2004) Children today in our schools are being told to hope, without any guidance or examples of what hope looks like or what it feels like to hope.

There is in today’s schools a huge push to close the achievement gap. This gap is mostly along racial lines, but social class and other demographic factors play important roles. The statistics today are bleak in the world of education. High school attrition rates are reaching over 80% in some urban districts. The majority of African American students in sixth grade are reading below a fourth-grade level. SAT scores are declining in some states, and all of this is happening as the competition to get into college becomes more and more intense. Educational attainment is clearly linked to wages and occupational attainment in our society. If a certain segment of the population is being excluded from high quality education, it is also in turn being excluded from future occupation choices.

The factors in place affecting children’s education are far beyond the scope of any one study. This study will attempt to shed light on one small aspect of educational outcomes. Specifically this study aims to see if there is a relationship between children’s hope scores and their educational and occupational outcomes. It has been suggested by current research that hope
is learned. This study aims to investigate the role that hope plays in children’s educational and occupational choices.

This study attempts to bring two areas of research together: hope theory and career theory. Hope levels have significant bearing on future educational attainment and both mental and physical health. Educational attainment is linked to occupational attainment. Therefore one of the roles of school is to adequately prepare students for occupational attainment. It is the school’s role to educate those in its charge, to prepare the young for active citizenship. Hope theory gives us a theoretical and measurable lens on Hope.

What is hope? Hope can be broken down into very measurable parts. “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 those goals)” (Snyder, 2002, p. 250). Simply put, to have hope one must have goals. One also must have the motivation to get started and a pathway to get there.

The current study aims to look at hope and its relationship to educational and occupational outcomes. The factors that affect a child’s ultimate outcome in life are multiple and diverse. Hopefully this study will begin to shed light on what teachers can do in the classroom to help build hopefully thinking in their students.

**Statement of the Problem/Research Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to investigate what children hope their futures will be like in respect to educational and occupational aspirations. This study was also designed to evaluate children’s understanding of careers, and their planning for achieving their stated educational and occupational goals. Specifically, the study is designed to answer two questions:

1. Do elementary children’s hope levels have a relationship to future educational and occupational goals?
2. Do elementary children have pathways formed for the attainment of future educational and occupational goals?

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Three schools in the same district located in Florida were used in the present research study. They were chosen due to their descriptive statistics. The goal was to obtain a sample of third graders that mirrored the demographics of the community at large. One school, where the majority of students were African American and eligible for free or reduced lunch, was chosen. A second school was chosen because the majority of its students were Caucasian and did not qualify for free or reduced lunch. A third school was chosen because of two of its characteristics. The schools racial population was almost equal between African American and Caucasian students. The school was a charter school and although it had the majority of its students eligible for free or reduced lunch the charter school was chosen as a control for SES. In order to be a student at the school you had to be specially enrolled by a parent or guardian, and transportation to and from school was the sole responsibility of students and their families. Therefore, each child had to have an adult in his/her life that was active in its educational decisions. The research shows that children who have a caregiver that who takes an active interest in their education have better outcomes. The Charter school was chosen to see if the population at this school which mirrored the demographics of the low SES school, might have higher hope scores.

**Significance of Study**

This study is an opportunity to bring two bodies of research together. Hope theory has been most commonly discussed as a measurable quality in medicine and psychology. Career theory on the other hand is most commonly addressed in counseling circles. If one’s hope affects a myriad of outcomes in life, such as physical and mental health, it may also impact occupational attainment. Educators have an obligation to prepare students for adult life, we must teach them to
be prepared for their chosen career. If hope is necessary for career attainment then educators must also teach hope to their students.

This study will also give voice to a small sample of children, who can help adults gain insight into how they think about and view the world around them. The principal investigator believes in the validity and necessity of qualitative research. Qualitative research is of benefit to teachers because it allows the problem to be viewed under the circumstances in which it occurred and under similar circumstances in which the problem will be solved. Educational research has long relied on adult interpretations of children’s actions and language, without asking the children to become part of the discussion.

**Definition of Terms**

- **Fantasy choice**: An occupational choice that is not seen by society to be a possible career, for example, fairy or pirate.

- **Occupational clusters**: Six categories of occupations as grouped by Holland, realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional.

- **Hope**: 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) (Snyder, 2002, p.250)

- **Pathway**: Routes to desired goals.

- **Agency**: The motivational aspect of hope that propels people along their routes to desired goals.

**Review of Related Literature**

The literature that forms the basis for this thesis is separated into two sections: career theory and hope theory. Career theory describes the development of future occupational aspirations. Hope theory has three main components; goals, pathways and agency. Each of these two theories will be discussed in length individually in the following sections. After explaining
both hope theory and career theory in detail, I will explain the ways in which the two can be synthesized.

**Career Theory**

There is a growing body of research looking at young children’s occupational aspirations and expectations. This research to date has answered many questions about young children’s future goals and helped to bring us closer to a theory of how children develop a concept of their future selves in relation to occupation. The majority of past research has been conducted on adolescents.

Ginzberg in his 1952 theory on occupational development was one of the first to include childhood in his model (Trice, 1995). Ginzberg separated childhood into two phases. He posited that children engage in ‘fantasy choice’ (careers such as time traveler) until the age of eleven (Auger 2005). In this stage, children “inspire widely and impulsively with the principal constraints being the father’s occupation and parental suggestion” (Trice, 1995, p. 307). From the ages of twelve to fourteen children begin to use more concrete criteria when making occupational choices. These choices are based on interest and not founded in ability or “other realistic constraints of choice” (Trice, 1995, p. 307). Ginzberg’s theory found modest support in studies from the 1960’s through early 1980’s (Trice, 1995). However, more recent studies conducted in the 1990’s found no evidence supporting Ginzberg’s claim that children aspire to fantasy choice options and fathers career until the age of eleven, and actually shows more support for a theory put forth by Gottfredson.

Gottfredson (1981) proposed that children actually begin to narrow career choices as they move through childhood in relation to age specific themes of size and power, sex-roles, and social valuation. Gottfredson’s theory separates childhood into four stages starting at age three and has children choosing realistic, as opposed to fantasy choices, by age five. She also
postulates that as children grow older and become more aware of social norms they begin to limit their choices to occupational clusters, and these limitations, once made, are fairly permanent (Gottfredson, 1981) Gender- and sex-type restrictions occur between the ages of six and eight years old. From the ages of nine to twelve children become aware of the roles social class and intelligence play in career obtainment and narrow their choices even further, eliminating careers seen as too hard or unrealistic (Gottfredson, 1981).

Gottfredson postulates that the major relevant elements of self-concept to vocational choice are “elements of gender, social class background, intelligence, and vocational interests competencies and values” (Gottfredson, 1981, p. 548). These four postulates make up the four stages of her theory. The first stage, orientation to size and power, occurs around the ages of three to five. Children realizing the concept of ‘adult’ as different from ‘child’ categorize this stage. The second stage, orientation to sex roles, occurs approximately around the ages of six to eight years of age. Here children consolidate a concept of gender and self. Orientation to social valuation is the third stage, which occurs between nine to thirteen years of age. Here the “more abstract self-concepts of social class and ability become important determinant of social behavior and expectations” (Gottfredson, 1981, p. 549). The final stage, orientation to the internal, unique self occurs after age fourteen. Here adolescents begin to listen to their own interests and capabilities.

Gottfredson also talked about the concept of accessibility and how this affects job choice especially around stage three. “Accessibility refers to obstacles or opportunities in the social and economic environment that effects one chances of getting into a particular occupation” (Gottfredson 1981, p. 548). Some obstacles may be the availability of the job in relation to the child’s geographical surrounding, perceived ideas of discrimination, how easy the job appears to
obtain, and a general lack of understanding of how to enter the occupation. Children start to create zones of acceptable occupational alternatives around stages three and four. These zones are based on information gleaned during the earlier stages. As such children begin to find occupations acceptable or unacceptable based on what is perceived to be appropriate for their sex and social class. All children may have high aspirations, what is an acceptable low aspiration may differ across sex and social class lines. Thus the major difference is not in the ceiling of what is acceptable, but in the floor of what is considered a possible alternative. When projecting oneself into the future, children often take into account the type of person they want to be. This idea coupled with perceived ability creates a zone of acceptable career choices.

One of the barriers children face to occupational achievement that is stressed by Gottfredson is intelligence. Throughout each stage of development intelligence plays a major underlying role in a child’s ability to see him or herself in future careers. Occasionally Gottfredson links this to grades in school, and how one views one’s ability in light of how adults view one’s intelligence. However more often than not intelligence is linked to social class. Gottfredson states that there is a correlation between social class and intelligence. She cites this correlation as one of the underlying factors determining occupational outcomes. She believes that class and sex socialization limit options, both for men and women, rich and poor, but she also appears to believe that the majority of the poor deserve to be poor. She promotes intelligence testing as part of career.

Roe attempted to create a theory that could predict specific occupational outcomes based on early childhood experiences with caregivers. These early experiences were classified into six categories, over demanding, rejecting, neglecting, casual, loving, and overprotective (Roe, 1957). Depending on parenting style a child would develop a personality that ultimately had the child
seeking careers that would either have him or her working with people, or have him or her working alone (Roe, 1964). Roe believed that how each parent acted towards a child could create a different occupational outcome. For example, a strong dominant father who is not around a lot might produce a child that is a lawyer. In contrast, an absent or weak father might produce a social worker (Roe, 1964). By 1964 Roe’s hypothesis of direct occupational predictability to childhood parent relationships had found little to no support in the research (Grigg, 1959; Hagen, 1960; Switzer et al. 1962; Utton.1962) even by Roe herself (Roe, 1964). Even though no direct relation in regards to occupational choice and parenting style was found the major underlying theme in Roe’s research was that early experiences with parents and adults affect occupational outcomes.

Much like Roe, Havighurst believed that early interactions with family affected occupational outcomes. Contrary to Roe’s idea that parental emotional interactions played the primary role, Havighurst (1964) believed that social class and the job of the father greatly influenced educational and occupational outcomes. Gottfredson (1981) clearly derived many of her theories from the early work of Havighurst (1964). Gottfredson (1981) championed the idea of occupational and educational attainment as a lifelong process, a process that was greatly influenced by societal factors. Both of these are assertions echoed by Gottfredson in later years. Havighurst (1964) theory states the existence of six stages of development. The first, which is observed around the ages of five through ten, is called identification with a worker. Here the child associates future self and “ego ideal” (Havighurst, 1964), which is the type of person they hope to be, with an adult worker. The second stage occurs between ten and fifteen years of age and is when the child starts “acquiring the basic habits of industry” (Havighurst, 1964, p. 216). Here the child learns how to organize their time and puts work commitments ahead of play. The
The four remaining stages of Havinghurst theory are, acquiring identity as a worker in the occupational structure, becoming a productive person, maintaining a productive society, and contemplating a productive and responsible life (Havinghurst 1964).

**Research**

**The 1990’s**

In the 1990’s, Trice (1991; 1992; 1993; 1995) conducted a series of studies to test the validity of aspects of Gottfredson's, Ginzberg's, Roe, and Havinghurst’s theories. In a 1995 study Trice set out to see whether there was evidence to support key aspects of all four theories. He examined the validity of the argument that choices before age eleven were erratic and based on fantasy (Ginzberg). To do this Trice (1995) asked children about their first and second choices for occupation in order to determine whether the choices were erratic or stable and based on rational thought rather than fantasy. He also sought out to discover if children’s focus narrows with age (Gottfredson, 1981). By examining children’s first and second choices by age for consistency and then looking at children’s answers to questions about why they had chosen each career to see if their reasoning was based in sex-appropriateness, ability, or status. Ginzberg postulated that children aspire to the occupations of their fathers. To address this question the researchers gathered data on children’s fathers’ and mothers’ careers in two-parent homes where both parents were working to assess which job, if either, held more influence in children’s choices. To test Roe’s theory that family atmosphere effects career choice the data were analyzed according to family structure. Havinghurst’s (1964) theory suggests that children will choose an occupation they are familiar with. To test this postulate, children were asked if they knew any one holding their chosen career. Data of parents and other members of the children’s household were compared with children’s stated occupational choice. All four theorists promote a developmental sequence in occupational choices. Data were analyzed to see if there was a
sequence or theme given by participants of why they chose a particular career. Ginzberg’s would have children mention interest, Gottfredson would expect status, ability, or sex-appropriateness to be a key factor, and Roe and Havinghurst would expect family and community to influence choice.

To test these hypotheses the authors asked 949 students spread across Virginia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Eleven elementary schools throughout these regions were chosen, seven public, two private (one Catholic, and one Christian). Participants were chosen across four grades. “The sample consisted of 168 kindergarten children, 239 second grade children, 272 fourth graders, and 270 sixth graders” (Trice, 1995, p. 3). These regions and schools were chosen in order to gain a diverse sample. There were 263, 296, 185, and 205 participants from rural schools, small cities, inner cities and the suburbs, respectively. The demographic makeup of participants in the study was 63% Caucasian, 25% African American, 8% Hispanic, and 3% Asian American. Four hundred and seventy eight boys and 471 girls participated in this study. The study gained a participation rate of 85%. All participants were interviewed at school, during normal school hours on an individual basis by trained undergraduate psychology majors or the principal author of the study.

The interview consisted of two parts. The first part of the interview was aimed at discovering children’s first occupational choice and their reasoning for this choice. Interviewers inquired if children knew any adults that held their specified job. Participants were then asked to identify a second career choice. Finally children were asked to identify adults in their household and specify their jobs and relationship to the child. The second phase of the interview aimed at discovering if children’s occupational choices narrowed with age. To determine this children were asked about their preferences towards thirteen different occupations. These occupations
were chosen based on the predominance of one gender or the other, or neither according to census data and children’s understanding of the occupation as according to a pilot study. Participants were asked whether they would like each occupation and why. Parents reported their own occupations on consent forms and transcripts were made of each child’s interview.

Trice (1995) based his categories of occupations on Holland’s previous theoretical work in career studies. Holland clustered jobs into six categories, realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (Holland, 1973). This clustering of occupational types made themes and trends more apparent. Trice found that among children who gave a first and second career choice, those who gave “the same Holland theme were significantly above chance” (Trice, 1995, p. 5). When occupational aspirations are clustered according to general type and prestige of work, children exhibit consistency across both choices. This result does not mesh with Ginzberg’s theory that children’s occupational choices are erratic and fantasy-based. If Ginzberg were right, then there would be little to no statistical correlation between first and second choice occupations. Children as young as kindergarten were making consistent and realistic occupational choices.

Trice also found evidence to support Gottfredson’s theory that choice narrows with age. Trice found that children did in fact narrow their choices as they got older, but their reasoning also followed a trend. As children aged and limited their choices, their answers of “don’t know” as a reason for ruling out an occupation grew as well. Boys, at twice the rate of girls, listed sex-inappropriateness as a reason for not choosing a career.

Trice also found that children aspire to the occupational cluster of their mothers at rates significantly above chance: 30% for boys and 36% for girls. When exact occupation was analyzed the rates where lower but still significant with maternal employment growing by age
level on its influence on girls. On average 7% of girls aspired to their mother’s exact career and 6% of boys. Neither boys nor girls aspired to their father’s occupational clusters significantly above chance. In regards to actual occupational matches only 1% of girls desired to have the same career as their father. The rates of boys aspiring to father’s occupation were also not statistically significant, but the results were interesting. The rates went up with each age level, so that by the sixth grade the rate of career aspirations were almost equal for sons in relation to mother and father.

Seventy-two percent of participants indicated knowing someone with their desired career, and that the person was a member of their household. School protocol would not allow the researchers to ask specific questions about the child’s relationship to members of the household in order to avoid sensitive questions about family structure. This supports Havighurst’s theory that children’s occupational choices are influenced by those they know intimately and not just through casual day-to-day interactions with occupations.

One trend in developmental sequence was prevalent. By fourth grade both boys and girls could give specific reasons for their first career choice. Children began to mention specific abilities and interests at increased rates. Fourth grade boys also listed status and money as important factors in occupational choice, while girls mentioned these factors much less.

One of the most dramatic revelations of the study concerned family structure and occupational choice. Trice was looking to see if family structure had an effect on the types of jobs children expected to have when they were older. What he found was not a difference in the types of careers chosen, but rather that as the family structure broke down, children had less of an idea what they would be when they were older. So, children from two-parent homes gave a “no choice” answer 7% of time, for single-parent homes children chose “no choice” 18% of the
time. Those living with other relatives said “no choice” 43% of the time, and children in foster care did so 59% of the time.

In 1991 Trice conducted similar, yet less extensive inquiries in to the stability of children’s career aspirations over the elementary years, similarities of children occupational aspirations to that of their parents, and similarities and differences between rural and urban children in career choice. Two questions were asked of the 422 eight- and eleven-year-olds: “What do you want to be when you grow up,” and “What do you really think you will do when you grow up?” (p. 137) The questions were asked by an interviewer, and then re-asked by a separate interviewer eight months later. Eighty-seven percent of eight-year-olds and 94% of eleven-year-olds gave the same career choice for both questions. Trice found no significant difference in the number or types of careers chosen by boys and girls, contrasting dramatically with studies in the 1970’s where girls chose careers from a significantly smaller pool than boys. For stability Trice found that 70% of eight-year-old girls and 69% of eight-year-old boys gave the same occupational choice in both interviews. Of those who expressed stability in career choice over time, 56% of boys and 54% of girls chose occupations similar to a parent or guardian. For the rural-urban divide, Trice found that 81% of rural children held stable career aspirations as opposed to 63% of urban children. Rural children were also more likely to select a parent’s career than urban participants, 55% and 38% respectively. The data for eleven-year-olds were similar to the data found for eight-year-olds. This study shows that children hold stable career aspirations, and that those choices are based on direct experience. This is evident in the fact that rural children chose fewer occupations than urban children.

When he controlled for children who gave fantasy responses (as defined by Holland, 1985) and those who gave no answer at all to questions about their second occupational choice, Trice
(1995) found that both occupations fell within themes identified by Holland at a statistically significant level (Trice, 1995). It would appear that children have high hopes for the future. However, when we look more closely at what was reported new questions are raised. Only 16.7% of children in this survey gave a first and second occupational choice. What about the other 83.3%? Trice concluded that family structure was of great significance in determining not what types of choices children gave, but if they would have any choice at all. As stated earlier, Trice found significant differences between children from two parent homes and those from—non-traditional, single- or foster-parent homes. The former did not specify a second career 7% of the time and the later 30% of the time. As family structure broke down, so did a child’s ability to project him/herself into the future. Unemployment rates also played a role. Two-parent households had an employment rate of 90% while 33% of single parents and 42% of other relatives were unemployed.

Career research of the 1990’s was dominated by Trice and his co-authors. During the next decade other researchers would join the scene, using the same theoretical background and sometimes coming to very different conclusions.

**Recent Research**

Auger’s (2005) research helps refine the differences in career theory. Citing the same mixed reports and opposing theories as Trice, Auger set out to answer four basic questions. First, at what point in children’s development do they begin to aspire to occupations that are specific and realistic? Second, what is the developmental trajectory of children’s tendency to aspire to sex typed occupations? Third, at what point do children begin to consider the social prestige of occupations when choosing a desired career? Forth and finally, what is the relationship between children’s career aspirations and the occupations of parents?
Auger’s (2005) sample consisted of one hundred and twenty three first, third, and fifth graders in two schools in a rural midwestern school district. Trained graduate students using a structured interview protocol interviewed the participants. The interviews were then transcribed. Parents of participants reported demographic information. Of the 123 children 75 were male and 48 were female, 110 were Caucasian, two African American, two Native American, one Hispanic, and eight other. Ninety-two participants lived with both biological parents, 20 lived with a single mother, seven lived with a biological parent and a stepparent, and four lived in a different type of arrangement. The median household income of participating families was $51,000-$60,000.

Auger concluded in his study that children as young as first grade aspire to realistic and specific careers. In fact, although the differences were not statistically significant, the first graders in this study gave the highest rate of realistic career choices, with fifth graders giving the most fantasy choice answers. Auger also found further support for Gottfredson’s theory of societal forces shaping choice. As children got older, the prestige of their desired career rose. As children become aware of the societal structure around them, they gained a sense of the hierarchy of careers and began to aspire to careers more valued in society. Auger found this happening around age nine. Auger found children reporting fantasy careers at rates of fifteen percent for first graders, thirty-four percent for third graders, and thirty-six percent for fourth graders. Children in this study were less likely to give sex-typed occupational career choices, as they got older. Sixty-nine percent of first graders reported a sex-typed career compared with only forty-two percent of fifth graders. The difference between fifth grade boys and girls in sex-typed career choice was fifty-nine percent and twenty-four percent respectively. Analysis of prestige ranking found that older children aspired to more prestigious careers than their young
counterparts. There was no correlation between sex or social class and prestige ranking among participants.

Most children in this study provided responses that differed for questions one and two. The second question concerned what they really thought they would do when they got older. Thirty-seven percent of children responded that they intended to have the same career as they had hoped to have, while twenty-two percent did not give any response at all, that is, they did not know what they would actually do when they got older. Of the children who responded, the prestige of their desired occupation and expected occupation did not differ. Thus children weren’t hoping to be one thing and expecting to be something less. Auger (1995) also found that older children who gave a fantasy choice of what they would like to do often gave a realistic choice of what they thought they would do. Finally, Auger found that most children could not name the occupations of their mothers and fathers, and that there was no correlation between children’s career aspirations and parental employment. Six percent of participants aspired to the careers of their mothers and ten percent aspired to the careers of their fathers.

Auger (1995) concluded that since there was not much difference in fantasy choices across age levels and because the number of children giving no response stayed fairly consistent across grade levels, a minority of fifth graders have not matured or given adequate thought to career goals. He also found no supporting evidence for Gottfredson’s (1981) theory that career expectations narrow with age. He hypothesized that this may have to do with what children are exposed to at home and in their communities. He posited that if more children were exposed, “to male nurses and female construction workers,” (p 328) they might be inspired to aspire to fields not common to their sex. Auger did find evidence that children begin to narrow job options based on prestige and ability level. This research found no support for Havighurst’s (1964)
theory that family and parents influence career aspirations. Auger believes this may be due to the increased sources of information and role models that young children have.

**Where Are We Now?**

We have evidence that children as young as kindergarten give realistic career choices (Auger, 2005; Cook, 1996; Hoffman, 1991; Trice, 1991; Trice, 1992; Trice, 1995). Trice found in 1991 that children’s career aspirations stay stable over the elementary years. In 1993, Trice conducted a secondary analysis of a longitudinal study conducted in 1926 by Terman, which analyzed transcripts to find a connection between what children wanted to do in childhood and what they ended up doing as adults. The research shows that not only are young children’s aspirations of careers realistic but they also are stable into adulthood.

Trice (1995) separated his analysis of Terman’s research into two parts. One was to look at exact occupational aspirations and outcomes, and the other was to cluster occupational choices and outcomes according to themes as defined by Holland. When searching for exact occupational matches, Trice found that 26% of boys aged six to nine at the time of the original study held the exact occupation they specified. As the participants’ ages rose, so did the likelihood of their holding their exact chosen career. Of the children whom were aged 14 to 17 in the original study 46% held the job they listed when questioned fifteen years later. The ratios of expectations and actualizations for girls in the study were significantly lower. Although 28% of six to nine year old girls now presently held their expected career, the numbers changed very little as the participants aged; that is 29% of 14 to 17 year olds held their specified career 15 years later. When Trice looked at the results of Terman’s study using Holland’s six career clusters instead of exact occupation you get quite different results. Of the oldest boys in the study, 65% had obtained a job in the same occupational cluster as they had chosen 15 years prior. Of the girls in the original study 71% had found employment related to their expressed aspirations in childhood.
The most recent data show that there is no statistical difference in the career aspirations and expectations between the sexes (Auger, 2005; Trice, 1991; Trice, 1995). There are also no statistical differences in the number or prestige of careers aspired to by sex.

Although the research consistently shows that young children have realistic and stable career aspirations, there are a lot of inconsistencies between Trice’s and Auger’s findings. Trice found that mothers’ occupations are one of the most significant factors affecting children’s future occupational choice. (Trice, 1991; Trice, 1992; Trice, 1995). Many other studies have confirmed mothers’ educational level as one of the top predictors of children’s educational outcomes. Trice (1991; 1992; 1995) found that children’s career aspirations did indeed mirror those of their parents, with a much higher correlation to mother’s occupation. Auger (2007), on the other hand found that children’s career aspirations did not correlate with their parents’ occupations, and if anything leaned towards the father.

This may be due in part to differences in the ways that Auger and Trice defined the parent’s careers. Auger looked only at specific job titles, whereas Trice looked at occupational clusters. Auger’s sample has many limiting characteristics. Almost all of his participants were white; there were only two African American children in the whole study. All the participants came from a single school district in the Midwest. Auger (2005) does not report how many women hold jobs in these communities, and many participants may have had stay-at-home moms. Trice postulated that perhaps the rise since the 1970’s in children mirroring their mothers’ occupational status might be partially related to the fact that more children now see their mothers working than ever before. Most children in Auger’s study were middle class. Auger’s study may be valid, but it may be generalized only in Midwestern, middle class, white communities. Trice on the other hand has been conducting research on diverse communities for over a decade.
Summary

Young children choose realistic career choices. The choices are stable into adulthood and can predict future educational and occupational outcomes. Both Trice and Auger found that children chose equivalent levels of prestigious occupations when asked what they would like to do and when they were asked what they expected to do. This shows that children at a young age, from different backgrounds, aspire to prestigious careers and expect to obtain prestigious careers. However, the data on adult occupational and educational attainment show us that class and mothers’ educational level are best predictors of future attainment. If children are significantly influenced by parents and other adults that they share an intimate bond with, then unemployment, divorce, and foster care impact the kinds of role models available to children, the kinds of careers they are exposed to, and thus the options they consider when thinking about their futures. If the child has not been able to form a bond with a caregiver who can role-model successful occupational attainment, then the child will not know where to start. If a child lacks an intimate caregiver relationship at all, they might not just be lacking in role models for careers, but role models and support for life in general. All the factors mentioned above, unemployment, divorce, and foster care could take an emotional toll on families and children. Something is happening along the pathway from childhood to adulthood. It is not surprising that some children are not projecting themselves into the future; after all, what do they have to be hopeful about?

Hope Theory

The hallways and classrooms of our nation’s schools are plastered with motivational phrases. Children in some low performing schools chant mantras every morning proclaiming they can succeed. We ask them to dream; we implore them to give education their all. We ask them to hope. We do not, however, show them how to hope or what to hope for. We make them proclaim their worth when other children just take that fact for granted. We tell them they are
valued as the ceilings fall in, the books disappear and the teachers give up. Children today in our schools are being told to hope, without any guidance or examples of what it looks like, what it feels like, to hope.

Overview of Hope Theory

“Hope is the glue that holds together the rest of the human condition as well as the energy that moves us ahead” (Peterson, 2000). The overwhelming majority of research on hope has been principally authored by C.R. Snyder. In his research alongside numerous colleagues and over multiple decades he has refined a definition of hope. “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 those goals)” (Snyder, 2002, p. 250). More simply, “Hope is the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals” (Snyder, 2002, p. 249). In previous theories of hope emotions played the major role in hopeful thinking. In Snyder’s theory of hope, emotions play a role, but it is one of support. Hope is a cognitive process and emotions are the reactions to the consequences of cognitive processes. Hope theory is based on several assumptions; hope is a cognitive process, all people can hope, hope can be increased, humans are linear in thought with past and future effecting present, most events can be construed as hopeful, and hope is affected by social constructs and experience. Most importantly Snyder emphasizes that hope is learned. One learns how to hope from ones caretakers over the course of childhood. Patterns of thought are instilled from the first days of life. The core of Hope theory rests on the trilogy: goals, pathways, and agency (Snyder, 2002). All three are necessary to have hope. All three will be discussed in the following section.

The Trilogy: Goals, Agency, and Pathways

Goals are absolutely essential for hopeful thought. In Craig’s (1943) theory of cognitive processes the mind is seen as being constructed to constantly figure out how to understand and
predict relationships among events. Point A to Point B with Point B being the goal. In order to have hope we must have a goal. These goals can run the gamut of possibility, from needing to go to the bank before it closes, to wanting to become a veterinarian. Goals are what we strive for. Humans have a linear view of time. There is a past, a present, and a future. These three (past, present, future), although progressing in only one direction, are constantly reciprocally responsive to each other. Our past influences our present, and our present is influenced by our vision of possible futures. It is this constant procession towards the future that makes goals so intrinsic. We know the future is coming, and we prepare in the present for what we hope the future will be like by creating goals.

Agency is one’s ability to enlist action towards a goal. Agency in essence is the motivational component in hope. Once one has created a goal, agency is the spark that begins you on the pathway to your goal. Agency also continues to interact with goal attainment along the pathway to attainment. At varying points towards attaining ones goal, one may encounter barriers, or lulls. Agency can interact again with the process and help one feel motivated once again to obtain a desired goal.

The third component of hope theory is pathways. Pathways are the routes one takes to obtain desired goals. Pathways are a critical component of hope. If one does not create effective routes to desired goals, then one’s ability to attain goals diminishes. As one repeatedly fails to attain goals, one’s hope begins to deteriorate. Subsequently, if one frequently creates effective pathways to goals than one creates more goals, and in effect hope increases. Applicable to Craig’s (1943) theory of cognitive development pathways are what connect A to B.

In effect goals, agency and pathways, are a cyclical progression, with multiple feedback loops occurring throughout. One creates a goal, has agency to start, and creates pathways to
attainment. Along the way obstacles may be encountered, pathways may have to be revised, agency may need to be tapped once again, and the goal itself may need revision. Ideas of the past and of the future influence goal creation and attainment. If one has had past success in achieving goals, this may serve as the source of agency to continue the pursuit. If a person has had negative outcomes in their pursuit of goals, this may serve to suppress agentic thought and limit goal attainment.

Along the pathway to goal achievement one may encounter various blockages or barriers. Some people when envisioning a pathway to a goal have but one path. But more often than not people envision multiple pathways to their goals. This ability to adapt and use counter strategies to achieve a goal is most often seen in high hope individuals. Agency is also needed to believe that one can overcome the current blockage, and motivate the person towards selecting an alternative pathway. Here, emotions play a major role. When encountering a barrier one must reevaluate the pathway to the goal. Here, emotions due to previous successes and failures influence thinking. If one has had little success overcoming barriers in the past, then those emotions will affect agency, motivation to continue towards a goal or to find alternative routes. If one has overcome barriers in the past, one might have alternative pathways to draw from and have the motivation to continue with the goal pursuit. “As such, hopeful thinking not only should facilitate success during unimpeded goal pursuits, but it should be especially helpful in the face of impediments” (Snyder et al. 2000, p. 11).

In order to have hope one must be able to create goals. There must be a desire. After that desire there must be a will, agency, to move in the direction of the goal. Once one decides to move towards a goal the pathway one chooses and how one can adapt to barriers are crucial for
goal attainment and subsequently for hopeful thought. We have learned about the basic components of hope, now we will discuss the development of hope in children.

**Development of Hopeful Thought**

Hopeful thought is a cognitive process containing developmental stages throughout childhood into adulthood. There are four stages of development to hopeful thinking. The early years, birth to three. The preschool years, ages three to six. The middle years, ages seven to twelve. The adolescent years, thirteen to eighteen (Snyder et al. 2000). In the following paragraphs each developmental stage will be discussed at length.

**Birth to three years of age**

The development of hopeful thinking specifically the component of pathways thought begins in infancy. Snyder et al. (2000) divided early childhood into two phases. Phase one focuses on the development of pathways thinking and occurs from birth onward. The second stage, the development of agency begins at one year of age. Goal directed thinking is common in both stages of Snyder’s theory. As soon as the infant is born it is inundated with an onslaught of information. This sensory information must be incorporated into the brain and categorized. In order for this categorization to take place the infant must supplement the sensory information with an internal perception of what that sensory data mean. This process of encoding and classifying sensory information is a cognitive process. As the infant applies perceptions to sensory events and begins to classify these perceptions, the process of building internal understanding of the outside world unfolds.

Next, the infant begins to observe what Snyder calls “linkages” (p. 26). Here infants begin to perceive the “this follows that” (Snyder et al. 2000, p. 27) of events in their lives. They begin to see an event has having a chronology; a linear view of time develops. During this stage the child starts to create goals. In infancy this can be viewed most easily by the child’s ability to
point to desired objects. The child has decided what he or she wants, presumably out of many options, and is beginning to express the foundations of pathways thoughts by pointing out the object in hopes of obtaining it.

Agency thought begins to occur around one year of age. This stage is characterized by two distinct realizations on the part of the child. First, the child begins to perceive self. That is, the child realizes that it is its own sentient being. Second the child learns that he/she can act on other objects in the environment to make events occur. That is, a child has a goal, a pathway to meet that goal, and now the agency to motivate him or herself to achieve that goal. An example of this may be a child who sees a toy that he or she desires (goal), the child decides to crawl towards it (pathway) and the child realizes that they can make themselves crawl, and that he or she can grab the toy (agency). Here toddlers start using the pronoun ‘I’ exemplifying with language what Kaplan (1978) referred to as a “psychological birth” (p. 28). The understanding of self and of self as instigator is crucial to agency thought. Here is where the toddler learns that he or she can take actions to achieve his or her goals.

The seeds of hopeful thought are planted in early childhood, and are one more important factor to the development of hope in the early years. As previously discussed one frequently encounters barriers to goals. In the early years the foundations of how to cope with and overcome barriers to goals are formed. Snyder et al. (2000) stresses that parents who try to anticipate their child’s every need are doing the child a disservice. In the early years if a child comes across a barrier to a goal, this is when the child learn to look for new pathways, and learn to have the agency to continue trying new pathways. I think of my nephew trying to get a ball that got stuck under his crib. He had just learned to crawl but every time he crawled towards the ball he hit his head against the crib. My sister and I reassured him that he could figure it out and
gave him time to try. We then thought-out loud different possible reasons for not being able to reach the ball, and then demonstrated physically how we would get the ball. He didn’t figure it out that day, but low and behold two days later in the same situation he struggled again, and this time he got the ball. It was frustrating for him at the time, but what he learned was to stay calm and try alternative pathways to his goal. This successful goal pursuit can be retrieved in the future when encountering a new barrier. As stated before agency thought is reciprocal, the more success the toddler experiences in effective pathways to goals, the more goals the child will continue to pursue, and the more positive past experiences he or she will have to draw upon and bring to new situations.

Three to six years of age

The ages of three to six are characterized by what Snyder et al. termed “the word explosion” (2000, p. 32). During this stage of development the brain grows to ninety percent of its adult mass. Children go from using about fifty words to over ten thousand. And individual words become paired together to create sentences. With this newfound ability children begin to be able to pair words with perceptions of objects and events. As they begin to do this, they begin to use language to achieve goals. For example, when an infant is hungry he or she will cry, when a toddler is hungry he or she may say, “I am hungry”. The toddler has attached the perception of what hunger is to the words we use to identify it.

During this stage children begin to take in the perceptions of others. This is crucial in learning hope as many of our goals are obtained by navigating through the social world. Here children learn that goal attainment occurs in a social context. Others are trying to achieve goals alongside their own. Sometimes one needs the help of others, and sometimes one must compromise with others if there is conflict in goal achievement. Also important at this stage is the beginning of understanding scripts. Humans follow scripts throughout their days and lives. In
this stage the foundation for future social scripts are being learned. One script in the average day
of a young child may be awake up script. The child would wake up, brush teeth and hair, get
dressed and eat breakfast.

**Seven to twelve years of age**

The middle years, seven to twelve, are characterized by three main themes. First, the child
masters reading. One, they learn how to read, two the reason for reading changes. Children don’t
just read for pleasure, but they begin to read for information (Snyder, 2002). Now a whole world
filled with previously undecipherable code is a world steeped in knowledge. Children devour the
written word, reading books, signs, labels, etc. All of this information is stored and processed in
the brain. During this stage the child’s brain begins to be able to store more information than
ever before (Snyder, 2002). Not only can the brain store more information then previous stages,
it can also be retrieved faster. During the middle years understanding of personal relationships
solidifies (Snyder, 2002). Children learn that their goals coexist with others goals. As a result of
this understanding of personal relationships children in this stage often acquire a best friend
(Snyder, 2002).

**Thirteen to eighteen years of age**

The adolescent years are the final stage before adulthood. Here relationships with others on
a personal as well as sexual level develop and deepen. A sense of self and personal identity
begins to transform into a premonition of adulthood characteristics. Many teenagers try on
different personas, but they begin to solidify into a solid self-image by later adolescence. Here
children begin to become accurate judges of their own abilities.

Hope is a cognitive process that develops through a series of stages. Each stage grows from
the lessons learned before it. The four stages of hope theory span the life of a child from birth to
eighteen years of age. Now that we know the developmental sequence of hope we will discuss how hope can be encouraged or discouraged.

**Hope’s Birth, Hope’s Death**

We have earlier discussed the developmental processes throughout childhood that make hopeful thinking possible. We shall now look at how hope can be encouraged and discouraged. As hope can be nurtured, so to can it be diminished. There are many ways that hopeful thinking in children can either fail to occur all together or be deconstructed over time.

From the first days after birth the foundation for hopeful thinking occurs. Here the caregivers attend to the infants every need. If the infant feels as though it is safe and loved, the child will begin to bond with a caregiver. A bond with a caregiver is an important component of hopeful thought. Children need consistency and boundaries. A bond with a caregiver allows for children to have an anchor as they practice goal related activities. The caregiver also acts as an all-important role model for the child creating goals and successfully navigating through pathways to attainment. If a child is neglected in the weeks following birth the trauma to the child’s developing brain and psyche begin patterns of negative thinking and an inability to create goals.

Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse all play a major role in the loss of hope in children. Studies have shown that children who had experienced physical abuse were prone to negative emotions, lack of enthusiasm, and were easily distracted (Egeland, 1983). In the same study it was found that children who were physically, emotionally, or verbally abused or whose caregivers were neglectful exhibited less problems solving ability then a control group in the study. Ability to solve problems is analogous with pathways in hope theory. If abuse and neglect of all kinds affect problem solving ability, then one can extrapolate that pathways, and thus hope are lost. Young children, who experience abuse, can retreat from caregivers and avoid peers
As they retreat further into themselves they sever themselves from models of hopeful thinking necessary for future success.

Snyder et al. (2000) also found that disruptions in the home affect hope. The loss of a parent or caretaker either through death or divorce can cause a child to lose hope. When a parent is lost due to death a child’s worldview is shaken. Bonds and realities that were thought to be stable and constant vanish. The child is left hurting, and without a role model of hope for the future. Likewise when parents divorce, children see family structures that they once took for granted as permanent as volatile. This leads to feelings of distrust between child and caregiver. Hopeful thought is impossible if the child feels as though his or her whole reality can change in an instant. The child no longer has a solid foundation from which to project him or herself in to the future. Agency and thus hope are greatly affected. Another important factor in the loss of hope in childhood has to do with the child’s perceptions of his or her capabilities. The child begins to pick up on parental and societal cues of what they think the child is capable of.

All the examples above reference extreme events that cause the death of hopeful thinking. For some children just the repeated exposure to barriers that they cannot overcome can cause despair and ultimately apathy. Snyder describes four common stages that hope can take when confronted with a barrier, hope, rage, despair, and apathy (1994). Children who lack effective pathways and/or agency to achieve goals when impediments occur, generally begin down the path to rage. At the rage stage children still are exhibiting agency, but that agency is misdirected and unconstructive. Impulsive and misguided actions are common and their effects and consequences lead to the next stage, despair. When in despair the child is still goal focused but is overwhelmed and unable to think of any pathway to goal obtainment, the child feels as though trying would be worthless. Many people who slip into despair “lack mastery or knowledge about
how to problem solve” (Snyder et al. 2000, p. 42). From despair children untimely find themselves at apathy. Here the child abandons all hope and gives up the goal.

The Children’s Hope Scale

The Children’s Hope Scale is an instrument created by Snyder and colleagues (1997) to accurately measure hope levels in children. The six-item Likert style questionnaire contains three questions designed to tap pathways and agency thought respectively. The scale is based on the assumption that children are goal directed by nature, “and that their goal-directed thoughts can be understood according to agency and pathways (Snyder, 1994, p. 63). The Children’s Hope Scale has been validated for use with children between the ages of seven to sixteen (Snyder, 1997). The scale was created so it could be administered and hand scored in under three minutes. The Children’s Hope Scale was created as an easy and quick assessment tool probing the pathways and agency thoughts of children. Hope has an impact on a child’s future. An instrument for assessing hope in children is extremely useful.

Research on hope

Snyder and colleagues have conducted the overwhelming majority of research on hope over the past decade. This research is the foundation of hope theory as outlined in the preceding sections. The theory that was born from the research has been discussed, now the research itself will be presented.

As stated previously “hope is the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals.” (Snyder et al. 2002, p. 249) Snyder’s research on hope began in 1989. In his first paper Snyder began to link hopeful thinking to a cognitive process (Snyder, 1989). Previous definitions of hope cast emotions at the center of hope. Snyder felt as though emotions played a supporting role and were affected by goal outcomes, not that goal outcomes were affected by emotions.
In 1991 Snyder and colleagues published two studies that gave a specific definition of hope, as well as clearly defined the terms, goal, agency, and pathway. Now that a framework had been created Snyder and colleagues began looking at how hope affected outcomes. To do this they created the Hope Scale (Snyder et al. 1991), the Adult State Hope Scale (Snyder et al. 1996), Adult Domain Specific Hope Scale (Snyder et al. 1999), the Children’s Hope Scale (Snyder et al. 1997), and Young Children’s Hope Scale (McDermott et al. 1997). Once these scales were validated hope could be measured across populations, times, and locations.

The Children’s Hope Scale now has been administered to thousands of children and adolescents across America. These findings show that on average children are more hopeful than adults (Snyder, 1994). Snyder is quick to recognize that this does not necessarily mean that the next generation is more hopeful. Since hope is cyclical and past experiences dictate future actions, children just may have not experienced the same number of setbacks as their adult counterparts. Unfortunately there is no longitudinal data to demonstrate if hope scores stay relatively stable over the course of a lifetime, or if they can change drastically.

The research is mixed on whether or not race plays a factor in hope. In one study (Snyder, Hozer, et al. 1997) race and ethnicity did not show to be a factor in hope scores. However McDermott and colleagues (1998) found a significant difference in hope scores across ethnicities. Hispanics and Native Americans had the lowest hope scores. Caucasians and African Americans scored significantly higher with African Americans obtaining the highest hope scores over all. The authors believe that some of this variance may have to do with the isolation of the Hispanic and Native American communities in this study. McDermott and colleagues found that “when children can learn in an ethnically diverse classroom where the tax base of the school
district permits more and better learning resources, the hope scores of all children, including ethnic minorities, appear to be higher.” (McDermott, Gariglietti, & Hastings, 1997, p. 186)

Functioning under the assumption that hope is learned, McDermott and colleagues created an eight-week course to see if instruction on positive goal oriented thinking could affect hope scores. The trainings were created to be presented to first and second grade children from disadvantaged backgrounds by their teachers using a story telling approach (McDermott et al. 1996). In this approach, goals, agency, and pathways are explicitly explained. After this, a story is read that contains a narrative that exemplifies hopeful goal directed thinking. The intervention took place for thirty minutes a day for eight weeks. Pre and posttest hope scores were taken and compared to a control group. The children in the control showed no difference in hope scores over the eight-week period. The group that received the training reaped modest gains in hope scores (Snyder et al. 2000).

High hope scores have been shown to positively affect the outcomes of children in a multitude of settings. Hope scores have shown to predict school achievement across age groups (Snyder, et al. 1999). Higher hope has a relation to higher academic performance (Snyder et al. 1999), higher scores on standardized achievement tests (Snyder et al. 1997), and higher overall grade point average for high school (Snyder, Harris, et al. 1991) and college students (Chang, 1998; Curry et al. 1997; Snyder et al. 1991). In a six-year study of 200 incoming college freshman hope scores were taken their first semester. Subsequently hope scores were able to predict higher grade point averages and lower attrition rates. Hope’s predictive power throughout these studies remained significant when controlling for other factors such as, previous grades, entrance examination scores, self-esteem, and intelligence.
Hope scores have been linked to athletic success both in high school and college sports (Curry et al. 1997; Curry & Snyder 2000). Since having hope means one has clear goals and pathways to achieve those goals this pattern of thinking lends itself to school and athletic success. Achievement in school partly depends on one’s ability to set goals and work towards them. Likewise athletic achievement also entails creating goals and creating pathways to obtain them.

Physical health and wellbeing have been linked to hope scores. In one study a group of high hope women scored higher than their low hope counterparts on a breast cancer awareness fact test. These women also expressed a higher level of intentions in being proactive about cancer prevention (Irving et al. 1998). In another study high hope participants were more likely to engage in preventative activities prior to becoming ill, such as exercise (Harney, 1990). Gay men with high hope scores were found to partake in safer sex practices than low hope gay men (Floyd & McDermott 1998).

Hope also plays an important role after one becomes sick. Numerous studies have found that high hope correlates to better adjustment when dealing with chronic pain and illness. Hope has been a documented positive factor in burn injury cases (Barnum et al. 1998), patients with fibromyalgia (Afflect & Tennen 1996; Tennen & Afflect 1999), severe arthritis (Laird, 1992) and blindness (Jackson et al. 1998). Another important aspect of medical treatment is adherence to a medical regiment. Moon (1991) found that children with high hope scores; especially high agency scores were more likely to take their asthma medicine as prescribed. In relation Snyder and colleagues found that hope scores predicted whether a participant would remain in a drug treatment center. Both of these studies were controlled for demographic and psychological factors. From these studies Snyder (2002) and colleagues postulated that high hope people would
have a high tolerance for pain as they would create coping strategies to obtain their goal (no pain). In a laboratory study using hot water, high hope and low hope participants were timed to see how long they could keep their hands in the water. High hope participants were able on average to keep their hands on the water nearly twice as long as low hope participants.

Psychological well being and it’s relation to hope were the subject of many studies throughout the 90’s. The overall findings of all studies were that “higher hope related to better overall adjustment” (Kwon, 2002). College students with high hope “reported feeling more confident, inspired, energized, and challenged by their life goals” (Snyder et al. 1991). College students with high hope also report lower rates of depression, higher feelings of self worth and higher levels of life satisfaction (Chang, 1998).

In addition to individual happiness it is postulated by Snyder (2002) that hope on a societal level may also be important. He cites a study in which the structure of societies was compared to suicide rates (Krauss & Krauss, 1968). It was found that cultures that were more restrictive had higher suicide rates than countries with less restrictive laws and roles. Lower hope scores have also been linked to higher rates of suicidal thoughts among college students (Range & Penton, 1994). One study of Vietnam veterans found that veterans were more hopeful during their time at war than in their present day lives (Irving, Tefler & Blake, 1997). Snyder attributes this to the barriers faced by these veterans after returning home. Trouble finding work and adequate medical care ultimately undermined hope (2002). A correlation has also been found linking low hope scores with posttraumatic stress disorder (Snyder & Pulvers, 2001).

One of the reasons that wellness corresponds so highly to hope scores is that as high hope individuals encounter blockages to goals they quickly tap into agency reserves and create a new or revised pathway to goal attainment (Snyder, 2000). Low hope people get stuck and do not
have the agency to move ahead in the face of blockages, nor do they have the skills to create alternative pathways to their goals. As a result their health, both physical and physiological suffers.

Parents, family, and friends appear to play an important role in hope. High hope adults have reported having strong bonds with a caregiver as a child and spending significant chunks of time with that caretaker (Reiger, 1993). These strong attachments in childhood lead to strong attachments in adulthood (Snyder, Chaevens, & Sympson, 1997). High hope adults report fewer feelings of loneliness (Sympson, 1999), are more socially competent (Snyder et al. 1997), and perceive more social support when encountering barriers (Barnum et al. 1998). It has been found that people gravitate towards high hope individuals (Cheavens et al. 2000) who are generally more flexible, tolerant, and forgiving.

**False hope**

Is hope always good? What if your hopeful thinking represents unrealistic goals or seemingly impossible pathways? Snyder (2002) has found that false hope as he calls it is in fact a beneficiary. Snyder found that high hope individuals have a slightly higher view of themselves and their abilities (2002). This positive view however is influenced by realistic feedback (Snyder, 2002). High hope patients with sickle cell anemia who showed extremely high hope levels at the beginning of treatment began to have lowered hope as the prospects of recovery became slimmer (Kliwer & Lewis, 1995). Likewise African American youth have been shown to have higher hope levels than their Caucasian counterparts. However, African American children who had directly witnessed violence against a family member had lower hope scores than those who had not witnessed a violent attack (Hinton-Nelson, Roberts, & Snyder, 1996). These studies show that having extremely high hope does not necessarily mean one is out of touch with reality.
Another aspect of false hope is that one may have goals that are just too big or unobtainable. Snyder found that “high level goal strivers are no less likely to attain their goals than their low level goals striving counterparts (1991). Snyder also discovered that one thing high hope people do is to accept an approximation of their original goal (Snyder et al. 2000). For instance a child might want to become the all time touchdown passer for the NFL. This is statistically very unlikely to occur. However striving for this goal may result in a rewarding approximation of the original goal. This high hope person may begin to reflect another characteristic of high hope thinkers, and they may begin to set personal goals, such as trying to throw for more passing yards than the season before.

Summary

Hope in this study is one’s ability to move towards chosen goals. Hope has been shown to predict and affect the outcomes of many people. We know that hope is a learned and that it is a developmental process beginning at birth. Hope relies strongly on role models and strong child care giver bonds. One grows hope. Our past experiences help to nurture our future expectations of our capabilities.
CHAPTER 2
PROCEDURES AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

This study was designed to answer two questions. Do elementary children’s hope levels have a relationship to future educational and occupational goals? Do elementary children have pathways formed for the attainment of future educational and occupational goals? The research was conducted in two parts. First, the Children’s Hope Scale was administered to all participants, and second, structured interviews were conducted with qualified students. The Children’s Hope Scale was used to select seven high hope and five low hope participants to take part in a structured interview with the researcher about future goals. The research procedures are explained in the following sections.

Context

Three schools in the Meechun County School District were chosen based on county-reported statistics. The schools in this study were explicitly chosen based on demographic factors. The researcher used the Department of Education’s website to obtain statistical data on the demographic makeup of all Meechum County\(^1\) public schools, including Charter schools. Three schools were chosen based on the most recent available data from the 2006-2007 school year. The first school was chosen because a majority of its students were African American and eligible for free or reduced lunches. The second was chosen because the majority of its students were Caucasian and not eligible for free or reduced lunch. The third school was a charter school with a majority of students eligible for free and reduced lunch programs. This charter school was chosen to widen the study’s scope. The children at the charter school matched qualifications to be labeled at-risk, but they had an adult who demonstrated significant involvement in their educational future by signing them up for the school and providing transportation daily. The

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\(^1\) The name of the county has been changed.
research on educational and occupational attainment and hope theory suggests that being attached to a caregiver can greatly improve outcomes. The charter school was chosen in order to examine whether there were differences in hope scores based on an adult being explicitly involved in a child’s educational choices.

In the interest of full disclosure, it should be noted that the researcher previously taught for two years at the charter school included in the study, but was not employed by the school at the time the research was conducted. The third grade class at this school contained two of the investigator’s former students and multiple siblings of former students. In addition, the teacher of one of the classes chosen at one of the other schools had worked in the school system alongside the researcher.

The researcher gained approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Florida and the School Board of Meechun County. The principals of the two county schools signed and returned the needed documentation for approval. These forms were not required for the Charter school. Instead, the principal of the school was contacted, and he gave verbal permission for the research to take place, as per county requirements.

**Setting of the Study**

This section will outline the basic geography and demography of each school, as well as that of the district where the research took place. It will help to familiarize the reader with the layout, size, and facilities available at each location. Each location used for the administration of the Children’s Hope Scale is identified in relation to the general design of the school. The locations of individual interviews are not referenced in this section, as there were many different locations for these interviews depending on factors that will be addressed in later sections.
Population and Sample

The three schools used in this study are located in a southern school district. Smaller rural communities surround the urban center. The city proper, like many American cities, is divided along race and class lines. The more affluent whites live on the west side of town. Poorer residents and non-whites generally tend to live on the east side. According to a 2006 estimate by the census bureau, the population of the county was two hundred and twenty seven thousand, one hundred and twenty. As of the 2000 census, 19.1% of the population was under the age of eighteen. The racial breakdown of the general population was: 73.2% White, 20.3% African American, 6.7% Latino, 4.5% Asian, 1.6% more than two races of origin, and 0.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Of those reporting, 11.5% did not speak English at home. The median household income was $34,696; the median house value was $97,300. The percentage of people living under the poverty line was 14.5%.

The school district is a preK-12 district encompassing seventy-two schools. According to NCES (National Center for Educational Statistics), as of the 2006-2007 school year there were 29,109 students enrolled in preK-12 public education. The district was classified as, “city: midsize” by the Department of Education, and it employed one thousand, six hundred and three teachers with a student-teacher ratio of 17.3:1. The district spent $8,502 per student for all educational and related services.

Three schools in the district were used in the present research study. They were chosen by their descriptive statistics. The goal was to obtain a sample of third graders that represented the range in demographics in the community at large. The next few sections present statistical data on each school as well as an overview of school geography. Also discussed is the decision to use only third grade classrooms.
The Schools

School One

School one (S1) is classified as a “rural: fringe” school by the Department of Education for the 2006-2007 school year. It is a K-5 charter school with 96 students in all. It is classified as a Title One school with a student-teacher ratio of 12:1. There were 10 students enrolled in the third grade. Fifty-three percent of the student body were eligible for free lunch, and an additional 7.4% were eligible for reduced lunch. The racial and ethnic composition of the school is: 57% black, 40% White, less than two percent Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian/ Alaskan Native (National Center for Educational Statistics).

S1 is located on the east side of town towards the edge of the city line. It is a charter school that lies between the city proper and outlying rural communities. There is no bus service to the school. Many children from the surrounding Eastside area attend the school as do rural children whose families work in the city proper and pass by the school on their way to work.

The school is contained in three buildings. The main building houses the office, the kitchen and small cafeteria, the computer lab, the guidance counselor’s office, principal’s office, teacher work room, one of the first grade classes, two second grade classes, and one third grade class. The teacher workroom is where the Children’s Hope Scale interviews were conducted, but is also used as an exit to the playground and other buildings.

School Two

School two (S2) is a preK-5 public elementary school classified as “city: midsize” by the Department of Education for the 2006-2007 school year. S2 was not a Title I school and had 127 students enrolled in third grade that year. There were 755 students enrolled with a student teacher ration of 14.8:1. Less than .1% of the entire student body were eligible for free lunch and reduced lunch. The racial and ethnic demographic information is as follows: 73% White, 13%
Asian, 6% African America, 6% Hispanic, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan according to the National Center for Educational Statistics.

S2 is substantially larger than S1. There is a small parking lot in front of the school. One enters through the office and is buzzed in to the main building through a security door. There are three wings to this school, all individually enclosed. One must walk outside to access the next row of classrooms. The first wing houses the library, office, media center, and art room, as well as multiple classrooms. In all the wings the classrooms are clustered together. One enters a main door off the hallway and into a common area shared by four classrooms. This area has computers, tables, and other materials. Students are allowed to move freely through this area during certain activities. Both the Children’s Hope Scale and individual interviews were conducted in this common area.

School Three

School three (S3) is classified as a “city: midsize” school with 453 students enrolled in 2006-2007 school year (Department of Education). There were 102 children enrolled in the third grade of this Title I public K-5 elementary school in 2006-2007. The demographic information is: 67% African American, 24% White, 6% Asian, and 3% Hispanic. Of the 453 enrolled students, 66% qualified for free or reduced lunch (National Center for Educational Statistics).

S3 has a very similar layout to S2. They both have three main hallways that one can access from the main office. There is no security door to be buzzed through at this school. One accesses the individual hallways from the office. The main hallways of each wing are enclosed, but one must walk outside to access the third hallway. There is no common area linking classrooms. Classrooms are located right off a main hall. The Children’s Hope Scale and interviews were conducted in this main hall and in a small teacher’s storage area.
Sample Selection

Grade-level, rather than age, was used as a selection criterion for two reasons. The first reason is the possible variance in ages in each grade-level depending on school. In Florida, all third graders are required to take and pass the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) in order to advance to fourth grade. This can result in age differences of up to three years for children in third grade. The second, related reason is that if age were a selection criterion, more classrooms would have been needed in order to obtain a large enough sample. For these reasons, a single grade level was chosen in order to have commonality to compare students’ hope levels across schools. By limiting the sample to one third-grade class per school, the researcher limited the time and resources the schools had to invest in the project.

The sample was not limited by prior achievement levels as prior achievement seems to influence children’s hope scores. Snyder et al. (1997) found a correlation between Children’s Hope scores and achievement test scores, using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. They hypothesize that “children’s capacities to form goals and to mobilize themselves along chosen pathways to those goals are important in acquiring and maintaining…information in school” (Snyder et al. 1997). Snyder et al also found no correlation between Children’s Hope Scale scores and intelligence level as measured by the WISC-R (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised) or WISC-III. If children perform poorly on the FCAT, a standardized achievement test, Snyder et al’s findings suggest that they will be more at risk of low hope. Therefore, if third-graders who had failed the FCAT were excluded from the sample due to age, a valuable resource into the perspectives of low hope individuals might have been lost.

One other factor influenced the decision to select third-grade children. The researcher wanted to interview young children because of the gap in the literature in career theory when discussing children. Most prior research focuses on high school-aged children. The average third
grader is eight years old, solidly within Piaget’s Concrete Operation Stage. At this stage, children’s thinking is characterized by an ability to create “hierarchal classification” and “the child’s ability to think simultaneously in terms of the whole and its parts” (Ginsburg, 1979). Children at this stage can classify objects in relation to each other based on the properties of each object as well as the relationships between objects (Piaget, 1997). In connection to goals and pathways, children of this age have the intellectual capacity to begin to rank their goals hierarchically and to assimilate those goals into contexts. Current research on career aspirations suggests that children’s career aspirations are realistic by kindergarten. Therefore, third graders should have realistic aspirations for their future careers and the capacity to communicate their aspirations.

Each third grade teacher was contacted via email. At their request, the researcher met with two of these teachers, and one principal to describe the research methodology and the purpose of the study. One teacher asked for the investigator to enter the classroom, meet the children, explain the study to them, and pass out permission slips. One of the other teachers, after meeting with the investigator, took the permission slips back to her class to pass out herself the next day. At the third school, the Curriculum Resource teacher met the investigator in the office and took the permission slips to that school’s participating third grade teacher who passed out the forms.

In the three third grade classrooms, a permission slip was given to every member of the class. Fifty-five permission slips were given in all. Of these, thirty-two were returned with signatures. Two parents refused permission, and five parent(s) or guardian(s) gave permission for the child to participate in either the Children’s Hope Scale or the interview about children’s future goals, but not both. In total 56% of parents gave permission for their children to participate in the study. The Children’s Hope Scale was administered to 28 children: nine at S1,
13 at S2, and six at S3. Of these 28 participants, six qualified as low hope according to the Children’s Hope Scale, ten were classified as high hope, and thirteen students scored in the moderate range. One low hope student did not have permission to participate in the interview, so five low hope students were interviewed (2 male, 3 female). Of the ten high hope participants, seven were interviewed (3 male, 4 female). One did not have permission to participate, and two were absent on the day of the interviews. Of the high hope participants eligible for the interview, five were male and five were female. Of the low hope participants, three were male and three were female demonstrating no difference in the ratio of males or females represented in either category (see table A-1 in appendix). According to the Children’s Hope Scale, S1 generated one low hope and one high hope participant. S2 generated four low hope and four high hope interview participants, and S3 delivered two high hope interview participants and no low hope participants.

Methodology

The current study is designed to answer two questions: First, do children’s hope levels have a relationship to future educational and occupational goals? Second, do children have pathways formed for the attainment of future educational and occupational goals? Description of the methods used to collect data is included here.

The Children’s Hope Scale

Purpose

Data about children’s level of hope were collected with a five-minute questionnaire entitled, The Children’s Hope Scale. This scale was developed and validated by Snyder and colleagues in the 1990’s. The Children’s Hope Scale is a six-item self-report measure “based on the premise that children are goal-directed and that their goal-directed thoughts can be understood according to agency and pathways” (Snyder et al. 2000, p. 63). Three of the
questions inquire about a child’s agency thought, and three of the questions are designed to measure pathways thought. The agency items tap into goals and thoughts about the future. The pathways items assess the children’s perceived ability to find ways to obtain future goals under both regular and extraordinary circumstances. This scale has been validated for use with children from seven to sixteen years of age.

**Administration and Scoring**

When the Children’s Hope Scale is administered to participants, it is called Questions About Your Goals (Snyder et al. 1997). The administrator can either read each item to the participant, or the participant can read the items him/herself. In the current study the questions, and all possible responses, were read to all participants for each of the six questions. There are six possible answers for each question presented in a six-point Likert scale format regarding statements about how the child feels the majority of the time. The possible options are: ‘none of the time’, ‘a little of the time’, ‘some of the time’, ‘a lot of the time’, ‘most of the time’, and, ‘all of the time’. The measure is then hand-scored by the administrator. Administering the survey takes approximately five-minutes; scoring takes around three minutes per scale. As stated above, three questions measure agency, and three measure pathways. Scores range from three to eighteen on each subset. Total scores on The Children’s Hope Scale range from six to thirty-six.

**Validation of the Instrument**

The average score on the Children’s Hope Scale is twenty-five indicating “the average child thinks hopefully ‘most of the time’”(Snyder, 2000, p. 63). Children who have both strong pathways and strong agency scored twenty-nine or above. These scores place the child within the top fifteen percent and are categorized extremely high hope scores (Snyder, 1997). In contrast, a score of twenty-one or below characterizes a child as extremely low hope. This indicates that the
child is generally dubious about his or her agency and pathways, and she or he falls in the bottom fifteen percent of children (Snyder, 1997).

Snyder (2000) is quick to note, however, that even children who report low hope still have some hope; they still believe that sometimes they have the power and skills to create and achieve goals. The average score on both the agency and pathways subsets is twelve and a half points, respectively (Snyder, 2000). A score of fifteen on either set indicates the child is in the top fifteen percent for agency or pathways. A score of less than ten indicates a child is in the lower fifteen percent for pathways or agency thinking. Most children score about the same on each subset (Snyder, 1994) demonstrating equivalent levels of pathways and agency (Snyder, 2000).

In the process of developing and validating the Children’s Hope Scale, Snyder and colleagues performed numerous studies on diverse populations. In their study, the Children’s Hope Scale was given to seven samples of children after obtaining parental consent. The first sample of children consisted of one hundred and ninety seven boys and one hundred and seventy five girls, aged nine to fourteen. All of the children attended school in the Edmond, Oklahoma school district. Of those original children, all of the boys and nearly all the girls retook the Children’s Hope Scale after a one-month period and constituted the second sample. The third sample that the measure was tested on consisted of 48 boys and 43 girls that took the Children’s Hope Scale at the beginning and end of a one week summer camp for children with sickle cell anemia, arthritis, and cancer held by Mercy Hospital located in Kansas City, MO. The fourth sample, one hundred and seventy boys ages seven to thirteen who were diagnosed with ADHD and attending a summer camp in Pittsburg hosted by the Western Psychiatric institute. As a control for the previous sample, 74 boys who had not been referred for ADHD services but had similar age-spreads as the ADHD group were tested. The sixth sample was of 70 boys and 73
girls aged eight to sixteen being treated for cancer at Anderson Cancer Center in Austin Texas.
The seventh sample consisted of 154 boys and 168 girls aged nine to thirteen from the Kansas City public schools in Overland Park and Lawrence.

The mean scores for all seven groups ranged from 25.41 to 27.03 with a median of 25.89 (Snyder, 1997). When each of the six questions on the Children’s Hope Scale was analyzed, a mean score of 4.32 was obtained. This suggests that children exhibit hopeful thinking “somewhat more than ‘a lot of the time,’ but not as much as ‘most of the time’” (Snyder, 1997, p. 405).

No significant differences in scores between boys and girls were observed. Two of the groups studied had sufficient racial diversity to allow statistical comparison. African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic children were evaluated, and the researchers found no statistical significance in median hope scores across groups. Caucasians had the lowest average score (25.73). African Americans were next (26.08), and Hispanics were highest (29.8). Snyder et al also found no statistical significance in variations by age.

**Reliability**

The Children’s Hope Scale has been administered to children across four states including children diagnosed with cancer, sickle cell anemia, arthritis, and ADHD, as well as children in enrolled in public education in the Lawrence, Kansas school district. “Internal reliabilities were acceptable” (Snyder, 2000, p. 64) with Cronbach alphas for the total score of the Children’s Hope Scale ranging from .72 to .86. The median alpha score was .77 (Snyder, 1997). The test re-test reliability of the scale has proven to be positive and significant. A population of 197 boys and 173 girls aged 9-14 in an Oklahoma school district retook the Children’s Hope Scale after a one-month period. Another group of 48 boys and 43 girls aged 9-17 took the Children’s Hope Scale before and after attending a one-week summer camp for children. As stated before both were found to be significant and reliable with r(359)=.71, p< 0.001, and r(89)= 0.73, p< .001
respectively (Snyder, 1997). The Children’s Hope Scale also shows response variability, which reflects the ratio of standard deviation to the total scores these numbers “ranged from 0.12 to 0.24 with a median of 0.19” (Snyder, 1997, p. 405).

**Procedures**

**Administration of the Children’s Hope Scale**

At each school the researcher took participants from their regular classroom and seated them in the quietest environment available at the school. The researcher gave participants a pencil and a copy of the Children’s Hope Scale. All questions and responses were read aloud. The researcher waited until all participants were finished and then read the next question. Group size varied from 2 to 13 and all children were tested within a three-week timeframe. When possible, all children at a school site were tested together. At one site several children were absent requiring a second administration but all children were surveyed within three weeks. The place of administration varied by school site but the short length of the survey and the researcher mediated administration enabled the researcher to re-focus children after the occasional interruption that occurred in two sites.

**Abnormalities in Administration of the Children’s Hope Scale**

The principal investigator scored all of S1’s Children’s Hope Scales off-site. While scoring, the researcher noticed that two children who had taken the scale in the second group together had the exact same answers. The researcher returned to the school the next day and retested each of these two children separately.

At S3 the researcher was unable to secure a space that would allow for at least a one-foot space between participants. At S3 all participants were seated no more than twelve inches apart. Also at S3 one child had trouble staying on task. The researcher sat next to this child. The child showed the researcher his answers to stay on task.
Interview About Children’s Future Goals

Purpose of the Qualitative Interview

At the heart of qualitative research is the desire to see meaning in context. A basic principle is that there is not one truth, but many. “There is not one reality out there to be measured; objects and events are understood by different people differently” (Rubin et al., 1995, p. 35). Physics looks for concrete principles and rules. Knowledge is contextual and changing when observing and studying people, rather than micro- or macrocosmic phenomena. It should be viewed through the lens of the complex and evolving society in which it is lived.

The quantitative portion of this study provides a “hope” score for each child but cannot tell the story behind this number. The qualitative interview is designed to help understand the individual ‘whys’ and ‘how’s’ in a story. Qualitative research gives voice to those that it studies. The oppressed have gained greatly from this type of research. It is one thing to see a statistic of how many families live in poverty, and another to hear the story of one family living the struggle. This study was designed using qualitative methods in order to give children a voice. The interview was designed to create a conversation in order to understand children’s future hopes.

In this study the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods increases the value of the research. Quantitative methods were used in the administration and scoring of the Children’s Hope Scale. This scale was used to identify participants at extremes of the scale in order to narrow the pool of interviewees to maximize results. If participants had been randomly chosen from returned permission slips important core concepts and dialogs may have been left out. Instead the survey enabled the use of purposive sampling of participants which enhanced the depth of the current study.
Development of the Interview

The interview protocol was developed over many months, and it took many forms. The final two-part eighteen-question draft was derived from the review of the literature and two pilot interview protocols. Pilot interviews were used to see if the questions would help the researcher to answer the principal questions of the study. They were also conducted to refine language and insure participants and the researcher shared a common understanding of meaning of questions. A structured interview approach was used due to the nature of the primary objectives of the study. The interview began with broad questions and used probing questions for clarification, allowing a conversation to occur and meaning to be created and understood. Clarification was sometimes needed to create a shared vocabulary and understanding.

Section one of the questionnaire contained nine questions. These questions were designed to probe children’s educational and occupational goals for the future and the pathways thoughts they had related to their first-choice career, as well as other careers they did not choose. This section also addressed children’s second-choice career options. This question was designed to see if children had considered other options and to determine whether this choice was related to high and low hope scores. The protocol also included questions about other specific, not chosen occupations for two reasons. First, the researcher wanted to see if children knew about these careers, and if so what they knew about them. Second, the researcher wanted to see if children could generalize goal-directed thinking to other occupations. Had children internalized knowledge about these careers and the knowledge one might need to obtain these careers?

The second section of the questionnaire contained nine questions as well. This section was designed to probe hopeful thought. How did the children envision themselves in the future? What did that future look like? This section also addressed questions concerning each participant’s view of success and failure. Questions addressing reasons for the success or failure
of others were designed to see if children saw internal or external forces at work in goal achievement. The interview protocol is included in Appendix B.

Collection of Interview Data

After the Children’s Hope Scale scores were tallied, five extremely low hope and seven extremely high hope children were interviewed. Each child was interviewed individually, in as much privacy as was possible given school geography and availability of space. Participants were given codes based on their hope scores. For example the first low hope participant will be named LH1, the second low hope participant interviewed was labeled LH2. The pattern continues for both low and high hope participants. The first high hope participant to be interviewed was labeled HH1. The following sections will describe the locations and events of the administration of the interview as well as any abnormalities that occurred.

All participants were taken from their regular classrooms to a separate location in the school for the interview protocol to be conducted. The space for the interview at each school was chosen by the teacher and identified as the quietest area that was available. Participants were allowed to seat themselves and the researcher took a seat next to the child. The assent form was read by the researcher and confidentiality requirements were clarified for the children. The children were encouraged to ask questions. After questions were answered the interview protocol commenced. The interviews lasted between twenty and forty five minutes depending on the child.

During three of the interviews abnormalities occurred. One participant whose interview was taking a particularly long time took a short stretch break in the middle of the interview. Two other participants on separate occasions were disrupted by the behavior of another child. In each of these instances the interview was stopped until the disruption was removed.
Analysis

Scoring the Children’s Hope Scale

The Children’s Hope Scale was scored by the researcher using methods laid out by Snyder. The researcher scored each scale by hand. Snyder has assigned a number value to each answer along the continuum of the scale. For example, if a child marks ‘most of the time’ this response is coded as a ‘5’. If a child marks ‘none of the time’ this response is coded a ‘1’. Each answer was given a number value; these number values were then added together to obtain a hope score for each participant. The researcher did this by hand, after the administration of the scale.

Interview Analysis

The interview protocol was analyzed separately from the Children’s Hope Scale. The researcher read through the hand-written transcripts of each interview protocol within twenty-four hours of the interview. The researcher noted potential core concepts as they emerged in a research journal. After all data were collected, the researcher reread each transcript individually and created an electronic copy of each. All participants’ answers to each question were compiled on a single list in order for the researcher to view all answers together. The researcher then used specific questions to guide interpretation of the data. For example, the researcher read questions using the following queries: How many children gave a second choice career? How many children gave no answer at all? Did the prestige level of participants’ first and second career choices differ? How many participants’ could demonstrate a pathway to their desired goal? How many participants’ demonstrated agency by identifying an action they could take in the present to facilitate future goal attainment? While looking for the above questions the protocols were also searched for evidence related to the three major concepts that emerged in the literature: goals, agency, and pathways. After this, the data were separated according to hope scores. All high hope children’s interview transcripts were read using the queries like those listed above; all low
hope children’s interviews were read using the same procedure. After this, the low and high hope participants were analyzed in terms of each other and then in terms of the group as a whole.

**Presentation of the Research**

Results from these analyses will be presented in the following chapter. The first section will present the results from the Children’s Hope Scale. The second section will present results from the interview protocol and will be divided into three subsections; goals, agency, and pathways.
CHAPTER 3
RESULTS

Since the research was a two-phase process, results will be presented in two separate sections. First, the data collected from the Children’s Hope Scale will be presented. After that, the information gathered from the interviews will be presented.

**Children’s Hope Scale**

The Children’s Hope Scales of twenty-eight participants were scored. The national average score on the Children’s Hope Scale is 25. The mean hope score obtained by participants in the present study, 26.43, was slightly higher than the national average. There were differences in hope scores by school. Of the three schools sampled the means were 27.17, 27.15, and 24.89 for school one (S1), school two (S2), and school three (S3) respectively. The range, median, and mode also varied by school (see table A-3 in appendix). From the twenty-eight completed scales, six children were identified as having extremely low hope, ten children were identified as having extremely high hope, and twelve children fell in the ‘normal’ hope range, as defined by Snyder et al. (1996) (see table A-2 in appendix). Children who scored at or below 21 were identified as low hope participants. Children who scored at or above 30 were identified as high hope participants. One school in the sample did not have a single low hope participant. The two other schools yielded both low hope and high hope participants. The six children in the low hope group and the ten children in the high hope group qualified for the in-depth interview. The 12 children who scored in the middle range were not interviewed.

**Interview**

The interview data were compiled and analyzed. Three core concepts consistent with the current research on hope emerged from multiple analyses of these data. These three concepts were: goals, agency, and pathways. These concepts will be discussed in depth in the following
section. For reader clarity, each participant was given a code that included both letters and numbers. Each code begins with LH or HH. LH indicates a participant who had a low hope score on the Children’s Hope Scale; HH indicates a participant scored a high hope score. Numbers were then assigned based on the order of the interviews. For example, LH4 fourth low hope participant to be interviewed. HH4 was the fourth high hope participant to be interviewed.

**Goals**

Snyder et al. (2000) define goals as “the endpoints or anchors of mental action sequences” (p. 9). Goals are what one hopes to obtain in the future. This future could be rather immediate, such as making it to the grocery store before it closes, or more long term, such as getting into an Ivy League school. In order for a goal to be hopeful, according to Snyder et al. (2000), it must have a little bit of uncertainty. One must not be completely sure that the goal will be achieved. If one is certain of goal achievement from the outset than there is no emotional benefit from success. No feeling of accomplishment. There must be an air of mystery. The goal seeker draws on past agency and successful pathways to goal attainment while creating new pathways. When the goal is achieved there is a sense of accomplishment and that in turn helps boost feelings of agency. Likewise, there can be no hopeful goals if one knows for certain that achievement is not possible. If the goal is viewed as impossible, then one will not have the agency to begin. Goals are the anchors of hope theory (Snyder et al., 2000).

All participants in the study expressed goals. Each child had his/her own individual way of thinking about goals. There were also many factors that impacted goal choice and how the participant viewed certain goals. Three goal patterns emerged in the data: career goals, emotional goals, and material goals. These will be discussed in the following subsections.
Career Goals

All participants, with one exception, gave a career goal when asked what they would like to be when they grew-up. These careers ran the gamut from engineer (HH3), to park ranger (LH4), to cartoonist (LH5). All participants who gave occupational responses could elaborate on skills needed to obtain their chosen occupation, with one exception. One low hope participant, who wanted to be a cheerleader, responded only, “Splits and jumps” (HH6) when asked about the skills she would need to achieve her career goal. The average number of skills listed by all other high and low hope participants who answered was 4.2. For example LH3 stated that she wanted to be a park ranger. When the researcher asked the participant to tell what she knew about the job, she said,

“I want to be a park ranger in Kentucky. You have to study about nature and take care of nature. You have to learn how to treat nature” (LH3).

LH5 also gave a detailed response. He stated that he wanted to draw cartoons. When he was asked about the kinds of things he would need to know how to do, he said,

“Draw it, step by step, you keep going. Color it and add details. Be creative, be exact…when you’re in college you need to get an artist scholarship” (LH5).

HH2 also had a detailed idea of the skills needed for her profession. HH2 stated that she wanted to be a writer and elaborated by saying,

“They write stories, children’s books, adults books, both. I would like to write stories by candlelight, not by electricity. [I need to know] nonfiction and fiction, and I would have to ask someone’s permission to use their name [in a story] because it might hurt their feelings” (HH2).

When comparing high hope to low hope participants, there was not a clear difference in the prestige level of occupational choices. This finding is contrary to past career theory and research, which indicated that children’s occupational choices mirror the prestige level of their mothers. In this study, eight out of 12 chose careers that fall in to the category of high prestige. The
remaining three rated low on prestige but can, in this modern era, bring high prestige if one obtained the top level. For instance, a pro football player has much prestige in our society today. So too could a gymnastics coach, if she or he were to coach a college team or run a youth gymnastics program.

Although goals can be short-term or long-term, all children discussed long-term goals in relation to occupational choice. There were no clear differences in the prestige levels of participants choices based on hope scores. Similarly, participants’ hope scores did not seem to impact their level of understanding of their chosen careers.

**Emotional Goals**

Emotional goals in this study refer to participants’ references to emotional states during the interview. It appears as though the children in this study link emotions to goal attainment, whether positively or negatively. When participants were asked about their future hopeful lives, ten out of twelve gave a response that incorporated an emotion. These included “happy, friends so you won’t get lonely,” (LH1), “Hooray! Do stuff, you’ll feel good,” (LH3), “Happy, work at home more than at work,” (HH3), and, “Perfect, live in Lake City with family so I don’t have to be fightn’ [the two boys that pick on him in his apartment complex],” (HH7). When participants were asked what they thought their lives would really be like, only half of the participants included an emotion in their response. HH1 responded, “be a writer. Helping people in the house that I wanted. Happy.” HH6 said, “Same as above…I want my kids to be happy and eat fruit.” Similarly, LH5 responded, “Sometimes ups and sometimes downs, sometimes do good, sometimes not so good,” and LH1 described her future life in this way: “boring, work, if I have kids they will probably be destructive.”

Another aspect of the study where emotions played a role was in the children’s interpretations of what it would mean to be a success or a failure. Of the high hope participants,
five out of seven listed an emotion in their response to what their lives would look like if they were successful. Three of these participants used the word ‘happy’ to describe their successful lives (HH3, HH4, HH6). Two of the five low hope participants listed emotions in their response to this same question. LH1 stated, “good, not in jail,” and LH5 said, “bright, feel good, yeah I accomplished it.” When participants were asked to define their lives as failures four out of seven high hope participants and two out of five low hope participants mentioned emotions. HH2 said, “I’d be embarrassed, poor.” Both HH6 and HH7 mentioned that they would be “sad.” Both HH5 and LH2 stated simply “bad,” and LH1 said, “not happy, poor, homeless.”

There were two other instances that dealt with emotions. First, when asked if school was important for being a success in life, HH5 stated, “No, school doesn’t make you happy.” Second, emotions were curiously absent from the answers of all participants when asked if they ever think about their lives as grown-ups. Not one high or low hope participant mentioned an emotion in their description of their future lives. Participants mentioned solely material goals in their responses, and these will be presented in the following subsection.

**Material Goals**

Throughout the course of the interview protocol many participants listed the attainment of material items as their goal, or as proof that a goal had been obtained. When participants were asked to describe their future lives as successful, half stated material goals as objectives. In fact, two high hope and one low hope participant mentioned only material goals, whereas all other participants also mentioned emotions. The materially oriented participants responded with answers such as, “have a PSP (Play Station Portable) (HH7), and “Get famous as a writer and get a big house, good paper and pens, and more candles” (HH1). Asked what their lives would look like if they were failures, four out of seven high hope participants and two low hope participants mentioned material factors. LH1 mentioned being “poor [and] homeless.” HH4 mentioned,
“Living in a trailer, no good water, no good money,” and LH3 said, “living on the road making stuff for money. I’d do it by a church so they would give me money.”

Five out of seven high hope participants listed material objects when answering the question about what they hoped their lives would be like when they grew up. Examples include, “have a lot of money, the good life, live in a big house,” (HH2), “big house with a lot of money,” (HH5), and “have a house, food, fruit,” (HH6). Of the low hope participants, two out of five listed material factors in the picture of their hopeful grown up life. LH3 said she would live on a farm and LH1 said, “not in a mansion because you can get lost in a mansion, maybe in a trailer or a house near here [the school].”

When participants were asked to describe what they believed their grown-up lives would really be like, five out of seven high hope participants mentioned material factors. Out of these five, four mentioned having a house, and two mentioned money specifically. For example, HH7 said, “lots of money.” HH2 said, “You never know what kind of house you’ll have or how much you get paid.” In sharp contrast, only one low hope participant mentioned material items explicitly in what she thought her life would really be like. LH1 said, “if I have kids they’ll destroy the house.”

**Agency**

“Agency is the motivational component to propel people along their imagined routes to goals,” (Snyder et al. 2000). Agency consists of one’s ability to feel as though one can achieve a goal, and it gives the beginning push towards goal achievement. Agency can also be tapped along the pathway to goal attainment. If a certain pathway is not effective, then one’s agency can motivate the individual to create a new pathway or a revised goal.
Belief In An Ability To Achieve

Snyder et al. (2000) argues that all children have some hope, even if it is low. All children in this study had a projection of themselves in the future. They could state what they hoped their lives would be like, and could state what they thought their lives would really be like in the future. All children had the ability to hope, but not all children expected their dreams to come true.

One of the largest gulfs in the data between high hope and low hope participants occurred in the differences between what they hoped their lives would be like in the future and what they thought their lives would really be like. High hope participants seemed puzzled by the question. Many stumbled over their answers, ultimately saying things like “the same,” (HH6) or “what I just said,” (HH3). When they were asked to clarify, they simply restated their previous answer of what they hoped their lives would be like. Some gave small addendums. For example, HH3 said, “maybe a little different than what I just said, you never know,” but none strayed too far from the original answers.

In sharp contrast, not one low hope participant gave the same answer for what they thought their lives would really be like and what they hoped for themselves in the future. Answers ranged from less optimistic revisions, to bleak predictions. One low hope participant, when asked about future hopes, replied, “Hooray, when you’re a success you feel good. Elementary middle and high school were a success. If you have kids they go to school,” (LH5). When asked what he thought his life would really be like he was less optimistic, “Sometimes ups and sometimes downs. Sometimes you have exactly what you want. Sometimes you do good sometimes not so good,” (LH5). When LH1 was asked what she hoped her life would be like she gave a lengthy and thought-out answer: “I would have a horse, a dog, a cat, lizard, frogs, turtles. I might live alone not in a mansion because you can get lost in a mansion. I’ll live in a trailer or a house near
here. Make sure my kids don’t trash up the house like we do, our room is messy.” When the follow-up question was asked to LH1 about what she thought her life would really be like she paused then made a sobering prediction, “boring, work, won’t be the boss, if I have kids they’ll be destructive.” LH3 had no idea what his life would really be like. LH4 stated that the question was “tricky,” and LH2 said, simply, “happy.”

In addition to participants’ evaluations of their own capacity for goal achievement, this study sought to investigate participants’ thoughts on peoples’ capacity for accomplishing goals generally. The researcher asked participants if they thought anyone could grow up to be anything they wanted also revealed a realistic view that achieving one’s goals requires work. When the researcher probed for further information, HH6 and HH7 responded that they “don’t know why.” HH5 stated, “I learned if you set your mind to something you get closer and closer to achieving that goal.” HH2 said, “Anyone can accomplish anything, work on weaknesses and go to college”. HH3 replied, “Yah, but you would probably have to pass certain things to do it. Everyone could but sometimes they don’t. Maybe they’re not so good at something or can’t figure something out.”

Three low hope children believed any one could be anything they want to be. LH3, when asked why she believed this, stated, “I don’t know.” LH4 said, “Yes, because when you believe in yourself. Things can happen and come out good.” “Yes, because their parents can’t force them to go places,” LH1 stated. The other two low hope participants were not so sure that anyone could be anything they wanted. “You want to be a doctor but you think it’s too hard,” suggested LH2. LH5 said, “maybe sometimes you want to be stuff but you’re not fit to be it. A different job will suit you better.”
The First Push

All participants in the study were asked to give an example of something they could do right away that would help them achieve their desired career goals. The majority of the high hope participants (five out of seven) gave answers that were specific and detailed. A participant who stated that he would like to be an engineer told the researcher, “me and my brother build stuff out of junk; we buy motors and use them” (HH3). Another participant who wanted to become a veterinarian stated that she could “learn more about animals” (HH5). A third said, “practice writing, help my writing skills improve, research books, improve my hand writing and write a book” (HH2). In contrast, only one low hope participant gave a detailed response. This participant, LH1, who wanted to be a veterinarian, said, “If a dog came in right now and was hurt I could give it a massage. Because my dad gives massages and I saw him give a dog a massage.” The rest of the low hope participants’ responses were brief and vague. Two participants simply responded, “No” (LH2; LH3). LH5, who wanted to be a cartoonist stated, “art,” and LH4, who wanted to be a park ranger said, “tidy up litter.”

Agency Through-out the Journey

In hope theory, a component of agency is the ability to revise pathways and goals and tap into one’s motivation when goal attainment is placed in jeopardy. Having a second career choice provides one indication of whether or not participants have planned for the option of revision to their stated goals. By already considering the possibility that first choice goals may need to be revised, the participant has set up a back-up pathway, and can tap into reserves of agency to switch gears. In addition to hope theory, career theory talks about first- and second-choice occupational options. It has been shown in career theory that as the family structure breaks down, children are less likely to have a second-choice career.
All high hope children in the study had a second career choice, should their first choice not come to fruition. All of the high hope children’s second career choices were of the same prestige level or higher than their first choice (see table A-4 in appendix). For example, HH1, HH5, and HH4 all would like to be doctors should their first choices of gymnastics coach, veterinarian, and scientist not work out. Originally, HH6 had stated that she would like to be a cheerleader when she grew up, while her second choice career would be President of the United States of America. Only three of the five low hope participants stated an alternative career choice. Two were at the same level of prestige or higher than the first choice. LH2 went from veterinarian to journalist, LH4 went from park ranger to veterinarian, and LH1 went from veterinarian to massage therapist. One participant (HH2), who was unsure of what she wanted to be, indicated that she had thought a lot about other options, but just hadn’t found one she really liked. She said that if she couldn’t think of anything else, she would be a veterinarian like her best friend.

A key difference between the high and low hope participants was the ability to describe skills and knowledge necessary for their second-choice career. All high hope participants could give details about the skills and knowledge needed for occupational attainment for their second career choice (for example, “take care of the sick and injured” HH3, “learn to treat and diagnose” HH4). The number of skills listed by high hope participants ranged from one to eight. The average number of skills listed across the high hope participants was three. In contrast, the number of skills listed by low hope participants ranged from zero to three. The average number of responses for the low hope participants was slightly less than one. Low hope participants provided fewer specifics. Two (LH2 and LH4) gave brief statements about skills needed in their second job (“articles in newspaper,” and “take care of sick pets”). Two participants (LH3 and LH5) had no answer at all, even after multiple probing questions by the investigator. LH1
provided the most comprehensive low hope answer by listing two skills or steps related to her second career choice of massage therapist; she could “keep watching her dad work and go to massage school.”

Pathways

Pathways are routes to desired goals, and are “absolutely essential for successful hopeful thought,” (Snyder et al, 2000, p. 9). Pathways entail both one’s ability to create routes to goals and also one’s ability to view oneself following along those routes. That is to say, strategies are created, and the person believes he/she can follow these strategies and be effective.

A commonality between high hope and low hope participants was that they all saw school as a necessary pathway for achieving occupational goals. HH5 demonstrated a deep understanding of the place of education in the occupational attainment process. She discussed the need to get an education in order to succeed in the context of work. Many other participants did as well. LH3 said school was important for career attainment because “you go to classes, teach you how to be. Teach you how to get a job. They teach you how to do a job.” LH5 said, “At school you can learn a lot, some jobs like scientist need science and math.” And HH4 said that school “teaches you things it’s hard to learn anywhere else.” Like most other participants, these children demonstrated a strong understanding of how the world of work operates in relation to school. In response to the question about whether or not school is important in occupational attainment, HH5 answered, “very much. You can’t go to a grocery store and they’ll teach you.” In order to learn, “you have to go to school because they are taught to teach us. If you work at Publix [a grocery store] no one at Publix is going to teach you to work at a recycling plant. Publix won’t teach you to work anywhere else.”

Two high hope children stated that their current school could help them to achieve their chosen occupations. All high hope participants thought that other schools would be relevant to
attaining their career goals, and two specifically mentioned college without prompting. All low hope children thought school was necessary. However, no low hope children explicitly mentioned college, and not one low hope child linked school to their chosen profession. Comments such as, school “teaches you how to do a job,” (LH2) and “It shows you jobs like teacher,” (LH1) were common.

When asked if education was important for success, all low hope participants answered in the affirmative. In contrast, four high hopers believed it was important, but three did not. One did not know why they thought it was not important, one indicated that you could learn things from your parents, and another stated “school does not make you happy,” (HH1).

Educational attainment and occupational attainment are intimately linked, and it was with this in mind that participants were asked explicitly about their desire to attend college and their reasons behind that desire. All of the children, with the exception of one low hope child, stated an intention to go to college. Of the 11 children who stated that they would go to college, eight provided specific reasons linked to job attainment and three referenced learning (for example, HH7 said, “so I can get my education”). LH5 expressed uncertainty about attending college and concerns that communicated his perceptions of barriers to college attendance. He said, “Maybe, if you don’t feel ready you can spend time working hard. You don’t have the money.” Of the eight who responded with answers that linked college to future occupational attainment, the participants either linked college to their specific career choice or to jobs in general. For example HH3 stated, “That’s where engineer classes are at,” and HH4 said, “[you have to go to college to] be a scientist (HH4).” Other participants gave comments that were not career-specific. HH1 stated, “I want to get a good job and college helps.” LH2 said, “You need to know certain things to become a grown up and get a good job.” And LH4 said, “[after college] you get a good
career.” The one participant that did not state a desire to attend college said simply, “I never thought about it before” (LH3).

The three core concepts discussed above—goals, agency and pathways—are the foundational elements of hope theory. The complex coordination of these elements is necessary in order to have and maintain hope. In the preceding sections, the results of this study have been presented. The following sections present a comparison of the key similarities and differences between high hope and low hope participants and then a discussion of the significance and implications of these findings.

**Discussion and Implications**

Presented here will be a discussion of how the current research study relates to the literature. This will be done by dividing the discussion into three parts; goals, pathways, and agency. After this discussion implications of the research and recommendations for educators and schools will be presented. After which reflections on future research will be followed by concluding thoughts.

**Goals**

In order to have hope one must have a goal (Snyder et al. 2000). This study appears to show that children at a young age have thought about what they will be in the future, and that all children, regardless of hope level, have goals. As stated by Snyder et al. (1997) all children have the capacity to hope, to have goals, some are just stronger than others. This study also further helps to lend support to Gottfredson’s 1981 theory that young children have thought about future occupational choices, and that these choices are realistic. In the current study all but one participant had a stated occupational goal. There was an agreement across hope scores of desired occupations both in prestige and type of work. All participants who had a desired occupation regardless of hope scores held similar aspirations. One participant with out a goal could identify
pathways to goals and demonstrated agency, as such all participants in this study demonstrated hope. In order to begin on the journey through hope one must first have a goal to strive for, so it is here that our discussion of the finding will start.

Ginzberg (1952) postulated that until the age of eleven children would respond to questions pertaining to future employment with what he called ‘fantasy choice’ answers. Ginzberg classified ‘fantasy choice’ answers as responses that were not grounded in reality or logical thought, that were wild and erratic in nature (Trice, 1995). He believed that children’s desires for future occupational placement would change quickly and not be grounded in real careers or the child’s interest or ability. Contrary to this the research supports the latter theory of Gottfredson (1981). Gottfredson believed that children would have realist career choices by the age of five. The current study supports Gottfredson’s research as all participants who answered gave a realist career choice.

Ginzberg’s (1952) suggestion that children’s occupational choices are wild and erratic suggests that there should be no statistical link between their first choice career and their second choice career. Trice (1995) found that when you clustered children’s first and second choice careers using Holland’s method the link between first and second career choices in children was statistically higher than chance. This shows that children were aspiring to a certain type of career as their first and second choices and as such their choices were not erratic or wild. This suggests that children as young as five are making realistic and thoughtful choices pertaining to careers. This finding is supported by the current study as 10 out of 12 gave a second occupational choice and of those all but one were of the same prestige level or higher than their first choice.

In the current study 10 participants gave a second career choice. As stated above of those participants nine stated occupations of the same prestige level or higher. These findings are
constant with both Trice (1995) and Augers (2005) who found that the majority of participants in their studies who gave first and second career choices were of the same Holland scheme significantly above chance. However, Trice (1995) only had 16% of participants identify a second career choice and Auger a decade later would record similar results. Likewise, in the current study, two participants failed to identify a second choice career. One of the founding components of hope is one’s ability to create goals (Snyder, 1997). In this study all children but one could identify a career goal. After this goal is created one must feel as though they have the ability to obtain this goal. In Trice and Augers research the children who had an answer for the question of a second occupational choice gave a similar occupation as their first, but what about the 84% who had no answer? And, what about the two participants in the current study who had no answer?

Agency

Agency is the motivational aspect of hope (Snyder et al. 2000). Agency is what starts us on our path to goal achievement and is what helps us continue when barriers are encountered. In the current study agency appeared to be the biggest separation in the thoughts and ideas of low hope and high hope participants. If one does not feel as though a goal can be accomplished then the likelihood of one starting the path to goal achievement is decidedly low. If one does not even start to achieve a goal, one cannot achieve. As goals are not met agency in turn becomes less and hope begins to plummet.

High hope people are characterized by their ability to be flexible (Snyder, 2002). High hope people generally make multiple goals and create multiple pathways to those goals (Snyder, 2000). If participants only have one career option, they do not have back up goals or pathways to those goals to draw on should they encounter a barrier to goal achievement. When one encounters a blockage to a goal that is when agency can again be tapped (Snyder, 2002). Agency
causes us to believe in our abilities and ourselves (Snyder et al., 2000). In the current study all high hope participants had a second choice career. Having a second choice may be evidence that they foresee many options, many possible futures. They believed that they would be able to achieve one of their goals. If they encountered a setback, they could simply go to plan B. By already having a plan B they demonstrated belief in their ability to achieve.

Two Low hope participants in the study had no second career choice and the three that did had only vague ideas of the skills needed to obtain their second choice career. These low hope participants may be at risk for further lowered hope. Since hope is cyclical (Snyder et al., 2000) as one goal is not achieved, the child could possibly have reduced agency in pursuit of a second choice career, this lower agency level could mix with less successful and thought out pathways to the attainment of an unclear goal. And cause further failure and reduced agency.

Gottfredson (1981) postulated that as children grew older they would eliminate more and more careers from their repertoire of possibilities. As careers were removed they would almost never be reconsidered, thus a narrowing of possibilities would occur. Two of the factors contributing to this narrowing of choices are socio economic status and ability. Hope in turn is affected by one’s own perceived abilities. This perception is based on past successes and failures as well as perceptions of what others think you are capable of. As children see themselves as less and less able, as their hope falls, they begin to perceive the possibilities that are open to them as smaller and smaller, and thus this narrowing that Gottfredson discusses occurs. This was seen in the current study, two low hope participants had no second occupational choice, thus they already were exhibiting fewer future options. It may be possible that these low hope participants will only encounter a further narrowing of occupational choices if a pattern of unsuccessful goal achievement is created and subsequently hope lowers. Some participants in the study even stated
ability specifically. When LH5 was asked if anyone could grow up to be anything they wanted to be he stated, “Maybe. Because sometimes you want to be stuff but you’re not fit to be it.” LH2 was asked the same question as LH5 and responded, “Not necessarily, you want to be a doctor but you think it’s too hard.” These low hope participants were demonstrating lowered agency. They had already begun to narrow their scope of what was possible, according to Gottfredson, they will never get those options back.

Some of the high hope participants in the current study appeared to have what Snyder et al. (2000) refer to as ‘pie in the sky’ hopes. Perhaps the low hope participants are just being realistic and the high hope participants are out of touch with the realities of possibilities attainable to them. HH7 wanted to be a football player when he grew up and HH6’s second choice career was President of the United States of America. These are both statistically unlikely to materialize as viable career options, but does that mean that they would be better off having a lower easier to obtain goal? People who set high-level goals fare better than their low-level goal striving counterparts (Snyder et al., 2002). As stated above one of the characteristics of high hope people is their ability to be flexible and approximate their goal (Snyder et al., 2002). Thus, this little girl who wants to be president may achieve something different, but still in the vein of President, perhaps she will be Secretary of State, or work for the United Nations. If she were to eliminate the idea of President because it appears to be impossible she would be beginning the narrowing process (Gottfredson, 1981) and would lose this possibility forever. This little girl shows a strong sense of agency, she believes in herself to achieve her goal no matter how high. The possibilities open to her are greater than her low hope counterparts.

Every single child in this study had a hope, a vision for the future. This is contrary to Ginzberg’s (1952) idea of career development where he believed that at this age children would
still have “wild” and “impulsive” ideas of themselves in the future. This finding is consistent
with Snyder’s assertion that all children have hope (2000). When asked what they hoped their
lives would look like, all participants gave specific and descriptive responses, some participants
responded with in depth hopes for the future. Many children closed their eyes and took time to
think before answering the question. All children have hope, even if it’s just a spark (Snyder,
2002). When the high hope participants were asked to describe what they thought their lives
would really be like they were bewildered. Hadn’t they already answered that question? For the
high hope participants in this study, there was no difference in what they hoped their lives would
be like and what they thought their lives would really be like. Hope and reality were one and the
same. These children had goals and believed that they were going to achieve those goals. This is
consistent with hope theory. Since these children had high hope, they had high agency thoughts
and believed that all their goals were obtainable. Consistent with hope theory these children fully
believed that they would attain their goals. They had strong agency and as such may not have
had many set back to goal achievement. As a result they still believed in their ability to reach
their goals.

Standing in contrast, not a single low hope child believed that what they hoped for would
come true. Every single low hope participant in the study gave a different response when asked
what she or he thought their lives would really be like versus what they hoped it would be like.
These children’s answers suggested they did not believe that they could achieve their goals. They
may have already lost the agency to envision themselves as successful. Perhaps because of past
blockages to goal achievement these participants were already beginning a cycle of negative
thoughts. Since hope is cyclical (Snyder, 2002) achievement fosters achievement and failure
begets failure. Without agency, goals and pathways are meaningless.
All high hope participants believed that anyone could be anything they wanted to be, while three low hope participants were not so sure. They did not believe, or were at least skeptical, that anyone could be anything. The reasons they cited are consistent with the developmental stages of Gottfredson’s theory. In stage four children begin to choose careers based on perceived ability and social class (Trice, 1995). Much like agency past experiences create a perceived vision of possible futures. One participant stated, “you might want to be a doctor but you think it’s too hard.” The participant, anticipating failure, begins to lower expectations. Hope is a cyclical process; as one succeeds one builds more confidence and gains more experiences to draw on in further goal pursuits. The fact that the low hope participants in this study were showing a lack of agency may be a sign that they have already begun the cyclical process of lowered hope. As more of their short-term goals are not met, they may begin to believe that their long term goals cannot be achieved either. They may edit down what they are striving for and create fewer pathways to goal achievement. Evidence of this could be seen in two of the five low hope children already beginning to waiver on the idea of a college education at the age of eight. As children fail to experience success in goal pursuit, they begin to narrow their conception of what is possible.

This study focused on long-term goals. Even long-term goals begin with a first step, and a characteristic of high achievers is that they constantly work towards a goal (Snyder et al., 2000). In this study, five out of seven high hope participants could identify something they could do right away to help them achieve their goals. Two even stated that they had already started doing the activity, as is evidenced by the budding engineer who takes things apart (HH3) and the aspiring author who writes at home (HH2). One low hope participant gave a detailed response of actions she could take immediately. However the actions LH1 outlined did not seem likely to aid
her in future goal achievement (she wanted to be a veterinarian and stated that if a hurt dog came in the room she could give it a massage). Here we may be witnessing the beginning of narrowed hope. She has created a pathway, but it will most likely not aid her in goal achievement, and as goals are not realized, one’s ability to create agency and new pathways may falter. McDermott (2000) calls children’s abilities to create pathways “waypower”. In the above example the little girl’s waypower may not in fact help the dog. This in effect will not be classified as a lesson that can be used in further goal achievement. Of the other low hope participants, two gave brief one-word responses, and the other two simply had no idea of what they could do now in their lives to achieve their future occupational goals. The ability to feel as though you can attain goals is termed by McDermott as willpower. Willpower is analogous with agency thinking and is a crucial element of hopeful thinking. McDermott states that waypower and willpower thinking are learned in childhood and affect our hope in adulthood. Here are low hope participants are already, at the age of eight exhibiting ineffective waypower and low willpower.

The seven high hope participants, all of whom named a second-choice career, could, on average, identify three skills required by their second-choice professions. The three low hope participants who gave alternative careers could list, on average, less than one skill needed for their second-choice professions. This gives us an example of the deterioration of pathways thinking. Perhaps the first to go is agency. Then as agency begins to deteriorate, pathways narrow. If these participant’s first choices do not work out, they will have one less successful pathway strategy to take with them to the next goal pursuit. If the pathways they have formed for that goal pursuit are already abbreviated, the likelihood of success is even smaller. Combined with the emotional pain that comes with failure it becomes harder and harder to envision potential pathways or to summon the agency necessary to achieve a goal. In childhood one learns
the patterns of hopeful thought (McDermott & Snyder, 2000). These patterns are greatly dependant on the child’s perceived ability to attain goals (McDermott & Snyder, 2000). If a child experiences multiple emotional setback, the child will begin to perceive that they are not able to achieve goals.

A study of college students found that high hope participants expressed feelings of confidence; they felt energized and inspired to reach their goals (Snyder et al., 2000). In the current study high hope participant’s demonstrated feelings of self worth and ability. For some failure was simply not an option. When HH2 was asked to describe what her life would be like if she was a failure she said, “I’d go to school again.” Her agency was so strong that she felt she would never give up, and thus since she was always trying she would never be a failure. A striking difference occurred to the counterpoint of the previous question. When participants were asked to describe their lives if they were a success, three high hope and one low hope participant inquired on the meaning of the question, and more specifically asked for a definition of success. Although this finding did not correlate to hope scores, it is shocking and has possible repercussions for children’s agency. If they do not have a vision of themselves in a successful future, than it is possible that they may not have the beginning push to start on the path to further goal achievement.

Having a second occupational choice has been linked in career theory to family structure (Trice, 1995). As the conventional family structure breaks down, children are less and less likely to have a second occupational choice. I believe this can be explained by hope theory, and by agency specifically. As the child experiences setbacks in short-term, family-based goal attainment—perhaps parents don’t get back together, or a child is placed in foster care—the child’s agency begins to disintegrate. Future hope depends on past hopeful experiences. Hope
begins with trust (Snyder, 2002). If the very foundation of a child’s life (i.e. the structure of their family) changes then the child may begin to lack the trust to take chances. Hope is a cyclical process; our past successes and failures dictate how we will move forward. If we have not had successes in the past, we will create fewer goals, and be less inclined to start on pathways towards them (Snyder et al., 2000; Snyder, 2002; McDermott, 1997; McDermott, 2000). In the current study, all high hope participants gave a second choice career. Of the low hope participants, three gave a second choice career, but two did not. Even after multiple prompts by the researcher, these participants simply responded with headshakes. They claimed they had never thought about it before. One of the high hope participants who appeared unsure of a second career choice talked at length about how she had considered certain careers but had not yet found one that she liked. This high hope participant had not decided on a second choice due to her lengthy selection criteria for a career. She did not lack a second choice because she did not believe she could achieve, but because she was being selective and was keeping options open but she had clear criteria for possible career choices and was actively engaged in thinking about future career options.

**Pathways**

Pathways are the routes we take to our desired goals. It was speculated by the researcher at the beginning of this study that the difference between high hope and low hope children would be most evident in their pathways thinking. Children would all have high goals and expectations of themselves. They would be brimming with agency and belief in their ability to achieve their lofty goals. The difference would be that low hope children had fewer or unsuccessful pathways to goal attainment and as such would have lowered agency in the future, which would result in even lower hope. As stated above this was not the case. Participants in this study did not differ greatly on their abilities to create pathways to their goals.
Pathways are one of the major components to hopeful thought as defined by Snyder et al. (2000). According to past research, low hope children have poor pathways and high hope children have effective and robust pathways (Snyder et al., 1997; Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 2000). However, the current study does not support this finding at least for elementary children. Though there were subtle differences in the pathway structures of high and low hope children, these variations were not as striking as the similarities. The majority of both high hope and low hope children in this study had clear and effective pathways to their goals. Children in this study demonstrated an understanding of what skills were required for certain careers and had an idea of how to acquire those skills. When LH2 was asked how she could learn to become a doctor she replied, “By going to doctor school. This school can help (you learn) math, and we do the calendar which will help me to make appointments.”

All twelve participants in this study answered in the affirmative when asked if school was an important factor for obtaining their chosen career. There was a clear link between the participant’s future goals and the use of school as a pathway towards those goals. Three low hope participants felt as though their current school would be helpful in attaining their future occupational goal. Not one out of the seven high hope participants felt as though their current school would be helpful in the process of goal attainment. Since high hope people have agency and pathways (Snyder et al., 2002) one might expect for the high hope participants to link their current schooling to future attainment. In fact in every other indicator in this study high hope children showed remarkably higher levels of agency then their low hope counterparts. So why then here do low hope participants believe that their current school can help them and high hope participants do not? There is nothing to account for this anomaly in the research of Snyder and colleagues and it raises an interesting question about how children view school.
Implications

The implications of hope for educators and society are enormous. Here implications will be discussed in two sections: first, the implications for educators, and second, the implications for society.

Teachers

Hope has been linked in the research to academic outcomes. Hope can be a predictive factor for grade point average, high school graduation rates, performance on standardized tests, and college entrance examination scores. High hope scores have a predictive power to target students who are likely to succeed. As Snyder and colleagues have found in their extensive research, hope is learned. If hope is learned, and if it can predict positive academic outcomes, then hope should be taught in the schools.

Educators are in a position to affect the hope levels of their students. Not only can educators explicitly teach hopeful thinking, but also they can act as role models of hopeful thought for their students. It has been further shown in the research that a strong bond with a caregiver increases hope. Teachers of young children can create a bond, a true caring bond that lasts with each of their students. Teachers are also in a position to help parents create caring bonds with their children. Here teachers could again act as role models of hopeful thinking, not just for students but for parents and other staff members. Teachers are also in the position to not just teach hope but to reinforce hope. Hopeful thought is a cyclical process; one draws on past successes to motivate further problem solving and uses past strategies to solve new problems. The school day, and indeed a student’s educational career, is full of goals to be achieved, successes to be had, strategies and pathways to explore.

Hope becomes even more important to teach in the schools as one begins to analyze why hope declines over time in some children. Family structure, perceived ability, accessibility,
unemployment rates, and repeated failures all diminish hope. Children of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to encounter multiple barriers to hope, as they are more likely to experience life situations like those above. Children are also at a greater risk for low hope if they have witnessed a violent crime against a family member. Students who usually fall into these categories are often the ones that receive the least encouragement and hopeful thought from school.

According to Snyder, there are four stages that one passes through in the processional towards the death of hope. First, there is hope. A child has a goal and sets out to achieve it. The second stage in the death of hope occurs when the child encounters a barrier to goal achievement that they cannot navigate. Here, the child enters the rage stage. The child still has agency, but the child’s actions are misguided and will not result in goal attainment. In despair, the third stage, agency is lost the child begins to feel as though trying is useless. The final stage, apathy, is when hope is abandoned.

Hope is affected by children’s perception of their ability. They base this self-perception on what they think the adults around them believe them to be capable of. This is consistent with career research that shows that as children get older they begin to pick careers based on their perceived ability and what is appropriate for their social class. Ability grouping, grade retention, magnet programs, and high stakes testing are just a few examples of the institutional ways that children create an idea of what they are capable of. If a child notices that he or she is always in the lowest reading group, or if they fail to perform adequately on a standardized test this can potentially lower their perceptions of what they are capable of.

The Schools

McDermott found that all children’s hope scores appeared better when children learned in a diverse environment where adequate per pupil spending occurred. The school system is
currently re-segregating itself, coming dangerously close to levels of inequality not seen since before the civil rights movements. Funding for schools is based on property taxes and as such serves to further disadvantage the already disadvantaged. If children continue to attend de facto segregated schools, with inadequate funding, the research shows that all children may demonstrate a loss of hope.

**Society**

High hope scores have been linked to beneficial outcomes both psychological and physiological. High hope persons are more likely to engage in activities that will prevent them from every becoming ill, such as exercise. Once a problem is detected, high hope people are more likely to get medical care and to adhere to the medical regiment prescribed by their doctor. The cost to the individual and the cost to society are greatly lessened. With such benefits, it would be in society’s best interests to inoculate all its members with hope.

Hopeful thinking facilitates success during unimpeded goal pursuits. However, hopeful thinking is especially helpful when one encounters barriers. The number of barriers a person faces may not be equal across society. Many of the factors that lower hope, such as unemployment of parents, divorce or separation, and witnessing acts of violence, are more likely to occur in the lives of a lower SES child than high SES child. Furthermore, children from low SES backgrounds are more likely to encounter these barriers en mass. Likewise, lower SES children are more likely to suffer from certain illnesses such as asthma, and they are less likely to receive adequate care. All of these create barriers to goal achievement and ultimately may result in the death of hope if we do not take steps to prepare students to overcome barriers. As these children age they become the new generation in charge of the country, a possible nation of hopeless, undervalued adults.
Implications for Future Research

The current study raises many questions that could be addressed in future research. Snyder found in his research that pathways and agency scores on the Children’s Hope Scale are roughly equivalent. The current study found that low hope participants lacked agency. They did not believe in their own abilities to achieve the goals they had planned out for themselves. Further research may be warranted to tease out this finding that is incongruent with Snyder’s current theory of hope.

Perhaps it would be beneficial for future research to explore whether hope can be learned. The implications of hope as a learned skill could have far reaching affects for classroom teachers. If hope can in fact be learned, the next step would be to investigate if elevating the hope scores of children created positive outcomes in educational and occupational attainment.

A longitudinal study of hope scores over the course of childhood could prove valuable. This research would be necessary in tracking the possible fluctuations of hope scores over time, as well as linking future outcomes to hope scores. We have a good picture of children’s hope at moments in time, but there is not a study that follows the pathway hope takes as one navigates through life. In order to see if hope can be taught, and that hope scores positively affect outcomes, a longitudinal study would be necessary.

Conclusion

It is not enough to tell our children to dream. We must as teachers and as members of society insist that all children grow up hopeful. We must arm them with the skills not just to dare to dream, but to obtain that dream. We must make every child feel as though they are valued and that they future they hope for can be the future they obtain.
### Table A-1. Hope Scores and Demographics by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Low Hope</th>
<th>High Hope</th>
<th>Moderate Hope</th>
<th>Mean Hope Score</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>Percent White (in study)</th>
<th>Percent Black (in study)</th>
<th>Percent Free/Reduced Lunch (school wide)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SS 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24.89</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27.15</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27.17</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A-2. Hope Scores by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>29</th>
<th>33</th>
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<tr>
<td>SS 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A-3. Measures of Central Tendancy by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A-4. Participants Goals and Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>1st-Choice Goal</th>
<th>2nd-Choice Goal</th>
<th>Difference between Hope and Expectation</th>
<th>Immediate Goal-Directed Action</th>
<th>School Important for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HH 1</td>
<td>Gymnastics Coach</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH 2</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Veterinarian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH 3</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Slight</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH 4</td>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH 5</td>
<td>Cat Vet.</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH 6</td>
<td>Cheerleader</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH 7</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Slight</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH 1</td>
<td>Veterinarian</td>
<td>Massage Therapist</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH 2</td>
<td>Veterinarian</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Slight</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH 3</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH 4</td>
<td>Park Ranger</td>
<td>Veterinarian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH 5</td>
<td>Cartoonist</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview questions:

Section I.

I asked you before if I could ask you some questions, I’m going to go ahead and start now; is that OK?

1. I am curious to know what you want to be when you grow up?

2. Tell me all you know about (specified interest); I’m really interested to hear all you know about (specified interest).

3. Can you tell me a little about what grown-ups do at (specified interest)? What kinds of things will you need to know how to do?

4. You said you’ll need to know how to ________. Do you think school will teach you how to do those things? Will some other school teach you how to ________?

5. Do you think it should?

6. You said you want to be _____. Do you know any grown ups who do this?

7. Do you know how grown-ups get to do (specified interest)? What might you have to do?

8. Do you know something that you could do right now that would help you to get to do (specified interest)?

9. What if you wanted be a doctor? What would you have to do to be a doctor?

10. What if you wanted to be a nurse? What would you need to do to be a nurse?

11. What if you wanted to work at the grocery store? What would you need to do to work at the grocery store?

12. What if you wanted to be a plumber? What do you have to do to become a plumber?

Section II.

Now I’m going to ask you a few different types of questions. Like before, though, I just want you to tell me what you think about them.

1. Do you think anyone can grow up to be anything they want to be?

2. Do you ever imagine your life when you’re a grown up?
3. How will your life look if you’re a success? What would it mean to be a failure?

4. Do you think school is important for becoming what you want to be when you grow up?

5. Do you think school is important in being a success in life?

6. Do you want to go to college after you graduate from high school?

7. Do you know anyone who went to college? Do you know anyone who didn’t go to college?

8. What do you hope your life is like when you are a grown up?

9. What do think your life will really be like when you grow up?
# Questions About Your Goals

**Name**

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

1. *I think I am doing pretty well.*
   - None of the time
   - A little of the time
   - Some of the time
   - A lot of the time
   - Most of the time
   - All of the time

2. *I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.*
   - None of the time
   - A little of the time
   - Some of the time
   - A lot of the time
   - Most of the time
   - All of the time

3. *I am doing just as well as other kids my age.*
   - None of the time
   - A little of the time
   - Some of the time
   - A lot of the time
   - Most of the time
   - All of the time

4. *When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.*
   - None of the time
   - A little of the time
   - Some of the time
   - A lot of the time
   - Most of the time
   - All of the time

5. *I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.*
   - None of the time
   - A little of the time
   - Some of the time
   - A lot of the time
   - Most of the time
   - All of the time

6. *Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.*
   - None of the time
   - A little of the time
   - Some of the time
   - A lot of the time
   - Most of the time
   - All of the time
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rose O’Hara-Jolley was awarded a bachelor’s degree in special education with a minor in early childhood education from the University of Florida in 2005. She taught third, fourth, and fifth grade reading and writing, as well as first grade at the One Room School House. Currently Ms. O’Hara-Jolley is a founding member of the Pave Academy in Redhook Brooklyn.