

# Writing Hope Strategies for Writing Success in Secondary Schools

A Strengths-Based Approach to  
Teaching Writing

Nicole Sieben



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**Nicole Sieben**

*SUNY College at Old Westbury, New York, USA*



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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

*This book is dedicated to the eternal memory of my extraordinary father, Marc Alan Sieben, whose loving and hope-filled embrace still encircles me every day and whose legacy inspires me and breathes hope into my work and my world.*

*For the ambassadors of hope in my life, my heart-beats of hope, especially my mother, Madelyn Morante-Sieben; my late father, Marc Alan Sieben; my sister, Joanna Sieben-Christensen; and my grandmother, Maria Morante; who have all been my foundations of hope my entire life.*

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## FOREWORD

According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology doesn't depend on "wishful thinking, faith, self-deception, fads, or hand-waving" but attempts to "adapt what is best in the scientific method to the unique problems that human behavior presents to those who wish to understand it in all its complexity" (p. 7). Grounded in positive psychology, and specifically building on Snyder's (2002) definition of hope theory—which situates hope as an attribute that contains goals, pathways, and agency, Sieben's *Writing Hope Strategies for Writing Success in Secondary Schools: A Strengths-Based Approach to Teaching Writing* integrates research in psychology, composition studies, and English education.

This book offers readers insight into how a hope-focused, strengths-based approach to writing instruction can benefit middle and high school students from all backgrounds in authentic ways. Sieben's text, based on a yearlong study in secondary classrooms across the United States and on her previous research on writing hope at the college level, is a timely and significant resource for writing instructors in middle and high schools and for college educators who teach first-year composition or who are charged with preparing future teachers of writing.

Offering readers relevant, teacher-tested strategies and resources such as the Writing Hope Scale and Writing Mindset Scale (both of which have strong validity and reliability findings and include online components providing immediate feedback for students), Sieben's Writing Hope Framework gives educators numerous ways to enact hope in their classrooms. Using guided goal setting and journaling, writing teachers can assist students in establishing goals that are personally meaningful and achievable. Working with writing hope pathways strategies and writing hope agency techniques further helps students during their writing goal pursuits. The recommended activities and resources shared by Sieben build on Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, and Feldman's (2003) call to apply hope theory by helping students set attainable goals, develop multiple pathways, and improve their agency through active reflection and dialogue. The book also connects to Dweck's (2006) work on growth mindset, extending the ways in which students can take responsibility for their own learning.

Moreover, Sieben's Writing Hope Works Project sets up a collaborative network in which educators can participate to enhance their own growth as writing instructors. Sieben's use of discussion questions at the end of each chapter calls readers into dialogue with her research. What's more, her choice to include stories about her own journey and use of writing hope strategies, testimonies from teachers from a variety of subjects, and examples from student writers helps readers to consider new strategies for motivating student writers, offering effective feedback, and assessing their progress and their writing hope levels.

## FOREWORD

Through *Writing Hope Strategies for Writing Success in Secondary Schools*, Nicole Sieben empowers writing instructors by providing practical, student-centered, hope-focused pathways to help students from all backgrounds to become more fully engaged, self-motivated, and proficient writers.

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Additionally, I would like to thank all of the teachers and students who have participated in the Writing Hope Works Project thus far, particularly those in the “Teaching Writing Hope” study through the NCTE CEE Research Initiative. It is through your feedback and willingness to engage in conversations about writing hope that this book is possible. Your work with writing hope in secondary school classrooms has helped provide a toolbox for other teachers and students to engage with and find hope within. I would especially like to thank Gordon Hultberg, a true partner in writing hope, who has continued on this journey of teaching and exploring writing hope with me, even two years after the culmination of the study. Your enthusiasm for participating in these conversations over time has provided valuable learning experiences for me that have increased my own hope for writing hope; thank you also for your copyediting expertise and feedback on these pages. Enthusiastic thanks go to all of the contributors in this work, both those who have chosen to remain anonymous and those whose names appear with their testimonies including, Joanna Christensen, Corey Costa, Gordon Hultberg, Danielle Lee, Kia Jane Richmond, and Stephanie Schneider. Yours are the voices that lift writing hope off of the pages. Thank you also to Laurie Mandel for creating a beautiful hope

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## INTRODUCTION

### MY PATH TO WRITING HOPE

#### *The Origins*

#### OVERVIEW

This introduction provides a brief overview of my positionality as the researcher of this work on writing hope and gives a synopsis of the content explored in the chapters of this book. The strengths-based, classroom-tested, student-centered writing hope strategies shared within a Writing Hope Framework (WHF) are designed to allow students to work within their own unique writing processes and insert their individual writers' voices and styles authentically and organically. The Writing Hope Framework allows students to choose which strategies and stages of the writing process they wish to engage in to succeed in writing goal attainment; it does not suggest that everyone's writing approach is similar and accounts for these differences in curricular design and implementation. Teachers can assess the writing abilities and self-beliefs of the students in their classes and then guide students in their strategy selection processes for writing.

#### POSITIONALITY OF THE AUTHOR

##### *As a Researcher of Hope*

Writing hope is a concept that emerged out of my doctoral research while I was a graduate student at Hofstra University studying with hope scholar, Dr. Sage E. Rose. After taking a course on Motivation and Emotion in Education and Counseling with Dr. Rose and studying the influence of strengths-based approaches to assessment, teaching, and learning; I came to see that much of what we need to consider as teachers of writing is engulfed in the science of motivation and cognition. Upon learning about the construct of hope that is grounded in the field of positive psychology (Snyder, 2000), I realized that this definition of hope is one that can lead to action plans for success in education. Though the term hope has been used in a variety of ways across diverse educational contexts, some of which I will discuss in this book, this definition of hope spoke to me as a former high school English teacher, as a teacher educator, and as a teacher and professor of writing.

After several conversations with Dr. Rose about the domain-specific nature of the hope construct, I felt there was critical potential to build hope theory into the field of English education that I wanted to explore, and this is what led to my quest

## INTRODUCTION

for uncovering the dimensions of the concept of “writing hope” (Sieben, 2013b), which I originally theorized in 2011 and later concretized in 2013. Writing hope is directly derived from Snyder’s (1991) theory of hope, the cognitive-motivational strength that leads to success during goal pursuit. In Dr. Rose’s work, she created and validated a Math Hope Scale with her advisor Cecil Robinson (2010), and from their work in this domain-specific area of hope, I realized the impact that hope could also have in the field of writing education. Thus, with Dr. Rose, who became the chair of my dissertation committee, I developed and validated the Writing Hope Scale (Sieben & Rose, 2012) that has been tested across numerous large-scale studies to date. Since the creation of this scale, our collaborative and individual research has shown the Writing Hope Scale to be valid, reliable, and predictive of students’ writing abilities across multiple studies with undergraduate and graduate college students and middle school and high school students (Sieben, 2013b, 2014, 2015, 2016; Sieben & Rose, 2012; Sieben, Rose, & Seirup, 2013). Based on my use of this scale over time, I have been able to explore the dimensions of writing hope as a theory and as a framework for teaching writing in secondary schools and college.

During my initial conceptualization of writing hope (i.e., 2011–2013) during my doctoral studies, I was fortunate to have the support and guidance of my dissertation committee members—Sage E. Rose, Andrea Perkins Nerlich, Holly Seirup, sj Miller, and Kia Jane Richmond—who asked thoughtful questions along the way and encouraged me to continue this work in the future. Collectively, the wisdom and input of this group of scholars during my dissertation process encouraged me to examine hope critically and reach for goals that have transferable value in my research and my teaching today. Individually, each committee member provided domain-specific perspective during my dissertation process (i.e., within English education, social justice theory, first-year college student education, composition studies, and educational and positive psychology) and helped me to consider various expressions of writing hope in education. In my dissertation, I articulate a desire to explore the implications of writing hope in secondary schools in future studies (Sieben, 2013b), and the findings shared in this book are the results of those new studies. Because of support from and conversations with English education scholars and secondary school teachers in the field (each named in the acknowledgements section) who have engaged in elements of this work with me and shared their beliefs about its potential, my continuation of this research has been possible.

*Writing hope.* Briefly defined, writing hope combines a person’s cognitive (skills) and motivational (affective) strengths when writing in order to help him/her/per accomplish his/her/per personal and academic writing goals (Sieben, 2013b). Through a feedback loop that exists between the cognitive (pathways) and motivational (will) components, students’ writing hope levels can increase and lead to enhanced writing success in supportive educational environments (Sieben, 2013b). Using research-based instructional interventions, which will be explored in detail in Sections 2 and 3 of this book, teachers can facilitate writing process

activities in their classrooms that develop students' writing hope levels and thus their writing competencies.

Throughout this book, the terms “skills,” “ways,” “routes,” and “pathways” are used interchangeably to refer to the cognitive components of the writing hope strength, and the terms “affective,” “emotional,” “will,” and “agency” are used to refer to the motivational components of the writing hope strength. Traditionally, the two main components of all hope constructs are identified as “agency” and “pathways” components or factors, and each of these parts will be described in greater detail in Chapters 1 and 2 of this book. It is the complementary combination of cognitive and motivational elements of hope that make a person successful during goal pursuit—the cognitive element informs a person's motivation and fuels it further, while the motivational element inspires a person to use the cognitive skills possessed and to learn new ones with confidence and energy. As a teacher of writing in various contexts, I have witnessed the importance of both agency and pathways in my student writers; however, it was not until I began studying hope theory that I realized there is a discourse and framework of hope that teachers and students can explicitly name and work within in the classroom to benefit each student's unique writing process.

*Application and implementation.* Further, while this book specifically addresses the application of these strategies in secondary school classrooms, it is also important to note I have implemented many of these strategies with my undergraduate and graduate students at the college level and have seen the benefits my college students experience by engaging in these hope-building processes. By adjusting the level of complexity of the activities and conversations around hope accordingly, I am able to integrate hope into my composition and teacher education courses across instructional levels. In my college classroom, I employ the discourse of hope when speaking about writing and when exploring teaching and learning strategies with pre-service and in-service teachers. I find this component of my courses to be essential to my students' growth and development as writers and teachers of writing. Because my research and teaching reciprocally inform one another, I will refer to my position in this work as both a researcher and a teacher.

Finally, while my research on writing hope began six years ago at the college level with first-year college students transitioning from high school to college writing, I have had the opportunity more recently to develop this research at the secondary school level with support from a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Conference on English Education (CEE) Research Initiative Grant. Through the financial support of the grant, I was able to travel to various regions of the United States to visit public and private schools and work with secondary school teachers and their students who provided generous feedback during the course of a year-long study I have titled, “Teaching Writing Hope: A Matter of Social Justice” (described in further detail in Chapter 2 of this book). While I made initial curricular suggestions

during the first professional development workshop weeks with teachers, I had the opportunity to engage in professional learning communities alongside the teachers in this study over the course of one school year (plus the months leading up to and immediately following the implementation year).

In some cases, this work has allowed me to foster collaborative partnerships with teachers that persist today. One such hopeful voice is frequently present in the pages of this book: Gordon Hultberg, an ELA teacher in one of the schools I worked with in this study, has been an instrumental collaborator in bringing this writing hope work into secondary schools, and I continue to be grateful for his critical feedback and partnership in this work. Gordon's voice will be heard several times in testimony throughout this book, alongside other teacher-participants, some of whom wish to remain anonymous though have consented to sharing their experiences in this study. Based on feedback from Gordon and the other 20 teachers in the study, I have revised and refined the original writing hope instructional interventions I shared in professional development workshops given teachers' and students' experiences with the strategies over the course of a school year. It is because of the time and commitment that teachers and students in this study invested in this work that I am able to contribute these research-based, classroom-tested strategies to the salient conversations already taking place about teaching writing through process approaches.

Further, I wish to acknowledge the important influence that prior work on writing process pedagogy (e.g., Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b; Graves, 1975; Hillocks, Kahn, & Johannessen, 1983; Smagorinsky, Johannessen, Kahn, & McCann, 2010; Whitney & Johnson, 2017; Zuidema & Fredricksen, 2016) has provided in my development of writing hope theory and curriculum, and as readers will see, these perspectives are referenced throughout the chapters in this book with connections made to the Writing Hope Framework I provide. Given that, what I aim to offer in this work is one strengths-based approach to teaching writing that puts students at the center of the work and gives consideration to both motivational and cognitive components that contribute to students' development as writers. The Writing Hope Framework is intended to support teachers' thinking about writing in perhaps a new way, but is in no way prescriptive or exhaustive in strategies. As Zuidema and Fredricksen's (2016) work calls on us to do, this WHF provides one approach to teaching student writers "strategically in light of" their unique "needs, expectations, and strengths" (p. 34).

As a researcher, I am extremely grateful for the prior work in the field that informs the development of the WHF and for the invaluable feedback the teachers and students in the "Teaching Writing Hope" study have provided me with thus far. I have considered this feedback when revising the WHF and the writing hope pathways and agency strategies for writing process development that I share in this book. Teacher voices and experiences are critical for the continued development of this work, and it is my hope that other teachers who engage with this framework feel invited to create curriculum grounded in these writing hope principles that aim to help all student writers within their unique contexts.

*As a Teacher-Researcher*

As a teacher of writing in a variety of contexts (e.g., public and private schools, private tutoring/home instruction, urban and suburban schools) and educational levels (i.e., middle school, high school, college—undergraduate and graduate school), I have worked with students who shared hopeful narratives about writing, those who shared hopeless narratives about writing, and those somewhere in between. The students who appeared to be hopeless about writing were absolutely capable of being successful in their writing processes, but somewhere along the way in their development as writers, their hopes were crushed instead of supported. Somewhere along the way, they were taught by a person or a system that was more deficit-focused than strengths-based. With this in mind, I set out to discover how I could be a hope creator for my students during their development as secondary school and college writers. I knew that if I wanted to make recommendations for a systemic change—one that shifted the focus from fixing deficits to building strengths—I needed to first learn from my own high school and college students.

I began with a qualitative study, interviewing first-year college students about their pathways into writing as an academic practice and as a form of self-expression. I asked them about the classroom activities that made them feel hopeful about their writing and about the ones that hurt their writing energies. I also interviewed high school students I worked with in one-on-one tutoring sessions as well as my former high school students who were willing to provide me with feedback on the degree to which their writing education in my high school classes prepared them for college writing and life. From these interviews, I learned what students felt worked in their secondary school writing educations and what they felt was missing, and then I took these findings into consideration when designing my research questions for my work with secondary school writers and their teachers.

The experiences secondary school students (i.e., fifth grade through twelfth grade) and their teachers shared with me were invaluable in my understandings of how writing hope could play a role in their writing processes and in their writing process discourses. Because a writing process approach is one of the most effective approaches to writing instruction, particularly for adolescents (Graham & Perin, 2007b), the curriculum that results from working within a Writing Hope Framework is intentionally designed to be process-oriented and places students and their unique writing processes at the center of the work. The Writing Hope Framework (i.e., Chapter 2) is a writing process framework that can lead to increased writing proficiency for all students regardless of ability level, race, gender identity, language, sexual orientation, national origin, ethnicity, religion, and/or socioeconomic status. Though writing hope is not the only strength needed for writing success, it does contribute significantly to students' success as writers because it encompasses both cognitive and motivational components essential for energetic goal pursuit by all students within their unique contexts.

## INTRODUCTION

In short, writing hope curriculum can serve as an instructional equalizer across various educational systems that privilege some and oppress others. While some strengths within positive psychology (e.g., grit and optimism) have been criticized for being promoted as the key ingredient(s) for student success, hope does not promise to be a fix-all. Rather, it is a part of the recipe for success that students need to accomplish their academic and personal goals, and as research shows, it does a lot of the work in ensuring that students reach bright futures (Lopez, 2013). Further, while some strengths such as grit and optimism have been seen as traits developed out of privileged upbringings, hope is one such strength that can be developed out of struggle and triumph and everything in between. There is no restriction on who can develop hope; all that is needed is an effective facilitator of hope (e.g., teacher, mentor, curriculum, school system, and discourse) to make it a reality.

### *As a Human Who Has Struggled with Hope*

To acknowledge the great efforts sometimes needed to facilitate and muster hope, I share a personal narrative that may at first seem unrelated to this work but which helped me to realize as a researcher and teacher of hope how intentional we need to be in implementing these writing hope strategies with students who struggle with writing and who feel a genuine hopelessness about their writing talents and abilities (and perhaps even about life in general). What I realized through a recent tragic loss in my life was that for students who already possess even a small degree of hope, it is easier to build a greater degree of hope into their self-belief systems and their writing routines. However, for those students who possess no hope at all about their writing and/or about life in general, it may feel near impossible for them to imagine a time when they will ever feel hopeful. For these students, and for all students, we need to be mindful of where they are and build from there.

Throughout the course of my life, I had often been a person who possessed a relatively high degree of hope about life in general and about writing specifically. I usually tried to maintain the belief that where there was a will (hope agency) there was a way (hope pathways) to accomplishing my goals. Given the hopeful belief system at my foundation, even when I experienced challenges or setbacks on the way to achieving my goals, I persisted and found new pathways to success. I would not give up; I would simply find a different way(s) and carry on. But, what would I do in the face of a situation where I felt as though there really was no way for me to carry on or move forward?

In the middle of this research study on writing hope in secondary schools, I lost my father, whom I love dearly. One day we were making plans to travel together as a family, and the next he was gone, suddenly and tragically, and there was nothing I could do to bring him back. Because death is one of those circumstances that can never be reversed (or at least not in my own personal belief system), I could not see any pathways forward; they all seemed to have “dead end” signs with no way of proceeding. I had no vision of how I would return to being the generally

hopeful person I once was. I lost my father, my best friend, my mentor, my coach, my teacher... my original hope facilitator. He was gone, and no amount of hope could ever bring him back. As a lifelong student of hope, I had a lot of questions.

In the early days of my loss, I asked many of these questions and was fortunate to have caring mentors who had perspectives to share in response. My dissertation committee chair and hope mentor, Dr. Rose, attended my father's wake services. Because I knew she had lost a close family member suddenly too only a few years before me, when I saw her I asked her through tears, "How do you find hope again or build it anew when it's completely gone?" She told me, "You start small. First you find hope in the little things, the everyday things, and you build from there." When I saw her again months after my father's passing we discussed more of the pathways through this grief and hopelessness. Again, she advised me, "You start small." Dr. Miller, another member of my dissertation committee and CEE mentor, often asked me in the early days after my father passed away, "What are you doing for today?" and that concept of "doing for today" became a new mantra for me in finding my way back to hope from hopelessness. Once I was able to integrate the concept of small hopes into my life, I was able to recognize hope again; though it took on a different form. While it may have seemed impossible to feel hopeful about big-picture goals at the time, "starting small" and "doing for today" were two concepts I could integrate into my daily practices towards hope. Because hope is a future-thinking concept, it can be difficult to think about long-term hope in times of hopelessness. Thinking about finding hope for today and being given permission to start small made hope seem more manageable and attainable.

Poetically, my first glimmer of hope after my father passed away came while I was writing: my writing practice was the only piece of me that I felt was recognizable after losing my dad. Nothing else seemed to fit right... I felt like a new person in my usually comfortable skin, but I was a writer and my skin still knew that. I was also a teacher of writing, and my heart still seemed to know that too. So, in the aftermath of my father's death, through tiny incremental moments of hope in my classroom or at my computer or with my notebook, I began to recognize hope again and realized I needed to build it from there. In these instances of lost hope, we need to start small to move towards a point in time where hope can emerge and grow. We need to be intentional about the strategies we engage students in, and we need to be mindful of the uniqueness of their journey, praising progress along the way. My father used to echo the adage, "Progress, not perfection" when he was trying to calm the perfectionist voice inside me. I think we need to remind our students of this too. We want them to see that we value their growth and authenticity above all else, and the success in performance will follow.

This experience of deep loss has left me "broken" as a person in a way—I will always miss my father and always wonder what my life would be like if he were still here to guide, support, and love me along the way. But this experience of hopelessness has also created in me a more "complete" hope researcher because I now understand what it feels like to be completely depleted of hope and to need

## INTRODUCTION

those hope facilitators to carry me through small moments of hope until I could create my own hope organically once again. The hope facilitators in my life were my teachers, professors, colleagues, mentors, books, movies, pieces of research, schools, friends, and family members who helped me see that my *process of hope* was more important than a *destination to hope*. My father always reminded me of the saying “Life is a journey, not a destination,” and he was right. So, too, is hoping a journey. Hope is not an end goal: it’s a starting point. Hope is a journey with all the obstacles and all the successes and everything in between; it’s a process oriented in action, just like writing.

I share this narrative not to belabor the idea of hopelessness, but to acknowledge my position as someone who has experienced hopelessness—who has existed in a state without hope for a time—and still was able to find and grow hope anew. Hope is not exclusively for the already hopeful students; it is also, and perhaps more critically, for those students who do not presently see hope in their lives but who can. Every student is capable of hope if it is facilitated effectively and purposefully. Given the nature of this research and the universality of its application, it is the intention of this book to bring readers through a process of hope that can facilitate life hope and writing hope in the classroom for and with secondary school students.

While writing hope can help improve writing competencies, it can also do something perhaps even more important for our students: it can build hope into our students’ lives where there is none. It can help our students to imagine worlds and contexts in which they could be hopeful and write the conditions for this new state of being into existence. It allows students to write plans and goals for a better future, whatever that means for them within their own contexts that shift organically throughout life. With writing hope, our students can survive devastating tragedies that have the potential to cripple them. My own experiences with loss have shown me that starting with a hope intention (e.g., I plan to write in a gratitude journal each night) may be all that is necessary to end up with a hope manifestation/actualization (e.g., I have written in my gratitude journal every night for one month and see places to be thankful) in the classroom and then in life.

## THE DISCOURSE OF WRITING HOPE

The discourse of hope can empower a person to achieve personal and academic goals because it engages us in a discourse of “nexting” (Lopez, 2013) in which people talk about their next steps and the actions they will take to make their goals a reality. The discourse of writing hope works the same way for writers as it propels their energies forward. It allows writers to have a common language with which to speak about strengths-based writing processes and gives teachers and students common ground to start from when talking about writing goal pursuit and transference of skills to future writing tasks.

Teachers and students need to have a common language with which to talk about writing and writing processes in order to be productive and purposeful in their work

together. Several of the teachers in my study recognized the Writing Hope Framework as important in their classrooms because it created a common language for their students and them that framed their conversations about writing in productive ways. As teachers pointed out, the Writing Hope Framework provides a language that is strengths-based, action-driven, and student-centered, and teachers and students have shared that the discourse of writing hope is motivating and instructional and guides them through a nonlinear process of writing that takes into account their unique voices as writers and thinkers in the world, not just in their classrooms. Just as Freire and Macedo's work (1998) calls on us to read "the word and the world" critically, writing hope is another means for students to do that and not only to read that way but to write that way too.

To assist in the implementation of hope discourse in the classroom, I have created a hope glossary of terms (i.e., Appendix A) for teachers to use with their students as the language of hope begins to manifest in the classroom. There are spaces left at the end for new hope terminology creations and manifestations that may occur unique to each individual classroom. In this space, I encourage teachers to work with their students to add hope language that feels authentic to their own learning communities.

#### HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

This book is divided into four sections that each contribute to understanding ways of building writing hope in secondary school classrooms. Each section or chapter can be read in isolation from or in conjunction with the others depending on a reader's need for information. If the goal is to garner strategies for building writing hope and writing competency in students, then readers can focus on Sections Two and Three. If the goal is to focus on assessing students' growth as writers over the course of a year or semester, then Sections One and Four can be consulted. If readers are looking to learn about the theories and frameworks that foreground these strategies then Section One is most important to focus in on. While the entire work may be most useful when read as a whole, readers may choose to skip to sections first that are most relevant to their immediate needs. Just as the Writing Hope Framework promotes a nonlinear approach to writing instruction, so too does this book support a nonlinear approach to learning about and integrating writing hope strategies into classroom practices.

Though the framework and strategies shared may seem specific to English language arts (ELA) classrooms only, other content area teachers participated in the "Teaching Writing Hope" study and found ways to implement these strategies in their classrooms too so as to make writing across the curriculum a goal within the entire grade level or school. Teachers who participated in this study included those in English language arts, social studies, science, art, and special education. Notably, three of the teachers in the study identified their roles in the classroom as special education teachers and reported these strategies as being particularly useful in scaffolding the writing

process for their students as well. Overall, this book provides hope-focused ways of thinking about the teaching of writing across the curriculum in secondary schools and shares research-based strategies for immediate use in the classroom.

In *Section One: Theories of Hope and Writing*, hope theory is explained first generally in the context of education in Chapter 1 and then specifically in the context of writing education in Chapter 2. The concept of writing hope is defined in more detail and a framework that guides the writing hope strategies presented in the following sections is outlined. The Writing Hope Scale, a valid and reliable measurement tool for assessing students' writing hope levels, is provided in Chapter 3 along with a thorough explanation about how to use it in the classroom to inform teaching and learning practices. Finally, this section closes with Chapter 4, which details mindsets that support the growth of writing hope. Further the chapter includes the valid and reliable Writing Mindset Scale, which can be used to measure students' self-beliefs about their ability to grow their writing talents and skills. This first section of the book explores the foundational theories that support the work found in the remaining sections.

*Section Two: Goal Pursuits through Writing Hope* focuses on how to build worthwhile writing goals with students through a Writing Hope Framework. Chapter 5 illustrates how teachers can use experiences of life hope as metaphors for writing hope. The chapter guides teachers through strategies for encouraging students to (a) consider situations in life that made them hopeful and then (b) apply these ideas to how they could also feel hopeful about writing. Having students talk about their lives is also useful for having them talk about their writing, and discussing the pursuit of life goals can serve as a useful model for the pursuit of writing goals. Once students write out their personal metaphors, they can begin to draft their writing goals for the year and analyze their progress in their "Writing Goals Journals." Suggested journal prompts, formats, and sample writing goals are provided in Chapter 6, which focuses on intentional goal setting and guided journaling practices.

*Section Three: Writing Hope Strategies for Writing Success: Pathways and Agency Approaches* provides writing hope strategies that teachers can use and adapt in secondary school classrooms with their students. Each of the three chapters in this section includes research-based, classroom-tested strategies that secondary school English language arts and other content area teachers have used in their classrooms with their middle and high school students. Each chapter shares samples of student work and teacher testimonies about how these strategies worked in their classrooms. Chapter 7 specifically explores pathways strategies that students can employ during writing goal pursuit including writing process pathways mapping, anticipatory problem-solving, and situational role-playing as a writer. These strategies and others can be used in combination with one another and can be adapted based on the context of each classroom. In Chapter 8, readers learn strategies for motivating student writers by building their writing hope agency; Chapter 9 explains effective strategies for giving feedback to students on their writing, which is both a will and a ways approach to developing writing hope.

In the last section, *Section Four: Authentic Assessment for Building Writing Hope*, readers are given suggestions for using formative and summative assessment systems that promote the growth of writing hope in students. Chapter 10 explores ways of integrating the Writing Hope Framework into the school year in authentic ways that assess and promote growth from the implementation stage to the conclusion of the year. Additionally, in this chapter, teachers will be given information about getting involved in the Writing Hope Works Project, which can connect their classrooms to a larger community of teachers and students outside of their schools if desired.

In all sections, each chapter ends with discussion questions and hope testimonies. The lists of discussion questions may be useful for educators to consider in professional learning communities or in independent reflections for their classrooms. Some of these questions could also be adapted as writing prompts for secondary school and/or college students as they engage in the discourse and discovery of hope. Future teachers may consider these questions too as they begin to develop their instructional methods for teaching writing. The featured teacher and student testimonies at the end of each chapter include reflections from educators and future educators who have engaged with the Writing Hope Framework in a variety of ways. Those contributors named in the work are those who gave permission to be identified by their names; those who wished to remain anonymous are either referred to by chosen pseudonyms or anonymous quotes as per their requests.

Finally, the afterword describes ways that writing hope is a matter of social justice as it could transform the teaching and learning of writing by applying strengths-based, classroom-tested approaches to writing education that are effective for students of all ability levels and backgrounds. These strategies—identified as the result of a collaboration between teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and students—can support adolescents as they become literate, empathetic, knowledgeable citizens with empowered voices able to write their own histories. With writing hope and writing competency, theirs will be the voices that tell their unique stories.



**SECTION ONE**  
**THEORIES OF HOPE AND WRITING**



## CHAPTER 1

# HOPE IN EDUCATION

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Hope has been defined in different ways across various educational contexts; however, this first chapter explains “hope theory” as it is defined by positive psychology in order to ground the following chapters within a framework of “writing hope” that combines positive psychology with writing education theory and practice. Hope theory in positive psychology has been applied to some specific academic domains (e.g., math education); however, up until this point it has not been applied to the teaching of writing. This chapter provides the background of how hope theory research in positive psychology can apply to educational practices in the classroom and explains how it has been used successfully in other academic domains to enhance student learning and understanding.

### HOPE AS A CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL TOOL

#### *Critical Pedagogy of Hope*

In education, the term *hope* has been used many ways in the context of teaching and learning (i.e., Freire, 2004; Giroux, 2003; McInerney, 2007; te Riele, 2010). Freire (2004) and Giroux (2003) express a need for hope in the context of critical pedagogy, calling for teachers to engage students in a conscious process of understanding that allows students to make meaning from their own lived experiences and to emerge from struggle if necessary. Freire (2004) describes hope as a basic human need that must be grounded in practice; he asserts, just as this book does, that hope is contextually specific and is important for the development of each unique learner. However, while Freire (2004) describes a pedagogy of hope, he does not purport to suggest hope as a methodology for teaching and learning, which this book aims to do. Additionally, this book builds on te Riele’s (2009) ideas about creating hope that is beneficial to diverse types of students in supportive educational communities and focuses on possibilities and strengths-based approaches rather than deficit models.

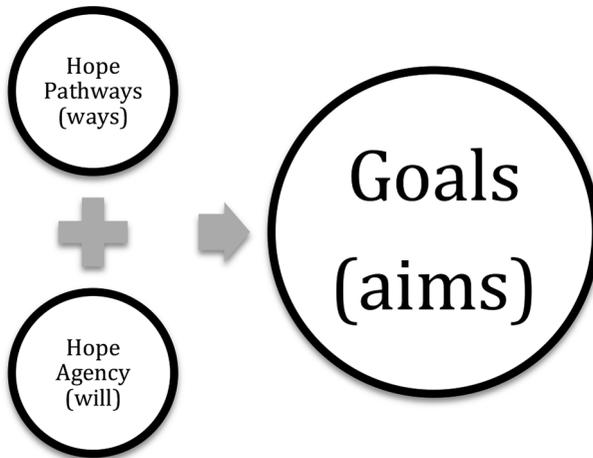
te Riele (2009) distinguishes her definition of hope from the rhetorically popular one that uses hoping synonymously with wishing and supports the notion that hope can be taught strategically and can be a helpful tool to students and teachers in challenging circumstances. In accordance with McInerney’s (2007) ideas about teaching hope to expand critical social theory, this book implicates hope as a potential change agent in that it can provide students with action steps and strategies

for accomplishing goals that could begin to balance systems of inequality. With these educational, philosophical perspectives of hope in mind, this book repositions hope in education as a contextually specific, influential factor in secondary students’ writing success.

Though a critical pedagogy of hope has been discussed in educational discourses frequently within the past decade, the educational hope framework employed in this book is rationalized in critical pedagogy, grounded in positive psychology, and applied to writing education in secondary schools through research-based, classroom-tested methodologies of writing instruction.

*Extending the Critical Pedagogy of Hope*

A strengths-based hope framework has implications for extending the critical pedagogy of hope that the aforementioned educational scholars have theorized (Freire, 2004; Giroux, 2003; McInerney, 2007; te Riele, 2010). Specifically, this book uses Snyder’s (1996, 2002) definition of hope—a positive, cognitive-motivational construct containing goals, ways, and will—to provide context for understanding students’ perceptions, emotions, and motivations about their writing abilities. According to Snyder (1996), hope is goal-directed thinking that includes knowledge of pathways (the ways or routes taken to achieve goals) and agency (the will or motivation to use the routes to achieve goals). This definition of hope is used in this work because it incorporates contextually specific, purposeful strategies and motivational components that could actively aid students in accomplishing their academic and future goals. See Figure 1 for a visual representation of Snyder’s (1996) hope theory and the interactive components of the construct.



*Figure 1. Visual representation of Snyder’s (1996) hope theory*

While this book emphasizes the importance of hope theory as the new contribution to the field of writing education in secondary schools, it relies on and builds upon the body of knowledge already established in positive psychology and social cognitive theory pertaining to contextually specific, strengths-based learning. From the research on domain specificity for certain dispositional constructs in positive psychology, the “writing hope” theory (Sieben, 2013b) expounded upon in this work is defined as a derivative of the general hope framework originally founded by Snyder (1996), which is described in detail below.

### HOPE THEORY GROUNDED IN POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

#### *Snyder's Hope Theory*

According to Snyder (2000, 2002), hope is a trait that can be cultivated in students and is a cognitive-motivational strength that contains three parts: goals, pathways, and agency. Within this framework, “hope reflects individuals’ perceptions of their capabilities to (1) clearly conceptualize goals; (2) develop the specific strategies to reach those goals (pathways thinking); and (3) initiate and sustain the motivation for using those strategies (agency thinking)” (Lopez et al., 2004, p. 388). When students set intentional, worthwhile goals, they then need multiple, effective pathways to accomplish those goals and the motivation to continue pursuing the goals set even when obstacles arise en route to the goal. Thus, goals are the aims of the actions taken; pathways are the cognitive routes used to attain those goals; and agency is the motivation fueled by the self-perception of one’s ability to successfully use those routes to achieve goals (Berg, Ritschel, Swan, An, & Ahluwalia, 2011; Padilla-Walker, Hardy, & Christensen, 2011; Snyder et al., 2002; te Riele, 2010). According to Snyder et al. (1991), pathways and agency thinking are highly correlated components of the hope strength, but they are distinct from one another. They work together to support engagement and disengagement of goal pursuit.

Unlike other positive, cognitive-motivational constructs (e.g., self-efficacy and self-regulation), hope theory places equal emphasis on all of the goal-pursuit components (i.e., motivation/will and strategies/ways) (Snyder, 2002). In order to understand the utility of the positive psychology hope construct in education, it is necessary to explore this strength with regards to expectancies that influence this strength and other strengths emphasized in educational contexts. Hope incorporates a reciprocal relationship between efficacy expectancies (agency) and outcome expectancies (pathways), reflecting that both are equally important for achieving goals. However, two other constructs in positive psychology (i.e., self-efficacy and self-regulation), which have been part of the conversation in writing education longer than hope has been, also incorporate expectancies. The difference between these two strengths and the hope strength can be explained by examining the degree to which expectancy is present.

While self-efficacy prioritizes efficacy expectancies over outcome expectancies (Snyder et al., 2002), self-regulation emphasizes outcome expectancies over efficacy expectancies, and hope places an equal emphasis on both. What this means is that when people have high levels of self-efficacy, they have the strength of believing they are capable of accomplishing a task; however, this does not necessarily include having the intention to act or having the pathways knowledge of effective strategies to complete the task successfully. Both hope and self-efficacy share emphasis on efficacy expectancies and persistence; however, hope theory incorporates a person's intention to act rather than just his/her/per confidence in his/her/per ability to act, as is the case in self-efficacy theory (Berg et al., 2011; Padilla-Walker et al., 2011; Snyder et al., 2002). On the other hand, self-regulation gives prominence to outcome expectancies and action, placing less of a focus on efficacy expectancies needed for motivation in goal pursuit. Therefore, if a person possesses the strength of self-regulation, she/he/ze may have the knowledge of how to accomplish a task, but she/he/ze may not necessarily have the motivation to act on that knowledge or to persist when the task gets challenging. The restrictions within the self-efficacy and self-regulation constructs with respect to expectancies demonstrate the need to build strengths in students that consider both efficacy expectancies (motivations) *and* outcome expectancies (strategies). While efficacy expectancies may fuel outcome expectancies and outcome expectancies may inform efficacy expectancies, students must possess both so that knowledge of strategies can develop their confidence in their abilities, and this confidence can provide motivation to use learned strategies (Snyder et al., 2002). In hope theory, the two expectancies are reciprocally present and work together for successful and meaningful goal pursuit.

### *Social Cognitive Theory Provides Context for Hope in Education*

The conceptual framework underlying hope theory is Bandura's (1986, 2001) social cognitive theory, which depicts human development as a succession of mutually influential interactions between a person, her environment, and her behaviors. Since hope-building cycles work in similar feedback loops where agency components motivate the use of pathways and pathways inform agency, this succession of mutually influential interactions is also present when working to build a person's hope levels. As social cognitive theory implies, a student's academic processes (i.e., behaviors) are influenced by the environment in which they are developed and are continuously informed and revised based on the succession of mutually influential interactions that occur between the student and her environment. For example, writing is one such behavior that can be influenced and developed by a person's environment and her beliefs about her writing abilities (Lavelle, 2009).

In accordance with Bandura's (1986, 2001) social cognitive theory, the context in which hope is developed and goals are set is very important. For instance, the strategies used for developing hope in the home may be quite different from the strategies used for developing hope in the schools. While strategies and affect might

vary depending on context, both home and school environments should provide a supportive space for relationships to be built between the teacher of hope and the student of hope so that hope can grow effectively in a way that moves the student forward in the direction of his/her/per goals (Lopez et al., 2004).

According to Halpin (2003), academic hope should be taught in supportive educational settings where students can rely on teachers to provide them with constructive feedback that builds their capacities for growth during goal pursuit. In order to ensure that sound, meaningful goals are set, hope may best be cultivated in a school setting where guided learning can occur. Snyder et al. (2000) assert that authentic change occurs in a person when she/he/ze internalizes strategies for effective agency, pathways, and goal-directed thinking. This internalization of concepts could occur in school contexts during guided, supportive instruction since research has shown “most people have the capacity to hope” (Lopez et al., 2004, p. 390) and school environments can cultivate that hope if the spaces are conducive to building trusting relationships between students and teachers (Lopez, 2012). In order for a person to have hope, she/he/ze must have a belief in her/his/per abilities to accomplish the specific goal and positive emotions about the attainment of the goal. As past hope intervention research has shown, hope theory requires that both pathways and agency components be integral parts of instruction to sustain successful goal pursuit. In isolation, neither is adequate (Berg et al., 2011; Lopez et al., 2004; Sieben, 2013b).

In past studies, hope has frequently been linked to academic achievement. Research reveals that children, adolescents, and adults with higher hope levels perform better in school and athletics and have better problem-solving skills (Chang, 1998; Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 2002). In a study of college students, Chang (1998) found that high hope students had better problem-solving skills and employed fewer disengagement strategies during stressful academic situations than low hope students did, revealing that hope is a skill worth teaching at the secondary level in preparation for “college and career readiness” so that students enter college feeling empowered to accomplish their goals and solve problems during challenging times. In a six-year longitudinal study, Snyder et al. (2002) found that hope scores reliably predicted academic achievement in college students, and Chang (1998) found that hope was a significant predictor of academic satisfaction in college students as well, which led to higher graduation rates for those students. Using Snyder’s Adult Dispositional Hope Scale and first semester GPA, researchers discovered that hope scores were significantly, positively correlated with college students’ cumulative GPAs (Snyder et al., 2002). General hope and graduation status were also significantly related (Snyder et al., 2002); this may be because high hope scores predicted higher cumulative GPAs, greater chances of graduating from college, and lower probabilities of dismissal from college due to low grades. Additionally, a study of student-athletes found that hope significantly predicted student-athletes’ semester GPAs, more so than cumulative GPA and overall self-worth did (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997). In each of the above studies, students with higher hope levels were more likely to achieve academic success defined in a variety of ways.

Through a meta-analysis of hope studies involving academic achievement, Snyder (2002) found that higher hope levels led to better academic outcomes overall. From this and other large-scale studies, Snyder was able to identify certain trends in students who possess varying degrees of hope. Students with higher hope levels tend to set specific goals and have one desired pathway to achieve those goals, but see other routes as options if the desired pathway is not possible. High hope individuals anticipate setbacks, recover from failure more easily, and set goals in many different aspects of their lives so that if one goal is obstructed, another goal can be pursued (Snyder et al., 1991). On the contrary, students with lower hope levels tend to set vague goals, have difficulty determining pathways to achieve those goals, and experience greater stress as a result of obstructed goals or failure (Snyder et al., 1991). Snyder found that low hope is related to low academic achievement, low athletic achievement, and worse physical and psychological health (as cited in te Riele, 2010). Students with moderate hope levels tend to have varying degrees of pathways knowledge and motivation towards different goals. Thus, researchers suggest that “combining [hope] information with other measures of student achievement and ability” will allow educators to “develop a more comprehensive picture of a [student’s] potential” (Peters & Gentry, 2011, p. 299) across various educational levels.

According to te Riele (2010), hope is only worth developing in certain areas when the specific goals set are worthwhile of pursuit; therefore, students can be taught how to set personally meaningful, specific, and constructive goals for success. Freire’s (2004) suggestion to act on hope—to pursue goals set in strategic ways regardless of obstacles present—is an important part of hope theory in education because students can be taught to have hopefulness about specific academic tasks (Berg et al., 2011; Lopez et al., 2004; Snyder, 2002), and this includes teaching students the skills necessary to develop their writing pathways and writing agency thinking. While much research supports the influence of general hope on academic achievement (Chang, 1998; Davidson, Feldman, & Margalit, 2012; Lopez et al., 2004; Padilla-Walker et al., 2011; Snyder et al., 2002), additional studies are needed on the utility of specific hope interventions in secondary schools with respect to building particular academic competencies. This book explores one such domain-specific hope framework that has allowed for the development of a highly coveted academic currency: writing competency. The Writing Hope Framework, which emerged out of past research on the writing hope construct (Sieben, 2013b, 2014, 2015, 2016), will be detailed in the following chapter, but first it is important to examine the utility of other domain-specific hope constructs (e.g., math hope).

### *Academic Domain-Specific Hope Theory*

A few recent studies reveal the predictive nature of domain-specific hope on certain learning outcomes in schools (Berg et al., 2011; Robinson & Rose, 2010; Sympson, 1999). While Snyder et al. (1991) originally theorized hope as a general

construct and created an 8-point Likert scale to measure people's general hope levels, Sympson (1999) later developed the Domain Specific Hope Scale including hope measurement of domains like work, leisure, relationships, and academics. In domain-specific hope theory, hope functions within specific contexts, therefore necessitating measures of hope to reflect specific contexts as well (Berg et al., 2011; Robinson & Rose, 2010; Snyder et al., 1996). In a recent study, Robinson and Rose (2010) found hope to be domain-specific in the validation of three variations of domain-specificity of hope measurement. These scales were the Math Hope Scale, Academic Hope Scale, and Dispositional Hope Scale; the creation of the math hope construct was the new contribution to the field of hope domain-specificity in this study. The domain-specific hope scales were reliable, factorally distinct, and better at predicting students' specific academic abilities than was the general hope scale (Robinson & Rose, 2010). Robinson and Rose (2010) were one of the first research teams to explore academic domain-specific hope and reveal the necessity for discipline-specific applications of hope in both educational and social contexts. This study led to new research in hope across other disciplines. Specifically, the validity of the math hope construct motivated the creation of the "writing hope" construct, which was first found to predict writing ability in college students (Sieben, 2013b) and later in secondary school students (Sieben, 2015, 2016). Following the creation and validation of the writing hope construct (described in the next chapter), a strengths-based "Writing Hope Framework" has been developed and implemented in secondary schools across the United States and has shown significant advancements in secondary students' development as writers.

#### HOPE DURING ADOLESCENCE

While hope is considered a necessary trait to develop in all stages of life, it is specifically beneficial for students to have hope during adolescence, a time when they realize their actions have consequences, worth-while goals should be set, and strategic decisions need to be made in order to achieve the goals set (Berg et al., 2011; Padilla-Walker et al., 2010; te Riele, 2010). Further, hope can act as a protective shield against negative factors (e.g., anxiety, helplessness) that could influence decisions that secondary students make in the classroom and for their futures (Padilla-Walker et al., 2010; te Riele, 2010). Higher hope levels in adolescents are related to academic achievement and school engagement, leading researchers to conclude that hope could also influence academic achievement *through* school engagement (Padilla-Walker et al., 2010).

According to te Riele (2010) hope must meet three criteria in order for it to be a useful construct in working with youth, especially youth who often struggle to meet academic goals. First, hope must be complex, or robust, in that obstacles and instances of struggle are recognized in order to conceptualize the alternative, hopeful vision (te Riele, 2010). Second, hope should be considered attainable and should assume the determined obstacles can be overcome. Third, hope should contain the

pursuit of sound, authentic goals that are worthy of attainment (te Riele, 2010). Along with these three criteria, te Riele (2010) says that hope needs to also be cultivated in a supportive academic environment. Schools that contain a positive learning environment tend to have high academic performance and have community members who show effort, improvement, and community spirit (te Riele, 2010). te Riele (2010) calls on teachers to support, question, and interrupt students' hopes in order to teach them to pursue worthwhile academic goals that matter to them; however, she believes support from a broader societal context is also vital for the complete development of students' hope levels.

With these underlying theories of hope in mind, the remaining chapters of this book provide (a) a detailed explanation of the writing hope construct and framework, (b) a description of the broader societal context within which writing hope was developed in a recent study, and (c) the research-based, classroom-tested writing hope teaching methods for writing instruction that emerged as a result of the study, which informs the use of these robust practices in writing hope education in secondary schools.

#### QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS TO CONSIDER

1. How do you define hope? How can you integrate Snyder's definition of hope into your own understanding about what it means to be a hopeful person?
2. What are your sources of hope? Who are the "hope creators" in your life?
3. What helps you learn/develop hope? What strategies do you implement to grow hope in your life?
4. How can you teach hope? How can you integrate the teaching of hope into your teaching and learning goals for and with your students?
5. What role do you think hope has (or needs to have) in education?

#### TEACHER TESTIMONIES EXPLORE HOPE QUESTIONS

*"Exploring Hope" by Gordon Hultberg, Secondary School ELA Teacher and "Teaching Writing Hope" Study Participant*

"Shanah Tovah!" The phrase was chalked on a blackboard at Feldman's Deli when I stopped in today for matzoh ball soup after being caught in a hailstorm in a canyon bike ride. I had to ask what it meant, as it was in the place reserved for their dinner specials. Jeff, the owner, told me what it means to him. Happy New Year. Time for reflection, and then a chance to atone for past sins, on Yom Kippur, then to set things right with other people, in order to have a better future year. This reminds me of what hope is. Hope is preparation we do in order that the coming steps might be fulfilling, gratifying, fruitful, worthwhile, and stronger. It acknowledges weaknesses and sees future possibilities for good, for growth, and strength. It knows about building strong relationships.

*“From Hope Student to Hope Teacher” by Dr. Stephanie Schneider, Teacher Educator in Literacy Education*

I had an English teacher in eighth grade who wrote on the board: “To whom much is given much is required.” He told us that it is our job to make someone’s day better by being positive and trusting that hard work and a smile go a long way. Mr. P instilled hope in me from the time I could understand what hope meant. All students should be so lucky to have hope in their classrooms every day. Mr. P instilled diligence in his students by keeping high standards. He never focused on where we were, but on the journey we undertook. Goals, pathways, and agency are three ideas that students and teachers can develop together. This takes work from both parties involved. It is much easier to focus on the negative and status quo. Mr. P never took that easy way out. Thanks to his teachings all those years ago, I strive to be the best teacher I can be for all of my students—with a smile.