

Research program brings hope to classrooms

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HOPE IS THE ABILITY to envision a future in which we wish to participate. It is an ally—helping to see us through dark times. It is also the unacknowledged foundation of those moments when all seems right with the world—when hope is alive and being realized. Research tells us that hope is key to sustaining mental health, a motivator for achievements, and firmly wed to a sense of healthy self and community. So often *hope* and *education* are used interchangeably, but their relationship is rarely unpacked. Just how can hope be an effective focus when teaching? And what are the benefits of focusing on hope in the classroom?

Edmonton teacher Amy Badger intentionally and actively structures her yearly planning around hope. She has done so for years and she has many research-based reasons for this choice. Her classroom stories about hope are powerful—stories of what she has seen it do for students and the impacts it has had on her as a teacher. Sit with her over coffee and she may tell the story of a sweet and quiet girl from one of her classes, whom we'll call Karley.

The story stands out for Badger because she was never quite sure just how much Karley was actually understanding. Karley was pleasant, yet she was also one of those students you can spend an entire year with and still not feel as though you really know. At the end of the year, Karley brought Badger a card. She told Badger it had been a very difficult year. Karley's parents were divorcing and there was a lot of fighting at home. If it had not been for learning about hope all year, Karley said, she did not think she could have made it through. In a dark year, Badger's hope-infused lessons had helped Karley stay educationally focused and mentally healthy.


Through the COVID-19 and budgetary disruptions that repeatedly impacted

the 2020/21 academic year, Badger and several teacher colleagues across grade levels and school divisions joined forces with researchers in the faculty of education at the University of Alberta. They formed a community of practice and together developed the Strengths, Hope and Resourcefulness Program for School Mental Health (SHARP-SMH). The goal of the program is to develop and refine proven, positive psychological practices for easy integration and implementation into curriculum and classroom routines. A hope-and-strengths focus builds on the strengths of students and the teacher, recognizing that difficult realities, like a global pandemic or even family divorce, can co-exist with hope.

Embedded in classrooms from Grades 2 to 10, the SHARP-SMH program is an applied research program, built on a foundation of more than 25 years of research at Hope Studies Central in the faculty of education at the University of Alberta.

The SHARP-SMH project was planned pre-pandemic and quickly pivoted to support teachers and students moving to online and blended delivery. With hope practices designed for clarity and flexibility, any teacher can choose the practices that align with the needs of their class and pick up new lessons for use in their own classroom.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS FROM SHARP-SMH

1. Hope is closely associated with personal meaning.
2. Hope engages even the most challenging students.
3. Teacher hope is as important as student hope.
4. One way to foster teacher hope is to collect teacher hope stories.
5. Hope can be easily integrated across much of the curriculum. 



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LOOKING FOR LESSON PLANS?

The SHARP-SMH website offers many lesson plans for teacher use and modification. Teachers are most welcome to use these evidence-based resources in their own classrooms. <https://sharp.wp.educ.ualberta.ca/>

PROJECT PARTICIPATION

Interested in participating in future projects related to SHARP-SMH? We would love to hear from you! Contact sharpasmh@ualberta.ca.

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