



Hope Sources and Threats: A Mixed Methods Study with Alberta Teachers



Denise J. Larsen, Ph.D., R. Psych.¹; Rebecca Hudson Breen, Ph.D., R. Psych.¹;
Darryl Hunter, Ph.D.¹; Veronica Taylor, MEd¹; Daniel O'Brien, MSc²; Chelsea Hobbs, MEd.¹

Background

- Teaching is a complex and demanding profession, with many teachers experiencing high stress and burnout².
- Hope is an essential and sustaining factor when facing stressful workplace conditions¹ and is necessary to overcoming challenges in educational contexts⁴.
- Hope is an important resource for adults working with young people, in terms of holding perspectives of hope for those they work with, as well as in experiencing a sense of purpose in their work³.
- Hope is also related to both academic success and overall well-being in children⁵.

Hope is...

- Within education, hope is typically described as a cognitive process focused on goal setting⁶.
- Within this project, we ascribe to a more multidimensional view of hope and define it as:

“A process of anticipation that involves the interaction of thinking, acting, feeling and relating, and is directed toward a future fulfillment that is personally meaningful.”

(Stephenson, 1991, p.1459)



Research Aims

In 2021, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) Pulse Survey indicated high levels of distress and hopelessness among Albertan teachers:

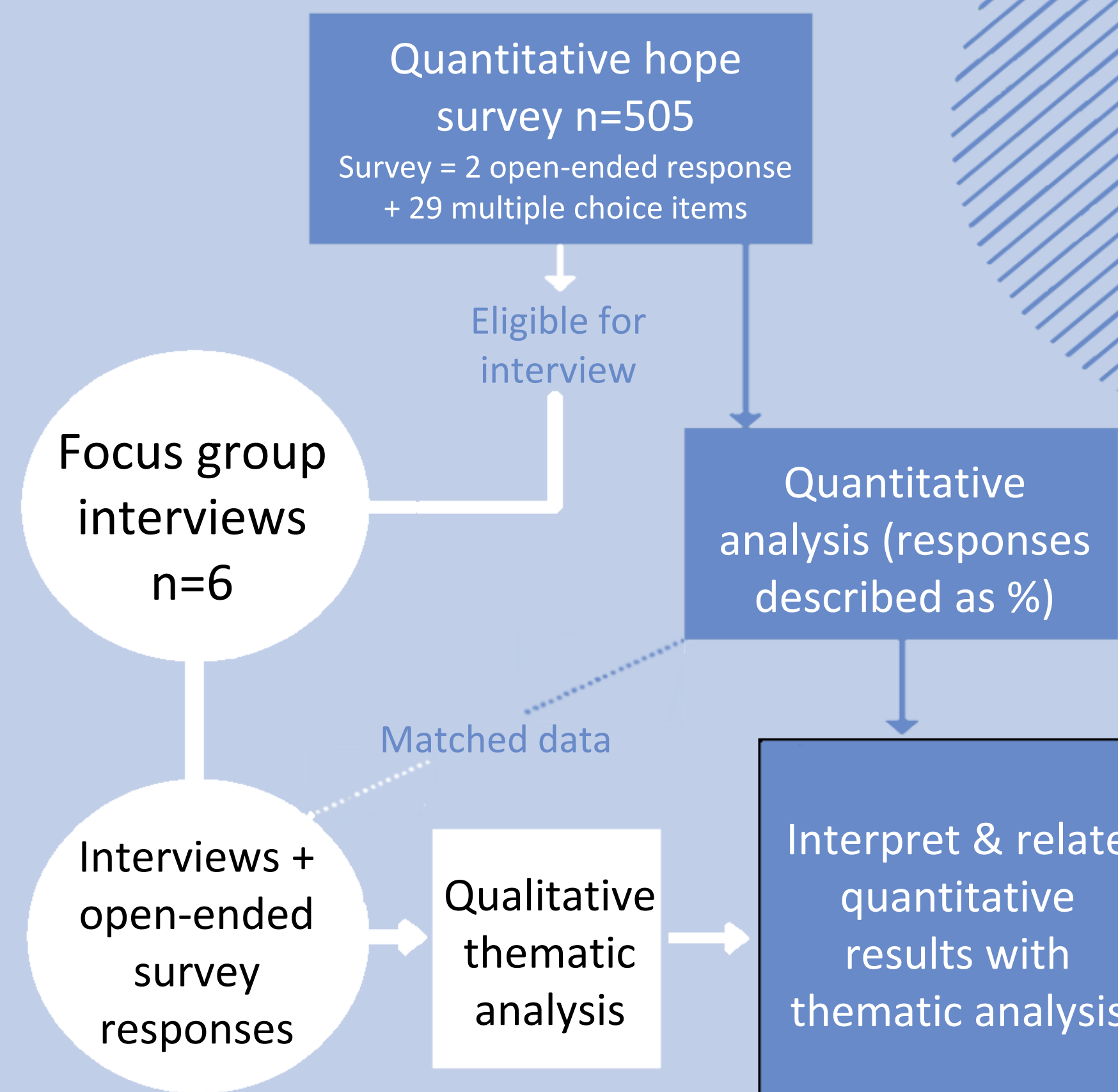
- 32% disagreed with the statement “I feel hopeful”
- 36% reported frequently feeling “down, depressed or hopeless”
- 37% reported that they would either retire, leave the profession, or move to another province in the next 5 years

In response, researchers from the University of Alberta launched the Hope: Resilience and Recovery Project in collaboration with the ATA. This study sought to better understand teachers' experiences of hope. Our specific research aims were to:

- Understand how and where Alberta teachers experience hope
- Recommend ways to support teachers' hope across myriad challenges on the educational landscape

Mixed Methods Approach

Integrating
Quantitative
Survey Data +
Interviews



Findings

80% of teachers report experiencing moments of hopefulness at work

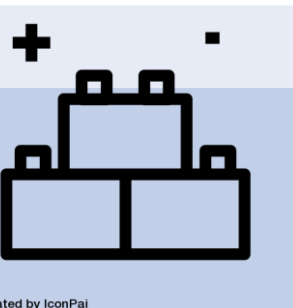


Sources of Hope

Student success and resilience



Building a better future



Supportive Leadership



“ I have a little girl, just reflecting back from September, she was struggling with numbers, like representation and counting and proper order and to now where she's using number lines to help her subtract double digits, so that was a hopeful moment like, “Yes! She's doing it, she's got this, at her own pace.”
– Mona

“ When I think about getting hope from students, we know that we are helping to form the next generation of leaders, as we come through, and so when I see one of my students being able to overcome their anger or overcome their frustration when they have a struggle, gives me hope for the future because if I can support them in learning how to be a better person in our classroom.”
– Vincent

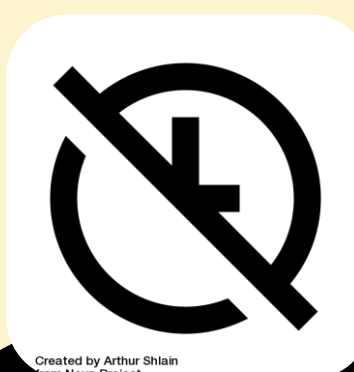
“ I'm very, very lucky to have like two awesome principals who are constantly offering words of encouragement or just acknowledgement that you've done something awesome, which really goes a long way....knowing that if I had any kind of issue or question or concern, I could go to my admin team and just know that I could work with them, and that makes me hopeful going forward too, that I have that team supporting me through that.”
– Luke

Threats to Hope

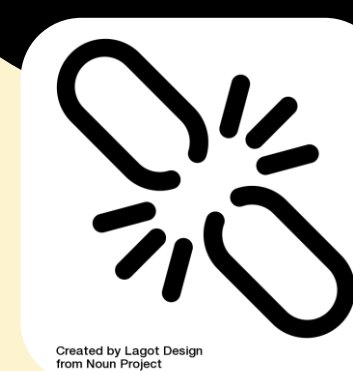
An uphill battle without relief



Lack of time and resources



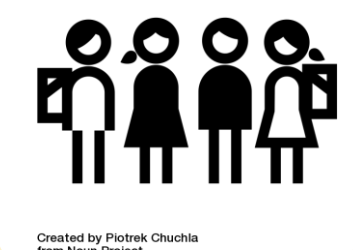
Disconnection from senior administration



Government attacks on teachers



Government actions hurting students



Devalued and misunderstood by the public



Discussion

- Alberta teachers evidenced strong reservoirs of hope, suggesting that students, classrooms, and schools are often hope-fostering sites.
- Sources of teacher hope include witnessing student success and resilience, recognizing their own agency and professional skills as teachers, and observing that teachers are helping build a better future.
- Teacher hope is often threatened by macro-level factors, including funding cuts that harm students, government leaders' negative rhetoric towards teachers, bureaucratic decisions that intensify teachers' workloads, and the sense that teachers' work is not valued by the public.
- Recommendations to support teacher hope:
 - Support teachers during difficult tasks and express appreciation for their commitment.
 - Celebrate teachers' successes, small and large.
 - Support teachers in cultivating ongoing networks of professional support.
 - Provide teachers with evidence of individual students' progress and accomplishment in their years ahead, beyond the grade level.
 - Adopt leadership approaches that prioritize teacher consultations.

Affiliations

- Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
- Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

References

- Fleisher, K. & Larsen, D. J. (2010). To offer hope you must have hope: Accounts of hope for reintegration counsellors working with women parole and probation. *Qualitative Social Work*, 12(1), 71-79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473232509383225>
- Gray, C., Wilcox, G., & Nordstokke, D. (2017). Teacher mental health, school climate, inclusive education and student learning: A review. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 58(3), 203-210. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000112>
- Murdoch, K. C., & Larsen, D. (2018). Experiences of hope for youth workers engaging at-risk and street-involved young people: Applications to the field of counselling and psychotherapy. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 52(4), 319-338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00084033.2018.1512025>
- Nolan, C. & Strizien, S. M. (2011). Meaningful hope for teachers in times of high anxiety and low morale. *Democracy & Education*, 19(1), 1-10. <https://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/>
- Pedrotti, J. T. (2018). The will and the ways in school: Hope as a factor in academic success. In M. W. Gallagher & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hope* (pp. 107-115). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Snyder, C. R. (1994). *The psychology of hope: You can get there from here*. Free Press.
- Stephenson, C. (1991). The concept of hope revisited for nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 12(12), 1456-1461. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1991.tb01593.x>



The Alberta Teachers' Association

Funding for this project was provided by the Alberta Teachers' Association

*This poster is created from a report written for the Alberta Teachers' Association called *Hope: Resilience and Recovery - A Report for the Alberta Teachers' Association (2022)*