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RESEARCH PAPER

“Building Hope for the Future”: A Program to Foster Strengths in Middle-School Students

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Abstract The authors investigated the effectiveness of a 5-week hope-based intervention designed to enhance hope, life satisfaction, self-worth, mental health and academic achievement in middle school students. The study includes a sample of 31 students from a community school, a matched comparison group of 31 students, and 2 secondary groups—guardians and teachers of the students’ intervention group. Students completed a questionnaire packet that included demographic information, the Portuguese versions of the Children’s Hope Scale, Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale, Mental Health and Self-Worth Scales. Academic achievement was obtained from school records. At baseline, groups are statistically similar on the variables of interest. At post-test the intervention group had enhanced hope, life satisfaction and self-worth. In the intervention group, benefits in hope, life satisfaction and self-worth were maintained at the 18-month follow up. Results suggest that a brief hope intervention can increase psychological strengths, and participants continue to benefit up to 1-year and 6-months later.

Keywords Academic achievement · Intervention · Mental-health · Middle-schoolers · Positive thinking variables

1 Introduction

In Snyder’s hope theory, hope has gone beyond wishful thinking to an understanding of how intentional thought leads to adaptive action. Snyder et al. (1991) characterized hope as a human strength manifested in capacities to: (a) clearly conceptualize goals (goals thinking), (b) develop the specific strategies to reach those goals (pathways thinking), and (c) initiate and sustain the motivation for using those strategies (agency thinking).

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