

1-30-2015

# Belief and an Act of Will: Hopeful Writing Theory for the Composition Course

Brian Fotinakes

*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

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BELIEF AND AN ACT OF WILL: HOPEFUL WRITING THEORY  
FOR THE COMPOSITION COURSE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Brian Fotinakes

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2014

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Brian Fotinakes

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

---

Claude Mark Hurlbert, D.A.  
Professor of English, Advisor

---

Gian S. Pagnucci, Ph.D.  
Distinguished University Professor

---

Gloria Park, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

---

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.  
Dean  
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Belief and an Act of Will: Hopeful Writing Theory for the Composition Course

Author: Brian Fotinakes

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Claude Mark Hurlbert

Dissertation Committee Member: Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci  
Dr. Gloria Park

This dissertation asks can writing be taught in such a way as to encourage hope? This dissertation encourages writing teachers to keep hope in mind as they interact with students, craft pedagogical approaches for teaching writing, and when designing writing programs. It rests on the belief that by making a hopeful pedagogy, writing teachers will, in turn, inspire a more hopeful future for society. Using narrative inquiry, the dissertation merges story telling with theoretical research from the fields of composition, TESOL, philosophy, and psychology in order to understand the role of hope in human life, what it means to write with hope, and how to support hopeful writing in composition courses. This dissertation proposes hopeful writing theory for the composition course.

Hope is a force that gives people the strength to negotiate their relationship with reality, or in other words, hope is the agentic force that motivates people to see the world as a place that they can affect rather than existing in a state of helplessness in which people find themselves unable to muster the power to change themselves and inspire positive, healthy change in others and in this world. Writing can be part of nurturing hope, and hopeful writing theory articulates how writing can be a hopeful activity. By composing, a person is capable of taking a dream and forming a clearer path towards what he or she hopes to achieve, create, and who he or she hopes to be someday. Writing can be a means to negotiate a person's relationship with the world as he or she learns to produce meaningful texts that help generate a hopeful perception of the social

and physical reality we both inhabit and create, and given the right circumstances, the composition class can encourage such hopeful writing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many teachers, students, family members, and friends who have helped me along the path that has led me to composing this dissertation, but I'd like to thank the following people in particular.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank Dr. Claude Mark Hurlbert for being a mentor to me. Serendipity was at work when I was assigned to Claude as his graduate student assistant. In so many ways we are very alike, and in Claude I've found somebody who inspires me to continue the great humanitarian work he has accomplished as a compositionist.

Thank you Dr. Gloria Park for pushing me towards writing a dissertation she knew would inspire not only my intellect but my emotions as well. The early writings that led to this dissertation began in a course on second language writing that I took with Gloria.

Thank you to Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci for laying the methodological foundation for writing a narrative dissertation. I have always loved telling stories, and it wasn't until I began to read Gian's work that I understood I could find ways to use narratives in academic writing.

Thank you Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Peck, my first and fourth grade teachers from Anna Borba Elementary School. You both nurtured the potential you saw within me at a young age, and in turn, I hope to do the same for my students.

Thank you to my sixth grade science teacher Mr. Walker from Lyle S. Briggs Middle School and my seventh grade science teacher Mr. Grannis from Templeton Middle School. Both of you made science come alive in a fun and real way for your students, and you both have inspired me to do the same in the writing classes that I teach.

I especially would like to thank my Advanced Placement Composition teacher Ms. Ronna Lee and my Junior Varsity baseball and football coach Gary Mctaggart from Templeton

High School. Both of you made me accountable for the many foolish things I did in my youth while always reminding me of the great things I was capable of accomplishing. Ms. Lee helped me see beauty in intelligence, and Coach Mac taught me to work hard and never give up. You both helped me learn to believe in myself. You are both excellent teachers.

I need to also thank several special professors who helped me gain confidence in my abilities as a writer and thinker—Dr. Kathryn Rummell, Dr. Carol MacCurdy, and Dr. Brenda Helmbrecht from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. These three women helped me understand what it means to be an academic and college professor, and all three cultivated in me the belief that I could achieve my doctorate.

Finally, I thank my family most of all. While there are many family members who have supported me, two in particular need to be mentioned. My uncle George Fotinakes and my aunt Dr. Joyce Kakkis took particular interest in my work and emotional well-being during my dissertation journey, and I doubt I would have finished if not for them.

I cannot think of myself without considering Mary and Nick, my sister and brother, who have been my best friends for all my life even though we've had some rocky moments between the three of us. Mary, from our relationship I have learned that change is possible and that no matter how bad a situation may become we can always find a better tomorrow, especially if we can experience a little laughter as we work through our troubles. You have taught me much about hope. And Nick, even though you are my little brother, I look up to you more than anybody else I know. You have always been more intelligent, talented, athletic, and simply a kinder person than I. You motivate me. You are a special person—remember that!

And most importantly, I thank my parents, Jim and Marcia. The two of you are the greatest teachers I have ever had in my life. You have supported me in every endeavor I have

undertaken. You have kept me in check when I needed it, pushed me when I needed to be pushed, and have been my greatest allies. I am merely the shadow of myself without the two of you. I love you both.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### A QUESTION OF HOPE

#### Introduction to the Dissertation

Sometimes I am meek. Sometimes I am small. And sometimes the world seems much too large. I think that what I do is unimportant, and I question if I can make any kind of impact by teaching writing. I feel as if I am a terrible teacher, and I worry that the entire enterprise of composition is futile. That one person like me cannot make a difference. I'm not a superstar scholar, nor am I stellar teacher. I feel hopeless sometimes.

But then something changes in me. Then I see the smaller picture. Sometimes the change comes from within me, from somewhere unknown for no explicable reason, and sometimes the change springs from the inspiration of another person—from a smile, a couple kind words, or a shared cup of coffee. I see a clearer vision of what I do.

I stand in a room with nearly twenty college students. They train their eyes upon me, though sometimes their eyes stray toward the window or a cellular phone hidden beneath a desk. But even when their sight wanders away from me, my voice sounds in their ears. Maybe they aren't always listening, but they are sitting in this room with me and with each other. I ask them to write. They write for me, they write for each other, and they write for themselves. I read their words. And even if they stop coming to class, I don't forget them or the words they write. Maybe I can't change the world, but I believe I can slightly affect my students' worlds through our time spent together in our classroom, just as they affect mine. And maybe together we can make a difference. Then I feel hopeful.

This dissertation asks can writing be taught in such a way as to encourage hope? In this dissertation, I intend to encourage writing teachers to keep hope in mind as they interact with

students, craft pedagogical approaches for teaching writing, and when designing writing programs. It is my belief that by making a hopeful pedagogy, writing teachers will, in turn, inspire a more hopeful future for society. It may sound naïve to have this belief, but I am following a long tradition of compositionists that also believe that teaching writing can make a better world. Michael Blitz and C. Mark Hurlbert state this very position in the opening of lines of *Letters for the Living: Teaching Writing in a Violent Age*: “We can’t imagine why anyone would choose teaching as a profession unless he or she had a notion that educating people is somehow involved in making better neighborhoods, better communities, a better world” (2). Didn’t many of us, I’d like to believe all of us, begin teaching out of love for other people and with the belief that this love would inspire the people in our classes to go into the world and make it a better place? I believe this. And in this dissertation, I work to encourage and understand what I believe is a fundamental piece of the foundation for a better life and world—hope.

Hope, I contend, is the purpose of education. Educators work for students, students work for their future, and hope is the motivating force to make a better tomorrow. Ernst Bloch defines hope as an active force that creates future possibilities: “The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them, cannot know nearly enough of what it is that makes them inwardly aimed, of what may be allied to them outwardly. The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong” (3). Hope inspires the infinite potential of humanity to work toward a better reality. My intent with this dissertation is to encourage hope in composition courses. I want to find how the composition class actively supports students in shaping their future through the writing of texts,

and how writing teachers look past the ills in education and society and celebrate the possibilities of a better tomorrow.

Hope is something that can be nurtured in groups of people supporting one another. Hope has been defined as a force toward a better life that manifests both in individuals and group collectives. Thomas Aquinas defines hope as the movement toward a positive future by means of the self or by the assistance of another person: “The object of hope is a future good, difficult but possible to obtain. Now a thing is possible to us in two ways: first, by ourselves, secondly, by means of others” (457). Education, which serves the purpose of helping students into a better future, should be particularly concerned with hope. As educators, we work for the future of our students. We should be people that can foster positive outcomes for our students while providing them with what they need to create a hopeful future for themselves. Educators should build hope with students.

Hope building represents the ability to change the world. Hope is possibility; hope is a perception of reality. Hope inspires an outlook on the world that posits reality as pure future potential that can be shaped through present human action. Bloch, in his three-volume work *The Principle of Hope*, describes hope as the determination toward that potentiality:

[The concept] of hope and its contents worthy of human beings, is an absolutely central one here. Indeed, what is designated by this concept lies in the horizon of the consciousness that is becoming adequate of any given thing, in the risen horizon that is rising even higher. Expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become: this is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but, concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole. (7)

Hope is an essential principle for humanity because it looks forward to the possibility of what could be and, in doing so, motivates people to act in the present reality in order to shape the future. Hope begins with the imagined dream and then moves to reshaping reality. Hope is a means of reconciling past failure and pain. Hope is a constant mechanism of change. And this change has infinite potential to create something better in future times.

In this dissertation, I am not making an argument for hopeful writing theory in the traditional sense of the concept of argument in academic discourse. I am not attempting to prove a particular pedagogy as an evil thing, nor am I trying to espouse one technique for teaching or understanding writing as necessarily better than another. We all know that our educational system has problems riddled throughout it. Budget cuts from state and federal government, opposing viewpoints on standardization, socioeconomic disparity, crumbling facilities, and the list can go on and on. I don't need to argue these problems. Rather, I want to move forward in a positive direction without tearing down another scholar's work in the form of argument construction. Mary Rose O'Reilley in *The Peaceable Classroom* describes academic arguments as possibly being a form of academic violence: "Argument can be (though it is not necessarily) a form of intellectual violence. We pile up evidence as the kids in my neighborhood used to pile up snowballs, each with a rock in the middle, on the rims of their winter forts. If the other side has more rocks, we concede" (12). It is not my goal to make hope into an intellectual missile designed to target and wipe out an opponent. Rather, I want to highlight the imperative need for all writing teachers to consider how to incorporate a pedagogy of hopeful writing theory into their teaching no matter the pedagogical or philosophical approach taken in their classrooms. I've written this dissertation so that my readers can share in hoping for better composition classes with me.

Like O'Reilley in *The Peaceable Classroom*, I'm working in this dissertation to seek out converts for hopeful writing theory that will find their own unique teaching practices inspired by hope: "I am less interested in winning points than I am in conversion. Conversion requires that the reader come inside the position, try it out, co-create, and in co-creating, assent to whatever captures the spirit" (12). In this dissertation, I want to highlight some of the most difficult moments in my young career as a teacher to illustrate how difficult but imperative it is to hold onto hope—to make hope a centerpiece of how we think about writing education even when we find ourselves faced with daunting obstacles, perceived failures, and our own prejudices. Then I intend to highlight moments when hope has prevailed and use these moments as inspiration for articulating a hopeful writing theory for the teaching of writing. My point in doing this is similar to that of O'Reilley's desire for *The Peaceable Classroom*; I'm asking my readers to join me in my stories and consider how hope has played a role in my work as a writing teacher. Then readers can reflect on their own stories and assess how hope might play a role in their classrooms. I'm aiming at creating hope together with my readers.

The structure of this dissertation is a collage of different modes of writing much like previous scholarship produced in the field of composition. O'Reilley describes *The Peaceable Classroom* as an assortment of literary elements working together: "It's a collection of stories, tropes, and images that nudge up against each other and try to reproduce the 'analysis' as an experience, an experience I hope the reader will share the living of" (xvii). This dissertation follows suit by crafting chapters that incorporate signposts that meta-narrate the structure of each chapter to guide the reader, narrative accounts of my experiences that exemplify moments of hope and hopelessness, and theoretical frames that function like academic essays seeking to

understand how the stories I share can help better understand how hope and hopelessness occur in a composition classroom.

This structure, which will be further discussed in Chapter Three, is theorized by Gian Pagnucci in *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making* when he describes his book format as consisting of several literary styles: “Taken together, the three elements of each section—story, poem, and essay—seek to unpack a variety of vital issues necessary for pursuing a narrative life. I have chosen to work in multiple genres, as well, to add weight to the argument that essayistic literacy is not the exclusive means by which one can create knowledge in the world” (2). Like Pagnucci, I believe making knowledge can take many forms, so I’ve chosen to follow the examples of other composition scholars who have used personal stories to better understand literacy in educational settings. Many compositionists have merged stories and academic theorizing through essayistic writing in their work. For example, Victor Villanueva, Jr. in *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color* describes his book as using a narrative style merged with academic theory: “I can tell of my journey, and I can tell of the theories, some mine, some others’, that help to explain such journeys. The theories are important, can provide the bases for classroom practices, can suggest why some practices might work better than others, how some practices might work counter to what’s intended” (xvi). Like Villanueva, I intend to tell of my journey as a young teacher that has struggled to remain hopeful, and how my life experiences, and the life experiences of my students, have intertwined to work for and against hope. I then seek to make better sense of this journey by using theoretical work of other scholars from across several disciplines to understand how a hopeful theory of teaching composition may appear in a classroom.

These stories are meant to present complex teaching situations. In this dissertation, I am asking how do we find hope in such situations, how do we use hope theory to make sense of particularly difficult teaching moments, and how does hope theory and composition theory inform composition pedagogy? Essentially, I am seeking to understand how I find hope in circumstances with my students when we may feel hopeless, and I want to articulate a hopeful writing theory. Robert Coles describes storied research as a way to complicate life's struggles rather than narrowing a problem to solve particularly small pieces of an issue: "The whole point of stories is not 'solutions' or 'resolutions' but a broadening and even a heightening of our struggles" (129). In failures I sometimes have the tendency to beat myself up, just as in my successes I feel compelled to aggrandize my accomplishments, but in this dissertation I work past both these extreme reactions to find the subtle nuances that texture my teaching life in anticipation of using hope theory to better prepare myself for the future challenges I will face as I grow as a writing teacher, and I hope in doing this my readers will be able to learn as they consider their own experiences in relation to my narratives and analysis.

Story telling acts as a way to capture a viewpoint on a life situation and reveal multiple layers of interpretations, allowing readers to see into the narratives in ways even I, the narrator, may not have noticed. And also for the readers, participating in my narrative recollection will hopefully inspire them to recollect on past situations where they found themselves with similar feelings and experiences so that they can learn along with me. David Schaafsma, Pagnucci, Robert M. Wallace, and Patricia Lambert Stock discuss how narratives provide the opportunity to open an exchange of ideas across a whole discipline of study: "Narrative inquiry projects offer for communal examination in the field whole, organic, dynamic stories of teaching and learning, drawing from a range of contextual considerations, including events, persons, emotions,

histories” (302). Narratives told well bring literary elements that carry contextual and personal variety, and with these stories comes themes, theories, research, and concepts from our field of composition that can be examined through the events in the narrative, and likewise the events told in narratives can be examined as scholarship. All the while the readers of narrative scholarship involve themselves in the interpretation and examination of the stories and theories while also remembering their own experiences that come to mind that may be similar or different from that which is described in the narrative research project. This is how a narrative research project may invite readers to participate in making meaning as they read and interpret the text.

This narrative dissertation will be broken into two sections. The first section, Chapters One, Two, and Three, will establish the question of hope, seek to understand what is hope through a literature review, and set the narrative methodology for understanding hope in the composition classroom. Each of these chapters opens with brief narratives of my perceived failures as a writing teacher who looks for hope building as an objective in my classes. Then the second section of the dissertation breaks this form. Chapter Four will be an extended narrative that depicts a poignant moment when I struggled to have hope when working with a hopeful student who was striving to escape a troubled past, and Chapter Five will analyze this narrative to better bring hope theory in accord with teaching writing by using my story of working with a bilingual student who had a background that challenged my personal biases and beliefs as a means for analyzing the hopeful teaching of writing. In all the narratives included in this dissertation, the names of students, schools, and programs have been changed.

Specifically, Chapter One begins by presenting the problem of hopelessness and the importance of hope in the lives of teachers and students. Chapter Two seeks to understand hope by drawing from the disciplines of philosophy and psychology that have defined and theorized

how hope manifests in the individual and in a group collective, and then in Chapter Two I place hope theory alongside composition theory to formulate an understanding of how composition serves as an academic discipline working for the hopeful future of our students. Chapter Three describes narrative as an appropriate methodology for understanding hope by drawing the reader into hopeless and hopeful situations when working with students. Section Two will then focus on narrating a hopeful teaching relationship between a student and myself and analyze the narrative for ways in which composition can be taught in a hopeful way. Chapter Four presents an extended narrative. Unlike the short narratives in Chapters One, Two, and Three, this much lengthier narrative will depict the shifting quality of hope, how past memories may influence the decisions I make as a teacher, and how working to understand a student's hopes can lead to meaningful writing. Finally, Chapter Five will put this narrative into discussion with theories of hope and composition to suggest possible ways teachers of writing may implement pedagogical practices that nurture the hopes of students and teachers. This final narrative and analysis testifies that hope is possible in the composition classroom and examines how hopeful writing may be achieved.

### Introduction to Chapter One

In this first chapter, I present the type of problems a person may face when using writing as a method for encouraging hope. I first present a narrative of my life before officially becoming a teacher of writing. I use this narrative to illustrate how my work with children held the seeds of fostering hope through writing even before I became a compositionist and the difficulty of maintaining hope when faced with pain and hatred. After this narrative, I move into an analysis of the story that uses composition theory and research to draw attention to the question at hand—Can writing be taught in such a way as to encourage hope? I want to teach

writing in such a way as to nurture hope in the composition classroom, yet it is very easy to lose sight of this goal and fall into a state of hopelessness when challenged by pain and prejudice.

### Brian the Great I Am Not

The Youth Center was a good place for the children that went there after school and in the summer.

Len was an eccentric man who I remembered for his antique car collection. On weekends, I'd sometimes see him driving one of the vehicles on our small town Main Street. My favorite was his Ford Model T with glossy green and black paint. The shining chrome Ford emblem elegantly scrolled upward on the black radiator. Len would drive the car up and down Main Street several times with his left arm hanging out the square window, waving to every child he saw. Sometimes he would pull into the deli parking lot or next to the downtown park. The car would sputter into a diagonal parking spot. Pu pu pu pu pu pu, the pistons would stammer with that distinct Model T engine sound. Len would get out and let any person, young or old, sit in the car, work the seemingly odd controls, and examine the polished engine. Len was especially proud of the motors in each of his cars; he spent years painting, polishing, and assembling the parts into perfect working order. Every once in a while, Len would take a child on a ride down Main Street in one of his cars, and it was hard to tell who was more happy—the excited and smiling child in the passenger seat or Len beaming beside as he sat behind the steering wheel.

When Len died, he left a large gift of money for the building of a facility and the implementation of a program to serve children in the community. The sum paid for a nice new building that was painted light blue with purple eaves. The front of the structure had giant windows to let in lots of light and green bushes bordered the sides. Upon entering the front of the

building through double glass doors, a person would find themselves in an interior with colors that matched the exterior: light blue walls with purple painted borders and the same color scheme on a checkerboard tiled floor. Once through the security entry, a person would emerge to a large room with couches, pool tables, ping pong tables, and even a television hanging from the ceiling for an occasional children's movie. Several other rooms for games, arts and crafts, and computers were inside the facility, and behind the building was a backyard with a basketball court, benches, and a playground. Fittingly, the Youth Center faced Main Street where Len once loved to drive his Model T.

The city's Community Services District was in charge of the Youth Center, and they did the best they could and always worked to maintain a safe and positive environment for the children. The CSD had a lot of responsibilities. They handled fire protection, water and sewer services, refuse collection and disposal services, street lighting, parks and recreation, and regional storm water drainage facilities. They did nearly everything in our small town, but the upper management still was able to budget the time and money to see Len's dream come true. They found the money to get art supplies, sporting equipment, books, games, and they even sent the counselors that worked at the Youth Center to conferences in order to learn how to work with children better. The upper management and their office did a good job providing for these kids.

I loved working at the Youth Center. It was a simple economic exchange from my perspective. I got money to play with kids. What's to complain about that? It wasn't a lot of money, but it was enough for me. And the hours worked with my college class schedule really well. During the school year, I could go to classes all morning and then get some hours of work in the afternoon. And in the summer I became a full-time employee. It was a great job. I loved the kids and the CSD. I worked there my entire time as a university undergraduate and one year

into my master's degree. I thought working with kids was fun and challenging. For example, take this one kid, Jason.

I was sitting in the main playroom on a rug and enjoying a good game of storytelling with several children one day. "Now, I will tell the story of Hector!" proclaimed Christina, a young, tanned girl with long brown pigtails and wearing pink shorts with a white tank top. Her little black sandals neatly sat beside her.

"Hector," I said. "That sounds like a great Greek warrior from ancient days."

"Oh, he was a great warrior," replied Christina in a deep, mock-epic voice. "He was known throughout the land as the champion of small kittens. He would protect them from big, bully dogs and feed the little kittens delicious saucers of milk. Mmmmmm!" She flicked her tongue in and out of her mouth like a cat lapping up liquid. The children and I laughed.

"Man, Hector sounds awesome," I encouraged. "Don't you all want to hear about one of Hector's great adventures?" I asked the kids sitting in the circle. They shook their heads up and down. Christina let out a little giggle.

She began her tale. "One sunny day, Hector was walking through a forest full of giant trees. As he walked, he came upon a cave. When he got close to the opening, he smelled the delicious scent of fresh baked chocolate chip cookies."

As I listened, just out of the corner of my eye, I saw six year old Jason creeping towards the security door. Careful, calculated steps. Slowly. One after another, and then another, and then another. I shifted my attention away from the story and looked right at Jason, who, upon seeing my head turn, made a passionate charge straight for the door.

"Don't do it, Jason!" I futilely screamed because he had already gotten through the security door that separated the kids from the entryway where the public could access the main

office. I heard the shouts of several other counselors from behind the office counter but they were powerless to stop him from back there.

“Jason!”

“No!”

“Stop!”

I jumped to my feet and took off at top speed. By the time I busted through the security door, Jason was out the main entrance and making his way across the north bound lane of Main Street. Luckily there was no traffic in either direction. I caught up to him, scooped the kid into my arms, planted my right foot firmly against the asphalt, and made the hard cut back to the sidewalk.

“Dang it, Jason!”

He laughed incessantly in the high pitch of a young child.

That was Jason. There seemed to be no reason to motivate the escape artist other than Jason enjoyed the challenge of beating the staff and getting out those front doors to feel freedom. My solution to his breakouts was to take him deep into the Youth Center building, far away from doors that led to the outside world. Through the main room, past the arts and craft room, down into the game room, like making our way into the depths of a ship, hatch after hatch.

The manager had a different solution. When she punished Jason for running into the street, she didn't take him back to the game room to engage him in a distracting round of Candy Land like I did. She simply pulled her rolling office chair away from her desk, instructed Jason to “Get under,” and then pulled her chair back to the desk to use her legs to imprison him.

“I don't think you should lock him up with your legs like that,” I'd say to her.

“Why does it matter? He’s going to end up locked in jail one day anyway,” she’d quip back at me.

Three years went by and Jason had stopped his escape attempts, but it was as if he traded one bad habit for several more. He was a fourth grader now and tall for his age. Thin and lanky. He liked to speak in a high-pitched voice that whined and scraped against your ears, almost like that annoying sound chalk will make if you pull it across a blackboard at a slightly awkward angle. With that voice, he especially enjoyed talking about bodily functions. It was a topic he reveled in much more than the common elementary school child and with a vulgarity that could make even me nauseous. And he had a penchant for stripping naked. Seriously, this kid got naked everywhere. Butt naked. When we took the kids to the park, or when we went swimming at the public pool, or when we picked tomatoes from our plot in the public garden, clothes would come off. The kid must have had an allergy to clothes or something. Jason quickly annoyed almost every counselor at the Youth Center. But I really liked him. I just did.

The Youth Center staff would walk several blocks to the elementary school in order to pick up the children after school ended for the day. We’d meet the kids on a set of benches near the kindergarten classrooms. There the children would group around us as we checked their names on a clipboard, then we’d line them up and shuffle out of the schoolyard and into the community with the counselors acting like cowboys and cowgirls herding around the children to keep them together and moving.

On one such occasion, we were nearly ready to leave, and I stood at the front of the line preparing to lead the drive downtown. Chelsea approached me looking at her clipboard and said, “Jason’s not here. What should we do? Wait?”

“No,” I answered as I glanced at my watch. “We’re already behind schedule.”

“If he shows up here later the secretaries will call us and somebody’s walking back,”  
Chelsea reminded me.

“I’ll walk back and get him.” Just as I finished saying this, I turned forward and saw in the distance a tall kid wearing all red and dragging a giant green book bag. He was skipping from side to side and swinging his free arm wildly in the air. And sure enough, across the schoolyard shrieked the shrill voice: “Wait! Wait for me! It’s Jason! It’s me!”

He ran towards us, and as he got closer I began to laugh hysterically. The kid was in a giant pair of red feetie pajamas. The technical term for this type of garment is a blanket sleeper. It consists of a loose fitting, one-piece garment with long sleeves and legs, booties attached to the bottom of the legs, and a long zipper that runs from the collar, through the middle, and down one leg to where it ends at the ankle. Typically, toddlers are the primary wearers of the blanket sleeper, so to see this four foot five inch tall fourth grader bounding up to me in his giant pair of feeties absolutely cracked me up.

“What are you wearing?” I asked through my laughter.

“FEETY PAJAMAS!” Jason answered in an inappropriately loud voice.

“Did you wear those to school?” I asked.

“Nope. I just changed into them in the baaaaathhhhhhrooooooom.” He sang the last word of the sentence.

“Does your mom know you have those here?” I attempted to control my chuckling.

“Nope. I snuck them in my backpack this morning.”

“Well stick your shoes on. We need to go.”

“Nope. Don’t want to.”

I stopped laughing. “Put them on.”

“Nope.”

“Come on, man. Think about it. The bottoms of those feeties aren’t made to be walking on cement and blacktop. They’re going to get wrecked.”

He stared at me for a minute. I was confident reason was working. He dropped to the ground, unzipped his big bag, and pulled out some sneakers. “On! Ready!” exclaimed Jason once he finished tying his shoes.

Jason was pretty awesome, at least in my opinion.

One day, I had just finished a vigorous game of soccer in the Center’s backyard with a large group of kids. When I came in through the backdoor and into the craft room, I saw Jason sitting at one of the half-circle art tables with his left hand pressed firmly against his forehead while the right hand violently scribbled across a sheet of paper. I peered over his shoulder. “What ya doing?” I knew instantly when I saw line after line that read, *I will not write bad things at the Youth Center ever again*. My face felt like it was flushing. I had nearly eradicated the use of reading, writing, and other academic activities as a tool for punishment from the repertoire of the counselors. As the assistant manager of the Youth Center, I flexed my authority and stopped the use of copying the dictionary when a child swore. I forbid counselors to use sheets of arithmetic problems as a way to occupy children that had been throwing toys across a room. Academics of any kind can’t be made a weapon of punishment or oppression, I contended.

“Errrrrr,” came from Jason in a tone much lower than normal for him. I knew this meant anger festering. “She’s making me!”

I knew exactly who “she” was. I went into the office. “What did Jason do?”

The manager sifted through some papers and produced a page with large red letters scrawled across it. She handed it to me and I read, *SEXY LADIES*. The capitol letters definitely

emphasized the message behind the words. I fought the smile that wanted to form on my face.

“I’ll take care of him,” I said. I grabbed a blank sheet of paper from the desk and walked back to the craft room. The manager followed.

“You’re not just going to let him go play, are you?”

Our relationship was contentious at best since we had drastically different opinions on childcare and managing the staff. Because I had worked there longer, and because my father was the local high school principal which brought him into contact with the CSD administration often, and simply because I think the higher-ups at the CSD liked me, I felt I could get away with directly challenging the manager from time to time.

“No, I got it!” I snapped back at her. “I’ll keep him writing.” She left us.

I sat down next to Jason and pushed away the paper with row after row of identical sentences that resembled row after row of prison cell bars. The manager had once used her legs to cage Jason; now she used sentences. Jason growled, “Emmmm—I have to finish that or I’ll get in more trouble!”

“Forget that,” I said. “You’re doing something else with me.”

“What?” Frustration was still in his voice.

“More writing.”

“Ehhhh—more writing! I hate writing!” he snarled through his clenched teeth.

“Hear me out, man. Don’t you want to make cartoons when you’re older?”

“Yes!” Anger was still in his voice.

“Well how do you think those cartoons start? People have to write the stories first, and then they draw them.” I really had no idea how cartoons were developed but that seemed logical to me.

He didn't respond right away. He took a moment. "Okay...so what does that mean?"

"Let's start like this." I picked up a pencil and set the blank sheet of paper in front of myself. "Pick up your pencil. I'll write the first sentence of a story, and then you write the second sentence, and then I'll write the next, and then you write another. And we'll keep trading back and forth until we write a whole story together."

He said nothing. I wrote on the paper. *There once was a kind prince who lived a long time ago and his name was Jasonian Francisco Smithsonian the 29<sup>th</sup> of the kingdom called Allendorf.* I pushed the paper in front of Jason. He looked at it for ten or so seconds. He glanced at me then back to the paper. He wrote, *Jasonian had a pet dragon.* He dropped his pencil. I pulled the paper back and I wrote, *The dragon was blue with giant wings, and Jasonian would fly on the dragon's back high over the village and laugh with glee.* This time Jason pulled the paper back to himself and quickly began to write. *Jasonian's dragon was named Brian the Great and he helped Jasonian whenever he was in trouble and together they would drop presents to all the kids in the village like they were Santa Claws.* I smiled at his misspelling of Claus but didn't have the slightest urge to correct it.

We passed the paper back and forth until the page was filled with a story about how an evil gorilla on a red dragon tried to steal the gifts from Jasonian, but with the help of Brian the Great, Jasonian fought the gorilla and banished it from the land. Then all the village children were happy as Jasonian and Brian the Great delivered their gifts. When we finished writing the story, I retrieved another blank sheet of paper. "Here. Want to be the illustrator and draw the pictures for our story?"

Jason worked diligently. Every so often, he would stop drawing to consult our story's text. He worked quietly for nearly an hour until his mother arrived to pick him up. As he was

leaving, he handed me the papers with our story and his drawings. Jason had divided the paper into fourths and drawn four scenes depicting the adventure of Jasonian and Brian the Great. “Do you want it?” he asked.

“I thought you’d want to keep it,” I replied.

“Can we hang it on the bulletin board in the front?”

“Sure.” We pinned our story, text and illustrations, on the board in the entryway of the Youth Center next to the monthly calendar and announcements for Youth Soccer registration. After Jason left, I printed a sign from the computer and hung it over the two pieces of paper. It read:

*Story Written by Jason and Brian.*

*Artwork by Jason.*

But it wasn’t always like that between Jason and me. There was something in Jason I could never understand. Something that no amount of laughter ever seemed to reach.

One sunny day the kids were in the backyard having snack. Several sixth grade girls sat at a picnic table talking and giggling as they ate their wedges of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. They occasionally drank from small, pink cartons of low-fat milk. A large Live Oak with twisting dark limbs that contorted at odd angles situated its deep green clumps of leaves between the shining bright sun and the children as they ate their snacks.

I watched as Jason calmly walked behind the girl sitting in the center of the bench. Without any provocation, his face contorted into a grimace that looked like angst incarnate. He reared back his right arm and mightily threw his carton of milk into the back of the girl’s head. The blow sent her head forward with milk streaming from her black strands of hair. Jason’s right arm flailed back again and this time came forward with his fist made solid and struck her

shoulder. She cowered forward more. She was unable to escape from the bench with her two stunned friends pinning her on both sides. By the time I reached Jason, his arm was coming forward to land another blow. I caught his wrist and froze the fist in the air. With my left hand I grabbed him by the waist and dragged him towards the building. He flailed his free arm wildly as I gripped his other arm and waist with all my strength. He dragged and kicked. He screamed, “Let me go!” As we entered the backdoor, I could see Chelsea going towards the victimized girl, presumably to check her condition. I wrestled Jason into the main office and pushed him into a plastic blue chair. My heart was beating hard. My limbs felt like electricity.

“Sit! Don’t even think about getting out of that chair! Why did you do that?” I loudly screamed every sentence.

He had an absolute blank stare. He folded his arms across his chest.

“What’s wrong with you? She did nothing to you!”

A vacant face.

I began to pace back and forth in front of Jason who remained sitting in the little blue plastic chair. Several steps left, then several right, and then repeat. Even though I only stood little more than a foot taller than Jason, I loomed over him, blocking him from getting out of the chair. “What’s your problem? Why did you do that?” I screamed again.

Still expressionless.

I kept raining down my verbal assault, just as Jason had kept pouring his fists into the girl’s back a couple minutes before. “What’s wrong with you?”

Nothing.

“Answer me! Why did you do that?”



In this section, I use composition theory and educational theory to show how the act of teaching writing can be much more than simply instructing a person how to use a linguistic system of language in written form. Instead, encouraging writing can influence the lives of the writer and teacher and be an act of creating hope for a better future. I do this by analyzing how my interaction with Jason in the previous section illustrates how encouraging writing transcends linguistic features and works as a means of controlling Jason's situation as Jason positions characters from his life in his story. Simultaneously, this story also testifies to the manner in which other factors block my use of writing instruction as a hopeful enterprise because of my anger and frustration with Jason due to his violent behavior.

As briefly discussed in the opening of this chapter, narratives have the ability to reveal the complicated tangle of elements involved in the events of the world. The story of Jason and me illustrates how we can both be funny and angry, mischievous and creative, thoughtful and petty. Most importantly for me, as a person who works hard for the growth of the people with which I work, this story reminds me that I am a human being capable of being kind and also losing myself in anger. This is similar to the reflection of Robert Kohl in *36 Children*:

I've said many stupid, unkind things in my classroom, hit children in anger, and insulted them maliciously when they threatened me too much. On the other hand, I've also said some deeply affecting things, moved children to tears by unexpected kindnesses, and made them happy with praise that flowed unashamedly. I've wanted to be consistent and have become more consistent. That seems the most that is possible, a slow movement toward consistency tempered by honesty. The teacher has to live with his own mistakes, as his pupils have to suffer them. Therefore, the teacher must learn to perceive them as

mistakes and find direct or indirect ways to acknowledge his awareness of them and of his fallibility to his pupils. (14)

Reading accounts such as Kohl's helps bolster my fortitude. It adds voice to the truth I find in my story—that educators are people. People who are capable of doing wonderful things and people who do awful things as well. And Kohl's work encourages me to pursue an honest understanding of my mistakes and to be more aware of them as I move into the future.

So in this story, I committed both good acts and poor judgment. I have something I can find pride in having done, and I have a disappointment I can examine in order to change my actions and attitudes in future situations when I am angered. I'm happy that through writing together Jason and I produced a text that engaged him in a meaningful literacy act. We wrote, he drew, and we displayed our work. This type of writing activity is what Dan Kirby and Tom Liner call for in *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing*: "Building confidence is your first job....To a large degree, our first job with most our students is to teach them that they don't have to be afraid of writing—a task not really as difficult as it may first appear. For one thing, a little success goes a long way" (32). In our story of writing together, I encouraged Jason to use his interest in cartoons to help him invest in his writing. This, in addition to pinning the work to the bulletin board, I believe helped Jason build confidence in his abilities and self worth. Writing transitioned from being an activity that represented oppressive control that Jason hated and became something that allowed him to express his talents and ideas.

But I also feel bad that I failed to find a way to reach Jason after he hit the young girl during our snack break. Obviously Jason could not be permitted to cause this kind of violence on another child, but I wish I could have taught him through this experience by channeling his thoughts to reflect on the pain and fear he caused in another child rather than only punishing him.

In *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter*, Vivian Gussin Paley writes, “It was not enough to view misbehavior as an error in judgment. The question was: How could these errors be used as legitimate learning experiences? I wanted to exchange negative images for positive active roles whenever possible” (91). Paley’s words reflect why I feel as if I failed in my situation with Jason at the end of the narrative. I hope to make every experience into something, anything better. Even if the experience is horrible, maybe some good can come from it. When Jason wrote “SEXY LADIES,” we turned writing in a positive direction. But when he struck the girl, I only became angry. In some ways I wanted to hurt Jason back, so I restricted his movement and his language. I deprived him of writing. I lost hope in this moment. This story of Jason and I working together addresses both how writing situations can be hopeful and hopeless.

Hope and hopelessness have been a focus in education for some time. Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, views hopefulness as a means of change and transformation. According to Freire, the ability to change the future in a better direction from present circumstances is paramount in an educational system that strives to move students into critically examining society instead of simply accepting the status quo:

While I certainly cannot ignore hopelessness as a concrete entity, nor turn a blind eye to the historical, economic, and social reasons that explain that hopelessness—I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings, and become a distortion of that ontological need. When it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes us, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to

muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world. (8)

The power of education is the empowerment of the student to have the means of changing society. For Freire, hope is a necessity; hope is the dream for tomorrow. Without a dream for the future, the future may be no different than yesterday. Change for the better comes from hope. Hopelessness, on the other hand, represents complacency. It accepts that things will not change and stagnates future potentiality.

To work to create a hopeful vision into a reality, whether it be for a Youth Center or a writing class in a college, requires risk, art, and eccentricities; it requires re-visioning how programs already function and letting go of our egos in the attempt to find what is right in a particular moment and context. It is akin to what Robert Inchausti calls the sublime pedagogy in *Spitwad Sutras: Classroom Teaching as Sublime Vocation*:

There are many ways to teach successfully, but there is only one pedagogy of the sublime. This prophetic art is born of poetry, excess, exaggeration, and risk. It is not so much a means of instruction as it is a call to self-transcendence, an act of liberation, a pure expenditure of energy in an excess of shame. And one can only learn how to do it the same way Kafka learned how to write—out of a marriage of desperation and infinite longing. (151)

When I decided to challenge the manager's authority, I began to work with hope, or what Inchausti might call the sublime. I risked defying the ruling power not for the sake of challenging authority in order to supplant my control over the manager's authority, but rather because a feeling of profound anger for what I continually saw happening to Jason compelled me to act. I was desperate to give an alternative for the way the manager treated Jason and longed for a way

to help Jason feel nurtured and safe at the Youth Center. This moment represented something more than simply an instance of disciplinary action toward a misbehaving child. Instead, it became the chance for Jason and I to create a change—an admittedly small change—but a single example for Jason to write himself how he wanted the world to view him. I wanted a way to help the child grow as a person, and I didn't believe the form of punishment he was receiving would help his growth. I used my imagination to revise what a disciplinary interaction could be with a child. I had no controlling method of what I would do with Jason; I simply followed my intuition. Without consciously realizing what we were doing together, Jason and I created a sublime moment together, similar to that described by Inchausti. I saw something wrong, so I reacted. And because Jason was open to revising our reality together, we created a hopeful story.

Inchausti describes the pedagogy of the sublime as a concept closer to that of a visceral experience in the moment rather than any specific educational technique. Instead of pedagogies that “seek to pass on skills, efficiency, and social power,” the sublime pedagogy is “powered by metaphor, irony, and a profound skepticism towards the ways of the world” (Inchausti 151). A sublime pedagogy dismisses the utilitarian view of knowledge transfer and seeks to inspire a meaningful experience that awakens a part of the human spirit that education will sometimes neglect. It is tapping into the human essence. It is more than grammar, handwriting, and thesis statements. It is more than socializing students into conformity and humdrum. It is finding the wellspring of creativity and potential and hope. It is making the spirit flourish. In Jason's circumstance, composing the phrase “SEXY LADIES,” practically speaking, should probably not be encouraged in that setting. The last thing I want is for a six year old to read such language then go home and repeat these words. Child caregivers have an obligation for the physical safety and emotional innocence of the children. So for his transgression, Jason might be punished. He

could copy sentences. Perhaps he could be placed on a chair in a corner for timeout. Maybe he could be required to dust the computers to perform a sort of community service for this transgression. He could receive a punishment that reinforces the social power structure that positions Jason as a bad kid that must be made to repent for his inappropriate behavior, and writing was the oppression technique used to reinforce his status as wrongdoer and the manager's position as an authority figure. I have done many of these punishment tactics with children—timeouts, service, etc.—but in this moment it didn't feel right. Something guttural grated against my senses and I felt myself flushing with excitement. When I began to write with Jason, my only conscious intent was to distract him, but there was a side effect more profound. We challenged the social structure and used a figurative scenario to rewrite the social system we found ourselves forced to grapple against. Together, we found a way that afternoon for Jason to transcend his role of problem child—to use his creativity and talents to write and illustrate a potential self that was different from how many other people perceived Jason. In his story, Jason no longer corrupted the other children. Now he made them smile.

Yet this narrative I share about Jason proves that I am no hero. I am no mythical figure recreating reality. I'm no radical revolutionary of the childcare world who redefined an institution. Rather, I'm a flawed individual who makes mistakes interacting with children just like the manager—the person I opposed. By the end of the story, I withheld writing from Jason and was using it as a means of punishment; I had fought to make educational activities meaningful engagement and was now withholding it. Using writing and the teaching of writing as a vehicle for hope is not simple. And as Parker J. Palmer writes in *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, I must engage with these stories to understand how to better use writing instruction as a generator of hope: “When you love your

work that much—and many teachers do—the only way to get out of trouble is to go deeper in. We must enter, not evade, the tangles of teaching so we can understand them better and negotiate them with more grace, not only to guard our own spirits but also to serve our students well” (2). I want to explore the dilemmas in the pursuit of hope. How do I balance the rules, obligations, and responsibilities of a context such as a classroom with the desire to nurture the hopes of students? I want to understand how to make sense of my actions when I have encouraged hopeful writing and when I have discouraged young writers. My story with Jason is an example of the tangles we can encounter when we work toward hopeful ways to teach writing.

### Seeing Brilliance and Possibility

In this section, I describe the importance of working toward a hopeful theory within composition studies. Even though it may be difficult to define and practice, I believe a hopeful pedagogy for teaching writing is of supreme importance because hope is what compels humanity to act in pursuit of the better good—for the individual and society. Hope is what makes lives better. And after all, isn't it the lives of our students and the lives of educators that create the beating heart of education? Blitz and Hurlbert certainly think so when they write, “Everything counts. We aren't going to pretend our lives can be withheld in brackets any more than our students can. What is at stake in teaching is the people in the room. The composing of the works. The living that becomes the works. Together. Compositions aren't merely warm-up exercises for the living. Writing and living and teaching are not separable” (2). These lines by Blitz and Hurlbert support the notion that the work of composition is inextricably the work of living life. It is writing. We write what we have lived, and we can also write what will come—a hopeful future. This is my hopeful vision of my life as a compositionist who will work toward a career devoted to students. Blitz and Hurlbert write that composition can be understood in wide and

creative terms: “One reason we love working in composition is that we have learned—or been taught—to understand the term ‘composition’ as broadly and imaginatively as possible.

Composing is a living process, and it is the living qualities of composition that we value most—the lives of the composers” (15). I imagine composition to be a hopeful enterprise that inspires hope in students and educators. This is the living quality I see in our work. I believe in hope as the force that gives life momentum to endure hardship and see a better tomorrow, and hope can be part of the life in student writing.

Yet there does exist pain, and hurt, and failure—the past moments when our students and ourselves have been convinced that we are hopeless. But I believe we can counter these forces in our classrooms. The idea that students and educators carry the baggage of the past into our classrooms with the hope that education can offer a better future for society runs throughout the work of Blitz and Hurlbert:

We need a vision of what is possible, and we must also face what is before us in our everyday line of sight. Our students bring incredibly complicated lives to our classrooms. So do teachers. Students bring their trials and successes, their desperation, their fatigue, their boredom, their excitement, their expectations for change in the way things are. And so do teachers. Our students offer us, at every turn, a resiliency in a culture that may not, for them, offer much hope of a vision beyond television or state-sponsored lotteries. And we offer—or our role as educators promises—alternatives. Or do we? Where can we begin? (22)

I think we begin with hope. We begin by working with our students to show them they can write and write well. We help them see that there is hope for being a good writer despite what they may have been taught in the past or how bleak the future may appear and that with writing they

can do great things. We can will ourselves to focus on the success and the potential as a means to work through the failures. Then, hopefully, our students will venture into the world outside our classroom walls with this hope in their hearts, ready to broaden the hopes of the people they encounter and the institutions and companies where they may one day work and influence the world.

It is much too easy to succumb to despair and then give up the pursuit of providing meaningful education. And who can blame the teachers and administrators who fall into a state of complacency, conducting education without igniting the soul and passion that inspires students to reach for goals they may have imagined too difficult to achieve. As Americans, we like to believe in the myth that no matter our race, economic status, regional location, ethnic heritage, we all have equal opportunities to learn and thrive. Jonathon Kozol describes this educational belief in equality as just this—a myth for many American citizens and immigrants: “According to our textbook rhetoric, Americans abhor the notion of a social order in which economic privilege and political power are determined by heredity class. Officially, we have a more enlightened goal in sight: namely, a society in which a family’s wealth has no relation to the probability of future educational attainment and the wealth and station it affords” (207). Yet I suspect many of us in education see with our eyes and feel with our hearts that this myth does not accurately reflect reality in our American educational system. Those of us teaching in many of our grade schools, our community colleges, and even in our state universities have to see the inequities every day on our campuses. In our schools we see facilities crumbling, class sizes increasing, teachers receiving pink slips, students who are angry, apathetic, and timid from a history of dealing with the ills that can be found in this world. And how do we respond? What do

we do when facing these circumstances? What do we say to the underprepared and culturally diverse students for whom the system has not functioned?

It would be easiest to respond in the same way that the manager treated Jason when he misbehaved. As writing teachers, we can answer with the metaphorical rote copying of sentence, after same sentence, after same sentence, after same sentence, over, and over, and over again. We drill out of them their errors and diversity, and we drill into them conformity and standardization. We say things like, “Write an introduction paragraph following this formula. Of course all essays have a thesis statement. Conclusions should only look like this.” We teach them to accept their station in life. Mina P. Shaughnessy reported of this type of response to basic writers in *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* when she describes past ways of dealing with underprepared and diverse students as focusing on correcting their mistakes and differences with standardization (2-9). The mistakes and disparities seem so large in our schools and in our society that we respond with standardization. We kill the life of language, and we kill the life in writing. We end up viewing our students and ourselves as automatons, passing on basic skills and losing sight of the beauty, creativity, and intelligence inherent in the human spirit. We kill hope.

Educators must look at the people in their classrooms and see the infinite potential of human creativity, resilience, and intelligence sitting at the desks and tables. Educators must believe in their hearts that each student has a unique intelligence and talent, and even if this intelligence and talent has been shadowed by societal, cultural, and political oppression, it can surface through nurturing guidance. I believe, as Peter Elbow believes in “*Illiteracy at Oxford and Harvard: Reflections on the Inability to Write*,” that all people are capable of brilliance despite the present circumstance that may cause somebody to perceive that he/she is weak,

stupid, or hopeless: “I think I see brilliance getting clouded over when someone is hurt or anxious—and sometimes reemerging when the fear or threat goes away” (13). I wanted to believe Jason’s destiny was not fixed. I saw in Jason creativity that could be encouraged in a positive manner. Although Jason appeared to be a child on the path of trouble—he liked to break rules, antagonize his peers, and cause violence—I believed we could move past his angst and we could find something he could do well. And in doing this, I also believed he could find a way to be a positive influence on his peers and the people he encountered in life, despite the judgment of people like the manager. I looked for the brilliance in Jason instead of focusing on his flaws just as Elbow urges educators to do: “I think I see students being smarter, thinking more deeply, and handling words better when teachers look for their brilliance, treat them as smart, and support them in dealing with what is trying to cloud them over” (13). Jason could impact the world in a positive way. So together, Jason and I used writing to work through our “clouds”—the manager, the labels she placed onto Jason, and the manner in which she treated him. She was Jason’s tormentor, and for me she represented my nemesis, but Jason and I found an alternative solution to reinventing her presence in our lives. Elbow looks at students, teachers, and classrooms as gatherings where optimism and possibility flourish. They are places where people can find strength. They are places where people can become better together. Jason and I helped each other turn our adversity into our potential greatness.

Essentially, Jason and I used writing to control and make better sense of our current predicaments. Elbow describes using written language as a means of taking control over one’s life in *Writing Without Teachers*: “Many people are now trying to become less helpless, both personally and politically: trying to claim more control over their own lives. One of the ways people most lack control over their own lives is through lacking control over words. Especially

written words” (v). The manager’s use of rote copying of words made Jason helpless and controlled—I would describe him as hopeless to affect his situation at that moment because he had no agency to change his situation. She controlled Jason by controlling how he used language. Exemplifying Elbow’s statement, Jason lacked control over the words in his life. Literally, he was forced to repeatedly use language to emphasize his mistake. But when Jason was set free of her influence, he could write his own story with his own words. He had a small piece of his control over his life back. Obviously I was a catalyst to this change, but I didn’t instruct Jason to write the story the way in which he chose to write the narrative. We wrote our story together in a shared enterprise. This moment was brief, and in the grand scheme of his life who can say what impact it may have made on him, but for this brief moment Jason took control over his life by controlling his words.

We must remember that words and the control over our language is a form of symbolic power in society. Irvin Peckham in *Going North Thinking West: The Intersections of Social Class, Critical Thinking, and Politicized Writing Instruction* reminds us of the importance of having the ability to control words through writing as a means to gaining or foregoing agency and power:

Writing is a fundamental act of literacy, of naming the world and writing one’s way into it. But writing, like teaching, is far from simple. Words, which form the fabric of writing, remove us from primary experience. They shape our understanding and identities. In a literate society, words are a primary agency of exchange. Words, even more than weapons, are consequently the tools of power. Words form webs of aggression and deceit. Through words, we sort people, create

and maintain hierarchies, and distribute privilege. They are the way we do things—and they are the agency through which things are done to us. (1)

Writing and the ability to construct our own narratives about our reality is a form of control over our lives. It is a way to have power. The words the manager used sorted Jason into a category that predicted he would be a failure in his future. Then she used words to reinforce this outlook when she made him copy sentences that highlighted his misdeed. These examples of language use by the manager coincided with actions that bolstered Jason's identity as a troubled child. But when Jason was able to use his language in a way of his choosing, he transcended the category of a problem child and rewrote himself. In Jason's story, he constructed himself into a hero. He was no longer the troubled child destined for failure as other's had constructed him. Instead of being evil, he became the champion who fought evil.

Jason and I worked together to create a reality different from that which we inhabited at that moment; Jason was no longer the troubled child, and I banished educational punishment from my workplace. We were writing a hopeful future together. We fought against a status quo we couldn't accept. For bell hooks in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, education is meant to promote actualization of the self and not foster blind acceptance of the norm: "Education as the practice of freedom affirms healthy self-esteem in students as it promotes their capacity to be aware and live consciously. It teaches them to reflect and act in ways that further self-actualization, rather than conformity to the status quo" (72). Jason's self-actualization occurred not because he followed the rules; instead, he challenged this power system. Then in a moment of supporting his hopeful vision of himself in our story, my agreement to hang our story in the entryway to the Youth Center represented validation of Jason achieving authority to control his identity in the world of our Youth Center. Hope, as Aquinas states, is achieved by the

individual and with assistance from another person or group of people (457). Together, Jason and I helped one another through our writing. It is this relationship in this moment that we were most hopeful. And it is these moments that I want to foster in composition classes. Tiny and miniscule these moments may seem, if we can generate more and more of these little moments then perhaps they will add to something so much larger and greater.

Yet my narrative about Jason and me writing together proves that the pendulum swings. At the end of the narrative, I stifled Jason. When I was angry, I didn't seek a way to use writing to channel his emotion and actions into a moment of self-actualization and reflection. For me, this is failure. This is hopelessness lost in fury. In retrospect, I believe that even in our moment of pain and anger we could have found a way to make our interaction into a moment of reflection, learning, healing, and hope.

But I want to work through the failure. I'm hopeful that this is possible. And I'm hopeful that even though I may feel small and meek at times, I can make small changes here and there, and maybe these tiny shifts will cause a change in the world my students and I inhabit. Palmer writes, "Most movements do not overturn the prevailing order but make incremental adjustments to it....Movements are more likely to fine-tune reality than to give rise to a brave new world" (180). I may not have the power to make a monumental change in a mere moment's time, but I believe I can make small changes with the help of hope, and these small changes might build into something large one day. I want to be hopeful.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HOPE IN THE LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction to Chapter Two

In this chapter, I present a literature review in order to better understand the concept of hope. The literature review in this chapter will draw from disciplines outside the field of English composition, mainly philosophy and psychology, because these fields have scholars who have worked to define and explain hope as a human experience. The chapter will open with a narrative and an analysis as an example of hopelessness. After the narrative and analysis, multiple sections will examine literature to describe hope in general, the cognitive aspects of hope, how hope becomes a social enterprise, and describe how trends in composition signify composition to be capable of being a hopeful discipline. The narrative in this chapter will serve as a means of exemplifying and illustrating how the concepts discussed in the literature review may manifest in the teaching of writing. Of course the narrative in this chapter presents a uniquely specific context involving a particular student, teacher, writing program, and student-teacher interaction, but the goal of merging this story with reviewed scholarship is to present a lived experience as a way to understand hope as an emotional experience and cognitive process.

After the narrative and a section that analyzes the personal and political ramifications for this student, I use this narrative in subsequent sections to help clarify hope as a theoretical concept and how it relates to the field of composition. In this chapter, I contend that hope, generally, is a future oriented emotion that compels humans to believe in possible changes and work toward accomplishing these changes. Hope manifests cognitively in three aspects—goals, pathways, and agency. I present work that views hope as something that can be done together as a social process of support for people struggling to find hope in their lives. With these sections

that depict the elements of hope, I merge composition theory to formulate how hope theory relates to the teaching of writing. For writing instruction, hope is something that can be taught and encouraged in educational settings such as the composition classroom. And furthermore, I contend that as a field, certain trends in composition already embrace the core fundamentals of hope theory, making composition a hopeful enterprise as long as its practitioners continue to value the experiences and knowledge our students bring into our classrooms.

### ESL Doesn't Mean Dumb

In 2006, I received my first teaching assignment. I was finishing my master's degree in English with an emphasis in composition, and now working as a writing teacher, I felt like I was doing exactly what I should be doing with my life. My father had been a teacher, my mother was an elementary school nurse, I had uncles and cousins who were teachers, and now I was a teacher. I felt like I was born to teach. I guess because of growing up as a child in a family full of educators, I never imagined myself in any other job, except maybe being a professional baseball player, but that was something that as an eight year old I figured I would do alongside teaching just like how my father coached high school athletics while also teaching Anatomy. As the years went by though, I realized professional baseball probably wouldn't pan out, but I still knew teaching was for me. Even my first jobs when I was a high school student related to teaching. I was a teacher's aid in a third grade summer school class, and I refereed and ran camps for the youth soccer organization in our town. I liked working in these roles.

So when I began teaching at a midsized university on the west coast, it felt natural. We were on the quarter system, and after the first two-thirds of the year had passed, I was doing great. My student evaluations were phenomenal, the best in the department, and my observations outstanding. I was building a strong teaching ethos based on the statistical accomplishments that

were reported on paper from those student evaluations and teaching observations. Sure, the normal grind could be tough—grading, lesson planning, faculty meetings, etc.—but all jobs have tedious moments. I was doing the right job for me, and according to all the available data, I was doing it well.

At the beginning of the final quarter of the academic year, the world looked perfect. It was spring on the central coast of California. Warm sunshine was everywhere in my golden state. The landscape was still green thanks to the winter rains, and the country was speckled with patches of wildflowers. Clusters of yellow Hayfield Tarweed spread across the hills making them shimmer like gold nuggets. The pink of Farewell-to-Springs and purple of Dwarf Brodiaea rolled over the land like the sweeping swaths of color in a sunset over the Pacific. And the fiery patches of orange from the state flower, the California Poppy, created a sense of vitality and optimism on the countryside. I was finishing my M.A. in three months.

At that time in my first-year-writing class, I assigned a short essay on the first day that asked students to compose a text describing why they chose to come to college and how writing could possibly play a role in their personal, academic, and professional futures. I collected the papers that same week, read them all, and then had short conferences on Friday. My goal for this quick writing assignment and conference was simply to get to know my students better, for them to get to know me better, and to understand how they viewed themselves as writers and discuss goals for them throughout the quarter. I didn't assign a grade.

After collecting the papers at the end of our Wednesday morning class, I returned to my office and began reading. I wrote some notes on the papers with my blue fine-point pen and happily plugged along until I came to Tron's essay. Tron hadn't spoken much during the first two class meetings during our class discussions, but he responded thoughtfully and articulately

the few times I spoke with him one-to-one. And after the first class, he had asked me about the topic he had in mind for the content of his paper. Everything seemed fine in class, but when I read Tron's paper, I got scared. My strong ethos began to fade quickly. I saw things happening in Tron's writing that I didn't know how to address. Things my composition courses and teacher training sessions didn't prepare me to confront. Weird things with articles and prepositions. Verb tenses were all over the place and sentence structures seemed odd. The story in the paper was great. It described how his parents had emigrated from Cambodia to the US, and Tron's acceptance to a well-respected university was the culmination of all the sacrifice and hard work involved in their immigration. Tron described himself as being the first true American to succeed in his family by going to an American university. But the grammar? What was I supposed to do?

I loved the paper because it reminded me of the stories my grandparents told me about coming from Greece to the United States and how even though my grandmother was raised on a farm and my grandfather a factory worker in a John Deere tractor plant, they dreamed of having educated American children. Those children were my father and his brothers. Ever since childhood, I can recall my grandmother speaking proudly of her three college educated sons: two teachers and a medical doctor. I remember her saying, "Now if only we had a mortician in the family, then we'd have the perfect American success story!" Apparently, to my grandmother, being a mortician ranked very high in status when it came to possible professions. Tron's paper resonated with me because it reminded me of my family's Greek heritage and immigration, but I had no idea how to deal with the grammar. That part was overwhelming me. In my short time as a student-teacher, I had never encountered a student with these writing issues. Even before that when I worked as a tutor in our university writing center, I hadn't seen a paper like this. I felt

like I was spinning in space with no gravity to create a point of reference for myself, so I turned to the one lifeline I had. It was my only option, I thought. I looked to other people for help.

I picked up my office phone and called my WPA and then the Writing Center Director. They met with me that afternoon, read Tron's paper, and then went over his transcripts and placement exam. Both agreed that Tron should have been placed in ESL English, and they directed me to explain this to Tron so that he could drop my class and enroll in the proper course. Easy enough, right? I left the meeting satisfied that everything would be fine.

When Friday morning came, I arrived at my office at 8 A.M. The plan for the day was to conduct conferences until noon and then head to the beach with some friends in the afternoon to enjoy the warm weather by the ocean. I went into my office and looked at my conference schedule; Tron was the last student of the day. I got through the other 21 conferences and was feeling a little tired. Then came Tron. I shook his hand and said, "Have a seat." He had a giant textbook under his arm. "What kind of book is that?" I asked.

"Oh, it's for advanced Calculus," Tron answered.

"That sounds hard to me," I replied.

"I think it's fun. English is scary," Tron said.

I got a little nervous at this response, knowing what I was required to tell Tron. "Everybody has some academic fears they have to overcome. When I was getting through my math requirements for my undergrad, my girlfriend at the time, who was a biochemistry major, would tutor me. I will always remember her saying, 'This is so easy. It's the same math I did when I was twelve.' I always thought that was funny even though I'm pretty sure she was insulting me a little. But she helped me through it, and now I'm always interested to see what

other people can do with math. I even know an English professor that relates some type of weird quantum physics with 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature.”

Tron excitedly began to explain his future plans: “I love math because it applies almost anywhere. Engineering, computer science, physics, chemistry. Math is involved in everything so the possibility of application is everywhere. I will have lots of possibilities to use math. Do you feel that way about writing?”

I smiled. “You read my mind, Tron. That’s exactly how I feel about writing. Everyone does it. And everyone can do it, in my opinion.”

Tron smiled. “I can’t do it good. I already know you’re going to tell me I didn’t do good on my essay.”

It felt a little like my heart was breaking when he said those words. I didn’t have a well-formulated plan for how I would tell Tron what I was instructed to do. I didn’t think it was going to be a big deal, but now I was starting to have second thoughts. I decided to speak to Tron just as I was taught to write an end comment on a student paper. I’d start with the positive, and then I would move into the more critical aspect of my response to Tron’s work. “Tron, this story is amazing. In a lot of ways, it reminds me of my grandparents’ immigration from Greece to America. And I doubt I could have expressed my family’s stories as well as you expressed your family’s.” We continued to discuss the content of his paper. I thought I could see the encouragement building in the young writer. He was nodding his head and smiling as I spoke to him.

“You really think I told the story good? I’m happy then because I spent a lot of time thinking about what to include. Did you like that part about my dad driving his cab in San Francisco when I was a baby?”

“That was definitely a powerful story to include,” I answered. “I can’t believe your father has been robbed at gunpoint twice. Including those types of details really highlight the work and risk your parent’s took in coming to this country and why they really wanted their children to attend college. I believe that was a very wise decision as an author to include those things in your paper.”

“Wow,” Tron said. “You’re one of first people to actually like something I wrote and say I did good.”

But I had to speak about the grammar and changing courses. I felt slightly sick now. I felt like a horrible person. Maybe I shouldn’t have told him the good I saw in his work. I was going to break all that positivity down. This is exactly the opposite of how I wanted to affect students. I just spoke.

“Tron, do you predominately speak Cambodian at home?”

“Yes. My grammar’s bad at times, isn’t it? Even if my story’s good, my grammar’s still bad.” He was going to beat me to the punch. He was already anticipating what was coming. I detected that he may have had similar conversations in the past.

“No, it isn’t bad,” I answered. “It’s just...different.” I wasn’t sure at all about what I was saying. “You need somebody specially trained to help students that are bilingual, and that’s not me, so we are going to have to move you from my class into another special ESL section. It is the same class though.”

I saw tears swelling around the bottoms of Tron’s eyes. My stomach ached more.

“I’m not smart at English, and ESL isn’t the same,” he stated. Then a tear rolled along his bottom eyelid and gently slid down his young cheek. “When I got in normal English, I thought I

finally became a good writer. I knew it couldn't be true. You don't understand. I studied so hard for the placement test."

"You studied for the English placement exam?" I questioned in disbelief. "Did you study for the math one, too?"

"I didn't need to take the math test because my SAT scores are high in math. But not in verbal. So I had to take the test. And I really studied. I studied my high school English books. I studied vocabulary words, and I studied grammar. But I still failed. I was happy when I thought I passed, but I really failed." He cried a little more.

My thoughts went to six years before, back when I had taken the same entrance orientation and exams at this same school before starting my bachelor's degree. Tron and I were on opposite ends of the same spectrum. My SAT scores were high in verbal, so I didn't need to take the English placement exam, but I did need to take the math portion of the test. And it never crossed my mind that I should study for it. I didn't care where I was placed.

"Tron, the placement exam isn't about passing or failing. It's about finding the right fit for you. It's about getting you into a class with a teacher that can really encourage great writing from you."

"I like your class. But I'm bad at writing so I can't take it. Now I go back to the class for different people."

"Tron, it isn't you. It's me. I think you're a good writer."

"I like your class," he said again. "You seem fun. But I'm dumb and I got to take dumb English with the other non-Americans." He cried a little more. A little harder. My limbs felt like electricity.

“No, Tron, ESL doesn’t mean dumb. And this has nothing to do with being more American than any other student.” My vision blurred a little, but I held my composure. “You’re not dumb. I’m the one that’s dumb. I’m not qualified or smart enough to teach you. You’re smart. This story is amazing...maybe better than I could write. All writing needs help in some way. Remember when we talked about that the first day of class? I’m just not good enough to help you in the ways you need. The other teacher can. Those kinds of teachers know grammar really well. I don’t. I don’t even use commas correctly in half the stuff I write. You’re a fine writer, Tron. You just need a better teacher than me.”

Neither of us spoke for about a minute. Tron stopped crying. I turned on my computer and helped him register for a new class. “Definitely take Sadie. I know her, and she’s a great teacher. Better than me and more fun. You’ll love her, Tron.”

We spoke a little more, but I can’t remember about what. We shook hands, and Tron left my office. I turned off my computer and packed my black canvas bag. I rotated my chair away from the open office door towards the sunlight streaming through the large window. I stared at the giant Oak in front of my building. Behind the dark twisting branches and deep green leaves of the Live Oak the sky radiated bright blue and the hills rolled green with their patchwork of colors. I stared without moving for at least five minutes. Then I snatched my bag off the desk and quietly walked out of the office, shutting the heavy wooden door behind me. I didn’t feel like going to the beach anymore.

#### Hope Denied—Goal Failed

Despite our best intentions as educators, we can harm students. Despite thinking we have an idea of what is best for our students based on the research we read and conduct, the curriculum we structure our courses around, and the learning objectives we strive to accomplish

in our classes, we still may alienate our students. Sometimes we make students feel as if they are hopeless writers. When I read Tron's essay, I knew that if I had assessed his paper based on the description of mechanics as outlined in the grading rubric I used back then, Tron would have failed. I thought what Tron needed was a teacher well versed in the linguistic structures of the American-English language, an instructor that could teach Tron grammar in a way I never fully understood because I did grammar from instinct without being able to articulate the rules well, and a classroom with other students that had similar needs. The course curriculum and placement system at our school reaffirmed my view of what Tron needed, but what I never accounted for was the feelings that Tron would experience by being moved to ESL English. It never crossed my mind that this placement affected Tron's perception of his status as an American citizen until he told me. It never occurred to me that Tron might feel hopeless because of a placement test. Maybe I should have sensed that from reading his paper. In this section, I explore how the effect of labeling Tron as ESL and moving him to an ESL designated writing class was a sociopolitical act in an educational context that damaged Tron's hopes of directing his sense of self as a student.

In *Minor Re/Visions*, Morris Young examines Asian-American literacy narratives and places them in relation to how literacy serves as an indicator for American citizenship. Young writes, "Intertwined with these literate acts are social contexts that are inextricably tied to the ways we are perceived to be literate. The pleasure and pain of literacy is both public and private, acting in the construction of a sense of self and citizenship" (11-12). Tron's particular experience with the first formal literacy act he performed in college reaffirmed his perception of self and citizenship as being outside mainstream America. And perhaps the pain Tron felt was especially poignant in our meeting due to the pleasure he had just experienced from being placed in the

mainstream writing course and having his teacher express praise for the content of his paper. Tron sensed his social progress toward his version of American citizenship with his placement; he felt this moment solidified him as a typical, successful young adult that was attending a good college and enrolled in the course curriculum that the majority of his peers would be taking. Tron felt hopeful about his hard work and potential change in his educational label. Yet by suddenly removing his status as a “normal” first year writing student from him, I threw Tron back to his old perception of self—different from his peers. The WPA, Writing Center Director, and myself—all of us—did what we thought best for Tron’s education without ever asking him what he thought best for himself.

Tron’s placement exam is an example of how educational testing can affect an individual’s sense of intelligence, ability, and hope. Danling Fu’s time spent with a young Cambodian immigrant attempting to achieve academic success in an American high school named Paw shares similarities to Tron’s story: “Students study for tests and are classified by the scores they attain on those tests. By being put at the bottom level in her English class, Paw is conscious of her low status at school. She is worried. She does not know why she works hard, yet still cannot use the language well enough to achieve her goal: passing tests and going to college” (50). The standardized exams used to place students into what educators’ presumably believe are courses that will most benefit a student’s development can have a serious impact on students’ psyche in a negative way. Both Tron and Paw state that they study hard to do well on these exams, but both continually fail to meet their goals. This is an example of hopelessness. Working towards a goal yet feeling as if that goal is unachievable no matter how much energy a person expends to reach his or her objective. Their failures to meet the standardized educational standards can instill a sense of inferiority.

Young describes how marking students as being less-literate because their language does not conform to what the institution deems as appropriate academic English will marginalize students: “Another tension is between those who are constructed as literate and those who are constructed as illiterate or less-literate, though this is often determined through a person’s facility with Standard English and is another way of marking membership and status within the community, and in providing educational and cultural capital” (7). It seems that Paw and Tron both sense that their facility with English serves as educational capital that will allow them to be accepted or rejected as members of their school communities and also as American citizens. In *Hunger of Memory*, Richard Rodriguez senses this linguistic tie with community acceptance after feeling as if he could control English well in an academic setting: “At last, seven years old, I came to believe what had been technically true since my birth: I was an American citizen” (22). The accounts of Rodriguez as a child mirrors the stories of Paw and Tron in that all of these people, even as children, sense that literacy and the ability to use English according to a homogenous standard represents political acceptance as an American citizen. Composition programs and courses that promote a standardized view of academic writing in their assessment practices and learning outcomes reinforce a belief that there is one American English that is privileged over all other forms. If, as composition instructors and college administrators, we continue to promote these practices, then we are admitting that we base our writing instruction on an idealization of what writing should be according to our perception of what standardized, academic English is in America.

This means we are convincing students, ourselves, and the public that there is one form of written English that exists and is valued above all other discourse structures and Englishes. Instead of celebrating the rhetorical, discursal, and linguistic diversity that we know each

student brings into our classrooms, we seek to create conformity under the guise of it being in the best interest for students, the college, and society. Bruce Horner contends that in contemporary American society “The permeability of the boundaries separating ‘native’ English speakers from ESL speakers is growing” (4). Horner’s argument is essentially that composition can no longer persist in the belief that a monolingual, standardized academic rhetoric exists in our classrooms and in our colleges and universities. Student separation based on varying literacy backgrounds, whether that be due to being labeled ESL, developmental, or even advanced, does a disservice to writing instruction because it creates schisms between students instead of looking at all students as capable of bringing richness and experience to a writing classroom. I believe if we attune ourselves to the literacies, languages, and writing styles of our students, we can work with them to dispel the mythical form of the one and only correct way to write in English. We can acknowledge that the literacies our students’ already possess are valuable. And in acknowledging the value of the skill and knowledge students already have when it comes to language and writing, we can show them ways to adapt to new writing situations in the future without demeaning what they already have in the present. Students can also help one another see diversity in language use and learn from one another. This is hopeful.

Because a person’s facility with the English language can represent political and cultural acceptance or marginalization in American society, the diverse and unique needs and desires of each student will be different depending on what the student hopes to gain through education. In “Lived Pedagogies: Becoming a Multicompetent ESOL Teacher,” Gloria Park shares similar insights with Young and Rodriguez about the political power of English instruction as she recounts her early experiences teaching adult ESL students at a community college. Park acknowledges that her teacher training hadn’t completely prepared her for teaching in this

context and she needed to examine each of her students' needs differently depending on the individual student and realize that learning English represented political power: "It entailed understanding that every adult ESL student comes into my classroom with different linguistic needs and cultural backgrounds. Also, it involved understanding that the English language could potentially present empowering as well as marginalizing opportunities for adult ESL students as well as for me" (20). Although the context Tron and I were in was much different to that of Park, I believe I needed to understand the same things Park began to learn from her teaching situation—I needed to listen to Tron's needs and examine how my decisions could impact him. If I had better understood what Tron expressed in his first paper, maybe I could have understood that the value Tron placed on his literacy performance amounted to much more than grammatical expression. For Tron, his language and designation in the university represented his acceptance as an American—something he had right to from his birth but felt as if it had been denied to him based on his educational label of being ESL.

Ultimately, I believe I failed Tron. Perhaps not with a grade, but I failed to help Tron move into a world that had been denied to him through educational language policies for most of his life. I failed to acknowledge Tron's hopeful pursuit for his education. Park writes:

I realized that teaching English, especially to adult ESL students, would be about more than simply helping them gain different language learning techniques and strategies in everyday practice. It should be about empowering them to navigate through the English language world in U.S. communities, having to converse with both native and nonnative English speakers... With this heightened awareness, they can become agents of their own learning and professional development, which, in turn, enables them to have greater confidence as they navigate through

multiple identity transformations living within and outside of their own and U.S. cultural communities. (22-23)

When I read Parks words and consider my memories of the brief time I spent as Tron's teacher, I still, to this day, feel shame. I'm ashamed that I denied Tron his agency to control where he felt he could best benefit as a learner. The truth of the matter is that Tron would be in mainstream writing soon enough. Aside from a Basic Writing ESL class and the First-Year-Composition ESL class, no other course at our school has an ESL designation. This means in his mandatory sophomore writing class, Tron couldn't be placed into an ESL labeled course. It could be argued, then, that Tron would eventually receive the designation he had hoped and studied to obtain when he entered this next course. But it isn't the same. What mattered to Tron, I believe, is that he studied and worked hard to be placed out of the ESL writing course, and Tron wanted to begin college with the identity for which he strove.

As educators, we believe we know what is best for our students when we place them into their courses. I believed this when I spoke with my superiors about Tron's essay. Even now, after two years of teaching ESL courses and an additional two years worth of TESOL courses in a Ph.D. program, I'm still uncertain about what we did to Tron on that beautiful spring day. hooks writes, "As long as educational institutions continue to serve as settings where the politics of domination in any form are perpetuated and maintained, teachers will need to confront the issue of shame. Conveying genuine respect for colleagues and students (especially those deemed other or different) we can affirm everyone's right to self-determination" (102). I worry that in a small way I blocked Tron's right to self-determination in his early college education, and no matter how much I tried to convince Tron that moving him was the best thing to do for his education, I

only added to his marginalization. I worry that I was also convincing myself that what was happening to Tron was okay. I worry that I will do this again in the future.

### The Philosophy of Hope—The Drive to Shape the Future

Having illustrated a moment of hopelessness with my narrative and analysis of “ESL Doesn’t Mean Dumb,” I turn to the work of philosophy and psychology to help better understand how hope plays a role in humanity in this section. By primarily using the work of Bloch and Anthony Reading, I present hope as an essential aspect of human activity that compels the belief that change for the better is possible and inspires the will to work in the present towards that change. Hopeful outlooks on the world posit reality as an unfixed state of becoming, and hope is the driving force behind human endeavors that seek to shape a better future, which is exactly what I believe educators should work to accomplish.

Early descriptions and interpretations of hope present this human experience in somewhat ambiguous terms, and there has been some debate over the positive or negative influence of hope in the lives of people. It is not clear whether hope is a positive or negative force for humanity according to different mythologies, philosophies, and scholars. Hesiod’s myth from *Works and Days* depicts Pandora capturing hope in the same box from which the evils she unleashed sprung forth into the human world:

Inside the cask’s hard walls remained one thing,  
Hope, only, which did not fly through the door.  
The lid stopped her, but all the others flew,  
Thousands of troubles, wandering the earth. (95-98)

These lines depict Zeus deliberately giving a box full of evils to Pandora who Zeus knows will not be able to resist the temptation to open the container. As punishment for Prometheus giving

humans fire, the curse of toil, disease, misery, and death comes to humanity. Pandora opens the container and out flies all these evils, and stored with the evils was hope, though Pandora manages to keep hope secured in the vessel. The presence of hope in this myth has an ambiguous quality. It remains untold whether Hesiod viewed hope as another evil to befall humanity since it was contained in a case full of ills, or if hope, the one thing that Pandora managed to keep safely under control, is actually a gift that could act as the counter balance against the evils that roam amongst humanity.

Some philosophers suggest that hope is an evil that torments humanity. According to Friedrich Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, the hope discussed in the Pandora myth represents the worst ill of all the plagues unleashed on humanity. For Nietzsche, hope is a terrible thing because it is the force that compels humans to endure hardship and suffering: “Zeus intended that man, notwithstanding the evils oppressing him, should continue to live and not rid himself of life, but keep on making himself miserable. For this purpose he bestowed hope upon man: it is, in truth, the greatest of evils for it lengthens the ordeal of man” (107). Nietzsche argues that life is torturous. Because of this, continuing to live is to voluntarily continue to submit oneself to ongoing anguish. Presumably for Nietzsche the only solution to ending the suffering is the termination of life. From this perspective, hope is an evil because it urges humans to continue in life despite the constant onslaught of the pain in the living. Nietzsche views reality as a constant torment that will not alleviate or change for the better, therefore hope, which offers the vision of a better tomorrow, is an opiate designed to prolong hurt.

On the other hand, Thomas Bulfinch in his extensive study of Greek and Roman mythology argues that hope remains within the vessel in the Pandora myth because hope is the

one thing that can counter the evils released upon the world, therefore hope remains in the control of humanity: “Pandora hastened to replace the lid! but, alas! the whole contents of the jar had escaped, one thin only excepted, which lay at the bottom, and that was *hope*. So we see at this day, whatever evils are abroad, hope never entirely leaves us; and while we have *that*, no amount of other ills can make us completely wretched” (11). According to Bulfinch, no matter how tormented a person may be, or how evil a person may become, the symbolic keeping of hope in the box means there always remains the slim possibility that the torment will lessen, cease, or that the evil person may eventually turn away from past wickedness. Hope does not ensure this will happen, but hope does offer the opportunity for change. It gives us a chance because hope reassures us of the belief that a new horizon of change for the better awaits us if we reach for it.

Furthermore, Dora and Erwin Panofsky reaffirm this interpretation of hope being a steadfast endowment to the perseverance of humanity over the potential evils of the world. The Panofskys trace the shifting representations of the Pandora myth through classical to Victorian depictions in art and literature. The Panofskys contend that modern translations and artistic interpretations of Pandora altered the vessel in the myth from a “practically immovable storage jar into a small, portable vessel” such as a box (17). In the depictions of Pandora that follow a more classical approach to the story, the vessel is a large jar or cask, and hope’s encapsulation leaves it “remaining in [an] unbreakable home” (Panofsky 33). This representation, similar to that of Bulfinch’s interpretation, suggests that while evils fly about the world haphazardly, by compulsion and with malevolent whimsy, hope is a force ever enduring that will steadfastly remain with humanity. Hope is a constant counter force to the inevitable suffering that comes with life. Hope balances the equation. It is potential.

Some scholars even believe that hope is an essential component to life and without hope humans can lose the will to live and fall into a state of mental and physical dilapidation. In *Man's Search for Meaning: Introduction to Logotherapy*, Viktor Frankl composes a poignant, heartbreaking, and inspiring narrative and analysis of his internment in several World War II German concentration camps. In his account of the mental stability of other inmates and himself, Frankl notices that "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate" (82). The prisoners that could not hold onto even the slimmest notion of hope experienced rapid decline in their physical and psychological health. In the context of the prison camp, hope manifests as the motivation for life to continue even in the face of the most extreme form of human cruelty and abuse. Frankl's account of perseverance against perhaps one of the greatest evils performed in human history testifies to the paramount importance of hope as a factor for sustaining human life.

Bloch's comprehensive philosophy on the nature and purpose of hope in humanity also follows an optimistic outlook on hope's power to endow humanity with the ability to work for a better future reality. Bloch's view of reality and life is what makes hope a positive endeavor for humanity. Bloch contends that hope manifests in a world full of potential beauty, and it is hope that helps this potential be realized:

But of course, even unfounded hope cannot be ordered among the usual evils of the world as it were the same as illness or worry. And founded hope especially, that is, hope mediated with the real Possible, is so far removed from evil, even

from jack-o'-lantern, that it in fact represents the at least half-open door appearing to open on to pleasant objects, in a world which has not become a prison, which is not a prison. (334)

The difference in understanding hope in Bloch when compared to that of Nietzsche exists in their differing perceptions of reality. Nietzsche's quote suggests the world is all evil and will remain so, whereas Bloch acknowledges the ills of reality yet also senses the pleasantness, beauty, and potential. The world is not a prison, but an open space that can be changed. The world is neither all ill nor all perfect. And the world is not fixed; instead the world is ever evolving. This balance makes hope powerful because it suggests positive change is a possibility.

The possibility in hope manifests from somewhere deep in a person, in the soul or in the psyche or in the physiology, maybe all three depending on your theological, philosophical, or biological view of yourself, and creates a compulsion to recreate the reality you inhabit—to alter your world. To begin to understand a philosophy of hope, we must start with the imagination, dreams, and wishes, which contain the seeds of hope's beginnings. According to Bloch, dreams are a force based on an imagined future, and it is through this vision of what may come that humans find motivation to work in the present:

If a person were completely devoid of the capability of dreaming in this way, if he were not able to hasten ahead now and again to view in his imagination as a unified and completed picture the work which is only now beginning to take shape in his hands, then I find it absolutely impossible to imagine what would motivate the person to tackle and to complete extensive and strenuous pieces of work in the fields of art, science, and practical life....The gulf between dream and reality is not harmful if only the dreamer seriously believes in his dream, if he

observes life attentively, compares his observations with his castles in the air and generally works towards the realization of his dream-construct conscientiously.

(10)

It is the ability to imagine a project completed, a victory won, or an obstacle surmounted that gives motivation to people working in the present. The dream of what could become of the future is a prophetic vision of what may be possible. For Tron, he envisioned himself as doing well on the placement exam and then registering for a mainstream composition course. Maybe more importantly and probably for quite a long time, Tron hoped to shed the label of ESL student. This is the dream where Tron's hope first manifested. Being able to imagine and dream of future accomplishments is the beginning of hope. I suspect Tron nurtured this dream for quite a long time before I met him. In our story, that long time dream matured into a hopeful pursuit of a tangible goal.

It is important to note that the dreams and the wishes that fuel hope must be relatively obtainable enterprises. Dreams or wishes that are realistically impossible will simply remain a dream or wish and never blossom into hope. The impossible dream is a wish to alter the unalterable, which Bloch describes as being similar to a person's desire to change the weather or counteract death: "We can wish for the weather to be fine tomorrow, although there is not the slightest thing we can do about it. Wishes can even be entirely irrational, we can wish that X or Y were still alive; it is possibly meaningful to wish this, but meaningless to want it. Therefore the wish remains even where the will can no longer change anything" (46-47). A wish for something out of the realm of possibility will remain just that—a wish and nothing more. These things cannot become hope. But if humans wish for something that can be possible, even if very difficult to come to fruition such as the ending of a war and the bringing of peace, these things

become hopeful because an individual or collective group of people can work toward this outcome. For instance, Tron's wish to change his academic label from ESL is not something out of the realm of possibility. And for a brief time, Tron had achieved this possibility until those in authority—me, the WPA, and Writing Center Director—revoked his accomplishment. The importance of Tron's dream rests in its potential to become reality. Dreams lead to hope when possibility exists.

When our dreams have possibility, hope begins to thrive as an energizing force. This force is dependent on two aspects: the ability to dream of tomorrow and the ability to act in the present. Reading, in *Hope and Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior*, describes hope as the motivation to act without immediate gain yet the potential to shape the distant future. This is hope as an energizing force toward action: "Hope is a uniquely human emotion that energizes us to engage in projects we believe will enhance our future well-being, even though they are of no immediate value to us. Without hope to fuel our dreams and our ambitions, we become captive to whatever is happening in our immediate environment" (Reading 3). Hope and dreaming give humans the will to act for a better tomorrow. If people did not have this energy, they would essentially be trapped in an unchanging position without any forward progress to initiate transformations: "The ability to imagine and anticipate the future is, in fact, a defining aspect of the human condition. Hope gives us a vision that things can be better, rather than just continuing as they have been, an expectation that some desired goal can be attained" (Reading 3). Reading's work posits hope as both a belief and an act of will. Hope is the perception that reality can be changed for the better—this is belief. And with this belief comes the willpower to work in the present moment for a future still unrealized—this is will. Hope is an

essential factor in the creation of change. Hope is the belief in tomorrow based on the will of today.

Because hope is a combination of belief and will, hope is an emotion that compels humanity to act based on the belief that reality can be altered for the betterment of the future through present action. Reading makes clear that the work of today is meant to create a better tomorrow: “Hope is an anticipatory emotion, an expectant savoring in our mind of a desired future occurrence that we believe we can help bring about. It differs from ordinary expectation—that things will continue as they have in the past—because it is based on a belief that we can through our own actions, make something turn out *better* than would otherwise be expected” (4). Hope is a feeling and an understanding that change is indeed possible. Hope is a belief in our will and willing our belief to initiate a movement from what is already into something different in our future. Both the feeling and the action are required to engage in hopeful thoughts and behaviors. Tron believed he could place out of ESL designated writing courses, and he worked to change this status by studying for his placement exam. Tron believed in his dream and willed himself to work for it. It is through the work of hope that a more positive future is possible.

Therefore, it is imperative for a hopeful minded person to view reality and the world as existing in a perpetual state of becoming. What a human can become and achieve is never completely determined by biology or social factors. Bloch describes humanity as pure potential of the possibility that is not based on biological factors such as an acorn seed that is destined to become an Oak Tree (235). Unlike an acorn or seed that will germinate into the realization of a determined form already destined, humans can shape their possible futures incrementally into nearly anything within reasonable possibility. This means the person that has been labeled stupid can someday be intelligent. The person labeled a failure may in fact succeed. The person told

they are a remedial writer can someday be a published author. The person that feels hopeless can find hope. Frankl describes this ability to transform ourselves as being “based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become” (110). The compulsion to move forward from what we are today and discover what we may become is the constant process of human progress. Hope is our key to transformation.

The transformative quality in hope tells us that we do not have to accept present circumstances or past failures and regrets. Despite our past histories and current situations, people have the potential to change with hopeful enterprises: “But people can, so to speak, become anything, incomplete as they are. Dark and indefinite as they are in themselves, in their folds. A woman who is feeling bad, left alone, becomes capable of anything, as it were. A man in a precarious situation or suddenly removed from his previous situation is nevertheless immediately capable of going amongst the dragons” (Bloch 930). According to Bloch, our past does not determine our future completely. Past traumas, pain, and suffering do not need to continue. And even more importantly, what we dream may be a possibility. We can become what we dream of becoming. With hope, biological and social constructs don’t confine our future potential completely. In Tron’s situation, the educational system labeled him ESL for much of his life. Yet even within the educational system, Tron sensed the possibility of altering his label. This was Tron’s dream. Hope’s dream capacity and energizing force allows us to envision a different future and make that potential into a form of reality.

This hopeful vision of reality views the world and life as a process unending. The future is never in a fixed, unalterable state. Past, present, and future are in a complex dynamic in which change is always a possibility: “No thing could be altered in accordance with wishes if the world

were closed, full of fixed, even perfected facts. Instead of these there are simply processes, i.e. dynamic relationships in which the Become has not completely triumphed. The Real is process; the latter is widely ramified mediation between present, unfinished past, and above all: possible future” (Bloch 196). Fate is never in a closed state. Change would be impossible if all things were already determined, therefore, the ability to adapt, change, and manipulate the future is a hopeful vision of reality. Hope presents a view of reality as being in a state of process during which the present can reinterpret the past and affect the future in multitudes of ways depending on how people work for that future in the present. Nothing is set in stone. For education, this means that all people involved, students, teachers, and administrators, have an immense amount of undetermined potential waiting to be harnessed for positive results.

The key to taking advantage of the undetermined potential rests in our perception and our willingness to work for the future good. Hope is a dance between the belief in the future and the will to work in the present. According to Reading, hope focuses on a goal, and if we believe we are capable of achieving our goal and willing to supply the effort in present time, hope is possible: “[Hope] motivates individuals to achieve their goals and aspirations. It differs from other types of expectation about the future in that: (a) it is based on what are *believed* to be realistic predications, and (b) it leads to actions aimed at achieving the desired goals” (5). Hope works with our belief and will. First, we must believe in hope; this means we believe that change is possible and we can create change. We must believe in our dreams and ourselves. We cannot wish for the impossible and call this hope, but we can dream of that which is difficult. Overcoming obstacles is possible with hard work, so second, we must will ourselves to act for the dream. We must be willing to struggle through frustration and hardship. We cannot be lazy by expecting change to happen without our efforts. We must will ourselves to action, and we

must overcome setbacks when we might feel hopeless. The emotion of hope compels an active expression of mental and/or physical energy in order to enact change.

To create change, hope helps a person look into the future and use foresight to shape present behavior and actions in the desire of creating a better tomorrow. This, according to Reading, is an integral human trait: “Our abilities to escape the confines of the present and base our behavior on hopes about the future is one of the most distinctive features of our species” (161). Furthermore, it is a motivator to expend energy in the now without instant gratification. Hope acts as a process that works toward potential in the future: “*Work* involves expending time and energy on a present-oriented task that is not inherently gratifying in order to obtain something needed or pleasurable later on” (Reading 144). In a sense, hope’s power is a balance between foresight and present action. The ability to perceive change is the first step in hoping. In Tron’s case, his unhappiness with being labeled ESL throughout his education prompted him to look toward a future when he could shed this label. And realistically, he foresaw the placement exam when he entered the university as the opportunity to enact the change he wanted to achieve. Studying was Tron’s course of action to creating his vision. Tron studied vocabulary and grammar as a way to increase his chance of fulfilling his dream. This is how hope manifested for Tron in relation to his education.

Unfortunately, having hope is not a guarantee that we will get what we want, never suffer, or be fabulously successful. In the case of Tron, his hopes were eventually diverted by the authoritarian intervention of my superiors and me. But hope represents possibility in the human mind. We can nurture a hopeful attitude and work ethic that may lead to better outcomes. Hope is an open doorway rather than a closed path of despair: “Hope gives us only possibilities, not guarantees; but it mobilizes us to act, to analyze and understand our problems, and to try to solve

them” (Reading 172). Hope is not always easy. It takes work, but it is possible. Hope is an outlook on reality that is never fixed. The future in hopeful thinking is mutable and can be changed. It does not mean we will succeed, but the option of success is present. It is better to have hope than to remain hopeless, for hope at the least tells us that we are not in a predestined state of complacency to social or biological stigmas. This is what gives humans the possibility to make dreams a reality. Our dreams are the prophetic visions of possible change. And these dreams inspire action. This is precisely what I believe our educational system should strive to accomplish. As educators, we nurture and encourage our students to use invention and creativity, hard work and perseverance, to show them and help them believe that they can shape tomorrow in a better way for themselves and for others. We act in present-time with our students to create the dreams of the future. In the present, we must believe in hope, work for hope, and trust hope.

#### A Cognitive Understanding of Hope—Goals, Pathways, and Agency

Having defined hope from a philosophical perspective as an anticipatory emotion that intertwines a belief in the future with a willful action in the present based on a mutable view of reality, I now turn to contemporary work in the field of psychology in order to better articulate hope as a cognitive process of interacting with the world. Essentially, in this section I aim to reveal how our thoughts can be trained to focus on hopeful endeavors by envisioning goals, developing pathways toward those goals, and having the agency to follow pathways. For writing teachers, these components of hope can give us a framework for when we interact with students, design assignments and curricula, and shape pedagogies with hope as a guiding principal. After giving a description of the three elements (goals, pathways, and agency), the concluding section in this chapter will directly relate these concepts in hope theory to composition theory and pedagogy.

Hope represents incremental achievements that can eventually bring about significant changes. Hope is control over our environment, and hope is a survival tactic for life. By the mid-twentieth century, psychologists began to describe hope as a force that contributes to a human sense of agency and control over circumstance. Karl Menninger, in the 1950s, began the argument that hope is a formidable power that can dispel fatalistic interpretations of the universe: “We must encourage each individual to see himself not as a mere spectator of cosmic events but as a prime mover; to regard himself not as a passive incident in the infinite universe but as one important unit possessing the power to influence great decisions by making small ones” (490). Hope, for Menninger, becomes potentiality. Hope is the power to create change and every human has this potential. This is how hope generates the inspiration for people to create control in their lives. Ezra Stotland argues that hope is the chief motivation that helps people survive the circumstances of life: “With little hope, there is little basis for actively dealing with the world” (158). Stotland cites a case in which hospitalized schizophrenics were treated in order to raise their sense of hopefulness by giving them responsibilities and encouraging them to view their actions as contributing to their recovery and well being. According to Stotland, these patients were discharged from the hospital faster than the average schizophrenic. These early psychological constructs define hope as an active forward progression towards purposeful change, and this paves the way for later hope theories that define hope as a goal directed cognition of the active mind.

Perhaps the clearest articulation of a psychological theory of hope comes from the work of C.R. Snyder at the University of Kansas. In the article titled “Hoping,” Snyder with coauthors Jen Cheavens and Scott T. Michael offer a definition of hope that is based on three cognitive elements: “According to this new theory, hope is a thinking process in which people have a sense

of agency and pathways for goals. Together, goals, pathways, and agency form the motivational concept of hope. This definition clearly is *cognitive* in nature and, as such, stands in contrast to other more emotion-based models of hope” (207). Hope manifests through an understanding of goals, ways to reach those goals, and the sense of motivation to achieve those goals. We see these aspects in the narrative about Tron. Tron had the agency to believe he could affect change and had a clear goal and pathways for the change he hoped to enact.

The first aspect of cognitive thinking in hope is the clear articulation of a goal. This goal can be thought of as being similar to Bloch’s dreams and wishes in his philosophy of hope. Snyder, Cheavens, and Michael found that people who reported a high level of hopeful thoughts and feelings often had clear objectives about what they wanted to accomplish: “The desired target of hopeful thought is the goal. Goal objects are constantly in our thoughts so that we can respond effectively to our environment. Goals are preeminent in hopeful thought, with high-hope persons clearly conceptualizing their goals, and low-hope people being more uncertain about their goals” (207). This definition makes sense if we agree with Reading’s description of hope being a future-oriented perception of a desired change. If hope relates to a sense of change in a foreseeable future, then having a clear understanding of what a person would like to achieve should increase a sense of hope. Tron had a clearly formulated goal; he wanted to no longer be labeled as an ESL student. Having a well-articulated goal allows a hoping person to set his/her sights toward a desired outcome by being able to strategize how to accomplish the goal.

Once a goal has been articulated, the next action in hopeful thought is generating steps to accomplishing the goal. These are pathways. Higher hope people are able to conceptualize behaviors and courses of action that will work to achieve the goal: “Pathway thoughts tap perceptions of being able to produce one or more workable routes to goals” (Snyder, Cheavens,

and Michael 208). This implies an important distinction concerning the goals aligned with hopeful thinking versus goals connected to wishful thinking. A hopeful goal is an ambition that has foreseeable routes to obtaining the objective rather than being a fanciful delusion based on wishful thinking where routes are unrealistic or completely inaccessible. This does not mean that lofty goals are automatically wishful. Rather, pathways represent the ability to conceive of the necessary steps in pursuit of accomplishing a desired outcome. Tron's pathways to achieving his goal of placing out of ESL courses included his studying English vocabulary and grammar using his high school textbooks. This course of action seems a reasonable pathway to achieve Tron's desired goal. Essentially, hopeful thinking acts as a path which people follow in order to successfully accomplish goals.

Also part of being hopeful is the ability to overcome failure and impediments. It is necessary for hopeful people to be able to adapt and change pathways or modify goals when their pathways or goals become blocked. This is how difficult goals are pursued and obtained. Through a succession of goals and pathways, loftier goals may be achieved. In "Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind," Snyder contends that hopeful people can achieve that which might seem impossible: "I have learned that high-hope people occasionally alter those seeming absolute failure situations so as to attain the impossible...The seemingly unreachable, therefore, may become reachable" (251). Achieving a goal that is difficult often involves trial and error—failures and restructured goals and pathways. The hopeful person will be able to devise new methods to achieve his or her desired result. This implies that a hopeful person must have the creative insight to be able to reexamine goals and pathways when faced with failure or obstacles. In Tron's situation in the moment of our meeting, he could not revise his goals or pathways. In this way, Tron's hopes were diminished because he could not reformulate a pathway for

achieving his goal. This does not mean that Tron could not continue to pursue his goal later if he found the will to do so, but in this particular moment Tron lost hope.

Snyder asserts that the hopeful person typically has the ability to strategize multiple routes to achieving a goal: “High-hope people describe themselves as being flexible thinkers who are facile at finding alternate routes, whereas low-hope persons report that they are less flexible and do not produce these additional routes; moreover, high-hope people actually are very effective at producing alternative routes—especially during circumstances when they are impeded” (251). In a sense, then, the hopeful person adapts to changing situations in order to constantly modify and reassess pathways. From experience, most people understand that we will not always achieve all our goals and that certain pathways will be blocked for us, but the hopeful people will be able to face adversity in goal pursuit whether that be formulizing new pathways or creating new goals. Perhaps this is what is most discouraging about Tron’s story. Once an authority figure, me, denied him his goal, he saw no other way to reformulate his goals and pathways in that moment. His hopeful vision of his educational status as a student had been thwarted quickly and completely at that time. Perhaps Tron felt this way because of his past placement as an ESL student so he was quick to accept that another large educational institution labeled him once again in a way he had not been able to change in his life.

Yet we can hope that Tron doesn’t completely abandon his goal of creating the academic label he wants to define his literacy performance. If we look at hopeful thought as a long process filled with success and failure, then perhaps we can take comfort in knowing that Tron’s literacy journey in education is not over. My narrative with Tron only captured a tiny glimpse of his education, and perhaps Tron later found a way to rearticulate his goals and pathways. In “Hope

in a Time of Global Despair,” Kaethe Weingarten describes hopeful thought as a recursive journey that involves failure and compromise:

First, there is often a lot of trial and error to define goals and pathways that will succeed. Goals and pathways may have to replace each other at a rate one would never have expected or wanted. Second, life deals us circumstances in which we have to select goals and pathways we never thought we could accept. Yet, the practice of doing hope, of re-forming goals and cultivating pathways to them, stretches us, helping us sustain the very practice of doing hope. (16)

Weingarten’s description takes into account unforeseen, unavoidable, and uncontrollable forces that can block people from following perceived pathways and reaching goals. No matter how well articulated a plan to achieving a goal may be, the possibility of failure always exists because of numerous unknowable variables. This means that to maintain hope, it may be necessary to accept some failure and then change or redefine goals depending on the situation. The hopeful person will be willing to restructure goals and reformulate pathways in order to adapt to his or her circumstances. Weingarten describes hope as a process and a journey: “Hope is a process of arriving at a goal—not matter how much it has shifted—and making sense of the journey there” (21). In order to continue to generate hope, a person must find understanding in their process of working towards their future. They can learn from successes and failures and maintain the agency to persevere through adversity and also renegotiate goals.

The lynchpin to hope is agency. Agency is well-written about in Composition studies and will be discussed as such later in this chapter, but in this section agency will first be examined from the psychological understanding of being a component of cognition regarding hope. Agency is the ability to believe goals are possible, to perceive if pathways are working, and to

reformulate goals and pathways if necessary. Agency ties together belief and will. Agency drives the work of pathways in pursuit of goals. According to Snyder, Cheavens, and Michael, a hopeful person must have a sense of agency: “Agentic thought reflects the perceived ability to begin, as well as to continue, movement along a selected pathway to a goal. Agentic thought provides the motivational force to pursue goals via the imagined pathways. As such, agency is the source of mental energy in the present hope model” (208). Agency in this definition of hope represents the understanding that people have a degree of control over their situation and can successfully use their perceived pathways to achieve a goal. This sense of agency provides the motivation to continue working pathways: “These self-referential thoughts involve the mental energy to begin and continue using a pathway through all stages of the goal pursuit” (Snyder 251). A sense of agency relates to Bloch and Reading’s contention that reality is in a perpetual state of becoming. Agency refers to our ability to shape the future through present actions. The failure of hope in Tron’s story is due to a lack of agency. When the authority of the university made judgment on Tron’s writing performance, Tron had no will or alternative to work a new pathway. Essentially, Tron’s agency was removed in this particular moment. If we consider the story of Jason from the first chapter, then we see an example of how agency aided his retelling of his role at the Youth Center. Jason had the power to rewrite himself in a different image than how the manager and some other people viewed him.

Furthermore, agency is key in a hopeful person’s response to a blocked pathway and failure to meet a goal. This is where Tron’s hopeful pursuit broke down. Agency is the force in hopeful thought that pushes a person towards reconsidering pathways when faced with difficulty: “Agency thinking is important in all goal-directed thought, but it takes on special significance when people encounter impediments. During such blockages, agency helps people to channel the

requisite motivation to the best alternate pathway” (Snyder 251). Agency is integral in moments of difficulty. The problem for Tron resulted in his inability to have agentic power to reformulate his goal in a realistic manner that could counter the obstacle that blocked him. This does not mean Tron lacked a will of strength in his psyche or didn’t have enough desire to achieve his goal, but rather it reveals that the sociopolitical power represented through the teacher (me) and the English department administrators (the WPA and Writing Center Director) as agents of the university were too daunting in that specific moment of time. In this instance, Tron had no alternate pathway when facing the force of the university. Unfortunately, Tron’s hope left because he could not overcome the challenge to his goal pursuit. The university wrenched Tron’s agency from him. And in this situation, acting as the agent of the university, I too lost a certain amount of control of my own agency, and my goal to be a teacher that positively impacted students became compromised.

The irony in this narrative rests in the idea that if I had a better understanding of hope at this time then the entire situation might not have occurred. As the teacher of the course, I would not have had to adjust my assignments to accommodate Tron. All I would need to have done is a simple tweaking of my grading rubric. When I opened the quarter with the essay asking students to describe their educational backgrounds, their feelings toward writing, and their desires for the course, I created an activity that gave students the opportunity to articulate their educational goals for writing and feelings toward language use, which in turn would allow me as the instructor to better understand each individual student and help formulate pathways through our class to help reach toward their goals. Through overt statements and subtle implications in his narrative about his family and education, Tron expressed that being enrolled in the mainstream writing course, not an ESL labeled course, was the culmination of his first hopeful goal in

college. But in my moment as a reader and teacher, I focused on my shortcomings and feared working with a bilingual student. It wasn't until I spoke with Tron that I realized how problematic my view of him might have been. Perhaps if I understood hope better and how to use hope to encourage my students, things could have been different.

But as stated in the first chapter, these stories aren't meant as a way to perform self-punishment for past mistakes. Rather, they are meant to find hope. The hopeful person will face a challenge and not be deterred by impediments, and the hopeful will rearticulate their goals in the face of an obstacle. Agency is the key to perseverance and finding a new direction after a goal becomes blocked. This story isn't the end for Tron or me. We both moved on. This story and others like it from my early teaching days and have inspired me to better understand composition and second language literacy development. As a result, in my hopeful pursuit to become a better teacher in the future, I decided to enroll in a graduate program that gives me the opportunity to merge composition and TESOL. I've studied to understand where the fields of composition and second language learning overlap, and I've discovered that other teachers have pursued similar lines of study. I've been exposed to scholarship such as that of Horner and John Trimbur who write, "As we hope to show, a tacit language policy of unidirectional monolingualism has a history and a cultural logic that have gone largely unacknowledged in our field and that, by remaining unexamined, continues to exert a powerful influence on our teaching, our writing programs, and our impact on U.S. culture" (595). Reading these words I take some comfort in understanding that my interaction with Tron isn't just a failing in myself, but also a failing in my field of study. Composition as a whole has left issues of multilingualism in American classrooms ignored for too long, and as a consequence many young teachers enter classrooms unprepared to work with multilingual students.

Furthermore, I take heart in reading such scholarship because it also calls for more attention to be given to the issue of multilingual students and their relationship with writing programs: “We pose an alternative way of thinking about composition programs, the language of our students, and our own language practices that holds monolingualism itself to be a problem and a limitation of U.S. culture and that argues for the benefits of an actively multilingual language policy” (Horner and Trimbur 597). Whether I agree completely with the call Horner and Trimbur make to our field is beside the point; what is important is that these scholars are bringing attention to the issue. Since my time with Tron, I’ve come to realize that composition classrooms will often have multilingual writers, and I’ve encountered many writers who all have unique backgrounds, linguistically and otherwise. And with my new educational experiences, I feel better prepared to help these students. I still make mistakes, I still feel unsure and uncomfortable sometimes, but I am better prepared. So while my story with Tron ended in hopelessness in that moment of time, it soon sprouted a more hopeful enterprise in my career and a better future for my future students and myself.

While the cognitive descriptions of the process of hope are helpful, it is important to not turn our back on the emotions involved in generating hope. Carmel Flaskas, in “The Balance of Hope and Hopelessness,” contends that the cognitive aspect of understanding hope can never be separated from the feelings that a person experiences:

The peril, then, of turning our backs on the emotionality of hope and hopelessness in either our theory or our practice is that we risk creating a chasm in our empathic connection with clients and underestimating the power of the emotional experience of hope and hopelessness. Yet to stay oriented just to the

individual feeling state of hope and despair undermines the richness of the relationship of emotion, meaning and behavior in human experience. (26)

Flaskas' words remind us that a person that works to encourage hope cannot separate the cognition from the emotion, and if these two elements were to be pulled apart, then the richness of the human experience of hope would lose meaning and power. For Snyder, emotions are an essential part of hope theory that compliments the cognitive thought process involved in generating hope (249). Emotions act as an indicator of the potentiality of successfully achieving a goal: "I have proposed that the person's perceptions about the success (or lack thereof) regarding personal goal pursuits influence subsequent emotions. Therefore, emotions reflect responses to perceptions about how one is doing (or has done) in goal pursuit activities" (Snyder 252). Emotions function as a gauge to respond to how well a pathway functions. So as an example, Tron's emotions signaled to him that his agency, and subsequently his hopes, had been thwarted and he did not have the ability to shape his realistic goal of seeing himself as an American student in a mainstream writing course. Emotions were a register of how his hope had been impaired. Also in this story, we see how my emotions played a role in exposing my underlying values and hopes for how I desired to impact students. When seeing Tron's reaction, I too felt hopeless and dejected. I had to struggle to maintain my composure in front of Tron. I hoped to be a teacher that helped students achieve goals, yet in this moment I did the opposite. I also had lost my agency and at that time could see no alternative pathway. As a student-teacher, I felt like I must obey the university's procedures and curriculum; this agency was greater than my own. My depressed feelings registered my failure for hope.

Although the three tenets in hope theory seem simple enough, they actually have a reciprocal relationship to a person's beliefs about abilities and capabilities. In his article "Hope

Theory: Rainbows in the Mind,” Snyder reflects on a decade of studying hope and makes it clear that the three components of hope become influenced by concepts of self. Snyder writes: “Superseding [people’s] thoughts about a specific goal, people appeared to have self-appraisals about their capabilities in goal pursuits more generally. That is to say, people had enduring, self-referential thoughts about their capacities to produce routes to goals, and their capacities to find the requisite motivations for those goal pursuits” (250). From Snyder’s description, hopeful thought becomes intertwined with the impression of the self. This implies a hopeless person may become stuck in a self-fulfilling cycle of failure and despair if a person understands himself or herself to be deficient in such a way as to make generating new pathways and goals seem futile. The hopeless may perceive of themselves as destined to always fail because of being inferior. Conversely, then, the hopeful person may be better at viewing herself/himself as a capable person who is able to overcome obstacles by regenerating new pathways in pursuit of envisioned goals.

From this work in contemporary psychology, we see that hopeful thought is a series of intertwining goals, pathways, and agency. These three elements cognitively help generate hopeful outlooks concerning future success; they reciprocally work together toward future change. Holding to the belief that humans have the ability to make changes motivates agency, and the ability to see goals while formulating methods of achieving these goals allows people to work for the betterment of their future. This is hopeful thought.

### Hoping Together

Having established the affective aspect of hope as an emotional reaction toward present circumstances that compel actions that work toward a change for the better—a belief in change and willingness to work for transformation—and then defining hope cognitively as a process

involving three elements—goals, pathways, and agency—I now present in this section the notion that hope has a social creation component that can be encouraged and nurtured through the help of others. This implies two important assumptions about hope. First, for those people that struggle to have hope for their future the possibility exists that they can be inspired to find their own version of hope through the assistance of other people. And the second assumption is that hope’s goals and dreams, pathways and wills, and belief and agency can be taught and fostered in an educational setting such as the composition classroom.

An important aspect of hope theory relates to the idea that hope is something that can be generated and supported through a community of people. Snyder believes that hope can be nurtured, encouraged, and developed with the help of others (253). Conversely, people can cause hopelessness in others as well. In his research, Snyder found that “A person’s pathways and agency thinking are learned over the course of childhood (and later). Most people lack hope, therefore, because they were not taught to think in this manner, or forces intervened to destroy such hopeful thought during their childhoods” (253). For educational purposes, this is exciting because it means educators can encourage hope. In our classrooms, we can help students learn to use writing as a pathway toward their goals. But educators must also be cautious about damaging the hopes of students as well; in Tron’s story, his hope was damaged when the authority of the university changed his placement.

Several studies on hope in group therapy support the belief that a community of people can work together to nurture hope. And while I am in no way making the argument that a writing classroom should be group therapy, these studies testify to the ability of a community of supportive individuals as being able to help one another reach positive outcomes. For the writing classroom, then, the community dynamics can be guided to facilitate growth from writers who

can use language to foster positive goals. In the article, “The Getting and Giving of Wisdoms: Generating Hope,” Catherine Ingram, Jenny, and Amaryll Perlesz describe how their experience working in group therapy has confirmed that sharing stories can be a way to overcome trauma and create hope: “We do ‘do hope’ together. The story invites the reader or listener to engage in an experience and to relate this to his or her own life. When we hear a story with an ending that relates wisdom, the understanding that comes from experience, we are potentially inspired and hope is generated. We also feel connected and no longer isolated in our suffering” (84). Similar to theories on narrative inquiry that contend sharing stories is a way to build knowledge as a community, Ingram, Jenny, and Perlesz find that exchanging stories can be a means of socially constructing hope in a group setting. For a writing classroom, activities that ask students to share their writing can actually be tailored to foster hope through writing. In one way, the sharing of stories can be a way to promote tolerance, sympathy, and empathy as students and teachers read of one another’s experiences. We are given a glimpse into the lives of one another through the written word. And from a more technical outlook on writing education, activities such as peer editing and workshops provide a pathway to help students learn new writing skills from one another as they revise and edit their texts. This is an example of how a writing class might become a writing group of hopeful supporters of one another. This is how hope might be done together in a classroom.

This means that hope generation and degradation can be viewed as a social construction. Flaskas’ research also focuses on group therapy, specifically family therapy, and she finds that within groups hope can be fostered or undermined. People and social institutions have the potential of building or destroying hope: “The relational context of hope and hopelessness, then, may involve the family constellation around hope, the community context and the extent to

which this context can support hope, as well as bearing in mind the broader political context and the way in which this constructs of undermines the individual and family and community experiences of hope” (Flaskas 28). Hope does not rest solely in the individual. Social structures and communities can play an integral part in creating hope or hopelessness. For example, the placement procedures and course designations in my college acted to dispel Tron’s hope, and I acted as the agent of the institution in creating the hopelessness that Tron felt. Then by doing this, I also felt hopeless in the face of such institutional power structures. This is an example of how a social process of hope went awry. But I believe this must not always be the case. The writing classroom and writing instruction can build hope for the betterment of tomorrow.

The question then arises concerning what it means to hope for the better. What is the good or betterment that hope works towards? Many of the philosophers and psychologists argue that hope works towards a goal that is inherently good, and the notion of goodness bases itself on a social construct. Aquinas saw hope as working toward a relationship with god; therefore he contends that hope is always moving towards a good goal. Bloch saw hope as a drive toward utopian ideals; therefore hope works for a better society for everyone and this goal is universally good for all people. But hope theory in contemporary psychology posits that hope is neither working toward a positive or negative outcome necessarily, and in fact the goals created by an individual or group may not be interpreted as good by other people in society: “Hope theory is meant to be neutral in its treatment of the value of goals selected by people. Therefore, because a person has high-hope, there is no theoretical premise that prosocial, positive goals are being pursued. Indeed, high-hope goals may be antisocial, such as a gang leader who wants to secure his turf and turn a handsome profit on the sale of illicit drugs” (Snyder 267). So while past theories have the similar notion that hope works as a forward movement toward positive change

for the individual and society, they almost always view the positive to be something universally good—salvation after death in the Christian tradition in the case of Aquinas or utopian equality in Marxist politics for Bloch—but for contemporary psychology, the individual determines the positive nature of an outcome and/or community perception of the inherent good of the goal, and everyone, given the context, may not share this perception. This may seem discomforting because it can mean people who hope for things such as genocide or murder and are able to generate pathways to achieve such goals might accomplish horrible atrocities. But the value neutrality in hope theory might also be comforting in the sense that hope represents the opportunity to work against a status quo that is perceived to be good by a majority of people but actually discriminates against a minority of the population such as sexism or racism. The key is how we understand and use hope.

For the writing teacher, finding the goodness in hope relies on listening to our students. We should encourage our students to articulate their goals for writing and help them generate pathways and agency toward reaching these goals. Obviously, students will come to our classes with a wide variety of goals, but if we can design assignments, rubrics, and activities that allow for variety and difference, then we will be better able to help our students work toward their unique goals. We will be able to build hope with our students as we work together for their well-being.

### Composition—A Hopeful Discipline

In this section, I present the notion that the field of composition is a hopeful discipline. Having established an understanding of hope as being a philosophical worldview that compels the belief that human action shapes a future reality, and having examined the several elements that psychologists have derived about hope (goals, pathways, and agency), I now relate these

principles of hopeful thought to the field of composition. I believe by analyzing composition through the theoretical perspective of hope, it may be interpreted that composition has generally moved in the direction of encouraging a hopeful outlook in student writers. While this review of composition is cursory and in no way meant to construct an in depth historical argument of the evolution of composition theory and pedagogy through a hope theory lens, that in itself would comprise an entirely separate dissertation devoted to such a lengthy enterprise, this section's purpose intends to help us understand that much of our scholarship and many of our practices in the classroom are in fact hopeful. Through the movement away from having students model their writing on literary texts and toward a focus on students' process of authoring texts, composition has continually progressed towards being a discipline with the firm philosophical stance that we strive to help each individual writer believe they can create important and influential pieces of writing. In this section, I examine the trends in composition that focus attention on students as authors, which I interpret to be a growing concern with the goals, pathways, and agency of students composing texts. This represents a hopeful discipline.

Many movements in composition have pushed forth an agenda that focuses attention in the classroom on the student as author rather than being centered on the teacher or model texts. This attention turned more and more toward the student composing has also caused compositionists to attend to students' feelings about their writing, their processes when creating texts, and how they navigate their positions in the world in relation to other people, other texts, and other ideologies. This gradual shift away from teaching writing as a practice that involves students passively emulating canonical models of texts and concentrating on final polished products to giving attention to the many nuances of student authors' composing lives signals a movement toward hopeful theories and pedagogies in composition.

First of all, since the early stages of changing teachers' attentions from solely being directed at written products and more centered on students' processes, compositionist refocus on the affective component of composing. This type of scholarship examines how attitudes and emotions influence the student writer in composition classes. For instance, Kirby and Liner believe that when working with children learning to write it is important to nurture a positive attitude in the students because that helps writing development: "Praise for producing written language and success in completing the task are closely tied to the child's desire to continue. Support and recognition also extend children's interests and encourage them to take risks and invent new forms" (6). This type of philosophy towards the teaching of writing reveals just how concerned many compositionists are with the psychology and feelings of their students. Kirby and Liner advocate for careful attention to be paid to the encouragement of student authors rather than discouraging writers so that they will be motivated to experiment and develop their craft as a writer. This attention to building confidence testifies to the way in which concerns regarding attitude and emotions in students influence the work that gets done in the composition classroom.

Similarly, writing a decade after Kirby and Liner (they published in 1981), Maxine Hairston continues to advocate for attention centered on students and their feelings toward writing. Hairston, like Kirby and Liner, also believes that confidence plays an important role in a composition course. Hairston makes the argument that students' texts should be the hub of a composition course rather than a textbook or professional author's writing: "First, students' own writing must be the center of the course. Students need to write to find out how much they know and to gain confidence in their ability to express themselves effectively. They do not need to be assigned essays to read so they will have something to write about—they bring their subjects with them" (186). Hairston's *CCC* article signals another important line of thought in

composition studies. Instead of bringing professional models of writing into the classroom, the students' language use is the content of the course. And furthermore, by stating that students will have subjects to write about and do not need to be assigned topics, Hairston acknowledges students' experiences, knowledge, and opinions as worthy topics for an intellectual activity. So as we see in these two brief examples, composition pedagogy has focused attention on the student—on the students' texts and on the students' feelings.

With attention on the student at the heart of composition courses, the hopeful work begins. This is the work of helping students realize that their words can have power. I assume that we compositionists believe that our texts have the ability to initiate change, therefore, we must believe, and help our students also believe, that students are authors who also can affect their worlds with writing. Peckham argues that a commitment to creating this belief in our students may be the most important work a compositionist could accomplish: "I have committed myself to this field in which we write to make a difference, to alter the outer reality into which we push our texts. If we can give students the sense of their right to speak and a belief in the power of their words, we can walk away from our classes thinking we have done good work" (162). According to Peckham, writing can create change, and this is hopeful. Similar to the notion presented by Bloch and Reading about hope being a catalyst that motivates humans to work toward changing a mutable future reality, Peckham essentially makes the case that one tool to create change in reality is the written word. This means words can work as hope. Words have power to make things different. I don't believe we consciously nurture this idea in many students often, yet this power already exists within them. We need to help students realize their ability to use language as a hopeful means of change. This is hope. Teaching writing and learning to write well is the creation of a hopeful vision.

Having shown how composition has moved toward centering the field on students and their texts, and having developed the notion that writing is a hopeful activity that students can use to initiate change, I now show how trends in composition attend to the three elements of hope—goals, pathways, and agency.

According to Snyder, the first component to generating hope involves being able to articulate goals, and composition studies has a tradition of encouraging students to find their own goals, their own purposes for composing texts. The first step in helping students find goals for their writing is to guide students towards finding a purpose for what they write, which can be done by highlighting the importance in sharing ideas and experiences through writing as discussed by John S. Mayher, Nancy Lester, and Gordon M. Pradl:

Helping students find or develop a genuine purpose in school writing is one of the most challenging aspects of writing instruction. It's all too easy for teachers to assume that *their* purposes for student writing are the same as students', although this is rarely the case, or to fall back on grades and other extrinsic motivations to disguise the fact that the writing itself is purposeless. Having a real audience can help, but the essential ingredient in finding purpose is the writer's conviction that she has something to say. Students must come to recognize that they know a great deal and have experiences worth sharing with others. Unless a writer gets sufficiently involved in developing her own ideas and beliefs, the writing will not be worth reading no matter how mechanically correct it is. (2-3)

Mayher, Lester, and Pradl use the term purpose to stress the importance in showing students that they have reasons to compose powerful texts. This means that we must encourage students to have reasons, motivations, and goals for the production of writing. So to accomplish this, we

need to help students articulate goals for their writing because this can lead them toward recognizing that their knowledge, opinions, and experiences matter, and through expression in written form that has been carefully crafted, this writing can make a text worthy to be read by other people. Purpose and goals inspire good, powerful writing.

Importantly, then, when helping students find purpose and goals for their writing, a composition teacher cannot supplant a student's objective for his or her own. As touched on by Mayher, Lester, and Pradl, it is easy for a writing teacher to take for granted that a student's purpose will vary and possibly be drastically different from the vision a writing teacher may think is the student's goal for writing. This means that in a hopeful composition class, a teacher cannot give the goal for student development to students. Peckham states that it is a teacher's responsibility to know and respect students' unique goals: "Good teachers *always* work and learn with their students. This means in the required writing class that teachers should investigate their students' literacy skills and goals, honor them, and work with them to help them improve their skills and reach their goals, even though their goals may be quite different from the ones the teachers had in mind" (101). In agreement with Mayher, Lester, and Pradl, Peckham contends that the goals for students' texts should come from the students and not the teacher. This is not to argue, though, that the teacher comes to a writing course and has no goals or outcomes they'd like to achieve. Rather, it means our goals as teachers should be flexible enough to adapt and support the goals of our students. This orientation on unique goals is part of a hopeful theory of composition. A hopeful composition teacher can have goals such as encouraging students to see how their texts can influence and be influenced by readers, or to craft rhetorically considered texts within the context for the goals students outline for themselves, but the key here is that the goals are meant to forward the purposes a student develops for his or her current, and possibly

future, pieces of writing. Granting students the right to establish and articulate the goals for their writing is hopeful.

The next component in hope theory after establishing goals is the ability to generate pathways to accomplish these goals as well as recognizing that pathways and goals need to be reconsidered and changed from time to time. While it may be argued that composition as a whole field concerns itself with pathways—routes to accomplishing writing tasks, better understanding the nature of writing, and helping people become more competent writers—a specific movement in the field of composition that clearly illustrates pathways has been the proliferation of process pedagogies. Although most scholars who trace the evolution of the field of composition would likely point to Donald Murray’s article “Teach Writing as a Process Not Product” as the watershed moment that shifted pedagogy toward giving as much attention to how students write as they do to what they write, writing teachers have been discussing and considering process pedagogies for decades before Murray’s seminal text reached publication. For example, in 1953 Barriss Mills published the article “Writing as a Process” in *College English*. Though Mills’ discussion of teaching writing as a process differs from the paradigm of prewriting, drafting, and revising that seems to dominate current composition textbooks, Mills discusses finding authentic purpose for student writing and adapting to audience expectations. In any case, the movement in composition toward a concern with how students compose texts can be interpreted as giving attention to pathways as they are described in Snyder’s work as a component to hopeful thoughts.

For some compositionists, it may appear that current process pedagogy is far from the changing and adaptable pathways towards goals as described in hope theory. Many of our textbooks describe the writing process as a set formula that works for most contexts and

purposes, yet, as Hurlbert discusses in “A Place in Which to Stand,” these process formulas are an idealized version of writing that oversimplifies the composing process:

The textbook companies advertise how adaptable their materials are, how they can be used in any college, how our concerns are, generally, the same. But their gross generalities about process and instruction mystify and keep us from grappling with the complexities of composing, our students’ needs and lives. Composition textbooks are a distraction from the realities of the places in which we live. Or better, they are a dream. They are a professor’s dream of the perfect student performing the perfect writing process and producing the perfect essay. In the dream, certainty and excellence come with standardization. All students have to do is follow how their professor presents the textbook writer’s or editor’s take on culture, meaning, or writing. (353)

The version of process writing presented in textbooks are a packaged and commoditized version of how to teach writing and how to write, yet any experienced writer will likely tell you that while these models may at times capture fragments of the steps that are perhaps needed to produce a text, the writing process is an ever shifting array of activities, thought processes, reflections, and other foreseen and unforeseen variables that affect composing. The standardized version of process is not hopeful because a formula cannot account for the myriad of goals and changing pathways required in hopeful pursuits.

Yet I contend that these lockstep process approaches are the result of a perversion of process pedagogies for the pursuit of capital gains and the enticing appeal of standardized educational practices. In actuality much of the scholarship concerning process isn’t concerned with a rigid system of text production. Even though Murray’s work does list several general

descriptions of phases most writers go through when composing—prewriting, writing, and rewriting—Murray makes clear in “Teach Writing as a Process Not Product” that these steps are recursive and that process writing consists of much more than simply following formulated steps (4). The main message Murray pushed forward in his article is diminishing the amount of attention paid to a finished product and refocusing attention on student potential: “What [process pedagogy does] require is a teacher who will respect and respond to his students, not for what they have done, but for what they may do; not for what they have produced, but for what they may produce, if they are given an opportunity to see writing as a process, not a product” (6). In relating this type of process pedagogy to hope theory, we can think about the potential in a composing process as the philosophical viewpoint that reality can be changed and that change finds shape through the pathways we work to achieve our goals. Process writing is a pathway to hopeful writing.

Furthermore, scholars that have discussed composition theory and have been labeled as part of the post-process movement complicate the idea that a writing process can be described in a manner that works for all writers in all writing situations. Gary Olson acknowledges that the process movement helped the teaching of writing by promoting pedagogies that direct students’ awareness of writing as a lengthy, ongoing, and recursive activity, but he also see the limits that the tendency to generalize a writing process creates:

The process orientation helped us to theorize writing in more productive ways than previously and to devise pedagogies that familiarize students with the kinds of activities that writers often engage in when they write. As several “post-process” scholars have pointed out recently, however, the process orientation has its own limitations. Key among these limitations is the fact that the process

orientation, as we have conceived it, imagines that the writing process can be described in some way; that is, process theorists assume that we can somehow make statements about the process that would apply to all or most writing situations. (7)

Olson's view of post-process theory is a hopeful vision because it works to move the field away from standardized views of writing instruction. Hope cannot be standardized. The goals each person has for writing will be unique, therefore the pathway to achieving a goal will never be the same for every person, so when it comes to composing the pathway, or process, to accomplish a purposeful piece of writing the process must be distinctive to the author, the goal, and the contextual variables involved in the act of composing the text. Any pedagogy seeking to formulate one-size-fits-all methods of instruction is working against hope by ignoring the fluctuating elements that each student creates when they work to find a meaningful purpose for writing. Allowing room for growth of a text through a more organic manner of composing that can be adjusted to the needs of the writing situation is hopeful.

Finally, the last component in hope theory is agency, a topic well written about in composition. Again, while this review is brief and not meant to present a comprehensive review of agency throughout composition's history in higher education, it does aim to make evident that composition has, and can continue to be, a hopeful endeavor for teachers and students if we value the important lessons we already know about teaching writing and continue to guide our scholarship on a path that supports pedagogies attentive to students success, empowerment, individuality, and creativity. I have examined through hope theory and composition theory the belief that student writers need to be able to find individual goals and personalized purposes in their writing development, and from goal articulation students need to be able to formulate and

adjust their writing processes, or pathways, toward accomplishing these goals with the support of a flexible and nurturing writing instructor, and now I present to idea that the force driving goal generation, purpose, and process construction is agency. Just as agency acts as the lynchpin in hope theory, it also operates as the unifying power that gives rise to students finding a purpose for their writing, viewing their texts as creations that can affect the readers and worlds into which they distribute them, and using writing to make an impact in their lives.

The concept of agency in the development of student writers has been a key issue in composition theory and pedagogy. In tracing the evolution of composition and the teaching of writing, Barbara Couture writes, "...we have a scene ripe for the full development of a paradigm change—a shift from the task of modeling ideal written products to developing the agency of the individual writer" (32). For nearly two decades, composition has devoted scholarship to the very force that according to psychologists like Snyder is the driving energy in hope theory. In hopeful thought, agency motivates people to pursue their goals and generate pathways as well as persevering against adversity when goals and pathways become blocked. So to analyze composition as a hopeful discipline, we must understand how compositionists have defined agency and how it plays a role in teaching student writers.

Trimbur's article "Agency and the Death of the Author: A Partial Defense of Modernism" thoroughly analyzes agency in composition. At the most literal level of definition, Trimbur cites two seemingly conflicting explanations of agency: "*Agency* signifies, on one reading, a domain of freedom, autonomy, absence of constraint—an arena of choice and decision. At the same time, another reading suggests that the term means a functioning part of something larger, such as a government agency, an insurance agent, a secret agent, or a double agent" (286). On the one hand, agency can represent a sense of free will that allows the

possibility to rebel from conformity and standardization. Yet on the other hand, agency can mean fitting into a system or playing a role that strives for accomplishing a shared mission. Agency can represent individual determination, or agency can represent social acceptance. In looking at agency through these two definitions, it may appear that the concept of agency has dualistic polarities.

But these two definitions of agency may not be as conflicting as they first appear. Instead, the free will and social cooperation aspects of agency represent the manner in which these forces manifest in the individual who navigates self-representation and autonomy with existing in a reality where social interaction and experience with the natural world intertwine: “Agency refers to the practical logic by which people negotiate their ways of life, the ways in which they cohere their activity and experience in the world” (Trimbur 285). From this respect, a much more textured understanding of agency surfaces. Agency balances a life in which the individual person must possess a sense of self with a large and complex world that exists outside the self. Agency is how we perceive our actions affecting the natural and social world, and these actions can either work for or against the social context depending on how we choose to act—that is of course if we have choice in a given context.

In a sense, then, agency gives meaning to our actions and inspires future actions in order to achieve a desired response, and the action of writing means we create texts with the hope to influence other people or create some sort of ripple in reality. Marilyn M. Cooper describes this process as an agentic way of shaping the self, affecting other people, and working towards positive outcomes: “Individual agency as the process through which organisms create meanings through acting into the world and changing their structure in response to the perceived consequences of their actions. Conceiving of agency in this way enables writers to recognize

their rhetorical acts, whether conscious or nonconscious, as acts that make them who they are, that affect others, and that can contribute to the common good” (420). In this definition of agency, we come to see that agentic authority in writing constructs perceptions of the self, has the ability to reach other people, and has the potential to enact social change. These three aspects all represent powerfully interesting interpretations of what a writer can do with language when they have a sense of will. The writer can use language to write who they want to be. The writer can touch the emotions and logic of a reader. The writer can find ways to change reality.

To put this conceptualization of agency into other terms, agency is the ability to express the individual idiosyncratic particulars while functioning in a socially constructed system. Trimbur writes, “Agency, as I see it, is the way people live the history of the contemporary, the way they articulate (in the double sense of the term) their desires, needs, and projects, *giving voice* to their lived experience as they *join* their productive labors to the institutions and social structures they live within” (287). Agency is a power that maintains an individual’s uniqueness while existing in the larger world. It is the person in society. Agency describes our ability to act in accordance with or struggle against social structures as we see fit. With agency comes freedom of choice. We have the choice to work for the social order or against it. In hope theory, this freedom and ability to work with or against social systems represents the belief necessary for people to shape the future. Agency compels this belief.

Yet according to Trimbur, the agency needed to be able to balance the personal and social aspects of life while maintaining the belief that the future can be changed is not a completely inherent trait in the individual nor is it solely a right that society grants. Trimbur writes that “Agency, then, is a kind of excess that is neither determinately given nor freely enacted; it bubbles over, as it were, from people’s struggle to make a life in the world” (288). Trimbur’s

statement suggests that agency comes as a result of people grappling to make sense of their situations and to initiate change in their lives. Agency results from people finding the will in themselves to understand their life predicaments and transforms those states of affairs. The tension created from sensing the need for change and acting for that change in the world is the site where agency manifests. The pressures of the social world acting on the individual results in agentic thoughts and actions. This means that writing teachers cannot simply grant agency, and it also means that students may not be able to express agency if some force of authority, such as a teacher, denies them freedoms and choice. Again, we see a balancing, a tug and pull between having some space to express agency and also needing to feel the will to enact agency. One may overcompensate the other. Perhaps agency is strong enough to overcome forces impeding freedom of choice, or forces could be so powerful that they break any will to express the self, but agency grapples with these two forces. For these reasons, student writers need to have the room to grow their agentic selves.

The question then arises: how do we foster agency in composition classrooms? The answer likely lies not in one pedagogical approach but in many. A pedagogy of hope that nurtures agentic growth needs to both respect the uniqueness of the individual while also addressing social pressure. For Trimbur, the two composition pedagogies that espouse values that appeal to the individualistic and social aspects of agency are expressivist and social-epistemic types of pedagogies: “Agency as lack of constraint plays a key role in expressivist rhetorics and the process movement’s figure of the composer, while agency as enabling participation in institutional work is axiomatic in social constructivist and social-epistemic rhetorics” (286). The expressivist and process focused pedagogies address the individual. It is in these pedagogies that the personal voice to express the needs, goals, and ideas of the self are

encouraged and developed. The author finds personal value and meaning in the texts they create. The social constructivist and social-epistemic pedagogies appeal to social engagement as shaping the texts an author produces. The author must navigate and confront the social parameters to create and influence the reading public, and social ideologies may shape what, why, and how an author writes. The hopeful pedagogy will promote agency by finding a way to combine both these theoretical views of writing and instruction. It will give room for a student author to find ways to express the self in response to social needs and/or address social issues that affect his or her life by using unique ideas and experiences while a social response to the writing helps the student author understand how the crafting of his or her texts causes an affect in a readership and how this affect may shape the author's future compositions. The hopeful pedagogy will construct methods to merge expressivist and social pedagogies.

While some compositionists may view expressivist and social constructivist pedagogies as extreme opposites, the act of writing, its very nature I believe, can lead to an understanding that both these pedagogical approaches have merit and space in a composition course, and in viewing them as mutual partners in the teaching of writing rather than competing paradigms, writing teachers may actually represent the activity of writing in a more complete vision of what occurs when writers write and readers read. For example, Jane Danielewicz describes the use of autobiographical writing as a bridge that intertwines personal expression with public rhetoric: "I wish to demonstrate how writing in personal genres, where the 'I' is at the center, not only develops voice and cultivates identities but also enhances authority. Authority increases the chances that individuals are able to participate in public discourse, which is, ultimately, agency" (421). Danielewicz's description of autobiographical writing demonstrates how writing functions as a way in which writers position themselves and then must contend with how they relate to a

reading audience. Yes, social factors influence the writer as they compose, but equally relevant is that writers influence the social structures as well. There is an intertwining, ever reciprocal relationship where the social constructs the self and the self constructs the social. This reciprocal relationship—this balance between “I” and “we” is the nature of agency. It is the authority to write your position in relation to a social setting. And that relationship can be one working to maintain or change social norms, organizations, and perceptions.

Ultimately, this change is what a hopeful pedagogy strives to achieve. It is the nurturing of authors to view the composing of texts as the act of an individual meant to influence personal or social change. Agency is the fuel for that hopeful belief that induces the energy driving the will to make change a reality. Couture describes the movement toward being a better person and creating a better society in composition as a result of encouraging agency in student writers: “Emphasis on the process of writing renewed—or was intended to renew—our concern not only with helping students write better but also with helping them *be* better, that is, develop into better persons through achieving agency, the capacity to act and to make a difference among other persons for having done so” (34). There exists a certain amount of altruism in hopeful writing theory. Writing instruction is not about teaching a formulaic craft—certainly craft is involved in composing, but this craft is not something that can be lectured and dictated at a student who would then be expected to return a perfectly static collection of words. Writing lives. And writing instructors give their energy to help see students make life out of words. Writing instruction is about how to use a human art—an expression of a living self intended to be felt by other living people. Writing can be an enterprise where we work to make a better world. What that world is—what it means to be better—I cannot describe, really, but I hope my students will write that world with me.

Students can write this world if they have the opportunity, the freedom and guidance, to negotiate their relationship with their realities through written texts. This negotiation happens through trial and error, through experimentation and understanding expectations, and through believing that a will exists in the human spirit to create change. A hopeful pedagogy cannot be prescribed. It will be evolving, changing, fluctuating for each student, each setting, and each teacher as all these people and places bring their unique goals and processes and influences to the activity of creating change with writing. This is hopeful writing theory.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TELLING STORIES FOR HOPE

#### Introduction to Chapter Three

In this chapter, I discuss my methodological choice to write autobiographical narratives. I open with a narrative and analysis that depict a moment when I tried to use hope to motivate my decisions as a teacher, but I question if I really did keep the hopes of my student with his life situation in mind. I then present several sections that articulate the value of using narrative methodology in a dissertation on hope. First, narratives are a way to connect the personal and private life with the professional life by dispelling the notion that these are completely separate spheres—hope influences all our lives, and even if we don't explicitly discuss our personal lives in a classroom, we still bring our experiences and emotions with us as we make decisions and choices. Second, I show how using theory to analyze stories is a method of meaning making and research. Then I contend that the interpretation of stories helps us understand the mutable nature of life, as a teacher and human being, without prescribing general solutions intended to fit every situation. I then describe how writing can be a form of healing and the building of a hopeful future. And finally, I conclude with a section that discusses the narrative form and organization of the dissertation.

#### Holding onto Hope

The guy had scared me when I met him. Tim walked into our Argumentative Writing and Research classroom with these supernaturally large arms covered in dark, menacing tattoos. He stood well over six feet tall, and he wore the brim of his blue Los Angeles Dodgers cap so low that his eyes vanished in a dark shadow. When each student took turns introducing themselves to the class and briefly describing past experiences with writing and what their goals were for the

course, Tim told us in a booming deep voice, “When it comes to writing, I hate it. I ain’t kiddin’. I already failed this class once. I suck.” He admitted his past academic performance with such open bluntness that I was a little surprised.

“Nobody sucks at writing,” I replied. “You’re here, in college, so I’m sure you can write well.”

“No, man. You don’t even know. I suck. Seriously. I always get bad grades in English. I FAILED THIS CLASS ALREADY!”

“Alright, I hear ya,” I responded to his even louder admission of past academic ineptitude. “Well it sounds like we have our goals for you this semester. Your goal is to get a passing grade, and I’m confident that you can reach that goal as long as you do your work. My goal’s going to be to try and get you to not hate writing so much.”

“Yes, sir. I didn’t mean to holler. Passing sounds good, but I doubt you’re gonna hit your mark,” Tim replied.

For those first few weeks, I thought we were on the path to accomplishing our goals. The class consisted of many small, low-stake writing assignments with one large course paper. Nearly every week I required the students to respond to an essay from our course reader with a page of writing, and nearly every week the students had to submit a paper that summarized two researched sources they would use in their course project. The project was a ten-page paper that presented a problem in current American society, and the students were supposed to present a clear argument about the issue with supporting research.

Tim had submitted every weekly reading response, and honestly, they were pretty good. He liked to slip into slang when he wrote, but I never minded that much. They all showed he had read the material carefully and crafted a thoughtful response. He showed he understood the

week's reading and made insightful analysis. Every time he'd come up to the front desk at the end of our Friday class to turn in one of the reading responses, I'd say to him, "You're one small step closer to passing. Keep it up." Then I'd ask, "So was this assignment terrible to write? How do you feel about your work now?"

He'd usually respond with something like, "No, not terrible. I feel okay, like I did a good job. But I still don't like writing."

"Fair enough," I'd reply, "but your writing is just fine and you're doing well in my opinion."

And he was doing well for the most part, until he had trouble with the research aspect of the large paper. He had chosen to focus his course project on drug laws, specifically the differences in prison sentences for people who sold crack cocaine versus those that sold powder cocaine. He wrote a strong topic proposal that articulated his suspicion that drug laws concerning cocaine were racist; he described growing up in Watts where he witnessed friends being arrested for selling crack on the streets and were now serving lengthy prison sentences.

Beginning the third week of the quarter, students were asked to submit a paper with citations and annotations for two sources on their chosen topic that they retrieved from the library. When Tim turned in his first set of annotations, I immediately noticed something funny. The font size and style changed throughout his paragraphs. And the writing just didn't seem like Tim. I typed several of the lines from Tim's annotations into Google, and sure enough, I found the word-for-word sentences on several websites. Tim had pieced together a plagiarized annotation.

The next Monday I asked Tim to hang around after class. I explained what I had suspected and what I had found, and Tim told me that he had thought that was what he was

supposed to do for the annotations. I gave him the benefit of the doubt. We talked a little about what I expected from the assignment, and Tim expressed that he was having a tough time finding research. This wasn't an uncommon obstacle for students in this course, so as I typically do with at least several students every quarter, Tim and I set an appointment to meet in the library and do some research together.

The afternoon Tim and I met on the first floor computer lab of our university library, we shook hands and greeted one another. We took a seat at one of the computers, and I opened the web browser. "Alright, when doing research for a school project, the first place I go is to our library's homepage." I typed in the address.

"Wait a second," Tim said. "I wrote kind of...you know...like a story for an introduction to my paper. Could you look at that first?"

"Sure," I answered. I hadn't asked Tim to bring any new writing to our meeting, but I was happy that he had taken the initiative to compose something without me prompting him to do so.

"I don't know if it's cool to use stories in this paper, but I just wrote this little something for it," he elaborated as he pulled several papers from his backpack.

"Well let me take a look it, and I'll tell you what I think." I took the papers from Tim and began to read. In his writing, Tim revealed some details he hadn't specified in his topic proposal. It turned out that Tim's father had been a major player in the illicit drug trade in Los Angeles and was currently serving a 35 year prison sentence. Tim described how in some aspects, his father was a scary guy. He told a story about a time when he overheard his dad yelling at a man and threatening to kill him if he didn't have his money. But then Tim also told a brief story about being twelve years old and upset over the break-up with his first girlfriend; his father had

consoled Tim by sharing the story of the first girl to break his heart and then took Tim to the movies.

“Tim, this is really good.”

“Seriously?” he asked with a look of shock on his face.

“You should definitely use this in your paper. It needs work, all writing can use work to make it stronger, but this has lots of potential. If we can get some good research and weave it into these stories, I could honestly imagine this possibly being published somewhere. I don’t know where, but this can be made into something really nice.”

“Bullshit!” Tim exclaimed. “It isn’t that good. There are grammar mistakes and no research.”

“So we’ll work on that stuff,” I said.

We went over the stories first. We found places where he could add details and elaborate and clarify things. Then we found some confusing sentences and reworded a couple. We left several more sentences for Tim to rework later on his own. Then we went to work finding some research for his paper. Together we retrieved a dozen journal articles and several books.

“Alright, so now the plan is going to be for you to read that stuff we just found and then summarize the main points. And pull out some quotes you might want to put into your project. And then we can meet again if you want to come up with how to fit it into your stories.”

“Sounds good,” said Tim with a smile. “Thanks for all your help, Brian.”

“Anytime.”

Then the next week Tim never came to class. All three class meetings he didn’t show.

Then the next week he still wasn’t in class. That Friday was the deadline for the first draft of the complete project to be submitted. As I took role that deadline day, I noticed he was the

only student absent. I hoped he'd show up a little late. No big deal. But he did not come to class that day either. Over the weekend, I checked my university email anticipating a message from him to explain a unique situation that caused him to miss so much class, but the email never came. I contemplated sending him an email. I wanted to remind him of his goal, the good work he already had finished, and encourage him to come back to class and finish what he began. But I wasn't sure of how appropriate it would be for me to contact him. Maybe he stopped coming to class because he didn't like me? Maybe his topic for the course project was too personal and dredged up memories and feelings he didn't want to address? I wasn't sure what to do in this situation, so I did nothing. Besides, I had twenty-four other students to worry about.

But I still worried about Tim. I had trouble falling asleep some nights when I wondered what had become of him.

More weeks with only absences. My hopes that he would come back to class or contact me faded away. He had missed more short writing assignments than he had submitted, and he didn't complete a single major graded portion of his course project. By now it was statistically impossible for him to pass the class. It seemed that we both couldn't meet our goals for the quarter.

Then one unexpected day he walked into the room right as class was beginning. He sauntered in and sat down in the back just as he had done during the first several weeks. I was surprised. He said nothing, and class was just starting so I didn't have a spare minute to take him aside and speak with him. Even if I did have the time, I'm not really sure what I would say. Should I tell him during class that it was now an impossibility for him to earn a passing grade? Should I tell him to leave so he wouldn't be wasting his time by sitting through a class he would inevitably fail?

The activity listed for that particular day on our course schedule would soon bring the matter to the forefront. We were working in writing groups, which the other students had become accustomed to doing over the past month. Each student brought a complete draft of their course project to be read by the other members in the groups and then discussed. After a short class discussion concerning the aims for the groups, the students slid their desks across the tiled classroom floor causing shrill shrieks to pierce the air. In the midst of the movement of bodies and desks, I could see Tim approaching the front of the room where I was standing.

“I don’t have a draft. What should I do?” he asked me.

“Well,” I said, “did you bring anything?”

“That’s the thing,” he replied, “I have been meaning to come talk to you because I haven’t done any work on my project since we met, and I’m having trouble. I’m also scared that I’m failing the class because I haven’t been here in so long.”

“Yeah, that’s a legitimate concern that we need to discuss. We probably shouldn’t have that conversation here in front of everybody else, and I have a midterm grade report for you in my office. Can you come with me to my office after class?”

“Sure, but what do I do right now?”

I honestly had no idea. Maybe I should have just told him that he had already gotten to the point that he could not pass the class and could just leave, but I didn’t do that. That didn’t seem right to me. I felt like I owed him a discussion at the least. But at the same time I didn’t think it would be right for him to sit in the classroom and do nothing. Wouldn’t that just be a waste of his time? I also didn’t think it would be right to simply send him away and tell him to come to my office later.

“I’m not too sure what you should do,” I answered. “If you don’t have a draft, you can’t participate in the writing groups. But I don’t want you to just sit there and waste your time either.”

“I brought all my research articles that we got from the library. Can I read over those and start an outline of my project?”

“Sure. Do that.” I still felt unsure about this course of action since in about an hour when we spoke in my office I would be telling him that he had already failed.

So for the next sixty minutes of class, he sat at a desk alone, quietly, while everyone else sat in circles, loudly discussing their projects, laughing, debating, and writing on each other’s drafts. As I made my way from group to group, engaging the other students in conversation and reading over sections of their texts, I would occasionally look over at Tim. He seemed to be doing very little aside from staring out the windows of the room. I felt bad. I avoided him.

When class ended, he hung around the front of the room waiting for me to get finished talking with several students that had a few questions about citing sources. After those students left, I said, “Ready to head over to my office?”

“Lead the way,” he answered.

My office was in a different building, so it took several minutes to walk there. “So how have you been doing?” I asked in an attempt to make some small talk.

“Eeehhhh,” he answered without offering up any specific details.

“Have you been back to southern California lately?”

“No.”

“I haven’t been back to Long Beach for a few months now. I miss my grandparents.”

“I don’t like going back to L.A.”

“Did you see the Raider game last Sunday?”

“Yeah.”

“That was a tough loss, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“You know, I heard the state might be cutting the budget to the CSU system big time next year. That could mean trouble for teachers and students.”

Tim didn't reply.

“It could mean cutting adjunct faculty, which could hurt me. And it could mean a tuition raise for you students, which could hurt you. I'd hate to see students take the brunt of the budget cut.”

“I guess.”

Conversation didn't seem to be working well so I stopped talking. We walked together in silence. When we got into the building that housed my office and began to make our way up the stairwell, a female student passed us on her way down.

“Hey, Athena!” he exclaimed and a big smile formed on his face. He stopped in the stairwell while I stood several steps above him, waiting.

“What you doing?” the female student asked.

“Nothing much,” he replied. “I ain't see you at the Alpha Omega party on Saturday. Where you at?”

“I had a big psych project due today and worked on it all weekend.”

As I listened to their conversation, I began to feel annoyed. So he can go to parties but can't make it to class or work on his project.

“Are you planning on going out Friday night?” Tim inquired.

“Yeah, now that I got that project out of the way.”

“Cool. I’ll text you later this week.”

“Alright, see you.” The female student continued down the stairs and we continued up them.

When we got to my office, I unlocked the door, opened it, and said, “Have a seat.” He sat down in a chair next to my desk, and I pulled out my desk chair and sat down across from him. “I guess you need to see your grade report.” I opened one of my desk drawers to retrieve the piece of paper.

“I don’t want to see that,” he said.

“Well it’s your grade. We got to talk about it.”

“Alright. Give it to me.” I handed him the paper. He read it and sighed, “Man those are a lot of zeros.”

“You’ve missed a lot of class and assignments. I haven’t even included the penalty you should receive for all those absences.”

“So that’s it. I fail again. Told you I’m a hopeless writer.” He frowned.

“You’re not a hopeless writer,” I contended. “You just didn’t come to class and turn in your work. But the writing you did do was great.”

“I couldn’t make deadlines. I couldn’t do the research part. Ain’t that part of writing?”

“Yeah, you have a point. But what happened? You were doing really well.”

“I got a lot of problems at home right now and stuff is going on with my head. I can’t concentrate on anything.” As he said these words, his eyes dropped to the ground. “You don’t understand.”

“How are your other classes?” I wasn’t certain what else to say or ask him.

“Terrible, aside from my swimming class. I’m failing math, and from what that professor said I don’t think I can pull the grade up. I’m close to failing psychology.”

“Man, you were really doing great in our class.”

“I can’t write,” he said. “I’ve been real messed up in the head I told you.”

“Have you talked to your academic advisor and a counselor? Withdrawing from the whole quarter might be your best option at this point. And there are counseling services on campus. I can give you their number or walk with you over there.”

“I’ve already been to the counselors. They got me on some pills. I’m going to try and find my advisor after I finish talking to you. I can’t fail out though. I can’t. Isn’t there anything I can do to pass your class?”

“I don’t want to fail you. But you haven’t done half of the work for the course. And you haven’t come to half the class meetings. There’s only three weeks left.”

Then he looked at me with small tears starting to roll from his eyes gently. I was surprised to see this subtle display of emotion. “So I got no chance?” he questioned.

“You’re missing so much,” I reasoned with soft spoken words. The large blocked “C” tattoo on his forearm and the “GS” written down his bicep that had frightened me so much on that first day of class seemed to shrink away with their once menacing message.

And then came his stories.

Stress, depression, therapy, and Prozac. Violence, abuse, neglect, and anger. “I’m the first in my family to go to college and I’m not quitting. I can’t go back to that place. There I’m either in jail or dead,” he concluded.

A pang resounded inside my chest. My limbs felt like electricity. My mind went frantic. I thought through my options and obligations. Can I ignore my syllabus? What is right in this

moment? Tomorrow? Next week? What is fair to the other students that had been coming and submitting work this entire time? I know some English teachers who wouldn't have even begun this conversation. They would have just stuck to their syllabus policies and been done with Tim. They'd call it professionalism, I bet. But I don't know why, I just couldn't be that way.

"I'll make a deal but no guarantee," I said. "Three times a week for the last three weeks of this quarter we are going to meet for an hour a day in my office. That will make up for all those absences. And every day you need to come with a new page of writing. You miss one meeting or don't have your pages and that's it. Fail. You also need to come to every class here on out. And this is going to be to earn a passing grade. This is a lot of hard work for both of us. But I'll make this deal with you because I think you're a strong enough writer to get this done." I stared in his eyes as I said these words. "You don't suck. I want you to realize that."

He didn't speak for a minute. I couldn't tell if my deal had put him at ease since he now had an opportunity to salvage his grade in the class or if he was feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of having to do so much work. I figured that I'd give him at least some amount of hope. A chance.

"You don't have to say yes or no to the deal right now," I told him. "Think about it. And I think you really need to get over to your academic advisor and discuss your situation."

"Yeah, I'll do that right now. Thanks for giving me a chance. Can I send you an email tomorrow with what I decide?"

"Sure. If you decide to take the deal, then we can work out our meeting times then. If you don't, then no hard feelings. I really do like you and think you have potential as a writer."

He stood up and so did I. He extended his right hand and I gave him mine. I walked him to the door. "Take care, Tim."

“See ya. Thanks.”

The minute he left I began to have second thoughts. I’m an idiot, I thought. Look how much work I just gave myself. I started to think about all my classes, all my students, and all the grading. I started thinking about the mandatory faculty meetings and office hours. I started thinking about the reports I had to write for the WAC program I was working with that year. Then I thought about how much I enjoyed running, watching television, hiking, skateboarding, and all the other hobbies that make my life all the more enjoyable. I tried to imagine how much they would be affected by adding another responsibility to my workload. I started regretting the deal I had proposed.

I also worried about what my colleagues would think of what I had done. Or worse yet, what would the WPA and the head of the English Department think? Would they deem that my deal was unethical and compromised the integrity of my course? Would they question if I would give this opportunity to any other student as well? Would I give this opportunity to another student?

I began to feel a lot of regret.

The next day, I received Tim’s email. He informed me that he would be withdrawing from school that quarter. He thanked me for my help and told me he would take my class again some day and prove to me that he was a good writer.

I felt relieved, like I had escaped a bad situation. I wrote him back and told him he had nothing to prove to me.

#### Lives in Our Classrooms

I often wonder what happened to Tim. I never heard from him again, and the next year he did not enroll in any of my courses. I still wonder if he ended up back in his home neighborhood

despite his strong desire to never return there. Tim had told me if he ever went back, he would probably either end up dead or in jail. When I read *The Peaceable Classroom*, I'm reminded of a similar story in which O'Reilley fails a student and he responds with anger at the prospect of being drafted into the Army: "He told me, angrily, that I was writing him a ticket to Vietnam, turning him into cannon fodder. On the subject of the grade I was implacable—to change one's mind was a sign of *weakness*, I then believed—but the conference gnawed at my conscience for years" (8). Unlike O'Reilley, I gave my student a chance, but I'm not sure it was a good chance for escape. The workload was probably too much for both of us, and just as I felt overwhelmed by the prospect of meeting three times a week, it may have pushed Tim over the limits after he already was experiencing emotional issues that had been affecting his work—at least that's what I worry. In this section, I briefly remind my readers that the personal and professional distinction in the lives of students and teachers can become blurry, and in fact, these two separate spheres of life are actually inextricably tied together.

What would have been the hopeful solution to this situation? Is there a hopeful solution? I want to be hopeful and help students achieve their goals and find value in their writing, especially when I view so much potential in the writers, but I also have objectives that must be met. The college, the writing program, my class syllabus, all based on requirements and objectives that my students agree to follow and I agree to enforce. Sure, I give extensions, tweak assignments to adapt to students needs and interests, and I even have begun to write my rubrics collaboratively with my classes, but at some point a line must be drawn, I guess. I offer as much personal help and flexibility that I can to my students, and if they don't do the work then they will likely fail. Yet if we consider hope theory as discussed in Chapter Two after I lost hope with

Tron, failure may lead to new opportunity and understanding, and it may lead to hope in the future.

Like O'Reilley, I'm not certain what the correct course of action would have been here. Was it right to give Tim a chance, or would it have been more honest to fail him then and there? I do know that as teachers we can't always assume that our decisions and course of actions don't sincerely impact the lives of our students. The lives in the classrooms are the same lives on the streets. That cannot be separated. Perhaps this is one of the hardest things for me to reconcile in my teaching. Teaching really becomes hard when we witness how much earning, or failing to earn, an education can seriously, literally in some cases, impact a student's life. Many of our students come from backgrounds they want to leave for various reasons, and it is education that they see as a means for hoping to make their lives better. Education represents hope. And even students that are happy with their backgrounds and upbringing will view education as a hopeful path towards continued happiness. But what do we do when students are failing for whatever the reason may be? These are the moments that Palmer describes as emotionally hurting a caring teacher:

As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require. (11)

I wonder if my heart was open to Tim's situation. I wonder if in creating a deal that was too much for Tim, I had actually been insensitive to his life and his situation. Was I only protecting myself from hard work or the judging eyes of my colleagues if they had found out I let a student pass a class after missing so much work by creating a deal that probably no student would accept? What will I do if I meet another student in a situation like Tim's? Even with all the uncertainty and questioning of academic integrity with which I wrestled, I want to believe that I made my decision because I did care about Tim's life. I believe in second chances. I think I gave him a chance to work hard and achieve his goal. I hope I gave him a chance.

When it comes to writing, we should not ignore the lives our students compose for us to read. Blitz and Hurlbert write, "One reason we love working in composition is that we have learned—or been taught—to understand the term 'composition' as broadly and imaginatively as possible. Composing is a living process, and it is the living qualities of composition that we value most—the lives of the composers" (15). No matter what our theoretical approach to our pedagogy may be, if we ignore that a human being writes to us then we run the risk of dehumanizing the very human practice of composing with written language. Whether we favor pure expressivist writing or social epistemic rhetoric, our students will inevitably write of their lives whether we ask them to or not. Even if writing instructors attempt to design assignments that approach writing instruction and performance as a technical skill, the fact will always remain—a human being with a past, with emotions, with dreams and goals has composed a text. It would be wrong to ignore the lives that our students compose for us because as Blitz and Hurlbert contend, "composing is a living process."

## Narratives and Life

In this section, I intend to describe how narrative story telling records life as lived and remembered. This section shows that the arbitrary act of behaving as if professional spheres of life cannot overlap with personal spheres is just that—arbitrary. In fact, narrative accounts can expose just how much personal feelings influence professional decisions and how professional occurrences affect emotional well-being. Because of this, research projects such as a narrative inquiry that attempt to reveal the inner struggles of a person making decisions in an educational setting help to bring the humanity of our profession back into focus.

It seems impossible at times to separate the personal life from the public and professional life. As much as it seems logical to see life separated into spheres with distinctive borders between the personal and professional, this division cannot be concretely separated. In *Minor Re/Visions*, Young writes that this separation is impossible when it comes to literacy education, therefore he purposely makes his professional research personal. Young does this because he argues that literacy is a personal subject that defines a person's identity, therefore, the public and professional aspects of literacy cannot be divorced from personal feelings:

“Personal/Public/Professional,” considers the implications for our research, teaching, and profession as we continue to think about the uses of the personal, what the minor means in our classroom, and how we participate both in and beyond our institutions. As a teacher and scholar of color, I choose to use the personal in my research because it provides a context for understanding how and why I apply specific analytical frames to the subjects I study. (15)

Like Young, no matter what sphere of my life I may inhabit at the moment, I am always a teacher even if I'm not in the classroom. And when I'm in the classroom, I can't help but be

influenced by my human emotions and experiences when interacting with students. I take the feelings I experience as a teacher home with me. In Tim's story from this chapter, I had sleepless nights worrying over him. In Tron's story in Chapter Two, I abandoned my plans to go to the beach that afternoon because I felt awful after the meeting. The professional occurrences of the day influence my personal feelings when I go home. Perhaps education has professional hopes for the future, but these hopes are personal as well. Narrative inquiry can act as a bridge between the personal and professional lives of students and teachers by revealing the complex nature of writing education and how it affects the lives of the individuals involved. Some people may want to make a distinction between personal life and professional life, but I believe narratives expose that our lives are all one in the same and the distinctions are rather artificial.

It is logical then to assume that if our personal and professional lives are intertwined, that similar to Young's work, some of our research will merge personal and professional issues. In education, the lives our students bring into our classrooms will affect their writing education, and the lives of teachers will influence how they teach writing: "What has become apparent to me the more I teach is that our lives are so intertwined in our learning that whatever we do in the classroom both as teachers and students has some referent, no matter how small, to an individual's lived experience" (Young 143-144). My teaching affects my life, and my life influences my teaching. I worry about students, and that is why I've chosen to write these stories. These narratives are an important insight into the life of a young writing teacher that wants to make an impact: "The personal is not simply an individual idiosyncratic story but rather part and parcel of the many stories that inform the larger sociocultural narratives that script America" (Young 172). While the stories may seem like egotistical reflections to some readers, telling stories such as these capture part of what it means to teach writing in English in an American

context in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. They record specific attempts to encourage hope in particular students. They capture a glimpse into the social and cultural dilemmas American society currently faces. For all these reasons, I've decided to tell some of my stories and create a narrative project to examine hope.

Narrative form as a research method aims at breaking down the borders that separate the personal by exposing the nuances of human interaction in all their complexity. D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly in *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* argue that narrative inquiry is a form of research that seeks to understand that which is often overlooked: "Narrative inquiry, from this point of view, is one of trying to make sense of life as lived. To begin with, it is trying to figure out the taken-for grantedness" (78). Hope is a feeling and view of education that I believe is often overlooked or dismissed. Or hope merely is used as a rhetorical tool to sell education policy. Too often in the classroom we focus on content delivery without considering the hopes of students, or we simply neglect to see our students as people who have invested emotional stock in their education. I'm using my narratives as a method to focus attention on what it actually means to teach for the hopes of our students' lives. Each life in our classroom is an important life. That is why focusing on only several students is an important research endeavor. Narrative is a way to understand particular difficult moments when teaching writing.

The moments that a narrative researcher chooses to narrate in research, that are put into discussion with other peoples' stories and theories, and that are the stories that haunt and enchant the mind of the author for years, even decades after their occurrence, represent significant and powerful episodes in a life. For some reason, perhaps explainable or maybe inexplicable, after all the fleeting events in a life, these particular images and stories have remained in memories and

influenced future decisions and actions. Coles describes the action of remembering as an impactful aspect of a life lived: “A memory is, of course, a story, an aspect of experience that lives in a particular mind...a recollected moment in which someone has tasted of life, a moment forceful enough, charged enough, to survive many other moments” (183). The several stories I have chosen to share are narratives that stand out in my memory. They have remained with me for many years. I retell them to myself, and I tell them to other people. These stories are of particular interest for this project because they are the impetus for my dissertation. As I have recounted them, I began to find the theme of hope in all these stories. Each one of them builds to a hopeful moment for the people involved when it appeared as if goals would be accomplished, and then the stories moved toward moments when people felt hopeless or lost. These impactful stories of hope and hopelessness have inspired this dissertation.

A question I often encounter when discussing narrative methodology as a research project involves the issues of subjectivity and truth. I am not going to entertain a lengthy discussion on the nature of truth. Rather, I’d point readers toward the work of Clandinin and Connelly who discuss truth and narrative inquiry at length. But just to make clear the value of subjective research projects, I’d like to cite Frankl’s view on the matter in the opening lines of *Man’s Search for Meaning*:

To attempt a methodological presentation of the subject is very difficult, as psychology requires a certain scientific detachment. But does a man who makes his observations while he himself is a prisoner possess the necessary detachment? Such detachment is granted to the outsider, but he is too far removed to make any statements of real value. Only the man inside knows. His judgments may not be objective; his evaluations may be out of proportion. This is inevitable. (20)

So called objective research has a mythical stature that gives the aura of objectivity as if bias and human feelings cannot infect the knowledge constructed through certain types of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Yet Frankl reminds us that such research may lose some of the humanity in examining life as lived. So while recording our personal narratives will bring subjectivity into the project, the subjectivity gives such research its unique value. It is showing the mind as it works through story telling and analysis from the perspective of one who has experienced first hand the account being told.

Writing these first several stories about failing to encourage hope is an attempt to take control over difficult teaching experiences as I remember them and make sense of them. These are moments that have impacted me enough to take a prominent place in my memory. Writing narratives, according to Murray in *Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem*, is a way to find meaning in experience: “Many of us hunger to write, need to experience our world once in reality and then to understand it through the insights of art, seeing with words what we had not seen at the moment of experience, discovering patterns that reveal meaning in experience” (9). I can see in my early stories as a childcare worker that using writing as a method of hopeful engagement with another human is difficult. And I see in Tron’s story that a failure to understand his personal connection with his public status as a student partly destroyed his hopeful educational dreams. And with Tim, I worry about how I tried to use hope to push him to work harder in the face of extreme personal difficulties that I could barely imagine. In all these stories and their retellings, I’ve learned that hope is something I want to encourage in writers. That is the first thing I’ve learned. And I hope that my readers also learn from my stories.

These stories that I’m telling and the narrative research method’s legitimacy rests on the ability for readers to identify with the narratives and share in the experience. It is through this

connection that the project takes on genuine research value. Jerome Bruner's essay "The Narrative Construction of Reality" contends that human experience is often understood and transmitted through narratives that represent reality:

We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative—stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on.... Unlike constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve "verisimilitude." Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and "narrative necessity" rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness. (4)

I am presenting a small glimpse into the moments that have shaped me as a young writing teacher. I am counting on the ability of my readers to connect to these stories to give the research legitimacy. I am relying on the social dimensions of story telling to connect readers to my experience so that they might learn with me. I then want to view my stories through the theoretical lens of hope so that together we may better appreciate how hope may aid the teaching of writing.

Ultimately, though, this dissertation and the stories I tell in it are as much for me as for any reader. I hope to learn from my disappointment in myself and the moments I felt proud as a teacher. Like Pagnucci, my stories have a personal value for me and a public value for my readership: "In this book, I've tried to make *everything* personal. I've tried to show how stories from my life can illuminate the ideas I'm talking about, can help readers connect back to the stories in their own lives. But I've also done this so that the writing will help me learn as I go along. I've written this book as much for myself as for anyone else" (28). Similarly, the stories I

am composing act as a form of educational catharsis. They are a means for me to understand moments I perceive as failures, and then to move on and use those moments to learn and make the future better. Essentially, my dissertation is a hopeful enterprise for my future as a teacher. I've written this dissertation to help myself and my readers to experience what it might be like to teach writing in such a way as to encourage hope in the composition classroom.

### Frames and the Voices of Others

In this section, I briefly discuss the format of this dissertation. I describe how narrative methodology achieves theoretical insight by combining my personal stories with past scholarship. As discussed in the first chapter, this dissertation functions through the use of several different styles of writing. It blends stories, meta-narration, and analytical essay writing. Clandinin and Connelly use the metaphor of soup to explain the methodology of merging story telling with essayistic analysis:

We likened narrative form to *a soup*....As we began to play with the metaphor of a soup, we realized that like the soups there could be different ingredients in our narrative pots. Parts of our research text can be composed of rich descriptions of people, places, and things; other parts can be composed of carefully constructed arguments that argue for a certain understanding of the relations among people, places, and things; and still others can be richly textured narratives of the people situated in place, time, scene, and plot. For us, all these can be narrative texts.

(155)

The first literary element in my dissertation is the signpost introduction sections at the beginning of each chapter that orient a reader to the goals for each chapter. The second component of my methodology is the narratives themselves; they function by capturing a particular teaching

moment. Then, by incorporating the work of other scholars, my third piece of this methodology is the essayistic analysis of the narratives.

This method of narrative research is not new in composition scholarship. The incorporation of other voices is what Richard J. Meyer labels as framing. Frames act as a means to understand our stories in relation to past scholarship:

The important point of framing is that it is used in the telling and writing of our stories. We bring in the voices of others to confirm our own voice. Or, we might bring in the voices of others to show that we are thinking differently from them. Either way, the voices of others help us. They may help us by confirming our own voices or they may help us by forcing us to articulate arguments against another.

(130)

Using the voices of others helps make sense of my stories—it can challenge or support educational assumptions and practices. For example, Tron’s story makes us question placement procedures and designating certain writing classes as ESL only, and the work of Young, Fu, and Park help support the theory that writing education can impact the sense of self in bilingual writers. This pairing of my stories and scholarship suggests that discussions with bilingual students about their placement may be beneficial if we want to encourage hope. I’m using my stories and ideas in conjunction with the work of other scholars in several disciplines to build a hopeful theory of composition.

This hopeful theory is built through the literature review and story analysis. In discussing the place of theory, Clandinin and Connelly describe “literature reviewed as a kind of conversation between theory and life or, at least, between theory and the stories of life contained in the inquiry” (41). In Chapter Four, I intend to write a lengthy narrative that will then be

analyzed in Chapter Five with the use of the literature used throughout this dissertation's first several chapters. This will be how I show an example of a hopeful theory of how to teach writing in practice with the use of theoretical framed analysis.

### Interpretations and Narratives

In this section, I discuss how a narrative research project offers conclusions, insights, and knowledge for a reading audience. Narrative projects do not assert definitive results intended to give sweepingly large generalizations on how to teach writing in some specific method across many different contexts. Instead, narrative projects act more subtly. These projects can ask a reader to share the experience recollected in a story and follow the narrative through the analytical frames, and this sharing of experience and thought invites readers to interpret and create knowledge and understanding that is personalized to each reader's unique experiences and knowledge.

As I work to create a hopeful theory of composition, it is important to be reminded of how narrative inquiry will offer answers to author and readers. Certainly, as stated by Pagnucci, stories contain answers: "To live the narrative life, then, is to open yourself up to the possibilities of stories, to give yourself over to them, to trust them. Stories are a kind of magic. Simple magic, really, but magic all the same. If we tell our own stories, preserve them, study them, we can find in our stories some of the answers for which we're looking" (83). So while the stories I write in this dissertation can help answer how to encourage hope in a writing class, it is necessary to remember that these answers are not the definitive, authoritative answers provided by other research methods and findings. Instead, narrative inquiry offers readers the opportunity to join the author in living the experience and analysis with the author. Narrative research does not offer us large, sweepingly general answers meant to fit each unique school, classroom, teacher, and

student: “The narrative inquirer does not prescribe general applications and uses but rather creates texts that, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (Clandinin and Connelly 42). So I am not giving a definitive argument for how every teacher should teach writing in order to encourage hope. Rather, I’m providing a glimpse of a hopeful theory and the stories that have shaped such a theory, and I’m offering the conclusions I’ve reached for myself. The reader can reinterpret this theory and narrative data so that the reader may find his or her own meaning: “In narrative ideology, there are always other possibilities for understanding events. Narratives always leave open the door for reinterpretations....This means stories never offer fixed answers, definitive accounts” (Pagnucci 48-49). With each narrative and analysis, there is always room for reinterpretation. This is why I state that I am presenting my work as an opportunity for readers to share in my project of understanding how hope manifests in a composition class by offering suggestions rather than absolute conclusions.

In order to create the opportunity for a reader to share in the making of knowledge, the author of a narrative project cannot authoritatively present story telling research as definitive findings meant to report absolute truth in the depicted events. Narrative projects seek to show the subjectivity, the elusiveness of making sense of lived events, to recount the complications for examination from readers as well as the author. In “Composing Narrative for Inquiry,” Schaafsma and Ruth Vinz describe conveying experience to a reader of a narrative research project as a temperate process of sharing experience: “We are thinking that effective narrative gives the reader a door to open and walk through. The reader enters and must be thinking: Take me gently toward meaning; make my feet move, step by step, across the floor. Help me experience what I haven’t experienced before” (277). Narrative inquiry seeks to share

experiences, thoughts, and ideas in order to spark recollection, trigger new ideas, and help a reader build a sense of individualized thought. The narrative project does not seek to declare total truth; the narrative project seeks to ignite future thought that textures how we view our field of study in relation to the world.

Through sharing experience and ideas in order to prompt the mind of a reader to produce ideas and memories, the narrative project creates a community of thought around the text. Schaafsma, Pagnucci, Wallace, and Stock describe the interpretive quality in narrative research as a means of connecting people together: “Narratives have tellers and listeners/readers; they represent very real efforts to link people together by inviting readers’ interpretations” (303). By writing a descriptive narrative of an experience, the author takes the reader into the depicted moment. Once there, a reader has the option to make sense of the conveyed world in the story on his or her own, and in reading accompanied framed research about the narrative, the reader also shares in the scholarly pursuit of theory construction. Paley expands on the idea of narratives linking people by illustrating how stories are a social occurrence that activates the minds of those who hear or read shared stories: “Our kind of storytelling is a social phenomenon, intended to flow through all other activities and provide the widest opportunity for a communal response. Stories are not private affairs; the individual imagination plays host to all the stimulation in the environment and causes ripples of ideas to encircle the listeners” (21). The activity of telling/writing and listening/reading stories inspires new stories to be told, new theories to arise, and new actions to be implemented. Stories operate as a means of inspiration to a community of people who build knowledge in a communal effort of understanding and sharing.

The importance of building ideas, theories, and stories together rests on the belief that this type of research does not seek to formulate standardized views and methods in education. As

Vinz states, “Every teacher needs to understand that the work of other teachers can become part of the dialectic on teaching, but it cannot essentialize each individual teacher’s work” (9). I do not mean for my narrative project and my conclusions to represent definitive declarations of how to teach hopeful writing for every teacher in every context. That’s far from my purpose for seeking to understand hope in a composition class. I am adding my stories and ideas to the conversation. A Burkean parlor conversation, if you will (Burke 110-111). A conversation that began long before I arrived and will continue long after I have left. But I’m adding my voice and stories in an attempt to challenge and inspire, not to promote conformity.

I cannot offer a hard-fixed understanding of hope in the composition classroom. And if we consider the nature of hope as discussed in Chapter Two—that hope and reality are always in an ongoing process of change—then this methodology presents the ideal means of viewing and sharing hopeless and hopeful moments. Given the nature of hope as being in flux, this narrative methodology offers a good way of viewing hope according to Schaafsma and Vinz’s description in *On Narrative Inquiry*: “Many narrative studies in education tell of the struggles, the resistance, and the broken silences while undermining the glorification of generalizations, the over-emphasis on mass initiatives, and the promise of finding replicable ‘one size fits all’ practices” (29). There is no one-size-fits-all version of hope. Hope will change depending on our context. Therefore, there is no way to prescribe a specific application that will work to encourage hopeful writers. Rather, hope in the composition classroom is an experience that we must share in together just as we can share in hope building moments as a community.

### Writing, Healing, and Hope

All humans have experienced loss, pain, and trauma. We all know the feeling of losing hope. We know what it is like to experience moments of hopelessness. But I believe that we can

use writing to counter this affect, and writing can be a means of generating hope. In this section, I draw from composition theory and group therapy theory to show that we can write hopeful futures for ourselves.

We live in a world full of ills. We see them everyday. Charles M. Anderson and Marian M. MacCurdy in the “Introduction” to *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice* state that all our students witness, experience, and commit these traumas and they come to our writing classes with these experiences:

Students in suburban and even rural settings must deal with traumatic events ranging from fist fights to drive-by shootings, as well as the less-directed but equally destructive effects of addictive drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, neglect, economic indulgence, and poverty. Even family structures are no protection from traumatic experiences. Today we know that the number of children damaged by sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, even within the family, far exceed our expectations. Their faces confront us every day, as we pour milk over our morning cereal, as we witness their broken bodies being “found” almost every week on the evening news. (2)

Students and teachers come into class as victimizer and victims, hopeless and battered, but also survivors who are hopeful. So how can we begin to heal each other, our world, and ourselves? How can we begin to use hope to make a better existence for teachers and students? I believe writing can be a means of hope for all people.

Hope is immensely important because it is the drive that helps us face and overcome trauma and adversity. It is hope that prompts us to believe we can achieve great things despite the past. Reading asserts that those people that succumb to hopelessness are less likely to aspire

towards dreams and a better future: “Individuals who have been hurt by lost hopes tend to protect themselves against future disappointment by lowering their sights and dimming their aspirations. People who are hopeful about the future can, however, endure all manner of deprivation and adversity, while those without hope are more easily overwhelmed and defeated” (17). So attempting to find a way to encourage hope is a vital component for any writing teacher that wishes to inspire students with their pedagogy. I want to recreate moments such as when Jason and I shared crafting a positive story. Writing can be a small, or large depending on the situation, means of creating hope. Students need hope to move forward and reach toward that which seems difficult to achieve.

Something powerful happens when people compose meaningful accounts from their life experiences. Writing can truly affect change in our lives. According to Joshua M. Smyth and James W. Pennebaker, psychological studies have shown that writing is a way to promote health:

When people put their emotional upheavals into words their physical and mental health seems to improve markedly. Systematic investigation of this phenomenon started over a decade ago, when college students were asked to write their deepest thoughts and feelings about traumatic experiences as part of a psychology laboratory experiment. Much more happened than just their writing about traumatic experiences, however. The writing exercise often changed their lives.

There was something remarkable about their expressing themselves in words. (70)

As writing teachers, we should be astutely aware of the power writing has to transform the lives of authors. The accounts of the study by Smyth and Pennebaker suggest that the act of composing has benefits for people dealing with stress and trauma. Furthermore, works such as those reported in the edited collection *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice* also

support the notion that writing has restorative power for those in need. And I would then contend that if writing about trauma can be beneficial as a healing and coping tool, that students who engage in this type of writing can also be building hope. Writing about non-traumatic events could also be a means of hope construction, such as Jason and Tron's papers that emphasized transforming their educational labels into something more positive. Therefore, if we truly believe we can have an influence on the lives of students and society at large, then we must encourage hopeful writing. We must also acknowledge and be open to the fact that hopeful writing will be different depending on each student's background, the context, and the goals of the student and the course. And we must engage in hopeful writing of our own. We must use writing to make a better future for our students and ourselves.

Hope is a forward oriented emotion that compels us to plan for future benefit from present actions and behaviors. Writing can be a means to work in the present for later returns. Tilly Warnock views writing as a way to symbolically test possibility as we organize language and compose narratives:

But writing and reading can allow people to live other lives and try things out symbolically, so that we can make better decisions about what we value and do. There is no guarantee, of course, that reading and writing make people act more wisely. But, writing and reading, by expanding our experience and repertoire of strategies, can provide additional possibilities from which we may choose in order to live and act effectively in specific contexts. (51)

I am writing my life as a hopeful teacher by writing this dissertation. Similarly, students can write about their hopeful futures. Whether that be healing from past trauma, spreading happiness,

or finding a way to make writing benefit their professional careers—all these things can represent hope.

Bloch writes that as we dream and let our dreams grow, they become closer to realization: “Then let the daydreams grow really fuller, that is, clearer, less random, more familiar, more clearly understood and more mediated with the course of things. So that the wheat which is trying to ripen can be encouraged to grow and be harvested” (4). I believe writing can be a way to encourage the growth of our dreams. It is a means to understanding what difficulties we have overcome and where we have succeeded. It captures our attention on who we can be in our future and how we can help our world. MacCurdy writes, “Our love for our students, for their truths, for their potential clarity of vision and writing talent can motivate excellence more than anything else” (194). If we cherish the work our students do presently, and the work we compose as well, we might be able to shape a hopeful future together.

### Breaking Prosaic Form

The purpose of this section is to discuss a shift in form between the first section of the dissertation—Chapters One, Two, and Three—to the second section of the dissertation—Chapters Four and Five. I structure the first three chapters of the dissertation using a pattern of meta-narration that outlines each chapter, followed by the narration of a short teaching story, and then sections of theoretical framing. Chapters Four and Five break this form. As mentioned in this chapter and Chapter One, Chapter Four consists only of the narration of a lengthy teaching story without sections of meta-narration or theoretical frames included in this chapter. Chapter Five, then, has no narration of a teaching story and instead only consists of sections that meta-narrate the outline of the chapter and accompanying theoretical frames. This change in compositional structure in which the concluding two chapters of the dissertation alters from the

initial layout of the first three chapters occurs because of how I depict hope and the obstruction of hope in Chapter Four. In the first three narratives, I encounter what Snyder describes as blocked pathways, or the need to produce alternative routes for pursuing hopeful goals (251). But in Chapter Four's narrative, there is a complete lack of hope. In this section I will discuss why this difference justifies a change in prosaic form.

The narratives in Chapters One, Two, and Three represent moments when hopeful pathways become blocked. In these stories, as the teacher I went into all these teaching situations feeling hopeful for the student writers I worked with in each narrative, yet at some point in all of these narratives, the route toward encouraging hopeful writers became impeded due to complicated situations. To reiterate the literature on hope theory reviewed in Chapter Two, often times, as people pursue hopeful goals, the perceived route towards accomplishing those goals may be prevented, but our goals can be reevaluated and new ways to pursue our goals can be generated in the future to maintain hope: "First, there is often a lot of trial and error to define goals and pathways that will succeed....Second, life deals us circumstances in which we have to select goals and pathways we never thought we could accept. Yet, the practice of doing hope, of re-forming goals and cultivating pathways to them, stretches us, helping us sustain the very practice of doing hope" (Weingarten 16). Pathways are the strategies, behaviors, and courses of action that people perform to reach goals. Sometimes there are moments in our lives when our plan for achieving a hopeful goal becomes hampered, but if we hold onto our hopeful agency as described in Chapter Two, there exists the possibility of achieving similar goals when we reconsider our means to accomplishing these goals.

Take for example the narratives in the first three chapters. I have the goals to teach composition in such a way as to encourage hope, to be a positive influence in the lives of my

students, and to help students work toward their educational objectives. In working to understand how to achieve these goals, I have narrated moments when my strategies toward these aims failed. In Chapter One, I believe I fell short of encouraging hopeful writing with the child Jason because after he violently attacked another child without provocation, I became consumed by my own anger. In this narrative, I lost hope for a moment, but in retrospect I've come to see alternative ways I could have used writing as a way to help Jason learn from the violent episode. Rather than punishing Jason by withholding writing, I could have encouraged hopeful writing in the form of an apology letter, or maybe a form of writing that would have encouraged Jason to understand what he had done from the girl's perspective. So while in this particular moment my method of helping Jason understand why he behaved as he did failed, I can now reflect on our interaction and see that I could have used writing in other ways to encourage Jason to continue his path towards no longer being the troubled child.

In my story of working with Tron in Chapter Two, we encountered a blocked pathway when I decided to move Tron from the first-year-writing course into an ESL designated section. In this narrative, I designed a writing assignment in which students would articulate their specific goals, and then during our conferences, we could strategize ways to achieve these goals. When I failed to understand Tron's objective concerning his educational label as an ESL student, Tron's strategies for shedding his ESL designation at the college appear to have failed, and I failed in my goal of being a positive influence in his educational experience at our school. But from this situation I formed a new plan for myself toward understanding hopeful writing and working with multilingual students. This incident helped inspire me to continue my education by studying in a graduate program that could better prepare me to work with multilingual writing students, and I

understand alternative decisions I can make when I work with multilingual students in the writing classes I teach in the future.

And finally, in Chapter Three I felt my hopeful goal, as well as Tim's, became blocked when Tim was unable to complete the writing class. In this narrative, I explicitly stated our goal of getting Tim to pass the class and not hate writing. In reflection, I do believe I gave Tim a hopeful chance to pass the course. The point here is that these narratives represent scenarios in which a writing teacher entered the classroom feeling hopeful and then encountered a problem that prevented goals from being achieved. These narratives help me understand that I can create alternative ways to encourage hopeful writing in the future when similar complicated problems may occur as I continue to teach writing.

The narrative to come in Chapter Four represents a much different impediment to hope in a composition class. Rather than another narrative depicting a moment when a hopeful teacher's goal of encouraging hopeful writing fails, Chapter Four's narrative portrays a total absence of hope. This narrative describes how as a writing teacher I had no hope for a specific group of students, and I believed they would never succeed in my writing courses or at achieving an education. As discussed in Chapter One, I have and continue to firmly cling to the belief that all people possess unique intelligence and potential, that all people can write and write well with the proper amount of work and support, and that all my students can do amazing things. I believe hopeful writing is possible for all people. But Chapter Four reveals an anomaly in this belief, a contradiction, a moment that could be described as cognitive dissonance. Leon Festinger's work, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, describes cognitive dissonance as an instance when a person's values, beliefs, and ideologies encounter either a social, psychological, or environmental contradiction, and this contradiction creates distress in the person: "In the

presence of inconsistency—there is psychological discomfort” (2). The narrative in Chapter Four portrays the experience of cognitive dissonance when teaching writing. As a writing teacher, I base my sense of self-worth on my ability to work with most students, regardless of a student’s background, and that I have the compassion to see past any problems or troubles that a student may bring into our classroom in order to help the student achieve his or her goals. In Chapter Four’s narrative though, I depict how I unconsciously had a prejudice that conflicted directly with these strong values. I believed a certain kind of student was indeed hopeless, and I don’t think I wanted to admit this to myself or anybody else. This is an example of cognitive dissonance because my underlying prejudice conflicted with my expressed values.

This feeling of hopelessness for students in Chapter Four’s narrative presents a larger problem than a failed plan toward encouraging hopeful writing. My absence of hope for a student creates a significant feeling of cognitive dissonance for me: “If two elements are dissonant with one another, the magnitude of the dissonance will be a function of the importance of the elements. The more these elements are important to, or valued by, the person, the greater will be the magnitude of a dissonant relation between them” (Festinger 16). Because my desire to be a hopeful teacher that believes in the potential of all his students is so strong, my hidden prejudice based on past experiences is a major dilemma in teaching writing to encourage hope. I avoided working with certain students. I thought they had no hope of succeeding in college, and I felt these students were destroying our community. As a result of possessing these feelings, I didn’t want to help these students, and if I had no choice but to work with such a student, then I wanted to convert him or her into my way of perceiving his or her past lifestyle. My actions conflicted with my values and this was my cognitive dissonance.

In order to textually represent cognitive dissonance in Chapter Four, I've purposely broken the prosaic form established in the first three chapters of the dissertation. This is done to create a sense of discomfort in the reader—an uneasiness that might mimic the discomfort experienced through cognitive dissonance. In “Dramatic Form—And: *Tracking Down Implications*,” Burke defines a repeating pattern of organization in a work as creating stability for an audience: “‘Repetitive’ form involves the ways in which a work embodies a fixed character or identity, the ways in which a work, however disjunct, manifests some kinds of internal self-consistency” (54). To this point in the dissertation, the form has been one of meta-narration, narration, and framing, yet at this point that pattern will be broken. For Burke, a repetition of form creates an anticipation of projected form for the reader who expects to find a continued pattern as the work progresses such as in Chapters One, Two, and Three: “And most important of all, there is repetitive form, perhaps the most compelling of all expectations, the requirement that, in some strategic respect, *the same general kind of procedure* will be maintained throughout a given work” (“On Form” 109). The repetition of an organizational structure in a text has the affect of encouraging a reader to anticipate that the form will be continued and carried on throughout the work. By fracturing the repetition of form and disrupting a reader's anticipation, I seek to create anxiety similar to the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance.

The pattern of narration in Chapter Four also shifts form from the pattern established in Chapters One, Two, and Three by continually shifting between moments in time to depict the origins of this cognitive dissonance and how it has influenced my teaching of writing. In discussing the creation of cognitive dissonance in a person's psychology, Festinger writes, “Dissonance could arise from logical inconsistency....Dissonance may arise from past

experience” (14). The seeds of the dissonance depicted in Chapter Four were planted in my childhood and were securely rooted by the time I began teaching writing. What I have discovered in composing the narrative about hope in Chapter Four is that I need to understand where the influences that guide some of my decisions in working with certain students originated. Pagnucci writes that “The stories of our childhoods shape us forever” (67). And accordingly, I too have found that for my research I must also write about my past in order to understand some of the decisions I make as a teacher and to reassess some of my values and beliefs. This means that the narrative in Chapter Four will contain scenes from two different time periods—teaching as an adult on the central coast of California and my childhood in southern California.

If I want to understand hope as a composition teacher, I must be prepared to look into my classroom as well as beyond those walls. In his book *National Healing: Race, State, and the Teaching of Composition*, Hurlbert examines how racism subtly, and sometimes overtly, influences the teaching of writing in the United States. Hurlbert offers his hope for how to rectify this important issue, and he writes, “If we are to find the healing we need in order to contribute to the end, finally, of racism, we will need to understand how the personal, political, and pedagogical realms of our lives are inextricably linked” (7). With a topic such as racism, Hurlbert acknowledges the need for composition scholars to examine all aspects of our lives in order to understand how racism infiltrates composition classes. Similarly, for the topic of hope, to fully understand how I can teach writing in a hopeful way I have to understand what in my past has inspired and hindered this goal and how these experiences contribute to my pedagogical decisions when working with writing students. Chapter Four’s narrative seeks to illuminate how the personal will shape political beliefs, which in turn guides pedagogical decisions and how these interactions affect hopeful writing, by composing temporal shifts throughout the narrative.

Of course, though, there still needs to be some form of unity to hold the final two chapters with the earlier chapters of this dissertation: “[The work] must to that extent possess a measure of substance (some kind of ‘unity,’ however loose) that would fall under the heading of repetitive form, and that thus gratifies our expectations by going on being the kind of thing we tend to expect, however great the surprises and variations encountered en route” (Burke, “On Form” 109). The narrative methodology of inquiry holds the unity in this dissertation. So while the pattern of organization and presentation changes in order to create the sensation of cognitive dissonance and understand where this dissonance originated, the method of narrative inquiry remains the same. The narrative in Chapter Four will be framed with theory and analysis in Chapter Five. Just as the narratives in Chapters One, Two, and Three work to generate theory in relation to narrated lived experiences, Chapters Four and Five maintain this same method of research as narrative inquiry—only now the pattern of form has changed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TWO SIMPLE NUMBERS THAT SAY SO MUCH

The pale blue sky hangs over me, and light strokes of white drift high above. The unimpeded sun begins its decent toward the Pacific. A green expanse ripples in the soft warm breeze. These grass blades supporting my back still yield comfortably under my body. In about a month, once the sun grows hotter and the winter rains have dissipated into memories, these same blades will be hard and rigid.

My black canvas bag acts as a pillow under my head, and Steinbeck's *East of Eden* rests open on the chest of my red and blue plaid shirt. Spring urges me toward Steinbeck, and even though I've already finished the weighty work several times over the past decade, I feel compelled to revisit the Salinas Valley as seen through Steinbeck's vision. I just finished Chapter Twenty-Four before I abandoned the story in favor of staring at the sky. Samuel, Adam, and Lee discuss discrepancies between different translations of the story of Cain and Abel. In one telling of the story, God promises that Cain *can* overcome sin, whereas in the other version God *orders* Cain to overcome sin. In this chapter, Lee describes his research into this biblical difference, and in his study he examines the original Hebrew text. He discovers that the pivotal word causing this schism is "timshel," which translates into "thou mayest." Lee interprets the meaning of the story to be that God has granted humans the choice to overcome sin—the freedom to change the course in one's life.

I tilt my head to the left and feel the lawn tickle my cheek. About thirty yards away, several students carrying bulky backpacks stride across the sidewalk toward the Academic Resources building where the California Community College's Writing Center is housed. I check the time. 12:38. Still a good twenty minutes before my shift begins but I don't feel like reading

anymore. I sit up and scan the campus from the vantage of the center lawn. Classes are still in session for this hour so only a few sporadic people walk toward the library, or head for the bookstore, and some seem on their way to the campus dining area. Friday feels lazy.

I put my book in my bag, stand, and walk to the Writing Center. Even though I've been working here for six months, every time I pass through the two large glass doors I'm still impressed by this place. The space is expansive. Walking through the entrance, the Center divides in half. To my right are six round tables in a 2x3 layout with six PCs on each of them. At least ten students sit at the computers, staring at glowing screens. To my left there are numerous round tables, at least fifteen, where people can sit and read, write, or work on anything they like. Ten or twelve students scatter across these tables with their backs hunched over notebooks and textbooks.

In the middle of all this, an island unto itself, sits a table with a sign atop a small metal pole—it reads “Faculty.” I pull one of the wheeled chairs away from this table and set my bag down on the ground. Four other faculty members, three men and one woman, varying in ages, sit here. They appear to be grading work from their English classes, but I can't be certain. It's a safe assumption though since that is what most faculty who tutor in the center tend to do during their shifts. As a part-time adjunct faculty member, I make thirty dollars an hour to work in the center. I can only imagine what the full-timers get paid.

I pull a packet of papers from my bag. Not student papers though. Richard, a full-time faculty member from the English department and one of the more outgoing and friendly people at the college, acknowledges my presence. “Hello, Brian. What do you have there? More applications for Ph.D. programs?”

“Hey, Rich,” I reply. “Yep, this is my last application.”

“I can’t understand why you want to do more school. Be honest, did anything from your M.A. in English help you in any way to teach writing here? Knowing Derrida and Foucault sure hasn’t helped me any. So why in the world do you want to go spend five years studying more of that stuff and putting yourself further into debt?”

Rich is a nice guy despite some of our differing opinions about how to teach composition, so I think carefully about my response because I don’t want to create too much tension at the table. He means well, usually, but we often don’t see things from a similar vantage point. My knee jerk response, purely out of defensiveness, is, *Of course what you studied in a literature program may have left you unprepared to teach composition because you didn’t take graduate composition courses or actually study how to teach writing.* But I don’t want to open space for that argument. My next reaction is to say, *Maybe you could get a tenure track job here with only a M.A. ten years ago, but the educational climate in community colleges is shifting, and more and more schools want a Ph.D.* But I decide not to have that discussion either. Really, Rich is a good guy. He is a good teacher. His students love him, and I like him just fine.

So instead, I take what I think is the safest road and also an honest answer. “Well...I want to get better at teaching. I hadn’t taught too many second language students until I started here, and I figure if I can find programs that do composition and TESOL together, then I’m going to prepare myself better for what will likely be the student population I intend to teach.”

“Can’t you just learn that with your experiences here?”

“Yeah, but I also like going to school and being exposed to new ideas.”

“I get that, but you’re going into more debt for *ideas*,” he says with a mocking tone around the word ideas. “Don’t you want to actually work and make money?”

*Yes! I think, but that requires me to get a job where I can consistently get courses and being an adjunct doesn't offer such stability.* “Well...” I begin to stammer, reluctant to state my real feelings. “Well, sure, but I’ll make more money with the Ph.D. because I’ll be on a higher pay scale. So that’s good. But seriously, I just want to get better at teaching and increase my opportunities for where I can teach and what I can teach. You have to admit that holding a Ph.D. with a concentration in composition and TESOL is going to do that for me.”

Luckily a student approaches the faculty table so this conversation can come to an end. “Check?” the female student asks with a Spanish accent. She’s a tall and slender young woman with a dark complexion. She stands right next to where Ed is sitting. Ed has an Ed.D. with a specialization in TESOL, I think. He doesn’t speak too much. He is a tutor that consistently has his attention focused on his grading.

“Check?” the student timidly questions again right next to Ed. This time Ed’s head quickly pops up from reading. His face appears flustered. He looks all the way across the table at Rich and me. It seems like he expects one of us to come to his side of the table and help the student. The three of us stare at each other for entirely too long, almost as if we are gunfighters in a western waiting for one person to draw his six-shooter, and then Ed finally reaches for the student’s paper. I can see it is one of the required Writing Center assignments. All the students in the ESL and Developmental Writing programs must complete three hours studying in the Center and one standardized writing assignment every week. Usually the assignments are either grammar drills, like fill in the blanks or identify parts of a sentence, or the assignments consist of responding to a poem or short story.

Ed makes short work of the student’s paragraph. With nimble quickness, the red pen leaves its marks. Circle! Circle! Circle! Circle! Circle! Circle! Circle! Circle!

“Fix these things,” Ed bluntly states as he hands the paper back to the woman. She meekly accepts her eviscerated writing and turns away.

Having stomached as much of the faculty table as I care to tolerate, I decide it is time for me to make the first rounds of my shift. I stand up and walk toward the tables where students hunch over books or scribble on pads of paper. I make my way to the last table where a tall young man with only stubble on his head writes by hand in a plain black spiral notebook.

“Sorry to disturb you,” I begin, “but I’m wondering what you’re working on there?”

The student looks up from his work a little startled. He blinks his eyes a couple times as if he is trying to focus on an unfamiliar scene. “Ummm...I’m trying to write this response to the poem here.” He gestures toward the collection of readings that all Developmental Writing students must buy from our bookstore.

“Want some help?” I ask with enthusiasm.

“Sure,” he answers. “Want to read what I have so far?”

“Yeah. My name is Brian, by the way.” I reach my right hand out as I take a seat next to him.

“Manuel,” he responds as we shake hands. “Nice to meet you.”

“You, too. So let’s see what we have here.” I read over his paragraph. Essentially, what the assignment requires in these reading responses is for students to summarize the plot and offer a brief interpretation. “Okay, you’ve done a really good job summarizing the poem.”

“You think so? I thought it might be too simple a summary, you know. It can’t be this easy.”

“Well, it’s a simple poem in some ways,” I respond. “You pretty much nail it. A guy is walking down a path in a forest, he comes to where the path splits, he thinks about which he should take, then he chooses one. You got it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. That’s the first step to analyzing poetry. Figure out what is literally happening. Now you have to interpret what the poem means.”

“I think it has something to do with choices in life.”

“Why?”

“Well, the forest and path is like the direction we take with our lives, and the forest is wild and all, but we make our way through it by following this path, you know. Like it is our fate or destiny.”

“This sounds good. Take notes in your journal as you keep telling me ideas.”

“Okay.” He scribbles words into his journal for a minute. “Want to hear more?”

“Yeah, yeah. Keep going. This is good.”

“The thing is though that fate isn’t all there is in life. We also control some stuff. And that’s why the guy in the poem has to make that decision. This is a moment where he has some control over his fate.”

“Love it! Write it down!” He writes for another minute. “That’s a great interpretation,” I say once Manuel finishes scribbling on his paper. “Now let’s support your ideas by citing some parts of the poem.” We look over the poem and add lines to his notes.

“I got one more question though,” Manuel states. “What do you think he means when he says he took the one less traveled and that made all the difference?”

I look at Manuel and ask, “Well, what does less traveled mean?”

“I guess it means that not as many people take that way.”

“Sounds reasonable,” I reply. “So what clues in the poem tell you that not many people walk on this path?”

“One is grassy and not too worn down. And it has leaves all over it. So that shows that people don’t walk on it all that much.”

“True. What does the other look like?”

“I don’t know,” Manuel answers.

“Sure you do,” I encourage. “You’ve picked up on a lot of clues in here so far. Just read through and find words that tell you how each path looks.”

Manuel focuses his eyes on the page. He begins to skim over the poem. “Two roads diverged...be one traveler...took one just as fair...had worn them about the same...both equally lay...” Manuel stops reading. “Wait a minute! The paths look exactly the same!”

“Yep,” I say with a smile.

“So what the hell, man? If they are the same looking path, then how do we take the one less people walk on and all that stuff?”

“I don’t know,” I answer. “That’s up to you to consider. But I think you have done a great job so far. Just keep thinking about what it all means.”

“For a simple poem, it sure does say a lot, you know,” Manuel chuckles a little as he says this.

“I do know. Write out your response, and I’ll be back in a little to see how it turns out.”

“Cool. Thanks, Brian.”

“No problem. Good job!”

Although no other faculty member does this kind of thing, I routinely wander amongst the students working in the Center and ask them if they need any help, if I can answer any questions, or if I can simply read what they are writing. I often take my things from the faculty table and sit where students are working. With them, I will work on my applications or read until anybody needs some feedback from me. Even though these behaviors are abnormal for our Center and I worry that they might put me at odds with the other faculty, I like to feel as if I am mingling with the students. After all, I am here to help them, so I want to make them feel comfortable talking with me and to know I have an interest in their work.

I ask several other students at nearby tables if they need any help. A few ask me to check some of the grammar drills they are doing.

“Are these verbs conjugated correctly?” a small girl with dark curls covering part of her face asks in a soft voice.

“Let me see.” I look over the answers she has written into the spaces on the page. “These are perfect. You got a hundred percent!”

“I did?” she says softly.

“Say, ‘I did!’ Say it with a powerful voice because you did it!” I exclaim.

“I did,” she says a little louder.

“Say it with more power!” I persuade.

“I did it!” she screams almost loud enough to get every head in the Center to turn towards us. We both giggle.

“Let me sign off on the bottom of the sheet, and then you can turn this in and be finished with this week’s activity.”

After I check on all the students at the tables, I head over to where people are working at the computer stations. I see several students at each of the tables. Then I slow down my movement while the physiology of my body speeds up. I feel my pulse beat in my hands, and I feel sweat form on my brow. I've completely stopped moving. My chest constricts in on itself. My arms and legs tingle like they are pulsing with electricity. My eyes fixate on one point ahead of me. I just stand.

Sitting with his back toward me as he works on a computer, a man sits focused on the screen before him. I can tell he is wearing long, blue shorts with tall white tube socks. He is wearing an A-shirt, or what is pejoratively labeled a wife-beater. His exposed arms are brown with tattoos covering them, but what my gaze focuses on is his head. His hair is completely shaved off, and on the back of his skull there is a large, black tattoo. The tattoo is simple. Two numbers. Two simple numbers.

After several seconds of staring, I compose myself and walk to the opposite side of the computer stations from the tattooed man. I circle the table of computers, asking if anybody needs help. The students there are diligently typing assignments and don't need assistance from me. I then move to the next computer table. There I find Nicole, a hard working student that had been in my Developmental Writing class last semester.

"Hi, Mr. Fotinakes!" she greets me enthusiastically.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Nicole. Now you know, you can call me Brian."

"I know, but it feels weird. I like Mr. Fotinakes."

"Well whatever you like is fine with me. What are you working on here?"

"I'm writing a research paper about organic food versus processed food."

"Interesting...what have you discovered?"

“I learned that there’s really no regulation on how companies get the organic sticker on their items. Like meats and stuff. And...” As Nicole is telling me about her research, my attention drifts to the table behind us where the tattooed man sits. I briefly glance at him then back to Nicole. “...so when you pay more money for food that is labeled organic, you actually may not be buying what you expect to be buying.”

“Sounds like you found some interesting research. Do you need any help?”

“I think I’m okay for now. Can I show you this draft when I finish typing it?”

“Sure,” I answer then head to the next table.

I circle each table, asking each student if they need help, just as I always do when I work in the Writing Center. But at the table where the tattooed man sits, I skip him. I don’t ask him if he needs my help. I don’t even look at him. I walk by. At least Ed would have offered the man a few red circles. I didn’t even give the guy that much.

I walk back to the faculty table. I sit down next to Rich again. I pull my Ph.D. application cover letter in front of myself, intending to revise it. I look up, and in my line of sight is the tattooed man. I don’t even see the man, really. All I see are those two numbers. Two simple numbers.

\* \* \*

I trace my finger in the numbers and letters carved into the wood pillar. From atop the playground fort, I can see Dad and assistant coach Larry putting the team soccer balls into the bright orange mesh bags. Mom is talking to some ladies as they sit in their foldout lawn chairs. Mom and Dad are on the opposite side of the soccer field from the playground. My gold soccer jersey has grass stains on it from where I slid to kick a ball before it went out of bounds. I like it

when my uniform gets dirt and grass stains on it. It shows I played hard. I'm number three. That's my favorite number.

I take a deep breath and my chest stings. The sky is brown and hazy again today. That's why baseball is better. I don't have to run so much in baseball. These smog days make my chest hurt because I have to run too much in soccer. On baseball Saturdays, my chest never hurts after games. Even if I play a doubleheader. Even if it is one of those really brown days when the sun looks funny like it has a shade over it. Those days the sun reminds me of the time Dad and I looked at a solar eclipse while wearing welding goggles.

I hear the squeal of the joints in the wooden suspension bridge that leads to the top of the fort. I twist my body around from where I am sitting cross-legged and see Mary in her pink shorts and white tank top with her pigtails held tight by two hair ties that have large pink plastic balls on the ends. She comes next to me and says, "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," I answer slightly annoyed. Little sisters sure are a pain sometimes. "What do you want?" I continue tracing my fingers along the grooves cut into the wood.

"Mom said we can go to Wienerschnitzel for lunch and you can get chili cheese dogs. But I'm getting a corn dog."

"Okay."

"What are you doing, Bar Bar?" Mary points to where my hand hovers over the symbols cut into the wood. She's called me Bar Bar ever since she could speak when she was a baby. I don't really like that name now that I'm a third grader, but sometimes big brothers have to let their little sisters do baby stuff like that.

"Nothing. Just sitting here."

"Who cut those numbers and letters in the wood?" Mary asks.

“Bad guys did.”

“How do you know bad guys did it?”

“Because Dad. One time when he walked me down the block to the baseball card shop, he let me go to the liquor store on the corner and get an Icee. Remember, we brought a cherry one back for you. When we were there I saw these same numbers and letters cut in wood outside the store. I asked Dad why someone did that and he said the gangs do that because it marks their territory.”

“What’s territory?”

“It’s like the gang’s base. There are other gangs in the city and they want to get into their base, kind of like when we play capture the flag and each team has its side. Their territory is like their side. So they cut the wood and spray paint the numbers and names for their gang on their territory.”

“How do they cut the wood?”

“I think they have pocket knives. They even take the knives to school where it isn’t allowed.”

Mary looks startled by this insight and questions with apprehension in her voice, “To our school?”

“Not ours. Our school doesn’t have gangs,” I assure her. “To schools like Dad’s. But don’t worry, he knows how to take care of himself.”

“Let’s go swing, Bar!” Mary exclaims.

“Okay!”

I jump up and Mary goes bounding over the bridge, causing the entire fort to wiggle under her tiny weight. I chase after her and holler, “I’m gunna tickle you!”

“Noooooooooooo!” She runs down the steps and towards the swings, her voice trailing after her. I chase after but stop when I get to an empty swing next to where Mary has already hopped onto one. I jump into my swing, and we both begin pumping our legs forwards and backwards.

“I’m gunna go higher than you!” I tease Mary.

“Nu uh!” she squeals.

We both giggle as we continually gain speed. Across the soccer field I see Mom walking towards us.

\* \* \*

As I walk up the stairs, the canopy on the side of the building shades me from the late August sun. I see my classroom in the corner of the building at the top of the stairs. The door is open and I can already hear the commotion of what is likely a large group of students. The Developmental Writing courses are capped at 28, which is large to begin with, but since so many students place into Developmental at California Community College, there are always a lot who are trying to crash the course.

When I near the top of the concrete staircase that hugs the exterior of the building, I see a young man with an unfamiliar face standing next to the open door. He’s wearing a navy blue pair of Dickies chinos, a plain white long sleeve shirt despite the heat, and a blue Dodgers hat with the brim pulled low to the point where it almost covers his eyes—a relatively typical outfit for a Californian, and garb that would not be all that uncommon for myself to wear on weekends and evenings, too.

“Hey,” I acknowledge the man as I get to the door.

“Hey, you the teacher in this class?” the guy asks.

“Sure am. How can you tell?”

“You’re wearing a collared shirt.”

“Yeah, this is my teaching uniform. What’s up?”

“Look, I need English 300 and already tried another class this morning but couldn’t get it. So can I get into yours?”

“Well, I don’t know,” I reply slowly.

“Look, man. That other pinche teacher, he was a fool. Man, he wouldn’t even let me add his class. But I need it. That fool wouldn’t even listen to me. I tried to explain why I need it but that puto wouldn’t hear me out. Ain’t you even going to listen to me too or just be like that other fool?”

“Hold on, hold on, hold on,” I say. “You look. I just met you and right off the bat you are calling one of my fellow teachers at this school a fool as well as some other Spanish words that I know are not very flattering. And you’re accusing me of possibly doing something that would warrant your anger, but we just met. Slow down. Calm down. Now whatever teacher didn’t let you add his class, that teacher may have had a perfectly legitimate reason, and even if you really need the class, he might not be able to let you even if he wanted to add you. So approach me differently. Just introduce yourself and tell me your problem.”

“Sorry,” he quickly apologizes. “My name’s Alejandro but people call me Al.” He reaches out his right hand.

I take his hand, “My name is Brian. Nice to meet you, Al. Now how can I help you?”

“I really need to take English 300 this semester. I tried to register for it before the classes started, but all the classes were full. I’ve already tried to crash one class, but the teacher wouldn’t add me. This is the only Developmental class I need before I can take a class that counts for transfer, so I really need it.”

“Okay, I understand how hard it is to get into this class. Come on in and sit through the beginning of class. After I take roll and see how many people have shown up and how many want to add then I’ll be able to let you know if I can add you are not. So no promises, but if you’re willing to stick around for the whole hour then I’ll see if I can help you out. Sound fair?”

“Yeah, that sounds fair to me. Thanks.”

“No problem. Head on in and find a seat.”

“Hey, sorry for how I talked when you first walked up. I’m just frustrated, you know. I’ve been trying hard at school and it makes me mad that I can’t get the classes I need.”

“No problem, buddy. I understand how you feel. Trust me, I’ve had problems getting classes when I was a student, too. Just head in.”

I walk into class behind Al. The room is packed. Nearly every desk has somebody sitting in it. I hear English and Spanish being spoken. It is loud. I’m sure at least ten other people here also want to add the class. What I didn’t tell Al is that I add everybody in Developmental classes. After a year teaching here, I’ve figured a few things out. I’m still not sure I understand how to teach ESL and bilingual students. I’m still not certain I’ve really made the transition to being comfortable in a community college instead of a university. But I do have a good idea of how many students will stop coming to my class over the duration of this semester, especially in the Developmental course. And frankly, I wouldn’t be surprised that if I do add him to the course that he’ll stop coming to class. After two weeks, most likely a couple students will stop coming, never to be seen again. By halfway through, I will be lucky if I still have twenty five, and by the end of the course, if I manage to only lose a few more, well, then I call that a victory.

I’ve heard other teachers bragging that they can get their classes widdled down to fifteen by midterm. But that’s not my style. I want to get as many students through the Developmental

course as possible. So I've learned to add way over my course cap. I know students will drop. I don't usually know why. There never seems to be a consistent reason. They just stop coming. It is inevitable. So I add over my cap.

I didn't tell this to Al. I want to make him sweat a little.

\* \* \*

I can feel the beads of water forming on my forehead even though I'm in the shade. It is a hot October day. I hope it cools down by the end of the month. Mom and I are working on my Ninja Turtle costume for Halloween, and I have to wear a full green sweat suit. Mom always makes our Halloween costumes by hand with us. Last year, in second grade, I was a Ghostbuster. Mom's costumes are the best.

"When is Mom going to get here?" Mary asks. We are sitting with our backs propped against the school building, sitting under the hallway canopy while looking at the driveway where we should see Mom drive through at any time. Mary kicks the heel of her shiny, black sandal against the smooth, grey concrete.

"Soon," I answer. Normally I also feel antsy for Mom to get here and pick us up after school, but I got a new book from the book fair this week, and it is really good so I don't mind waiting today.

I pull my backpack between my crossed legs and unzip it. From the inside, I retrieve my book. *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* by Judy Blume. One kid in my class said Judy Blume books are for girls, but he is wrong. This book is really good, and the characters are mostly boys anyway. Where I am in the book, Fudge, the little brother, just jumped off the jungle gym and hit Peter, the older brother, in the mouth and knocked out Peter's front teeth. I open to where I dog-eared the last page I read and prop the book on my bag.

“When is Mom getting here?” Mary asks again.

“Soon, I already told you.”

“But when?”

“Get out the book that you got from the book fair and read while you are waiting.”

“Fine.” Mary pulls her purple backpack between her crossed legs and fishes out the new Berenstain Bears book.

I get back to reading but almost immediately Mary interrupts me again.

“What is this word?” She points to the cover.

“Messy, just like your room. Always messy.” I laugh a little.

“My room isn’t messy. Your room is!”

“Just read,” I say.

“How do you read the title?”

“It says *The Berenstain Bears and the Messy Room*. See how the picture shows the two little bears and their room is messed up?”

“Read the next page to me.”

“You can read,” I say, anxious to get back to my own book.

“But I like you to read to me, and then I can just look at the pictures.”

“Fine,” I exhale. Sometimes it’s the big brother’s job to do things like this, I guess. So I put my book away and take Mary’s.

I begin reading each page to her. We pause when I have finished the short paragraphs so that Mary can point out images in each illustration that match what we have just read. Sometimes she comments on what she points out, and other times she just sits there and smiles. We go

through the book, page by page. Then, when we are halfway done, we hear a car arrive. Mary's head darts up and she exclaims, "Mom's here!"

I can see Mom in the driver seat of her large, white Chevy Astro van. Mary picks up her bag and goes running across the blacktop. She left her book behind. I guess a big brother's work is never done.

\* \* \*

Standing in front of the classroom, I look over my yellow legal pad at the work I have planned for this class. Today I am assigning the first essay, a Literacy Narrative, and we are reading Sue Lorch's "Confession of a Former Sailor" as an example. I have several questions I'm going to use in a group activity where the students will analyze how Lorch constructs sections of her essay.

"Hey, class! How is everybody doing today?" I loudly ask.

No student offers an answer to my general query. This is a common response early in the semester that I have become accustomed to whenever I begin classes. I know I always feel awkward when I'm in some sort of group meeting and the person leading asks us to all respond in chorus to such a question, but for some reason I do it anyway. I know eventually when those students who continuously attend class get comfortable with me and each other, we will probably be talking a lot before class begins.

"Alright! Everybody stand up," I command.

Uggghhhhh..." a few scattered groans rumble from a few students, and the rest of the class looks a little confused.

“Seriously,” I say. “In this class you aren’t just going to sit in your desks while I drone on and on and on at you. You’re coming in here ready to share, to discuss, to do stuff. So let’s wake ourselves up!”

The students slowly rise from their seats. They sit in rows. I’d rather have them in a circle, but over thirty students is just too many people to physically form a ring in the room.

“So class,” I begin again, “how are all of you doing?”

“Fine,” most of them respond in chorus.

“Excellent!” I say. “Now, I want you to all come up to the front of the room and introduce yourself to several people and shake hands. Ask them how they are doing.”

Slowly chaos begins to emerge. Bodies walk all which ways. People greet each other. Most in English, but once in a while I hear, “¡Hola! ¿Como Estas?”

The students straggle back to their desks.

“Okay, so is everything going okay? We are through our first week of classes, so are there any problems or things I can help you with? Or maybe somebody in class could help you?”

There is silence for a second, then a young woman sitting in the front speaks. “I already know I’m going to fail my math class. We’re already doing these equations in class that I can’t follow so I have no shot on the homework.”

I respond, “First, remind us of your name.”

“Rachel,” she tells us.

“Well Rachel, I really stink at math. In fact, I almost failed out of college my first year because I couldn’t pass my Developmental Math classes. But maybe somebody in here has some advice. Which math is it?”

“It is Algebra. Math 235. The teacher goes so fast I can’t even keep up.”

“I had that class last spring,” a girl sitting in the back of the room spontaneously offers to the conversation. “It is hard and I thought I’d fail, too. But do you know about the Math Lab?”

“No,” Rachel answers.

“Go there,” the girl in the back advises. “It’s in the Academic Resources building near the library. The people that work there are so nice and patient. They help you understand the lessons and help you do your homework. I practically lived there last year.” She laughs.

“Thanks,” Rachel says. “I’ll try it.”

“See,” I state, “we are all here to help each other out. We all have different experiences and different knowledge that we can offer in this class to help each other learn. I mean, I just learned something, too. Now I know a place I can send students who tell me they are having trouble in a math class. That’s awesome! What’s your name?” I point at the girl sitting in the back.

“Maria,” she answers with a smile.

“Thanks for helping all of us, Maria. And thanks for being brave enough to admit you are having a hard time, Rachel. This is how we learn and grow. Now, let’s try learning each other’s names.”

I take out the roll sheet and slowly go down the list. Aside from Rachel and Maria, I only remember one student’s name from last week.

“Alejandro but he likes to go by Al!” I exclaim when I reach his name in the middle of the roster. “You’re the only person I remembered. Do you feel special?” I smile at Al.

“Very special,” he says and laughs a little. He is wearing his blue Dodgers hat pulled down low again. Today he has on a long sleeve grey t-shirt rather than white.

After roll, I hand out the prompt for the Literacy Narrative. This is an essay assignment that my first WPA encouraged when I was a Teaching Associate during my M.A. at California State University, and I've continued using it at California Community College. Basically, the assignment asks students to tell a story of an important literacy event from their lives. Students sometimes write about difficult moments in their educational history when they were learning to read and write. Some will write narratives about triumphs—times when they wrote something they were especially proud of having composed. Others write about reading something that had a powerful impact in their lives. The idea behind such an assignment is for students to explore and reflect on their experiences with literacy and understand how their literacies have impacted their lives and the lives of their classmates.

I read the prompt to the class as the students follow along. Then some begin to ask questions. A young woman sitting near the middle of the room raises her hand.

“Yes,” I pause as I point at her. My voice pitch rises with uncertainty when I say, “Your name is Carmen, right?”

She smiles and exclaims, “It is Carmen! Does this story have to be about using English? Or could it be about Spanish because I spoke and wrote in Spanish until I started school here in California in the fourth grade?”

“That’s a great question, Carmen,” I respond. “Literacy doesn’t mean only speaking and writing in English. Literacy is using any language, so if you use two or more languages you can certainly write about your experiences with a language aside from English.”

“But we can’t write the paper in Spanish, right?” questions a young man sitting toward the back left corner of the classroom. “It has to be in English, right?”

“Well, yeah,” I answer as I move in the front of the room toward the left side to be nearer the student that just spoke. “Hey, real quick remind me of your name.”

“Miguel.”

“Miguel brings up a good point here,” I address the whole class. “What does everyone think about the language you use in this essay? Do you have to only write in English?”

The class doesn’t say anything for a few seconds. I wait, one of the hardest things for me to do when I teach, but I give them a chance to respond before I say anything more. I wait another good ten seconds and the silence becomes a bit awkward feeling.

Finally, a tall woman sitting near the door in the back of the room says with some annoyance, “First, my name is Ana because I know you are going to ask that. And yes, we should write in English because this is an English class. The class is English, duh.”

“That seems valid to me, Ana, but what if a person in here writes a story about learning Spanish with their grandmother, or maybe a story about translating from English to Spanish for a relative, or something like that. If you are writing about Spanish, should the whole story only be written in English?”

“I guess not,” Ana replies.

Carmen jumps back into the discussion. “It would be dumb not to have any Spanish in the paper then. Because if we talk or write in Spanish in the story, then those parts would be written in Spanish in the paper. Right?”

“That seems reasonable,” I respond.

“But you don’t know Spanish,” Ana challenges.

“Well actually, I know a little. I took about eight years of it in school and a lot of my friends spoke it growing up. But a few other people in here speak other languages, too, right? Does anybody speak a language aside from English and Spanish?”

I look across the room and a thin, tall young woman raises her slender arm.

“Your name is Shana, right?”

“Yes,” she says.

“Shana, what languages do you speak?”

“I speak Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. Not so good at English though.”

“Your using it fine right now,” I say. “But I don’t know any Cantonese or Mandarin,” I say to the entire class. “But if Shana wanted to write about those languages in her literacy narrative, she could include them. Now, what you probably need to do if you weave another language into your story, whether it is Spanish or anything else, is give me clues of what the words mean. Help me see through the actions and emotions of the people in the story. Give me hints to understand what is being said in those other languages.”

Al raises his hand.

“Yes, Al.”

“So I get the feeling we don’t necessarily need to write about school then. We can write about stuff that has happened outside of school, like with our friends or family?”

“For sure,” I answer. “Just like literacy doesn’t happen only in English, literacy definitely doesn’t just happen in school. It happens in most aspects of life. So you can certainly compose a narrative about writing or reading that has nothing to do with going to school.”

After we conclude our discussion of the literacy narrative, we move to group work with Lorch’s article. Based on the discussion we just had about the many languages students could use

in this literacy narrative and now knowing the many languages my current students use, I wish I had found an essay that discussed transitioning from one language into English, or at least a piece that somehow captured the theme of multilingualism. But I have to make due with what I planned. The students circle desks, answer questions I provide them, then we discuss their answers as a class. The day has gone well, and I dismiss the class. As the students are leaving, Al approaches the front of the room.

“I have an idea for my story already. Can I meet with you tomorrow?”

“That would be great, Al. I work in the Writing Center tomorrow from one to five. Can you stop by there between then?”

“That works,” he says. “What about if I get started writing and bring you what I have? Will you read it and give me advice before it is due?”

“Oh yeah! That would be perfect.”

“Great, see you tomorrow.”

I finish packing my bag.

\* \* \*

Mary is in the middle seat fumbling through her backpack. I’m sitting in the front seat of the van. Mary eventually pulls out a folded piece of paper.

“Look, Mommy!” Mary exclaims. “This is the picture of Rapunzel I colored today.” She unfolds the paper revealing a sheet with purple and yellow colors mixed all over the page. She pushes the paper toward the front driver’s seat.

“Mommy is driving right now, honey. I’ll look at it when we get home.”

“Now!” Mary hollers and continues pushing the colored page forward.

“Stop, you’re going to make us get into an accident!” I shout back at Mary.

“Be quiet!” Mary shrieks.

“Both of you, quiet. I’ll look at your picture in a few minutes, Mary.”

The three of us sit quietly. I stare out the passenger side window at the familiar stores and businesses that border our route home. As Mom turns the corner to the busy street where the liquor store and baseball card shop are located, I notice flashing lights far down the road. It looks like police cars or something. Our quiet neighborhood is just off this street. The lights are much further down.

“Mom, do you see those lights?”

“Yes, Brian.”

“They look like they are at Dad’s school.”

“I can’t tell from here.”

“Are they police cars?” My stomach feels funny like I went down a big drop on the roller coaster at Knott’s Berry Farm. I squint my eyes and try to see as far down the road as I can. Mom isn’t saying anything.

“Mom, are they police cars?” I ask again with more excitement.

She still doesn’t respond to me. I look back at Mary who has become distracted by her Berenstain Bears book. She is flipping slowly through the pages and kicking her little shiny sandals back and forth as her feet dangle from the bench seat.

I look forward. “Mom! I see two ambulances!” I feel full of energy. It is like there is electricity going through my body.

“Don’t worry,” Mom says.

“Mom, we need to drive down there and see what’s going on! Come on, Mom, please!”

“Okay, we can drive a little ways down the street.” Mom’s voice sounds different, I think. Mary still isn’t paying attention. She is still looking at her book.

As we get closer I can make out five police cars in front of Dad’s school. Two are blocking the street in both directions. Behind them several ambulances sit with their rear doors open. Even further there is ring of people, lots of people, looking toward the ambulances. Police officers are keeping the people back. Most of the people look like high school kids, but a few wear ties or dresses. They must be teachers. I don’t see Dad anywhere. I can’t see any paramedics either. The ambulances are blocking whatever is going on. I don’t know what is happening. The electricity continues to shoot through me.

Mary has realized we didn’t go straight home. She looks up and asks, “What’s happening, Mommy?”

“Something happened at Daddy’s school. We are just checking.”

“Why are there police?” Mary pushes her hands down on the bench seat to raise her body up an inch. She peers curiously through the windshield.

“I don’t know, honey, just sit tight.”

Now I notice a policeman standing in front of his car and waving his arm. I think he wants us to turn around. But Mom drives up next to him, and she pushes the button on the door that makes the window slide down all by itself. The policeman takes a couple steps toward our van. “Ma’am, you need to turn your vehicle around. This street is closed.”

“What happened here? My husband is the vice principal. I’m Marcia Fotinakes.”

“Fotinakes?” says the policeman. “You’re Jim’s wife? I know him.”

I look at the policeman. I can’t see his eyes because he is wearing those sunglasses that look like mirrors. I can see Mom’s face reflected in them. I think she looks worried.

The policeman keeps talking. “There was a drive-by shooting.” At these words the electrical current through my body causes my heart to stop. I’m paralyzed. I focus only on the officer’s face. On the pointed navy blue hat with the gold star on it. On his straight nose and jaw line. And on those sunglasses that reflect Mom’s face.

“Was anybody injured?”

“I just arrived, ma’am, so I can’t tell you too many details. I just know that multiple shots were fired and ambulances were dispatched, obviously. That’s all I know. Sorry.”

Mary asks from the back, “Where’s Daddy?”

“Daddy will be home soon, honey.” Then Mom says to the policeman, “Thank you for your help.”

“No problem, ma’am,” he replies. “Drive safely.”

Mom turns the van around and begins heading back up the street. She isn’t talking.

“What about Dad?” I demand. My heart beats again and my body can move again. I swivel backwards to look out the rear windows at the lights and cars falling into the distance. Mary sits on the bench seat and her face looks confused now. I wonder if Dad is okay. I know what drive-by means. It is when the gangs drive in a car in front of the school and start shooting at people. Lots of times they hit a lot of people that aren’t even gang members. I also know that depending on what week it is Dad has to stand in front of the school to watch the kids leave. He takes turns with the other assistant principals. I can’t remember if this week is his turn to be out front or not.

“Don’t worry, Brian. I’ll call the school when we get home.”

We drive back to our block, past stores and houses. We turn onto our street. Even though Dad’s school is less than a mile away and just around the corner lies the strip mall with the

baseball card shop and liquor store where the gang members hang out sometimes, our neighborhood has always seemed like a little shelter from these places where bad things can happen.

Not that Dad's school is all bad. I mean, good things happen there. In the spring Dad takes me to the baseball games. Those high school guys are big and really good. Last year the Angels drafted the catcher and a pitcher from Dad's high school team. Those guys even signed my little league hat for me. And in the fall the school theater put on *The Wizard of Oz*. They needed some kids to play Munchkins and Mary was one. It was a really good play. The songs were fun.

But bad stuff happens there, too. When I've gone with Dad on the weekends to his office to help him work, I've looked through his desk when he didn't know I was doing that. I know he has a drawer where he keeps the bad things he takes from students. There are lighters in there. And even worse, there are lots of knives. Big ones and small ones. Some of the knives have the gang numbers scratched into the handles. I also know that sometimes they take guns from students, but when they do that they call the police, and the police take the guns away when they arrest the bad students. It scares me when I hear Dad tell these stories to Mom at night. They don't think I hear these stories, but I do hear them.

Mom turns the car into our driveway. "Okay, kids, I'll make your snack and you can watch fifteen minutes of cartoons. Then you work on your homework, and then you can play." This is the kind of thing Mom always says when we get home. She is acting like everything is normal.

"What about Dad?" I ask.

"I'll call the school. He probably won't be able to talk anyway."

“Do you know if he was on front duty this week?” I ask as Mom shuts off the van. She takes off her seatbelt, but I keep mine fastened.

“Yes, he was, Brian.”

“What does that mean?” Mary hollers from the back. She sounds like she might cry. I don’t think she understands what is going on. She isn’t old enough. But she is starting to sense that something is wrong.

“Honey,” Mom responds in a soothing voice, “there was an accident at Dad’s school so we just want to make sure everything is okay.”

“Is Daddy okay?” Mary questions.

“Yes, Daddy is just fine.”

Mom doesn’t know this. And I don’t like that she calls it an accident. That makes me mad. It wasn’t an accident. These shootings aren’t accidents. They happen all the time in our city and the other cities around here. It’s because bad people are doing bad things. Every night on the news there are lots of stories about shootings all around Los Angeles and the other cities. It isn’t an accident. But I can’t look mad or upset anymore in front of Mary. I’m the big brother, so I have to be strong. I don’t want her to cry. She is too small for all of this.

All three of us get out of the car and head through the garage and into the house. Mom pours milk into our plastic colored cups. Mary takes the red cup and I take the green one. We both sit at the kitchen counter on our tall stools. Mary reaches and turns on the small television that is on the counter. She turns the dial until she gets to eleven. *Muppet Babies* has already started because we took longer to get home today. Mary and I always watch *Muppet Babies* when we eat our snack. Mom brings us a plate with some Oreos and apple slices. Mary begins dunking an Oreo into her cup of milk, but I don’t take one. I’m not hungry.

“Mom, call the school.”

“I’m going to right now, Brian.”

Mom goes through the door that connects the kitchen to Dad’s office. That’s unusual. Normally she would just call Dad from the phone in the kitchen, but now she is going to use Dad’s office phone. She doesn’t shut the door though.

I take an apple slice off the plate sitting between Mary and me. I take a small bite. The apple doesn’t taste like anything. It isn’t bad, but I just don’t taste anything.

Then I hear Mom’s voice from the office. “Yes, this is Marcia Fotinakes. May I speak with Jim please?”

There is a pause. I look into the office. It is dark in there. Mom didn’t turn on the light.

“Okay, I understand. If you can, just tell him to call me at home. Thank you.”

Mom comes out of the office. “Where is he?” I demand.

“He couldn’t come to the phone.”

I try to detect any hint that Mom knows something else but isn’t telling me, but I can’t sense anything. She walks over to the sink and begins filling it with water. She squirts several drops of dish soap into the stream coming from the faucet. She stands next to the sink and stares out the kitchen window. Suds begin to grow.

“Why couldn’t he come to the phone,” I continue. “Is he okay? What’s going on? What did the secretary tell you?”

“She said that he was out front and that she still doesn’t have any information about what happened. Don’t worry, Brian. Your Dad is fine. Just finish up your snack and get started on your homework.”

I drop my body down from the tall stool. I grab my backpack by one strap but don't put it on. I drag my bag behind me all the way to my room. I go inside. I push the door shut behind me until it latches. I fling my bag into a corner of the room hard enough so that when it hits the wall it makes a loud banging noise.

I walk over to it and kick my bag as hard as I can. I step back and swing my left foot through the air and with the laces of my shoe I kick my backpack square in the middle so hard that my foot hurts. It makes a loud thumping noise. This is how Dad taught me to kick a soccer ball the right way. When you want to make an accurate pass to your teammate, you use the inside of your foot. When you want to kick hard to take a shot at the goal, then you use your shoelaces. I kick my bag several more times with my left foot's laces until my foot hurts so bad that I have to switch and use my right foot. I give my backpack a couple more good shoelace kicks.

I don't do as I was told. I don't open up my backpack and get out my homework. I don't sit at my desk and begin doing it. I don't feel like doing any homework right now.

I walk over to my window that looks toward the street. I look to the left in the direction where Dad's car will come from when he drives home. The street is empty. I don't see Greg across the street. He is our neighbor who always sits in his garage and drinks beer. I look over at my friend Ryan's house. I don't see anybody there. Ryan's older sister goes to Dad's high school. I wonder if she is okay.

I walk to my cupboard and open one of the small wooden doors. I pull out one of my boxes of baseball cards. I open the lid and take out a black binder with two stickers on the front—one for the California Angels and the other for the Los Angeles Dodgers. This binder has some of my favorite cards in it. I flip it open and slowly turn the pages. I pause to stare at a particularly favorite card of mine. This one is Steve Sax who plays for the Dodgers. He is my

favorite player. He plays the same position as me, second base, and we both are number three, too. I take the card out of the plastic sleeve.

Last spring Dad took me to a Dodger game. Dad got us good seats. We sat right above the third base dugout. It was perfect because that meant I had a great view of Sax playing second base the whole game. Dad knows a lot about sports. He was one of the best players on his teams. So the whole game Dad would explain to me why Sax was positioning himself in certain ways for certain plays. Dad even bought me a Dodgers hat after the game.

I turn the baseball card over and read the numbers printed on the back. Then I replace the card in its slot. I continue to slowly turn the pages for another fifteen minutes until I put the binder back in its box and the box back into the cupboard.

I get up and walk over to the window again. I stare down the street. It is still quiet. I stare for a little while.

I look at the clock sitting on my desk. It reads 4:15. I get my backpack and take out my homework. I sit down at my desk with a sheet of multiplication problems. I begin filling in numbers.

There is a knock on the door and before I say anything Mom opens it. She pokes her head into my room. “Are you working on your homework, honey?”

“Yes.” I set the pencil on the math worksheet. “Has Dad called back yet?”

“Not yet, but he should be home soon. Do you need anything? Need any help?”

“No. I’m almost done with my math.”

“Are you okay?”

“Yes.”

Mom stares at me for a couple seconds. I pick up the pencil and return my attention to my math homework. I start to scribble numbers onto the page again. I ignore her even though I know she is still standing in my doorway. After I answer three more questions, I hear my door shut.

I finish math, so I take out my phonics book from my backpack. I open to the page where we left off in class. I have to complete the last two pages. I glance at the clock. 4:39. I begin filling letters into blank spots on the worksheet. Then I write a couple sentences. Now it is 4:46. When will Dad be home?

After I finish all my homework, I walk back over to the window. I look to the left, down the street, but no cars. Nobody. Where is everyone? Why isn't anybody doing anything? Why isn't Greg drinking his beers? Why hasn't Ryan come and knocked on our door to see if I would want to ride skateboards with him? Why isn't anybody mowing their lawns or walking their dogs? Nothing is happening.

I keep staring. There is a scraggly weeping willow tree outside my window. It isn't like the big ones at my cousin Alex's house that have long branches with leaves that hang down. This one is really skinny and doesn't have many leaves at all. I stare at it. I concentrate really hard on one leaf. I focus on that leaf alone. I examine all the tiny veins running through the light green leaf. They run like roads over the surface of the leaf. The afternoon sunlight shines through the leaf making the veins look black. I follow the paths of the veins. Back and forth my eyes follow the paths of the veins on the leaf.

Following them back and forth.

Following them.

Back and forth.

...

...

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Finally the sound of a car engine breaks me from my trance. The electricity shoots through my body bringing me back to life. I jolt my head to the left. Time slows. I see Dad's dark blue van coming down the street and it slows as he turns into our driveway. I can see his face through the window. His dark skin. His big forehead from where his hair is falling out. His dark sunglasses covering his eyes.

I run from the window and over to my bedroom door. I carefully, slowly, twist the knob to the left so I don't make any noise. Then I gently pull the door open until I can see into the hallway. Nobody is around.

I slip out the cracked door. The beige carpet gently cushions my steps so that I can silently slip down the hall. I peer into the family room. The television is silent. Nobody is around. I turn and look back down the hallway from where I had come. I can see at the end that Mary's bedroom door is open, and I faintly hear her voice. Maybe she is playing with her Barbie dolls.

I quickly creep through the family room. I stop at the opening where the kitchen begins. I stay next to the wall so if anybody is in the kitchen they cannot see me. Through the kitchen there is a door that leads into the garage. This is the door that Dad will come through any moment. I stand without making a sound, pressed against the wall, waiting. I hear clanking pots. Mom must be starting dinner. She has to know that Dad is home, but she didn't go out to the garage to see him.

I hear the creak of the door and Dad's footsteps on the linoleum tile. "Hello." I hear him greeting Mom.

“Hi.” I can barely hear Mom’s voice because she is talking softly. I can tell she is talking but can’t make out all the words. I hear, “What happened today? You never returned my call.”

“It was bad,” Dad says. “Did you see the lights when you were bringing the kids home?”

“Yes. How many people were hurt?”

“A freshman girl and a senior boy.” Dad’s voice sounds flat when he says this. I can’t understand what he says next or if he tells Mom how bad the people who got shot are hurt.

“Where were you?”

“I was over by the tennis courts when the shooting started...” Dad’s words get quiet and I can’t hear anything else.

I feel my throat getting tight. I don’t want to stand here anymore. I can’t stand here anymore. I move from behind the wall and run into the kitchen. “Daddy!” I exclaim as I wrap my arms around his legs.

“Brian,” Dad says, “what’s wrong?”

“I was so scared, Daddy!” I begin to cry. Tears start to steadily come and I gasp for air.

“Brian, calm down. I’m fine. Everything is fine.”

I pull Dad’s legs tighter with my arms. I cry harder and begin choking out words. “It isn’t fine! It isn’t fine at all! It isn’t fine! I was scared!”

“Brian!” Dad pulls me from his legs and leaves his large hands on my shoulders. “Son, I’m okay.” He bends down and hugs me. I hug him back. Then he stands up again. His hands are still on my shoulders. “I’m fine, son,” he repeats. “Everything is okay.”

“No, it’s not okay. I hate those people!” I holler as loud as I can. “I hate them so much!”

“Brian, don’t say that.”

“But I do!” I can’t control myself. I can’t control myself at all. The electricity is controlling my body and my words. My body shakes and tears stream. Out of the corner of my eye I see Mary. She must have come into the kitchen when she heard me screaming. So much for being the strong, big brother, but I keep hollering anyway, “I hate them so much! I hate all the gang members! I want them to die! I want them to die!”

I feel Dad’s fingers squeezing into my shoulders. Not to hurt me. It’s almost like he is trying to get me to be part of him, like we are connected through his hands. He kneels down on a knee and says, “Look at me.”

I hold my chin pressed to my chest. I don’t look.

“Brian, look me in the eyes,” Dad says sternly.

I look up at Dad. His dark skin looks like leather. His brown eyes stare into mine. I try to stop crying. I huff a little and my chest shudders, but the tears have stopped.

“Brian, don’t say you want people to die.”

“But I do,” I respond in a reasonable volume. “They are bad.”

“Brian, you have to understand that those kids have had hard lives. They haven’t been raised in the same way you have.”

“So what? They shouldn’t shoot people and do bad things.”

“You’re right. They shouldn’t shoot people. But I don’t want them to die. I want to help them. That’s why I work with them.”

“I don’t want you to work with them anymore,” I stubbornly state.

“When I go to their houses to try and help them, Brian, sometimes they don’t have parents. And sometimes their houses only have dirt for a floor. Do you know that one time I asked a guy when his birthday was. He didn’t know. I asked him if he had ever had a birthday

party. He said he hadn't. He said that his birthday could be any day and it didn't matter. Try to imagine what his life was like when he was your age."

I don't say anything. I don't know what to say. I still feel scared for Dad, but I also feel sad about what he just told me. I look over at Mary who is staring at us. Listening as well. It isn't fair. Things don't feel fair. I love Mom and Dad. They buy me birthday presents even though I act spoiled on my birthday. I don't deserve what they give me sometimes. But I also don't want Dad to be hurt. I feel confused, and I still feel scared.

"Brian, wishing another person to die isn't going to make anything better. You have to find ways to help."

\* \* \*

"Hey, Brian. Ready to get busy and help some people?" says Sadie, a woman who attended the same M.A. program as me at California State University, as I stroll into the Writing Center about ten minutes before one. It is pretty crowded. Most of the computers have students using them, and at least a couple students sit at nearly all the tables.

"Sure am," I answer. "I'll start making the rounds right now." I set my bag down and walk in the direction of the last table at the end of the Center, intending to make my way forward toward where the computers are located.

I arrive at the last table, and I ask the students there if they need help. I make my way from table to table doing this. Sometimes the students want my help, other times they politely decline. After about an hour of working with students, I feel confident that I've checked on just about everybody.

I head back to the faculty table and take a seat. I open my book and pick up where I left off. As I read, I continually glance up from the book to make sure there aren't any students that

need help. After about five minutes, I see a young guy walking through the front doors. He has a Dodgers hat on, and I think it might be Al, so I stop reading and watch the man. Sure enough, once he is a little closer, I can tell it is Al. Today he isn't wearing his normal long sleeve t-shirts like he had before. Today he has on a plain white shirt with short sleeves. I can see a lot of dark tattoos on Al's arms.

When he gets near the table, I stand up and say, "Good afternoon, Al. How are you?" I glance down at his arms. Each arm has at least five tattoos on the visible sections of his skin.

"Fine, Brian," Al says and reaches his right arm towards me. "How you doing?"

"I'm okay," I answer as I take his hand. I notice on his inner arm the two numbers. They have the same jagged styling as the many similar tattoos I have seen on other gang members' bodies. I don't look Al in the eye like I did when I first shook his hand outside our classroom over a week ago. All I see are those two numbers, clearly, almost as if they are glowing on his inner arm.

"Let's go sit at this table over there." I gesture toward a table with only one other student sitting at it. We walk to the table and sit down. "So, what is your idea?"

"Well, I already wrote something like I said I would," Al says as he unzips his backpack. His movement of his arms allows for the two numbers to be visible again.

"Reeeeeaaaalllly," I say in a drawn out version of the word in a high pitch, trying to be funny, but I can't help but stare at his forearm and those numbers. "So what did you write?" I'm trying my hardest to stay in character. To keep working the script of being an excited writing teacher.

“You said this can be like a story and all. And that it didn’t have to do with school or anything like that. So I thought about the first time I ever wrote something and was proud of what I wrote. And that’s what I wrote about.”

“That sounds good. Can I see it?”

“Yeah.” Al hands me several sheets of paper. “I typed it up here yesterday afternoon after class.”

“Great! Did you save it?” I try to keep the energy that I usually display to students in the Writing Center and in my classes.

“On a flash drive just like you recommended in class.”

“Good. Now let me start reading this and I’ll tell you what I think.”

I slide the papers in front of myself. I start to scan my eyes across the pages, but instead of seeing letters, all I see are numbers. Over and over across the page two numbers repeat, one then the other. Over and over. I look down the page and every line is the same—two numbers repeating. I glance up at Al and on his face is a large tattoo of the two numbers. That wasn’t there before. I quickly look back at the paper. Numbers, numbers, numbers. Then, all of a sudden, a vivid image of my father appears in my mind. It is my father from long ago. It isn’t him now, a bald principal of a central coast high school wearing a suit and tie everyday to work. This is my father before. He still has his comb-over. He’s skinnier. Younger. He is wearing a white and yellow polo shirt with “Southern California High School” and “Vice Principal” embroidered on the chest.

I stop staring at the pages in front of me.

“Hey, Al. Before I read this, can I get to know you a little better?”

Al looks at me with what appears to be curiosity. “What do you mean?” he asks.

“Well, I know you like the Dodgers like me. I know we both think DJ Quik is the best rapper to come out of Compton. But I want to know more about what you are doing here. I remember that when we first met you mentioned that you want to get into a transferable English class. So do you plan to transfer to a university some day?”

“Yep. I want a college degree. I don’t know anybody else with a degree.”

“That’s a great goal,” I say. “How long have you been at California Community College?”

“This is my second year. I already took the first Developmental Writing class, and when I pass yours then I’m on my way to getting college credit.”

“Did you grow up here?” I already know the answer will be “no.” The tattoos give it away. But I ask anyway, trying to learn more. To understand.

“No, I’m from down south. I moved up here with my aunty and uncle. Get away from all the trouble down there.”

“Trouble...” I say slowly. “I did notice some of your tattoos.”

This is a story becoming all the more common at California Community College on the central coast of California. In the past ten years, as the agricultural industry has expanded and the cities grown, more and more people involved in gang activity in the Los Angeles region relocate several hours north, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes because family forces them to, in order to leave behind their gang roots. But from my perspective, this migration seems more like the spread of cancer rather than the redemption of sinners. All I’ve seen is the proliferation of gang culture. For example, the city where California Community College is located once was considered to be one of the safest cities in California ten years ago, but now the city has one of

the most rapidly growing murder rates in the state. Instead of escaping the gang life, people like Al appear to be bringing it with them.

“Usually I wear long sleeves to cover my ink. Some teachers and people like that judge me. But you seem cool.”

I laugh, “No, I’m not cool at all.” If Al only knew the truth, then he’d understand this isn’t a self-deprecating attempt at humor.

“You’ve been pretty cool with me and other people in class. You called me out on some of my crap that first day when we met. I respect that. And you don’t try to erase our Mexican side. You know what I’m saying?”

“No, what do you mean?”

“Like letting us write some in Spanish. And letting people talk in Spanish. Sometimes in English class we have to act like we are becoming gringo. But you let us be who we are.”

I feel uneasy. My body almost feels tingly, sort of like a small electrical charge is pulsing across my torso and into my limbs. “Do you ever regret those tattoos?” I ask.

“Can’t change the past. Sure, I don’t want people judging me, but that’s who I was. I’m through gang banging, but I did it. I don’t want that life no more. It ain’t really life anyway.”

“So what do you want to get a degree in? Do you know?”

“I’m thinking art. I really like to draw. Want to see some of my sketches?”

“Sure.”

Al retrieves a pad of paper from his bag. He flips it open and slowly turns the pages so I can briefly glimpse each image. The sketches are done in pencil, and they have the Chicano Art Movement style. They’re good, too.

“You have talent,” I sincerely say.

“Thanks!”

“Al, are you really done with the gang? It’s hard to leave that life, isn’t it?”

“One hundred percent done. I cut myself off from that place. I think it would be awesome to help kids stay out of that stuff. Maybe give them opportunities that I didn’t have to steer them away from banging.”

“That would be awesome,” I respond. “Alright, let me get to reading this.”

I look back to the pages before me. The numbers are no longer there. They’ve been replaced with letters. I begin reading. As I make my way through, I’m impressed with what Al has written. I glance up at him once, and the tattoo I had seen on his face ten minutes earlier is gone now. I get back to reading. Sure, the paper needs some work. There are parts where I become confused about what is happening, and some spots where adding details would really make the scenes and actions come to life, but it is a good piece.

Al has written the text by merging some Spanish with English. This aspect is really cool in my opinion. He tells the story of the first time he tagged a freeway overpass. He was twelve years old. The story starts with Al and two older teenagers plotting the vandalism. Since Al is the smallest and youngest, they decide Al will do the painting.

In the narrative, the three accomplices wait until three in the morning. They go to an overpass above one of the busiest freeways in southern California, but this late at night few cars are on the road. Wearing a satchel across his chest that holds four cans of spray paint, Al is lowered over the edge of the overpass with ropes tied around his waist and shoulders. He drops his first can of paint onto a dark, empty roadway below. His so-called friends threaten to drop him if he loses another can of paint. Then, for thirty minutes, Al writes his gang’s name in a mural on the overpass edge.

I finish the story, and I'm not certain what to say. I can comment on making the narrative more vivid with details, and I can advise some changes in terms of the organization, but what bothers me is the message behind the content. To me, this isn't the story of a man repenting for a troubled past. I read this as a person glorifying gang life and activity.

I stare at the page for another minute, pretending to still be reading but really I'm just stalling. Then I say, "This is a crazy story, Al. Weren't you scared when those guys hung you above the freeway?"

"Hell yes, I was!" Al laughs.

"Then why don't you add some details like that into the story? Show us how nervous you felt. Like, were you shaking or anything like that? Eyes watering?" We turn to the page when Al is preparing the ropes that will suspend him from the overpass and discuss some things to add in the narrative to show his fear. Then we continue discussing more details to include and work on the organization. Then I say, "So look, here is something else I've noticed. The story makes it seem like you're proud of doing this gang related activity. Is that what you want?"

"I am proud," Al bluntly states. "Didn't you say we could write our story about a time when we wrote something we were proud of doing?"

"Yes," I answer, "but you're proud of writing graffiti?"

"Graffiti ain't all that bad. And it's not like I got good grades in school. Nobody ever stuck any essay I wrote with an "A" written in red to any refrigerator. I never got any awards from school. Hell, it's a miracle I even graduated from high school. Throwing up graffiti and seeing it around the city, hearing people I didn't know that weren't even in my gang say it looked awesome, yeah man, that's what I have to be proud of in my life."

I try to consider what Al says. "But don't you want to leave that life behind you?"

“I don’t want to live like that anymore. No, not at all. But I can’t let go of all of myself.”

“What if some kid reads this? You make gang banging seem cool.”

“It’s just tagging. I’m not proud of a lot of the other stuff I was involved in and regret a lot of that crap, but this was like my art. My outlet.”

I stare at Al, in the eyes, and I say, “Couldn’t you just add something about how you moved on from this kind of stuff? Something to show that this kind of thing is wrong?”

“You got to understand,” Al says with what sounds like desperation in his voice. “This is all I got from my childhood. This is where my talent developed. Hanging over freeways and painting on walls. That’s where I got to express myself to the world. I never did that crap where we cross out other gangs’ tags either. That’s the junk that starts fights. I just drew my art and was happy with that.”

“Alright,” I say, “but just please consider what I’m saying about how you portray gang life and think about how it could appear to some readers. Now let’s see if we can really jazz up some of these descriptions of your art.”

We work on adding some descriptions and details. We shift around paragraphs and sentences. After that, I pause and think for a moment. Then I say, “Al, you told me how proud you were to have this outlet for your art and expressions. Maybe we can add something that captures those feelings more, too, like at the end?”

\* \* \*

At the end of the next week I collect the Literacy Narratives. I purposely save Al’s for last. As I read it, I notice he made all the revisions we discussed in the Writing Center. All, except for one thing. Nowhere in the text is there any kind of remorse for living the life he led back then. There is no regret for participating in gang activity, and there is no warning to other

kids to avoid such behavior. There's no statement about tagging being related to the social illness plaguing California. No mention of remorse for defacing public property. No sentiment that what he did might encourage violence and pain. I do notice, though, the care Al has taken in describing the tag he spray paints on the overpass—it's the strongest part of the paper. Al doesn't glorify the gang's name. Instead, he meticulously describes the movements he makes with his arms and hands to produce the lines, the coloring, the shadowing, and the blending to create his art. The paper ends with the sun setting behind the overpass. Al describes the light glowing around his work as if he had a painting hanging in a museum somewhere, only here everybody in Los Angeles County will see it, not just those places where only the rich get to go and see famous artists who hang their paintings. Al concludes the narrative by describing how for months, whenever he passed the overpass, he looked at the words he'd written with a pride he had never felt before.

I read Al's essay twice. Then I decide to go for a run. I put on some shorts, slip on a t-shirt, and lace up my running shoes. I head out the front door. I decide to run a route that will last about four miles. Sometimes when my feet pound pavement, when my lungs strain to push out and pull in air, when my physical being becomes overcome with effort, that is when my mind becomes clearest. As I run these miles, I compose and revise what I might write at the end of Al's paper in my head. Over and over I rewrite the end comment in my mind. Alone in my thoughts I write to Al:

I think I might finally understand what you were telling me last week, Al. One of my favorite authors, F. Scott Fitzgerald, wrote in his famous novel *The Great Gatsby*, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." I always thought this meant that people could never escape their pasts. That

we are always destined to be who we are, unable to change because of what we had done and what had been done to us. But when I consider what you have written and what we discussed last week, I'm not sure I believe this anymore. The past isn't a monolithic immutable force shaping our future. Rather, the past is something that we use to shape our future in a way we determine. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. Thank you for teaching me.

I continue my run with the golden hills our state as my backdrop.

\* \* \*

I wake up and walk to my apartment window, and outside the backdrop of the world is going green. Looking down the hill onto the small college town, the trees are bright neon in their spring hue. In my apartment complex parking lot, a groundhog darts across the asphalt and underneath the deck of the building across from me. Groundhogs are another one of the novelties of Pennsylvania that I've come to enjoy. I've made it through my first real winter, snow and all, and I've made it through my first year as a Ph.D. student.

I leave the spring morning outside my window and take a seat at my desk. I turn on my computer and open the web browser to check my email. I have one new message. I look at the sender's name. Alejandro.

I haven't thought about Al in nearly a year. That semester with Al feels like rain in the California summer. I read his email. In it Al thanks me. He tells me I was the first teacher to really see his potential and believe in him. He also tells me he has been accepted to attend California State University, and because he knew that is where I graduated from that I would be extra proud of him. He writes that he is going to be an Art Education major, and he hopes to be a teacher someday. Al tells me that I played a big role in helping him get to where he is now. And

he writes that he has something more to be proud of aside from the graffiti he used to spray onto walls.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### HOPEFUL WRITING THEORY

#### Introduction to Chapter Five

In this final chapter of my dissertation, I use the narrative from Chapter Four, the scholarship presented in Chapter Two's literature review, and other relevant composition theory and research to illustrate what a hopeful writing theory and hopeful writing instruction can be in composition courses. First, it is important to remember that while hopeful writing theory and my narrative can offer suggestions and examples of hopeful practices for teaching writing, how hope manifests in different contexts with different teachers interacting with different students will likely be distinctively unique depending on numerous circumstances. Therefore, the purpose of this analysis is not to give the impression that there is one perfect method for teaching writing in a hopeful way, but instead to offer suggestions and to present the philosophical mindset that is important to foster when using hopeful writing theory to design classes and when teachers work with students.

Hope is a force that gives people the strength to negotiate their relationship with reality, or in other words, hope is the agentic force that motivates people to see the world as a place that they can affect rather than existing in a state of helplessness in which people find themselves unable to muster the power to change themselves and inspire positive, healthy change in others and in this world. Bloch depicts hope as the transformation of dreams into a process of creating growth: "Then let the daydreams grow really fuller, that is, clearer, less random, more familiar, more clearly understood and more mediated with the course of things. So that the wheat which is trying to ripen can be encouraged to grow and be harvested" (4). Writing can be part of nurturing hope. By composing, a person is capable of taking a dream and forming a clearer path towards

what he or she hopes to achieve, create, and who he or she hopes to be someday. I believe writing can be hopeful, and I believe people can use writing as a means to negotiate their relationship with the world as they learn to produce meaningful texts that help generate a hopeful perception of the social and physical reality they both inhabit and create, and I also believe that given the right circumstances the composition class can encourage such hopeful writing. This concluding chapter explores how composition classes can encourage hope.

The first section examines what it means to compose hopeful writing. Looking closely at the narrative composed in Chapter Four, I analyze how narrative writing can be part of nurturing a hopeful outlook toward the world and create change. The second section of this chapter will discuss strategies and lessons a composition instructor may choose to use in order to encourage such hopeful writing. The third section discusses possible future research projects that examine how hope theory and composition theory relate. And the final section of Chapter Five concludes the dissertation by offering my understanding of what it means to believe in and to work for a hopeful pedagogy in a composition class.

#### Hopeful Writing and Hopeful Writers

In this section, I analyze the narrative “Two Simple Numbers that Say So Much” from Chapter Four while considering relevant theory and research in order to help understand what hopeful writing can be. When considering the narrative alongside scholarship from composition, psychology, and philosophy, I take the position that writing, narrative writing in particular, can be a means of fostering a hopeful perspective for the writers who compose such texts. Narrative writing can act as a means of taking control of the past in order to inspire and outline future change and goals. In writing narratives, authors possess the ability to organize past experience into a motivating factor for a hopeful future.

Reviewing the literature on hope theory and the philosophy of hope discussed in Chapter Two, it is important to keep in mind the cognitive perspective of hope as well as the philosophical description of hoping. The psychological theory of hope presents a methodology for hoping. As discussed in Chapter Two, Snyder, Cheavens, and Michael outline the three essential components to hopeful thought: “According to this new theory, hope is a thinking process in which people have a sense of agency and pathways for goals. Together, goals, pathways, and agency form the motivational concept of hope” (207). In this cognitive view of hope, the authors do discuss how hoping through these steps may be recursive and require revisions of pathways and goals, but there still seems to be a mechanical, step-by-step feeling toward this theory of hope. This process may imply that hope acts as a fixed system to be applied to specific scenarios and situations. But from a philosophical perspective, hope is much larger. Rather than simply being a means for creating success in specific situations alone, hope becomes a state of living and a process of becoming as described by Bloch:

[The concept] of hope and its contents worthy of human beings, is an absolutely central one here. Indeed, what is designated by this concept lies in the horizon of the consciousness that is becoming adequate of any given thing, in the risen horizon that is rising even higher. Expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become: this is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but, concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole. (7)

For Bloch, hope is a lifelong process of development. Hope means putting one foot in front of the other, day by day, and everyday knowing ever more assuredly that all things are unfinished and the possibility of making an even better outcome the next day and the day after always

exists. So while the psychological theory of hope may help achieve particular goals such as passing a test, winning a sporting event, passing legislation to open a homeless shelter in your county, creating an art program for elementary school children, and a trillion other possibilities, what the philosophy of hope entails is a developing a hopeful view of the self, of humanity, and the world as existing in a state of becoming. Our setbacks, failures, and regrets are a part of the journey, and the path forward can be infinitely better as we work many pathways towards many different goals. Hope is a series of experiences throughout a lifetime.

Therefore according to my description of hopeful writing theory, much of the time the act of composing a text will not be the goal in itself. Hopeful writing is not the end product of a hopeful process. In certain circumstances a writing project may be a goal, but it isn't the end of a process of hope. For example, completing an essay for a composition class and earning an A, writing a resume for a job and getting an interview, composing wedding vows for your marriage to the love of your life, or even finishing a dissertation and earning a doctorate degree can all be goals in and of themselves, but these writings also are a part of a pathway towards future goals, towards more lofty goals, and towards generating a life of sustained hopefulness that spreads far beyond the composed words. In this sense, then, writing becomes a vehicle to nurture hope along a path to the future. It reinforces hopeful thought and a hopeful outlook on life, and even if composing a text is a goal, it is only one small goal in a series of goals along a hopeful path through life. In hopeful writing theory, writing isn't the end in itself, but rather writing is part of the process of hope.

What I've learned, the conclusions I've come to understand through narrating several of my stories teaching writing and in particular my story of working with Al the ex-gang member from Chapter Four, is that hopeful writing composes the past as a foundation for a better future.

Hopeful thinking is the pathway from past to future, and hopeful writing can be a step on that hopeful path forward. It is taking adversity and crafting it into motivation. It is taking success and building from achievement. Hopeful writing composes the events of our lives into stories that underpin a future full of hopeful endeavors.

Consider my narrative “Two Simple Numbers that Say So Much” as well as the narrative I described Al composing about graffiti in my story. Al’s writing and this dissertation represent examples of hopeful writing. Composing, as well as reading and sharing stories, can be a way to take our lives’ narratives and generate hope. Essentially, this is what it means to be in a state of hopeful becoming. Bloch writes that “We have in us what we could become. This announces itself in the unrest at not being sufficiently defined” (927). In our lives, we become labeled, and judged, and categorized. Sometimes by other people and institutions, and sometimes these tags come from ourselves. Yet what hope brings human life is the ability to move away from labels, to redefine who we are and to rewrite ourselves in new. Hopeful writing is one part of the path towards our regeneration and revision of how we view ourselves and how the world sees us. And one way that hopeful writing does such a thing is by creating a view of the past that projects a better tomorrow. It is a means of balancing the past and the future as we become the individuals we yearn to be. Al’s narrative defined his past. He wrote it in such a way so he could highlight his talent, which he would later decide to use for a future career. My dissertation took challenging moments from my early years teaching writing and helped inspire and structure these events into a project from which I could learn to become a better instructor of writing. Al and I embody hope—writing our pasts becomes about composing hope and propels us into our futures.

For Al, hopeful writing was composing a glimmer of greatness in a problematic past as one tiny fragment in a long process of growth toward becoming a person that devotes his life to helping children. Warnock, who extensively uses writing as a means of therapy with individuals and groups, sees writing as the symbolic act of testing out roles and decisions in life: “Writing and reading can allow people to live other lives and try things out symbolically, so that we can make better decisions about what we value and do” (51). From Warnock’s experience, the act of composing is a way to evaluate the decisions and paths that have led a person to a certain point in life, and the implication from here is that writing can then act as a means to reformulating the pathway and take a new direction in life. This is hopeful because it is creating change, potentially for a much better tomorrow. Through his narrative Al was beginning to write his life as he hoped it would be understood and in a way that promoted a positive future for himself.

In Al’s literacy narrative he was casting off a cultural narrative that could have shaped him into being a loser, a hopeless burden on society destined to spiral further downward toward death or prison where the narrative will often end for gangbangers from his gang. Think about the way I viewed the ramifications of so-called former gang members who were moving to the city where California Community College was located. I blamed them for the increase in violence in that city, as did many of the other residents in the community. Therefore I viewed all the former gang members I encountered through this same narrative construct. But hopeful narrative writing can be a step on the path to rewriting such narratives for specific individuals. In “Life as Narrative,” Bruner writes that:

...eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very ‘events’

of a life. In the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we “tell about” our lives. And given the cultural shaping to which I referred, we also become variants to the culture’s canonical forms. (694)

On one hand, my life experience of growing up in a city where gang violence plagued the community and often threatened my father’s life tapped into the cultural narrative of gang bangers being a continual blight on society and this shaped my perception of seeing all people who have been affiliated with such gangs as being unable to change. I shaped and was shaped by this continual cultural narrative in California. Al could have easily been influenced into believing this narrative applied to him as well, but instead Al rewrote the narrative. Bruner states that as we tell these autobiographical narratives, we are shaped by culture but “we also become variants to the culture’s canonical forms” (694). This variation implies that we have the ability to vary and change the narrative. This is what Al did. Al took the narrative of his life and began to retell it into a different cultural narrative—one in which a person who once led a life of trouble was able to turn it around and find a way to make a positive impact in the community. Al varied his autobiographical narrative when he began to compose his story.

For me, my narrative “Two Simple Numbers that Say So Much” acts in a similar way to Al’s in the sense that both our stories represent taking our autobiographical narratives and rechanneling how they influence our lives and future. But my story involves taking a narrative that could have festered in prejudice from past experiences and seeing that these events actually held the early inspirations for future work that would strive to nurture the potential in the people that society may not always encourage to succeed in life based on past behavior. Yet the hope that I found in my narrative sprung from the help Al inspired in me to reconstruct my narrative. When I pictured myself at the time this narrative took place, I considered myself to be a liberal,

caring teacher who worked well with people of diverse backgrounds. Yet clearly this wasn't completely true, and I never realized nor understood this prejudice in myself. It wasn't until I began to work with AI that I saw my prejudice. And now in composing this story and using it for research on how to teach hopeful writing, I began to understand why I held these views, how I overcame them, and how I can learn from them.

The cultural and autobiographical narratives that guide our decisions may lie deep under the surface of who we perceive ourselves to be. Once I worked with AI I started to understand how my past influenced the present, and now in composing this narrative as a piece of this dissertation I understand how I too have rewritten my story. In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Bruner writes, "Insofar as we account for our own actions and for the human events that occur around us principally in terms of narrative, story, drama, it is conceivable that our sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us" (69). As I have narrated my experience with AI and one of the moments in which gang activity threatened my way of life as a child, I've taken control over this narrative to a degree and used it to reevaluate how I interact with former gang members. Now I look at the experience with my father as the focal moment in inspiring me to work with people who are sometimes marginalized in society. Rather than seeing this moment as a time when I was a traumatized child, I see this moment as when my father inspired me and taught me a valuable lesson about being an educator and a human being.

These are examples of hopeful writing theory at work. It is taking past events and organizing them, working with them as we write, and revising them into structured narratives until they become the foundations for motivating us to believe in and work for a better

tomorrow. Bruner contends that consciousness and memory form through narrating events in a manner similar to how I've described hopeful writing:

I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future. I have argued that a life as led is inseparable from a life as told—or more bluntly, a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold. ("Life as Narrative" 708)

For Bruner, memories form through creating narratives of our experience, and people use these memories to continue the narrative forward into the future. This implies that hopeful thought, and by extension then hopeful writing, can act as a means of redirecting the future by retelling our past narratives from a new perspective. I, nor Bruner necessarily, are arguing for fabricating past events, although memory does seem to perform such a cognitive trick from time to time, but rather narrative retellings are a means to reconceptualize the significance and meaning behind the events. For Al, this took form in his past as a graffiti artist leading into a future as an artist and teacher. For me, this reconceptualization of a traumatic event gave inspiration to follow a similar profession to that of my father's career by helping people succeed academically when for one reason or another they had trouble in their pasts.

This view of narration as being a means to reconceptualize the past in order to change future routes in life can also be found in composition and educational research. Clandinin and Connelly describe narrative research as a means to compose new ways to interpret the significance of social events: "For us, doing narrative inquiry is a form of living. Living, in its

most general sense, is unbounded. The structures, seen and unseen, that do constrain our lives when noticed can always be imagined to be otherwise, to be more open, to have alternative possibilities” (89). I believe what Clandinin and Connelly describe here is the agency that can come with narrative writing and is essential for hope. Agency, as discussed in Chapter Two, is a key component to hopeful thought. And as explored through the use of Trimbur’s scholarship, agency can be both a way of fitting into a social system and/or a means of expressing individualism against social convention (286). A narrative writing project therefore can be hopeful by supplying the agency required to use hopeful processes to move into a different and possibly better future. Hopeful writing in narrative then is structuring past experience in language so as to use the past as a springboard or inspiration to future change. Narrative writing is taking control over the past.

I began this dissertation by quoting Blitz and Hurlbert’s notion that educators become involved in this profession because we initially believe that through this vocation we can create “better neighborhoods, better communities, a better world” (2). When Blitz and Hurlbert call for compositionists to explore how this could be done, I answer with hope. The premise this dissertation rests upon is that hope, and therefore hopeful writing, can lead to a better world. I believe this to be true because hopeful writing is one step in the direction forward to understanding and overcoming our regrets and prejudices. It is not succumbing to the discourses that may portray people as hopeless failures; instead hopeful writing is one means of rewriting such discourses. In *National Healing*, Hurlbert writes, “Even when not overtly political, writing is always these things because it is a life impulse, an impulse toward freedom and independence that makes healthy forms of belonging possible. We write to claim our lives, to carve lives out—even for minutes at a time, from the discourses that texture them from without” (25). Here

Hurlbert offers a definition of hopeful writing. It is agentic writing in which the author can take control over the discourse in some small way and begin to see a path toward hoping for more. This type of writing is shaping a hopeful mindset. It is laying down the narrative pathways in the mind that lead to other hopeful endeavors and hopeful projects. This is how hope grows.

Furthermore, hope can also grow through writing and sharing hopeful narratives. This is the social aspect of creating hope between individuals. In their work using writing in group therapy, Ingram, Jenny, and Perlesz describe how hopeful writing leads to creating hope in the audience of such texts as well: “[Writing] thus change[s] ‘stuck’ monologues into evolving dialogues and inviting changes in self-perception that influences changes in one’s own and other family members’ behavior” (76). Similar to the depictions of hopeful writing we see from Bruner, Hurlbert, and Clandinin and Connelly, writing can inspire hopeful change as it allows the author to reevaluate the “monologues” that may place a person in a state of stagnant hopelessness, similar to discourses that may label a person as a failure, by creating an opportunity for revising and changing perception. And just as this hopeful process can occur with the author of a text, it can also influence those people who read, listen, and experience the writing. In Chapter Four’s narrative, Al and I both helped nurture hope and hopeful writing in one another. For Al, being in a formal educational situation in which he could express his story as he wanted to compose it allowed for him to write his past in a way that could lead to future hope. And in fact, it was one tiny step leading him towards becoming an educator. My support in helping Al craft his narrative to his vision encouraged and nurtured his hopeful goals. For me, Al’s text inspired me to look closer at my prejudices and how my experiences as a child influenced how I treated certain people when I later became a teacher. This led to me composing this narrative, writing this dissertation to better understand how I can be a hopeful writing

teacher, and perhaps my text might inspire further hopeful writing. This is how writing aids in a process of hope and change between people.

Now let me be clear, there is no assurance that writing will be hopeful, but it can be hopeful. And there is no promise that narrative writing will produce the same results as depicted in “Two Simple Numbers that Say So Much.” As Warnock writes about her experiences using writing in therapy, “There is no guarantee, of course, that reading and writing make people act more wisely. But, writing and reading, by expanding our experience and repertoire of strategies, can provide additional possibilities from which we may choose in order to live and act effectively in specific contexts” (51). Can all writing be hopeful? No, it cannot. But writing has the potential to be hopeful, and in this section I have shown how narrative writing becomes hopeful when it structures past experience in a way in which future hopes, dreams, and goals can be attainable achievements. Hopeful writing is taking the discourses that shape a person and using agency to reshape them in a manner that inspires a future trajectory toward a better tomorrow. Hopeful writing is taking control over our life. So how can we encourage this in a composition course?

Much of this description of hopeful writing discusses how discourses shape individuals and how individuals reshape discourse. James Berlin writes:

While language indeed serves as a means for control and domination, it can also serve as an instrument of liberation and growth. Language in its positioning between the world and individual, the object and the subject, contains within its shaping force the power to create humans as agents of action. Each individual occupies a position at the intersection of a multitude of discourses....These codes can define subjects as helpless objects of forces—economic, social, political,

cultural—that render them forever isolated and victimized by the conditions of their experience. These discourses can also, however, form individuals as active agents of change, social creatures who acting together can alter the economic, social, and political conditions of their historical experience. (106)

The goal then in a hopeful writing pedagogy that inspires students to compose hopeful texts is to encourage students to harness some of that power of language and find ways to use their language to articulate their hopeful visions of their future and the future of their communities and the future of our world. In the next section, I discuss some strategies a composition instructor may use to encourage hopeful writing.

#### Hope for Compositionists Teaching Writing

Having described hopeful writing theory—narratives which take control over the discourses that shape our pasts as a means to inspiring better futures, I now discuss tips for designing pedagogies, classes, and assignments that have the potential to inspire hopeful compositions from students. I advise that in order to create the opportunity for hopeful writing in composition courses we must stay true to using a student-centered pedagogy. Doing this, we must give students the opportunity in our classes to narrate their lived experiences without writing teachers imposing feedback that potentially could alter students' narration because of the teacher's bias towards topics of interest, themes, or discursal analysis. Teachers need to be aware of the discourses and cultural narratives influencing the feedback they provide when interacting with students, and teachers need to allow for students to write with the freedom to express their versions of their discourses in order to be able to find hope in their writing.

Since this dissertation's analysis of hope in composition classes defines hopeful writing theory as that which involves changing and choosing the discourses that student-authors express

in their writing, I feel it important and necessary to take a moment to clearly define discourse and to briefly discuss the different approaches to how the concept of discourse influences composition theory. To define the concept of discourse, I turn to the definition given by Iara Lessa. Drawing her understanding from the work of Foucault, Lessa defines “discourses as systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of actions, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (285). According to Lessa, these discourses influence political and social power in that discourses are involved “in wider social processes of legitimation and power, emphasizing the constitution of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them” (285). I interpret the concept of discourse to be akin to Bruner’s discussion of cultural narratives (“Life as Narrative” 694) and Clandinin and Connelly view of grand narratives (25). These concepts represent communicative acts that convey beliefs and power relations. Albeit cultural and grand narratives follow elements of the storytelling genre, whereas discourse does not necessarily need to take shape in narrative structures though it could. And within narratives discursal themes can be seen, and narratives told and retold have the power to shape discourse.

We see cultural narratives and discourse at work in “Two Simple Numbers that Say so Much.” I carried with me stories from my childhood that depicted people involved in gang activity as being antisocial and dangerous. This shaped my view of all people involved with gangs and all the activities that went along with gang lifestyle. Furthermore, when I was teaching at California Community College, I associated the northern migration of gang activity to be the result of the kind of people I saw coming to the college who had clear gang association based on their appearance. The truth is though that I had no personal proof of this, but it was the story I came to believe because it was the narrative being told in the community as anecdotes between

people, it was reported in the newspaper alongside stories of gang violence, thefts attributed to gangs, and drug trafficking. And then there are also numerous television networks that produce pseudo-documentaries extolling the savage violence of specific gangs and notorious members of those gangs. This is how personal narratives intertwine with the narratives told by other people and are spread, and then these narratives become involved with the stories in the media, and soon we have cultural narratives being told and being written that influence the discourse surrounding people, groups of people, events, and intuitions, and all these discourses carry messages of values, judgments, and positions of status and power. The narrative in my community about gangs portrays them as a plague in our neighborhoods. This attitude spreads into our discourse as we discuss, write, and make policy. And this discourse influences actions. We see this in “Two Simple Numbers that Say So Much” when I worked with every student in the Writing Center aside from the one I marked as a gang member. These are grand narratives and discourse at work, influencing my actions.

The prominence of discourse in composition theory has led to pedagogies that attempt to focus the writing in composition courses around examining discourse in one way or another. According to Bruce McComiskey, during the 1980s and 1990s with an emphasis on discourse and rhetoric, composition turned toward what he labels social theories of composition:

Social-process composition pedagogies treat critical writing as rhetorical inquiry and political intervention into the cultural forces that construct our subjectivities. Composing processes remain the focus of these pedagogies, but composing is always situated within particular socio-political contexts rather than within autonomous individuals or structured minds. Recent attempts to contextualize the

writing process have focused on ways in which cultural forces, such as social narratives and ideologies, influence the act of composing. (3)

While there are many variations on this type of pedagogy and many different names, there has been a decisive trend in theory that examines the social and political forces acting upon an author and influencing the author's writing. To a degree, these trends and theories dispel a great deal of subjective agency from individual authors. As McComiskey states, discourse can be viewed as the "cultural forces that construct our subjectivities" (3). Yet in McComiskey's social-process pedagogy, he contends that these constructing forces can be acted upon. For many teachers, analysis of cultural, political, and discursal elements in composition courses functions as the means of disrupting and challenging dominant discourses and cultural narratives.

For example, in discussing her first-year-writing course LuMing Mao writes that she requires students to perform discourse analysis, particularly in classes with multilingual writers, in order to breakdown discourses and cultural narratives that place more value on a native speaker of English as opposed to a second language English user. Mao writes:

It is our responsibility, as teachers of writing and rhetoric, to guide our students to trace and analyze how such discursive copresences have been historically formed and how they are being currently manifested. In other words, we must study and promote words, concepts, categories, and discourses that can debunk the Standard English ideology and that can reveal relationships of subordination, resistance, and re-presentation. (191)

While I agree with the point Mao makes concerning multilingualism and the native English speaker fallacy, I do not necessarily believe the first-year-composition course or a developmental writing class is the place for such an assignment, at least not without other types of writing as

well. For one thing, from my perspective discourse analysis puts the act of analyzing discourse ahead of the act of students composing their own discourses. The assignment to analyze comes before the actual writing students do in the class. I see this as a hierarchy of focus in which analysis rather than composing becomes the emphasis. Writing becomes the medium to deliver the analysis, no longer the main focus of the course. Yes, students must use writing to express their analysis and navigate the rhetorical demands of the assignment, and certainly I believe this can help develop writing abilities, but I also feel as if this style of analysis removes students from engaging directly in discourse creation and modification.

Wouldn't writing that directly challenges the discourse of the native English speaker fallacy by actually composing texts that are multilingual, or employ rhetorical and aesthetic elements from cultures not often represented in American academic writing or veer away from the mythical standard English grammar, do just as well in criticizing this linguistic and cultural notion that English language learners must strive for native like expression? Again, yes, an analysis of such discourses in academia and popular culture are valuable to exposing these beliefs and presenting academic and political arguments of their erroneous and damaging assumptions, but what if students who have been affected by this issue decide to compose their lived experiences on such a topic? What if multilingual students and teachers compose their narratives about learning and using English? I believe students will no longer be analyzing discourse—now they will be shaping and creating it.

For instance, in the edited collection *Language and Culture: Reflective Narratives and the Emergence of Identity*, language scholars share their narratives about learning languages and how their experiences shaped their understanding of the political and cultural discourses involved in being a “non-native speaker” of any given language. Kimie Takahashi recounts her

early aspirations and motivations for wanting to learn English as well as the varying types of English education she received growing up in Japan and then studying abroad in her narrative “Multilingual Couple Talk.” Takahashi writes, “Living in a predominately English-speaking Western country, I saw my identity as a second language speaker of English and being Asian as a disadvantage. Thus I wanted my partner to be ‘perfect,’ to be someone from whom I could get assurance in all things English, and Western” (200). In her story, Takashi depicts how after meeting a man who spoke several languages, including English but it was not his first, she began to understand her bias and reevaluated her understanding of what it means to be a speaker of a language, whether that language is a second or a first or maybe even a third. My point here is to point out that by composing such narratives, instead of critiquing a dominant and possibly oppressive discursal cultural narrative, Takashi is rewriting the narrative from her experience—she is literally recreating this cultural narrative in her own unique way.

Consider the same issue of native speakers and multilingual students in light of the narrative “Two Simple Numbers that Say So Much.” It could be argued that students such as Al, who composed in Spanish and English, created a discourse that embraces multilingualism and perhaps even challenges the monolingual discourse of composition in the United States. If enough of these narratives are written and read, then they will change the grand narratives circulating higher education and society. This is why I believe it important to move away from academic style essays that asks for analysis and critique in favor of encouraging students to create narratives in which they express their lived experiences—this is a way to create discourse. Discourses that might challenge something such as the native speaker fallacy, or they might reinforce a discourse. It is up to the student to compose such a text.

Furthermore, assignments that explicitly call for discursal analysis may decrease student agency. Rather than encouraging an organic and natural allowance for students to engage in creating their own discourses which may contain themes and undertones that can subvert or reinforce dominant discourses, students are forced into a form of linguistic discursal analysis because, frankly, those are the research interests of the teacher. I also wonder how much pressure a teacher applies toward influencing students into critiques that reflect the teacher's political and cultural opinion. Now, I do feel there is a place for discursal analysis in a writing curriculum, and I also believe that in analyzing discourse people are recreating discourse, and that such forms of teaching can be done responsibly and well, and also that hopeful writing can be produced from such assignments, but I feel a more appropriate place for such an assignment would be an advanced composition course rather than writing courses early in students' academic careers.

I do believe though that research and theory on discourse and the social forces that influence an author are helpful for understanding how writing can be taught in a hopeful way. As Olson states, "...writing is always already ideological, always already political—always saturated with questions of power and domination. Thus, authority and the social positions from which one is entitled to assert it are centrally important" (12). What I believe the lesson we should take away from such theory, if we are to encourage hopeful writers, is that we need to find ways that our students can assert their authority through composing texts. A major component of hope is agency—the agency to create change—so students must have authority over the discourse they compose in a writing class. Presuming that all people, including writing teachers, consciously and unconsciously feel the influence of competing discourses, the texts we compose can contain multitudes—discourses will be challenged, promoted, reinvented, and modified in a myriad of ways. I believe it is more valuable in hopeful writing to encourage

students to compose texts in which the student has the decision in what the content, structure, linguistic composition, and other textual components are as he or she writes. For hopeful writing, students need to authentically compose their lives as they see fit, during which they may choose to cast off discourses that have followed them throughout their lives as they narrate their stories as they see and understand them.

Hurlbert describes an example of a pedagogy that works well with hopeful writing theory in *National Healing* (182-197). In his book, Hurlbert discusses a pedagogy he developed with Blitz that has “students write semester-long projects, short books—some might call them chapbooks—on what they are burning to tell the world” (182). In this pedagogy, one that I have adopted and adapted over the past several years for my first-year-composition classes, genre forms and topics are not imposed on student writers. Instead, students must find their own unique purpose for composing. I instruct students that this project should entail writing that is both personally meaningful—what they are burning to tell the world—and writing that is socially significant—a text that will hold the interest of a college level reading audience.

Hurlbert describes this pedagogical approach as one that invites students to look into their lives for inspiration to express themselves to a reading world: “My composition class begins with writers learning to look inward in order to articulate and interpret the many experiences of their lives and world....The goal is to have students write a lot so as to become better artists and activists in their own lives. And in this process they learn to address their worlds” (182). This pedagogy dovetails nicely with hopeful writing theory because it prompts students to write of important aspects and events from their lives—to compose their lived experiences and share these texts.

Furthermore, Hurlbert's pedagogy goes beyond expressivist pedagogy in that much of the class centers on students responding to the writing of their classmates. Students conduct writer's workshops and also compose forewords for their classmates' books. By working closely with one another, students learn about their peers' lives while helping one another express and examine these lives through the written word. Writing about the forewords students compose in his class, Hurlbert states, "In these forewords, each student identifies and discusses the key issue in the book they are reading, and each student connects the book to larger cultural or historical issues or trends" (182). This pedagogy encourages students to write about what is important in their pasts and what it means for their futures. Then the students share these texts. This creates the potential for hopeful writing theory to flourish because it directly draws from students' life experiences and their ability to see and shape the world through composing, through sharing texts, and through responding to the writing done in the course. Writing acts as the connection that brings people together to do hope.

It is important for writing teachers to be reminded that all our students, no matter what their backgrounds, have an abundance of experience, knowledge, and linguistic ability. All the students in my narratives in this dissertation were in one way or another discriminated against by educational institutions. In Chapter One Jason was the problem child destined for trouble. In Chapter Two Tron was the ESL student who would never speak or write like native English users. And in Chapters Three and Four Al and Tim were gang members, always to be associated with antisocial activities. Yet they all had experiences that were unique, interesting, and insightful, and all these young men had intelligent contributions to make to our colleges. Shaughnessy describes how such students possess great knowledge but higher education and academic culture threatens to stifle them:

Neglected by the dominant society, they have nonetheless had their own worlds to grow up in and they arrive on our campuses as young adults, with opinions and languages and plans already in their minds. College both beckons and threatens them, offering to teach them useful ways of thinking and talking about the world, promising even to improve the quality of their lives, but threatening at the same time to take from them their distinctive ways of interpreting the world, to assimilate them into the culture of academia without acknowledging their experience as outsiders. (292)

Hopeful writing does not involve assimilation. Hopeful writing allows for, it even encourages, diversity. Hope is unique, therefore if writing in composition courses has the chance to be hopeful we must find ways to make the process of writing and expressing the self through language in ways that students can find their own voice and articulate their experiences. In “Two Simple Numbers that Say So Much,” I may have given the opportunity for rhetorical and linguistic expression as I encouraged students to write creative nonfiction narratives and merge languages, yet I also felt compelled to urge AI towards expressing his narrative toward a cultural discourse that reflected my middle class values rather than truly trying to understand the experiences that had shaped AI’s narrative and discourse. Thankfully I recognized this bias and my resulting compulsion to assimilate AI through this text. For hopeful writing, there needs to be freedom that does not seek to assimilate students into writing a teacher’s discourses or beliefs.

I now will discuss the lessons I have learned through researching hope, composing the narratives included in this dissertation, and theorizing what hopeful writing can be. I interpret the writing that students composed in all the narratives included in my dissertation as being hopeful. Jason, the child from the narrative “Brian the Great I Am Not” in Chapter One, wrote of himself

as a hero. Tron, my Cambodian student in the narrative “ESL Doesn’t Mean Dumb” from Chapter Two, depicted himself as becoming a typical college freshman in his writing. Tim, the former gang member from Los Angeles from Chapter Three’s narrative “Holding onto Hope,” challenged the notion that drug dealers are completely evil. And Al from Chapter Four showed that his past had value. These people all took ways in which popular or traditional discourse has positioned each of them in a negative manner and composed writing that challenged these preconceived discourses by composing narratives that expressed differing values, interpretations of events, and ways in which their futures can be positive.

The first lesson I have for encouraging hopeful writing is to create writing assignments that students feel compelled to invest themselves and their energy into composing. Hurlbert writes that to create engagement “Something in the assignment has to suggest relevance or touch a personal and human need to make meaning. Something has to make an opening—or better—suggest why students should want to participate. Serious classroom writing requires an invitation to students to make the writing theirs” (*National Healing* 35). This goal, as I’d imagine most writing teachers would agree, is not an easy one to accomplish. But if we examine my narratives, each student felt driven to express their views, their perceptions of themselves, and their stories through their writing. Jason became interested in the creativity he could use in our writing when he wrote with fictional elements of story telling, but he really invested when he composed himself as a character in our story—a character that represented who Jason wanted to be—no longer the troubled child. Tron was excited to share his family story of immigration and how he had achieved one of his educational goals on his path to being an acculturated and successful American college student. Tim wanted to show another side to his incarcerated father. And Al had a desire to express his pride for his talent. All these writers personally invested in their

writing. Therefore, to promote investment and the potential for hopeful writing, I feel it is imperative that composition instructors should develop assignments that allow for personal, meaningful expression. While many readers might say this is an obvious desired goal for teaching writing, I'm not sure many composition teachers honestly reflect on how their assignments and course design invite authentic engagement from students. I see many writing teachers apply themes to their courses, and while some do it very well, I suspect many students simply can't invest their whole energy into writing about topics they care little about in their lives at the moment. And I also see many who still teach modes and other formulaic writing assignments. I truly believe engagement is something that needs to be seriously considered when designing a hopeful writing class.

When teachers choose themes for students to write about, students lose some of their agency over their texts and this can reduce authentic engagement. Rather than generating the desire for students to see a purpose beyond the class assignment for composing, students might feel that their sole purpose for their writing is to satisfy an assignment and a teacher. In all the narratives in this dissertation, the students were able to go beyond the fulfillment of the assignment requirements and begin to see themselves as authors who were compelled to write in order to articulate important experiences, stories, and ideas. This is why Hurlbert's pedagogy previously described has the potential to nurture hopeful writing because students must find a personal and social purpose to sustain the semester long project.

The next lesson gleaned from my narratives and research is that once a teacher has a student who has invested in his or her writing, to encourage hopeful writing a teacher should offer enthusiasm and express how the student's text personally affects the teacher as a reader. This type of reaction can authentically show the student the power of his or her writing. Such

feedback encourages agency and investment, and according to Mayher, Lester, and Pradl is “the essential ingredient in finding purpose is the writer’s conviction that she has something to say. Students must come to recognize that they know a great deal and have experiences worth sharing with others. Unless a writer gets sufficiently involved in developing her own ideas and beliefs, the writing will not be worth reading no matter how mechanically correct it is” (2-3). By witnessing his or her writing affect a teacher, the teacher validates the student’s knowledge, experience, and expression. Every student in each of my narratives became excited when they saw my energy directed toward their composing process. Obviously, this won’t always produce future investment as we saw with Tim when he could not finish his research project, but I do think this type of feedback can encourage students to write more and write with hope. While a teacher may help a student with organization, word choice, and other textual features, the teacher needs to express his or her excitement at helping a student powerfully express their ideas and the events of their life. Think about this for a moment. We are writing teachers; we should be excited to read and dialogue with students who invest in their texts.

Now that we know it is important to inspire personal, invested writing, and that composition instructors should offer enthusiastic response to such texts, my next lesson for inspiring hope is to use narrative writing to create student investment in the work. I believe it is important that a hopeful writing class begin with students’ personal experiences if we want students to write with hope. Perhaps later in the course an assignment that calls for explicit discourse analysis may take place in one form or another, but we need to start with what our students have lived. While other genres of writing may also lead to hopeful texts, the narratives in this dissertation all depict students composing their stories. Even Tim from the narrative “Holding onto Hope” who was writing a research paper wanted to include narrative. Narrative

encourages personal writing, which is essential for hope, and equally important narrative invites social interaction as Ann Ruggles Gere states: “I believe that the finely textured personal and autobiographical writing now emerging in the academy leads us to public and social contexts rather than private and individualistic ones” (26). Narrative writing is not solely a private endeavor in the composition classroom. Instead, it can lead to social engagement. Hopeful thought is the belief that our actions can impact our world. Therefore, the narrative writing of our students allows them to personally express themselves to the world.

I witnessed this investment when working with Al as described in Chapter Four’s narrative. Al expressed a desire and commitment to compose a text that captured how he viewed his situation growing up in southern California. As Al and I conferenced about his text, he spoke with a passion and a desperation for me to approach his text from a reading perspective that could view his text from a position that took his life circumstances into account. Al wanted me to understand his story as he constructed the narrative. And from our conference together, I was able to reevaluate my own past history and how it influenced my present day actions. This is an example of how hopeful writing theory encourages student investment and social change through composing.

Encouraging students to invest personally in narratives that have social importance is a means of creating the agency needed for hope. Students may come to understand that by carefully writing and then sharing their experiences they are exercising their voice and power to use their experiences to shape public discourse. Narratives that are shared become hopeful in this way as described by Danielewicz: “A *public voice* is not something intrinsic to the writer but results from the writer’s engagement and position in the world. Thus, a text with voice means the writer has the confidence and position to speak out and the potential to influence others” (423).

The agency nurtured in a hopeful composition course can help grow a writer's confidence in self-expression, and then when we give our genuine feedback the writer understands how this self-expression impacts a reader. For example, although I cannot write this conclusively, I suspect Al's confidence grew when he witnessed that his writing about painting graffiti in southern California and our conversations on the topic shifted how I viewed students who may have lived lives similar to his own. And I hope that this small bit of confidence helped continue to inspire Al's hard work in his later classes. This is hope in action.

Now, a key lesson for a hopeful pedagogy is that writing teachers do not impose their opinions and experiences into a student's text. Any good compositionist knows the dangers of appropriating a student text, but to truly be hopeful we must be mindful of how we authentically dialogue with students about their narratives and the discourses that influence their texts as well as our responses. Dialogue is an important element for hopeful writing because it shows a student how a reader interprets the text, but we cannot alter a student's discourse in order to insert our own opinions if we want hopeful writing. Freire's work, in my opinion, best articulates student-centered pedagogy, and he writes that "It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 85). I agree with Freire in that I do think for a hopeful experience in a composition class our dialogue with a student should discuss both a teacher's world views, the student's world views, and how the text and the interpretation of the text affects both views. But we must do this in such a way as to not pressure a student into revising his or her writing to conform to our beliefs. The dialogue is a moment when we help a student understand how their writing connects with a reader and perks the interest of a reader, and by dialoguing our views about the discourse in the text, we reveal to

students how their narratives support or challenge our world views. With Al in “Two Simple Numbers that Say So Much,” I’m glad I discussed with him my alternative reading of his narrative and the discourse I’d add to the story, but I do wish I had been more open with him about my past because I think it would have been clearer to him what discourses influenced my reaction. It would have been even more inspiring for him to know how his narrative shifted the discourse I held toward gang members and graffiti. Seeing a teacher’s worldview change because of a text increases a student’s agency to promote hopeful change with writing. But even if a student doesn’t instigate a change in a teacher’s beliefs, it is still paramount that the teacher does not push his or her agenda too strongly. After all, human existence and experience is diverse, so we must give space to the hopeful diversity of discourse composed by our students.

The final lesson, then, is allowing diversity of discourses to be expressed by students when composing their narratives because this is paramount in a hopeful composition course. A possible issue in this allowance is the potential for students to compose stories with discourses that might be quite toxic in some respects, but I believe this is a risk we must take in order to work toward encouraging hope. Although it has not been investigated in this dissertation, future research might examine how such harmful discourses can be dealt with by social intervention, and this future research project will be discussed later in this chapter. In any case though, hope has to be free to manifest however a student chooses to tell his or her story. A hopeful pedagogy motivates students to use writing to express their stories even if that writing challenges convention and tradition, and what I see as being the most hopeful about this is that it represents the human condition. It isn’t stretching reason too far to understand why in Chapter Four I might be concerned with how Al represented gang activity in his narrative, but when I dialogued with Al I began to better understand his position and in doing so I was able to reevaluate how I judged

some gang activity and the individuals who may have participated in such behaviors. When humans come into contact a conflict of ideas and beliefs is bound to occur. Hopeful writing should stimulate students to express these conflicts in a way to inspire healthy change as they see the different stories and beliefs being composed in the class, and hopefully this will lead to future tolerance and healthy discussion. Hurlbert writes, “But just as important is learning how to use language to open up the meaning of self in society, the harmony of one in many, the location of humanity in nature, or to articulate the complex beauty and discord of human being” (*National Healing* 17-18). Hopeful composition classes need to respect the harmony and discord in human life. Al and I came together with very different narratives and discourses concerning the region in which we both were raised and the social issues of this location. Yet in our differences and through our dialogue, beauty was found and hope was formed. I helped Al narrate a story he was proud to have written, that represented the person he saw himself as being, and was the background leading to who he wanted to work to be in the future. Al helped me understand my past in such a way as it would inspire me to be a better teacher of writing. Both of us used this moment as a small piece of motivation to continue a hopeful path towards our goals.

The composition course encourages hope by nurturing students to express their stories. These narratives should be treated with respect by writing teachers and show students how to negotiate the discord that can result from competing discourses. This is hopeful writing. These narratives have the power to shape the discourses and cultural narratives in our communities. Young affirms this when he writes, “The personal is not simply an individual idiosyncratic story but rather part and parcel of the many stories that inform the larger sociocultural narratives that script America” (172). If we can work to help students truly express their narratives well, to help them understand that a well-written story can change people, and if we can get more and more

students to do this, then together we might just change the world. With every narrative written and read, discourse is slightly changed. This is hope. This is the goal, the path, and the will to work for change. Here is where we find hope in the composition class. This is a hopeful writing theory.

### Future Research in Hope Theory and Composition

In this section, I discuss possible future inquiry into how hope theory and composition theory relate and can aid in creating more hopeful writing classes. In this section I discuss some limitations to my research project and how future scholarship might account for these limitations and further illuminate how to encourage hope through writing in composition courses. Two major topics for future inquiry would be further discussion of how hope theory and the teaching of writing can help when a student composes a text expressing unhealthy and dangerous discourse for either themselves, other people, or society at large, and the other major topic would be more research into the social aspect of hope building in a writing classroom, particularly between students. Finally, because this dissertation begins the examination of the relationship between hope and composition, more in depth and detailed inquiry into specific composition topics and their relation to hope theory could prove fruitful for further understanding of hopeful writing theory.

To begin with, much of my suggestions about teaching writing to encourage hope centers on the idea that students be given ample freedom to write narratives and create discourse. Yet what if students compose texts that glorify savage violence, disgusting sexism, or horrible racist discourse? With Al and Tim in Chapter Three and Four, I walked a fine line here because they both wrote narratives involving antisocial gang activity. Yet with both these young men, when I spoke with them and we discussed their goals for their work it became evident that they were

writing to reveal the textured layers of such social activity in order to show that people who engage in these activities are human and possess positive human traits as well. This is how Tim and Al challenged dominant discourse and brought further insight through their narratives. Still though, I can imagine much worse stories that I might not be able to see the positive hopeful discourse layered in them. O'Reilley discusses this as a possible complication when we encourage personal writing:

Thus, I have come to distrust any pedagogy that does not begin in the personal. To teach beginning students to write a formal, academic dialect is to disable them not only emotionally but also politically. Having made people feel like charlatans, it submits them, half-clad in rags of personhood, bashful and confused, to the dominion of force. Of course, a student's inner world may be positively poisonous; she may need to be led away from it toward health and sanity and the laws of physics. Thus, I have come to distrust any pedagogy that does not conclude in the communal: subject to the checks and balances of the others, the teacher, the tradition, and the texts. (61)

O'Reilley also champions personal writing but recognizes the pitfall of potentially harmful texts, too. Her solution is to use a social element in the classroom to compete with the possibly dangerous texts, but I would like to see more research done on this remedy, especially in light of hopeful writing theory. This then leads into the next line of future inquiry—social interaction between students.

Much of this dissertation and its narratives focus on the interaction between teacher and student. Future inquiry would do well to focus attention on how hope can be encouraged through student interaction in composition classrooms. Particularly, studying peer-groups and workshops

where students discuss one another's texts and respond to each other will benefit how students can hinder and help those who compose hopeful texts that work for or against grand cultural narratives. An insight in hope theory is that hope is often nurtured through people interacting, so giving attention to how this occurs between students would be beneficial to teaching writing.

Finally, using hope theory as an analytical lens to examine different composition pedagogies, theories, and techniques might be a way to further understand how writing can be hopeful and taught in a hopeful pedagogy. Chapter Two's literature review briefly analyzed composition theory and pedagogy using hope theory as an analytical lens. Obviously, this review of composition theory only begins the discussion of how hope theory relates to the historical trends and competing theories that shape composition studies. The purpose of the review in this dissertation simply represents examples of what pedagogies and theories exemplify hope theory in order to better understand that composition can be, and has been, a hopeful experience for teachers and students. Future scholarship may benefit from conducting a much more thorough historical analysis of our field in relation to hope theory in order to expand on my definition of hopeful writing theory. This historical scholarship may help yield interesting insight into trends and pedagogies that have elements and methods that can foster or inhibit hopeful writing, while also continuing the discussion of what it means to write with hope. This type of scholarship could be used to develop more hopeful methods for teaching writing by reviewing the merits of past trends in the teaching of writing while also exposing techniques that hinder hope.

#### Hope in the Composition Course

I conclude my dissertation by philosophically discussing hope in the composition class. I've examined hope through the components of goals, pathways, and agency. I've considered approaches towards writing instruction, placement practices, and teacher response, but I think

what might be most important in finding hope in the composition classroom is to remember who we, the teachers, are when we walk into these rooms. Certainly we should reflect on what we do in the classroom and examine our decisions, actions, and beliefs and how they influence our students. And I do want my description of a hopeful writing theory, my narratives, and my suggestions for practices in composition classes to aid in such reflective practices in order to help myself and other teachers make hopeful decisions when designing composition classes and programs in our colleges. But perhaps the most crucial thing we can remember is that the attitude and energy emanating from our human spirit is what gives life to our teaching and can inspire students to put life into their writing. We nurture hopeful writers by being hopeful ourselves, which means we must deeply believe in the potential of our students and allow them the freedom to compose their lives, their dreams, and their hopes. Teachers who hold onto hope and bring it into the classroom have the chance of spreading this feeling and belief to their students. Hope is remaking reality. Writing is the symbolic ability to remake the world with words and convey visions to readers—this is writing with hope. As composition teachers, we must represent hope to our students. We must believe in hope, and we must have the will to work for hope.

In discussing an effective teacher at an underfunded and understaffed elementary school, Kozol writes, “But what is unique in Mrs. Hawkins’s classroom is not what she does but who she is. Warmth and humor and contagious energy cannot be replicated and cannot be written into any standardized curriculum” (51). Kozol recognizes that curriculum, lessons, activities, and assignments are not the most important thing in an effective and inspiring classroom. The most important thing is the teacher. A teacher’s personality and attitude inspires students and models for the pupils what it looks like to love serving others for a better tomorrow. Again, the educational practices we use in our classroom certainly make a difference and should be

examined and refined to best meet the needs of our students and the goals in our classes, and I wholeheartedly support the teaching suggestions I have made in this chapter for encouraging hope in composition classes, but even if these suggestions are implemented and a teacher attempts to carry them out, they will not be as effective if the teacher does not believe and live hope everyday in that classroom.

Hope is a human emotion, a cognitive way of understanding, and a force that initiates action—hope is an indispensable aspect of humanity. Without it, humanity’s future becomes dark and lost. Writing about the ways in which prisoners in concentration camps found ways to keep motivated to survive and persist under horrendous conditions, Frankl writes that prisoners who lost this ability—lost hope—soon succumbed to a rapid demise: “The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay” (82). No doubt the physical atrocities played the major contributing factor to the prisoners’ conditions, but the point Frankl makes throughout his writing is that hope for the future, even if miniscule, is what kept him and other prisoners able to survive under the absolute worst circumstances imaginable. And without this force aiding the prisoners in their survival, they died quicker. Hope is necessary. It is a requirement for human existence. As Aquinas describes it, “Hope itself is a movement of the soul” (457).

Because hope is immensely important to humanity, this is why writing teachers must believe and be committed to teaching writing with hope and working to encourage hope. Even when facing difficult situations in our schools, we need to hold onto our belief in hope and continue to work to make things better. Disturbed students, shrinking budgets, over-standardization, discriminatory language policies, armed forces protecting our campuses, and a

million other large and little things trouble our schools, but we cannot submit to these occurrences by losing our hope. We cannot put our heads into the sand and ignore them, nor can we lose our agency and say, “I’m just one teacher; there is nothing I can do.” We have to believe in our hopes and use this motivation to work against, even if only slightly and slowly, the ills in education. And we must be examples for our students.

Of course we will not always succeed, and we will fail from time to time. Hope and what is right will not always prevail, nor will it be clearly discernable in some situations. This is why we must hold to hope even tighter, and show our students perseverance. After all, when our students leave our schools they will be facing daunting challenges themselves. Reading describes how hope will not conquer all problems people encounter, but it is our best option to push forward and find that better tomorrow:

Hope gives us only possibilities, not guarantees; but it mobilizes us to act, to analyze and understand our problems, and to try to solve them. Realistic hopes are, unfortunately, difficult to come by in times of crisis and uncertainty.

However, we will never know whether we are able to give up our shortsighted, destructive ways, forgive age-old rivalries, and work together for the common good if we do not try—or do not believe we have the talent and ingenuity needed to tackle these problems. (172)

This is why writing teachers must believe in hope and teach writing in order to encourage hope. We live with our students in a world with incredibly complex issues. From climate change to warfare, our world faces destructive forces that threaten our very existence as a species. This is why it is so important that we help our students understand that with the texts they write they can begin the process of change. They can change themselves, and they can change other people.

And then, I believe if we work for such hopeful writing from our students, they can carry that hopeful momentum into all the works they do in this world. After all, these people in our classrooms have the potential to work against the plagues of humanity.

This is the belief that a hopeful teacher needs to have in a writing classroom. To believe that the hopes of the students in the class are important and achievable. That all the students can write great things and do great things. That despite the ills that plague our schools, and the global issues that we face today and will deal with tomorrow, the hopeful teacher still sees the beauty in today and the potential for change in tomorrow, and the hopeful teacher recognizes that the people sitting with him or her in the classroom *are* the people that can create that change. Blitz and Hulbert write, “Our students do remarkable things when they feel sure they can do remarkable things. If I can do nothing else, I want them to feel, to *know*, they can” (73). This is what a hopeful writing pedagogy can accomplish. It can help students understand that they can do great things, and this is what we need to work to teach in our classes. I believe they can accomplish wonderful goals, and that is why I go to work everyday, and I walk onto my campus hopeful.

My hope is that I teach in such a way as to encourage hope. Hope in my composition class is the feeling and the understanding that when we write, we are taking control of our lives. We are controlling our narratives and the discourses that surround and shape this world, and we alter them to reflect the world in which we would rather live. A better world. And I am not the only compositionist to have such a belief and drive to do this work. Amongst many others who share similar values toward this profession, I like how Peckham describes his role as a compositionist: “I have committed myself to this field in which we write to make a difference, to alter the outer reality into which we push our texts. If we can give students the sense of their

right to speak and a belief in the power of their words, we can walk away from our classes thinking we have done good work” (162). I believe hope is a way to accomplish what Peckham contends is the work we do in our composition courses. Hopeful writing as described in this dissertation gives students’ their right to speak by narrating their stories and they see the power in these stories as they witness how their words shape discourse. This is our good work.

I cannot write anybody’s past, and I cannot write anybody’s future, but I can write mine. When I do compose my life as compositionist, I can only hope that I’ll be a teacher who helps inspire students to write their pasts and their futures as they see fit. I hope I can offer my support and share my experiences with the people I encounter as we write a better world for all of us. Yes, sometimes I will feel meek and small. I will feel like I am failing and that what I do is not important. I will feel hopeless at times. But in these moments, I will remember why I do this. I can open up the pages of this dissertation and remind myself I have had these feelings before, and with the help of these wonderful and patient people who once were my students, by reading and reminding myself of them, my hope can be restored. I teach writing because this is important, and through writing I want students to know that their ideas and experiences are important and their writing can make an impact.

There are so many goals and so many paths in this life. I can’t precisely predict where my students take their writing or what they might write in their futures, but for the time I get to spend with these people, I will believe and I will work to help them write to their greatest potential. To understand that they can write hope into the narratives of their lives and communities. This is my hope.

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