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Dale Jacobs

*University of Windsor*

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#### Recommended Citation

Jacobs, Dale. (2005). What's Hope Got to Do With It?: Theorizing Hope in Education. *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, 25 (4), 783-802.

<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/englishpub/11>

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## What's Hope Got to Do With It? Toward a Theory of Hope and Pedagogy

Dale Jacobs

Whatever the perspective through which we appreciate authentic educational practice . . . its process implies hope.

—Paulo Freire

**H**ope. It's a word that we often read in monographs and journal articles in our field. It's become so much a part of our conversations, especially in that part of the field influenced by critical pedagogy, that we take little notice of it. But we need to notice it. Hope is part of our discourse, part of our orientation toward the future, part of how we sustain ourselves in our daily work. We hope for the best for our students, both individually and collectively. We hope that the world will become a better place. We hope that we get tenure, a new job, better working conditions, a grant, a new computer, or whatever it is we need to sustain our professional lives. We think that, *of course*, we should cultivate hope in our teaching lives. *Of course*, our pedagogy should be hopeful. But what does being hopeful mean? What do we mean when we talk about hope, especially in relation to pedagogy? Do we simply mean it in the everyday sense of being optimistic? Do we mean it in a Freirean sense? A Christian sense? Whatever sense is intended, hope is universally seen as positive, a quality we should cultivate in ourselves as teachers and as human beings.

We can see how hope has shaped recent work on pedagogy by turning to bell hooks' most recent book, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. Here hooks extends the work of her 1994 *Teaching to Transgress* by imagining the possibilities of the world as a classroom, untethered

from the traditional system of schooling, a place of liberatory possibility for the ending of racism and white supremacy. Hooks' pedagogy is a pedagogy of hope, both in its orientation toward the possibility of a better, changed future through collective, pedagogical action and in its overt invocation of Freire's *A Pedagogy of Hope*. She explicitly invokes the idea of hope in the book's preface, arguing that hope helps move us beyond critique and cynicism. She writes, hope "empowers us to continue our work for justice even as the forces of injustice may gain greater power for a time. As teachers we enter the classroom with hope" (xiv). She also observes, "Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness"; "we live by hope"; "living in hope says to us, 'There is a way out,' even from the most dangerous and desperate situations" (xiv, xv). Even though the book is profoundly connected to ideas of hope, apart from these two pages in the preface, hooks sets aside the explicit use of the concept of hope for the rest of the book. There is no real sense of what hope actually is or how a fully developed or theorized conception of hope might help us in our work as educators.

As Freire says, to quote another aphorism on hope, "There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope" (*Hope* 91). But what exactly do we mean when we talk about hope and why is it imperative that we think about it? How can we unpack hope in critical and reflective ways, especially in relation to pedagogy? This essay is my attempt to help us begin to theorize hope and to bring together some of the important strands of thinking about hope in relation to pedagogy.

### Hope and Communal Responsibility

Before I articulate what hope is in this profession, I need to make clear what hope is not. In doing so, I'm going to turn to Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), a philosopher and theologian whose ideas on hope, along with those of Freire, will underpin much of my discussion in the rest of this essay. In *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, originally published in 1951, Marcel writes,

Hope is only possible on the level of the *us*, or we might say of the *agapé*, and that it does not exist on the level of the solitary *ego*, self-hypnotised and concentrating exclusively on individual aims. Thus it also implies that

we must not confuse hope and ambition, for they are not of the same spiritual dimension. (10)

Hope, then, is social in nature, rather than individual, and is wrapped up in the web of social relations that each of us inhabits. Hope is decidedly not about individual aims, desires, or ambitions; it is not possible as an I but only as a we—or, more properly, as the articulation or joining together of individuals into what Marcel refers to as a communion. As Albert Randall observes in *The Mystery of Hope in the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, “For Marcel, it is at the level of communion that hope first becomes possible because hope requires a relationship of presence i.e. an actualization of communion” (272). I’ll return to this important idea of presence (or availability, or what Marcel calls “disponibilité”) and how it operates as an actualizer of communion, but for now I want to concentrate on Marcel’s idea of communion itself.

As with all theologians of hope, there is the sense that this communion involves a relationship with God. However, in Marcel’s work God is always in the background, providing a foundation for hope and communion. The overwhelming sense, however, is that the cultivation of hope and communion involves the acts of sharing and participation within a human collective. In *Being and Having*, Marcel writes that hope is “not only a protestation inspired by love, but a sort of call, too, a desperate appeal to an ally who is Himself also Love. The supernatural element which is the foundation of Hope is as clear as its transcendent nature . . .” (79). For Marcel, God is our ally, the foundation of hope, but hope is also clearly implicated in the material world within which we now live. Like liberation theology, Marcel’s theology of hope does not eschew the spiritual, but neither does it focus on heaven to the exclusion of attention to material conditions of our life here on earth. As the editors of *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader* contend, the “unifying principle” of liberation theology is “a passionate concern for the poor and oppressed and a commitment to living the gospel in ways that link everyday life with its transcendent foundations—God’s love and concern for all human beings” (viii). God is still central to such theology, but the focus shifts from the next world to the present world, from promised salvation to current injustice. Similarly, Marcel maintains that God is the basis of hope.

However, he shifts attention away from the traditional, eschatological conception of Christian hope, with its focus on last things and hope in salvation, and draws attention to our life together, in the here and now of our material circumstances.

In Marcel's definition of hope, then, a communion between human beings assumes a position of key importance. In his most famous formulation of hope, Marcel expresses such a relationship of communion in this way: "I hope in thee for us" (*Homo* 60). This simple statement expresses the social and communal dimensions of hope as well as the extent to which possibility is built into the idea of hope. Hope is at its core thoroughly intersubjective, a horizontal relationship of mutuality that looks toward a shared future. As individuals, we may want (hope-for) tenure, a raise, or a new computer, but this kind of individual wanting does not involve the kind of hope-in (a collective idea) expressed by Marcel. That is, hoping is not tied to having (hope-for), a state of mind that is closer to desire. Hope-in rests in a collective, rather than individual, future. It is this kind of utopian hope that I believe is imperative for us to articulate and to see as aligned with the kind of pedagogy expressed by hooks and others such as Chris Gallagher in *Radical Departures* and Amy Lee in *Composing Critical Pedagogies*. For hooks, pedagogical spaces are places of "liberating mutuality where teacher and student together work in partnership" (xv). We can further see the implicit connections between hope as a communal endeavor and pedagogy in Gallagher's sense of the term—"pedagogy is what happens when people seek to produce knowledge together" (xvi)—and in Amy Lee's definition, "pedagogy is teaching, working with students, committee members, colleagues, citizens, and parishioners in specific contexts. And that pedagogy is also thinking about what, how, who and why we are teaching in those specific sites" (9). For hooks, Gallagher, and Lee, pedagogy is shared inquiry "constituted by reflection and action" (what Freire defines as praxis), regardless of where that inquiry happens (Lee 9). Such working together toward the future in a relationship of praxis is, as we shall see in this paper, what I believe constitutes hope. Such pedagogy is hope-in each other rather than hope-for an individual desire.

Too often, however, it is precisely this attention to individual desire that impedes hope. In *Homo Viator*, Marcel makes clear his disdain for

individualism, writing, “I have no hesitation in saying that if we want to fight effectively against individualism in its most harmful form, we must find some way of breaking free from the asphyxiating atmosphere of examinations and competition in which our young people are struggling” (18). Though he’s not specifically talking about schooling here, I think that his comments could certainly apply to our educational system and to the ways in which it stimulates competition between students (and teachers), rather than the kind of shared inquiry advocated by hooks, Gallagher, and Lee. This kind of competitive system is, in Marcel’s words, “the most depersonalizing process possible” (19). If competitive systems inspire individual desire and discourage working toward collective change, the question, then, is how do we conceive of individual agency (constrained and constructed by its social situatedness) as a part of the fabric of collective social action? Or, how do we acknowledge the individual and individual choice and action without giving in to individualism? For Marcel, the answer lies in the idea of communion—our shared responsibility to each other. He poses and answers the question in this way, “But to whom am I responsible, to whom do I acknowledge my responsibility? We must reply that I am conjointly responsible both to myself and to everyone else, and that this conjunction is precisely characteristic of an engagement of the person, that it is the mark proper to the person” (*Homo* 21). In other words, we are social beings and responsibility to each other is part of our ontological makeup. If, as Freire has it, hope is “an ontological need,” then intersubjective responsibility undergirds the necessity of communion (*Hope* 8).

This idea of communion gives Marcel a way to frame individual responsibility as it is situated in the real world of consequences. His ideas illustrate the importance of this aspect of hope and are thus worth quoting at length:

I tend to establish myself as a person in so far as I assume responsibility for my acts and so behave as a real being (rather than a dreamer who reserves the strange power of modifying his dreams, without having to trouble whether this modification has any repercussions in the hypothetical outside world in which everybody else dwells). From the same point of view, we might also say that I establish myself as a person in so far as

I really believe in the existence of others and allow this belief to influence my conduct. What is the actual meaning of *believing* here? It means to realise or acknowledge their existence in itself, and not only through those points of intersection which bring it into relation with my own. (*Homo* 22)

Seeing oneself as part of a larger social fabric of responsibility provides the impetus for people to consider how the exercise of their individual agency affects the world and the people in it. This, in turn, helps ensure that utopian goals act as spurs toward concrete action rather than as unattainable dreams divorced of any connection to the material world within which we live and work.

It seems to me that Marcel is getting at exactly the kind of critical hope to which Freire refers in *Pedagogy of Hope*: pushing beyond simply dreaming of a better day and into consciously thinking about *how* to work toward that collective vision. Further, this intersubjective approach to agency acts as a way of anchoring the individual to the social even when not in the physical presence of others. This formulation of responsibility pushes us to see that we are always already enmeshed in a web of social relations in which our actions matter and have consequences. Or, as Marcel puts it at another juncture, “hope is always associated with communion, no matter how interior it may be” (*Homo* 58). Through a conception of hope that involves this kind of radical intersubjectivity, we internalize our responsibility to others as we move toward collective action that is rooted in, rather than outside of, material reality. Marcel summarizes the way hope is channeled in this way: “Person—engagement—community—reality” (22).<sup>1</sup> Engagement, or what Marcel calls availability or *disponibilité*, is what connects the individual to the community and, ultimately, to material reality within which actual change occurs.

But what exactly does Marcel mean by availability, and how does it relate to pedagogy? Availability does not, he contends, mean emptiness, but rather “an aptitude to give oneself to anything which offers, and to bind oneself by the gift. Again, it means to transform circumstances into opportunities, we might even say favours, thus participating in the shaping of our own destiny and marking it with our seal” (*Homo* 23). He further elaborates on the social aspects of availability, writing that “The

being who is ready for anything is the opposite of him who is occupied and cluttered up with himself. He reaches out, on the contrary, beyond his narrow self, prepared to consecrate his being to a cause which is greater than he is, but which at the same time he makes his own" (24–25). The gift to which he refers is oneself and the intersubjectivity that results from a group of individuals giving themselves to a cause external to themselves, but which they have internalized. The availability that leads to hope moves us beyond individual desire or competition (for tenure, raises, and so on)—represented by hope-for—to striving toward an imagined future (whether in terms of large social change or smaller institutional change) that has been conceived together, in dialogue with the others in the group.

Marcel's concept of availability is very similar to the concept of engaged pedagogy that hooks writes about in *Teaching to Transgress*. For her, what is important is that everyone in the classroom (teachers and students) be an active participant rather than a passive consumer. She connects this pedagogical stance to both engaged Buddhism ("the focus on practice in conjunction with contemplation") and Freire's ideas of praxis ("action and reflection upon the world in order to change it") (14). Engaged pedagogy, then, is about teachers and students being wholly present (or, to use Marcel's term, available) in the classroom with a kind of intersubjective investment in the class and the outcomes of the class. Writing about her students, hooks says, "I continue to teach them, even as they become more capable of teaching me. The important lesson that we learn together, the lesson that allows us to move together within and beyond the classroom, is one of mutual engagement" (205). For hooks, individual engagement leads to mutual engagement, just as availability, in Marcel's model, leads to connections between the person and the community.

I raise Marcel's ideas of availability because they can help enrich hooks' pedagogical ideas, as well as other critical/radical pedagogies. Though Marcel's ideas are not explicitly pedagogical, they have much relevance for critical/radical pedagogies because of the way hope is woven throughout the fabric of these theories. Looking at Marcel's ideas of hope can, I think, help us think through pedagogical theories and practices in more nuanced ways.

### Hope, Dispair, and Change

As hooks frequently acknowledges, her work is much influenced by Paulo Freire, whose ideas about education have had perhaps the greatest influence on critical pedagogies in North America. Freire's work certainly also has analogues to Marcel's ideas about availability, most notably in the notion of dialogue. In order to engage in dialogue, each participant needs to be radically open to every other participant, striving toward "a mutual relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (*Oppressed* 72). In other words, the kind of availability that Marcel advocates as a necessary precondition of communion is exactly what, according to Freire, is needed to establish dialogue. Freire goes on to write that "dialogue cannot exist without hope. Hope is rooted in men's incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search—a search which can be carried out only in communion with others" (72). Marcel and Freire's ideas are here mutually informing and help to shed light on the relationship between availability, love, communion, dialogue, and hope. The search, or orientation toward the future, springs from communion, which, as we have seen, is only possible through availability, involving profound love between human beings that orients us toward a shared future on earth, rather than in the next world.

How, then, are we as educators to work together toward change? How do we move beyond the kind of dreaming critiqued earlier by Marcel? The key, it seems to me, lies in Marcel's definition of availability as a "means to transform circumstances into opportunities" (23). Such a definition of availability grants us individual agency, intersubjectively connected to others through the idea of communion. Such communion underlies the hope that allows us to move beyond cynicism and fatalism by allowing us to think in creative ways about how to transform particular circumstances into opportunities/possibilities for change. This does not mean that we become blindly optimistic, but instead that we endeavor to work in dialogue with others to transform what Freire calls limit-situations into other possible futures. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire discusses this concept of limit-situations:

In sum, limit-situations imply the existence of persons who are directly or indirectly served by these situations, and of those who are negated or

curbed by them. Once the latter come to perceive these situations as the frontier between being and nothingness, they begin to direct their increasingly critical actions towards achieving the untested feasibility implicit in that perspective. (83)

The circumstances within which we can intervene (in Marcel's formulation) correspond to Freire's idea of limit-situations—opportunities for action if we regard them as problems rather than as givens. This is where Freire's "untested feasibility," a concept analogous to hope, comes into play—thinking about possibility within the framework of the material contexts within which we find ourselves.

As Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly argue in "Untested Feasibility: Imagining the Pragmatic Possibility of Paulo Freire," untested feasibility involves "mediating between what is and what might be," looking simultaneously at the present and toward the future (615). Untested feasibility allows us to undertake this temporal mediation and to balance our attention between present circumstances and future possibilities; it involves fostering a critical belief in what is possible in order to overcome the obstacle or limit-situation or circumstances before us. Ronald and Roskelly put it this way, "Being able to break through limit situations means being able to see them as problems rather than givens and thus being able to act to change them as well as reflect on the consequences of that action" (615). This point is crucial to the way we think about both untested feasibility and hope: seeing material circumstances as opportunities for alternative approaches, engaging in both individual and collective agency (enmeshed as we have seen that they are), and then critically reflecting on those actions. Ronald and Roskelly are not advocating a naive hope that somehow things will work out, but are articulating the need for a critical and reflective hope that articulates (in all senses of the word) individual and collective agency. We need, as Ronald and Roskelly point out, to understand our own context and then be able to achieve enough "detachment from that context to imagine alternatives" (620). Such is the frame of mind that makes us available, in Marcel's sense, both to these alternatives and to the articulation of self with others that is necessary in the reimagining, reacting, and reflecting on the situation.

Of course, as teachers we are not always prone to see our circumstances or limit-situations as problems that can be solved through creative thinking and collective action. Too often, we *do* see those circumstances as givens—a curriculum we are told to teach that is not of our design, an ever-increasing number of students in our classes, the implementation of high-stakes testing for our students—and are paralyzed by them. Often we think, what can I/we do? How will any of our actions make any difference? Such thinking can result in despair, the obverse of hope.

Despair is a constant threat to hope because the tendency toward despair is always there, ready to rise when we do not make ourselves available to others and to possibility. In thinking about hope, despair should not be overlooked since, as Marcel asserts, “there can strictly speaking be no hope except where the temptation to despair exists. Hope is the act by which this temptation is actively or victoriously overcome” (*Homo* 36). Despair, then, is not inevitable, but the *temptation* to despair is and this is why hope is so important. Hope helps us work against this temptation so that we can see the future as possibility rather than as historical inevitability. That is, hope puts time on our side while despair pits time against us. Understanding this temporal relationship is crucial to us as educators because it links our orientation toward possibility/action or inevitability/inaction to hope or despair, which can be expressed as functions of time. Marcel writes,

Despair is in a certain sense the consciousness of time as closed or, more exactly still, of time as a prison—whilst hope appears as piercing through time; everything happens as though time, instead of hedging consciousness round, allowed something to pass through it. It was from this point of view that I previously drew attention to the prophetic character of hope. Of course, one cannot say that hope sees what is going to happen; but it affirms as *if* it saw. One might say that it draws its authority from a hidden vision of which it is allowed to take account without enjoying it. (*Homo Viator* 53)

These twin images of time closing in and hope piercing through time help me to understand the nature of hope and its relationship to both time and

despair. Despair is passive—we are the objects, closed in on by time in a way that we see as inevitable. Hope, on the other hand, is active—we exercise agency, piercing through time by seeing the alternatives, the possibilities available to us in moving beyond a particular limit-situation.

In seeing a way to move beyond our material circumstances, we glimpse “a hidden vision,” a utopian goal toward which we can strive. But it is important to notice that Marcel is careful to emphasize that this glimpsed future is not inevitable, only *possible*, a future toward which we must strive through our availability, individually and communally articulated and reflectively practiced. This notion of the future is, it seems to me, similar to Cornell West’s idea of prophetic pragmatism, as described by Ronald and Roskelly in their discussion of the confluences of romantic and pragmatic thought. In West’s conception of prophetic pragmatism, he includes the concept of hope; he emphasizes this connection between hope and the future, noting that we need to believe that “the future is open-ended and that what we think and what we do can make a difference” (qtd. in *Reason* 53–54). This is the prophetic nature of hope, that we can see a changed future, a utopian vision, in the best sense of the term, as a spur to action rather than as a naive dream.

It’s important, then, to see the world as always in a state of change and as a site for change and intervention. In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Freire phrases it this way, “The world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming” (72). Or, as Marcel writes, “Hope is engaged in the weaving of experience now in process, or in other words in an adventure now going forward. . . . Hope thus understood involves a fundamental relationship of consciousness to time” (*Homo* 52). In such a view, the world is not determined, but is instead open to our intervention as human agents, to the possibility of change. Hope implies, as John Macquarrie argues, “an empty space before us that affords us room for action . . . an open road along which we choose to move” (8). As human beings, we are conditioned by social relations, not determined by them; the past influences us and our actions, but does not determine those actions or what the future will bring. In other words, hope changes our orientation toward time by pushing us to see the future as open rather than as closed. Freire puts it very well in *Pedagogy of Freedom*:

Hope is a natural, possible, and necessary impetus in the context of our unfinishedness. Hope is an indispensable seasoning in our human, historical experience. Without it, instead of history, we would have pure determinism. History exists only where time is problematized and not simply a given. A future that is inexorable is a denial of history. (69)

If, as teachers and as human beings, we see the world as unfinished and open to revision, then we can resist the inexorability of social forces outside our control and instead attempt to intervene to promote institutional and/or social change.

I am not saying that hope can change the world all by itself. What I am suggesting is that hope is a necessary condition of our work as educators attempting to bring about change. Hope problematizes time by opening it up to our intervention, allowing us a starting point from which we can articulate and move toward a shared vision for the future.

But what happens when our hopes are thwarted, when the vision that we glimpse does not come to fruition, when things seem to get worse instead of better? What happens when we make ourselves available, form coalitions, work together to achieve change, and then see nothing happen as a result of our efforts? What happens when the requirements of an imposed curriculum get more stringent, when the number of students in our classes continues to grow, when the use of high-stakes testing increases unabated? What happens when our hopes remain unfulfilled? When our hopes are thwarted, the temptation to despair is at its greatest since then hope seems to have been misplaced or misguided. Such despair is what we should rightly call disappointment, as Laura Micciche has chronicled in her essay, "More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work." Micciche notes that while hope deals with "the realm of the *possible* in a given community. Disappointment, in contrast, develops from a sense of hopelessness stemming from *the impossible*, or from what is made to *seem* impossible. From this perspective, disappointment is a failure of imagination nurtured by material conditions as well as by diminished faith in others" (448).

Disappointment is particularly paralyzing because it sends us back into the inertia of despair, pushing us to think that hope is ineffective, that

hope is simply naive optimism rather than critical and reflective collective action. In this way, disappointment makes us less available to others and less open to the possibilities of a changed future, convincing us more than ever that limit-situations are givens rather than problems to be solved collectively. We've all seen this sort of cynicism, particularly in institutional settings such as universities or public schools. This kind of thinking is particularly problematic in that "it may become a 'fixed' stance, eventually hardening into disillusionment, resignation, passivity in the face of new, ever-changing situations" (448). In universities or academic departments, disappointment can lead to a cessation of imaginative thinking in approaching limit-situations, setting a tone "of what is possible or impossible, thinkable or unthinkable" (453). Disappointment silences us and pushes us away from the kind of critical hope that can help us to intervene in our circumstances; when disappointment sets in, intervention in our future no longer seems possible and process seems to yield to inevitability. The temptation, then, is to give in to hopelessness, or what Freire calls "a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it" (*Oppressed* 72). The paradox is that while hope pushes us to embrace the world and its possibilities, it is the thwarting of such hope that also pushes us toward disappointment and cynicism. The question, then, is how do we fight against despair and disappointment in order to nurture critical hope in our teaching lives?

### **Dialogue, Love, and Hope**

The answer, for both Marcel and Freire, lies in the belief that love underlies intersubjective communion and, ultimately, hope itself. In *Presence and Immortality*, Marcel writes, "I hope for you. It is not enough to say that you remain present to me. I do not separate you from myself, and what is not for you cannot be for me either. Agapé lies at the root of hope" (183). For Marcel, as for Freire, love is not abstract, but is, as Albert Randall observes, "always a concrete relationship which is possible only as communion (as an I-thou relationship). In this sense, love literally implies hope for Marcel" (280–81). As discussed earlier, communion forms the basis for hope and each is implicated in the fabric of the other. Similarly, love as the binding force between human beings is imbricated in the act of communion and the process of hope; without love, there can

exist no “level of the us,” no relationship of communion, and, consequently, no real hope.

Jeffrey Godfrey affirms the triadic relationship between love, communion, and hope in his book, *A Philosophy of Human Hope*, noting that “hope proper is located on the spiritual plane, and on this plane one’s relation to oneself is mediated by a relation to another” (111). He further describes how the love that undergirds hope “is one which intends a joining together of those who hope and are hoped for, a sort of true human community. Hoping makes a difference when it is hope-for-us” (116). With Godfrey, we’re back to the idea of intersubjectivity, a “hope in thee for us.” What’s important to remember is that such communion and hope must stem from a love for others that pushes us to respect, value, and empathize with those around us, whether they are students, colleagues, or administrators. Love is what allows us to push past disappointment, to make ourselves available to others and open to the possibilities in them rather than simply seeing them through a lens of our own making. In *The Existential Background of Human Dignity*, Marcel writes, “To love one’s brothers is above all to have hope in them, that is, to go beyond that in their conduct which almost always begins by bruising or disappointing us” (281). We make ourselves available by embracing love in a way that allows us to move beyond disappointment in others so that we can enter into the kind of communion described in Marcel, Freire, and hooks, and throughout this essay. More than that, though, such love needs to be rugged enough to withstand the disappointment that results from thwarted hope so that we can continually renew our commitment to others and to the future and re-vision the possibilities of particular limit-situations. This is the kind of rigorous love of which Freire speaks in his work and that underlies both dialogue and hope.

As an intersubjective phenomenon based in love between human beings, dialogue is clearly related to hope and to an orientation toward the future and movement toward change. As we have seen, dialogue, for Freire, cannot exist without hope; neither can dialogue exist without love (nor, I think, can hope exist without love). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he writes, “Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination. . . . Love is an act of courage, not

of fear . . .” (70). As an act of solidarity and courage, love must be strong enough to foster hope and dialogue and to overcome the disappointment that threatens when dialogue seems to break down and our hopes are temporarily unrealized. As Macquarrie observes, “True hope lives in the awareness of the world’s evils, suffering and lacks. Hope must remain vulnerable to evidences that count against it, humble in the face of the evils that have to be transformed, and, above all, compassionate toward those whose experience has been such that their hopes have grown dim or have been dissolved in despair” (13). Love is what sustains hope in its vulnerability and what allows us to maintain our hope in the face of the actualities we see around us. Love, in its radical intersubjectivity fuels our orientation toward the future and our belief that change can and will happen. Through love we are involved in the process of making and remaking the world. Dialogue, love, hope—these are all necessary processes in the unfinished world envisioned by Freire and Marcel.

While I underscore the need for hope, Freire reminds us that “hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs water” (*Hope* 8). But what does it mean to have critical hope? I come back to reflection as a component of the praxis within which hope should be situated. We need that orientation toward the future, that change in our consciousness of time underscored by the intersubjectivity of communion. However, we also need the ability to step back and reflect on our actions and consider how they engage us in that process of unfinishedness. Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez expresses it this way: “Hope makes us radically free to commit ourselves to social praxis, motivated by a liberating utopia and with the means which the scientific analysis of reality provides for us. And our hope not only frees us for this commitment; it simultaneously demands and judges it” (238). Hope, then combines “a liberating utopia”—a vision of the future toward which we can work—with “the scientific analysis of reality”—reflection on action. Or, as Macquarrie writes, “Hope can remain healthy and be prevented from lapsing into optimism and other aberrations only so long as its intellectual side continues to criticize the objects which hope proposes” (15). This is hope that is anything but weak and wobbly; this is critical hope. It is this hope that allows us to imagine what is possible;

possibility does not shape hope, but is instead shaped by it. For hope to be of use to us as educators, we need to see that it, like education, is rigorous and intellectual.

### **Reclaiming Agency Through Hope**

I want to end these observations about the connections between hope and pedagogy by returning to Gallagher's *Radical Departures* because of the close attachments that the word hope has had with the progressive and critical pedagogies described there. Whether through the grand gestures of social change that Gallagher critiques or the daily incremental change achieved through the shared, reflexive inquiry of teachers and students that Gallagher espouses, critical and progressive pedagogies are infused with hope for a better, more democratic future. It is this orientation toward a changed future and toward possibility (what Ann George sums up as a "utopian move toward social transformation") that marks the link between hope and critical/progressive pedagogies (96). In the last twenty-five years, thinking along these lines has been dominated by what's been ironically termed "mainstream" critical pedagogy, focused especially around the work of such writers as Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Ira Shor. In their vast bodies of work in critical pedagogy, Giroux, McLaren, and Shor focus on social change and on the possibility that is inherent in the teacher-student relationship.<sup>2</sup> Like Gallagher, I am troubled by the way, in this version of critical pedagogy, the teacher is constructed as transformative intellectual and elevated above the student by virtue of a perceived ability to see more clearly the ideological structures underlying the world we inhabit.<sup>3</sup> Despite their emphasis on a language of possibility, it seems to me that such hierarchical conceptions of the teacher-student relationship actually mitigate against hope.

In rejecting this version of critical pedagogy, Gallagher turns to "pedagogical progressives" such as Dewey to argue for a more collaborative teacher-student relationship that will result in more incremental change through increased institutional literacy, rather than the kind of grand social change advocated by thinkers such as Giroux, McLaren, and Shor. In Gallagher's formulation, transformative intellectuals do not transmit critical knowledge but develop "the collective ability—with our colleagues and with our students—to read and write, and to re-vision,

institutional discourses” (81). This re-visioning of the future, especially in this kind of collective manner, meshes with the way we need to consider hope, as outlined throughout this paper. Gallagher, in fact, avails himself of the language of hope in the introduction to *Radical Departures*, writing that “this book offers a (guardedly) hopeful message” and that the second half of the book works “in a hopeful, but I trust not naive way” (xviii). His use of the language of hope here is interesting in that he seeks to orient himself toward the future and toward change, but is, as I read him, both reserved in his claims and, perhaps unintentionally, hinting at the necessity for hope to be critical (not naive). That is, we cannot just wish for something to happen, but must instead think reflexively about the situation and about how we can assert our agency within the situation in order to overcome the limits imposed on us by that situation.

Where, then, does this leave us in thinking about the place of a fully theorized hope in relation to our pedagogy? To conclude, I want to return to Freire, who writes in *Pedagogy of Freedom* that “hope is something shared between teachers and students. The hope that we can learn together, teach together, be curiously impatient together, produce something together, and resist together the obstacles that prevent the flowering of our joy” (69). Both hope and education are wrapped up in a kind of horizontal relationship of mutuality, a parallel that has helped me begin to think creatively about the ways that hope and education might mesh in real and productive ways. First, we must realize that hope is not only emotional and volitional, but it is also intellectual, critical, and reflective. That is, hope necessarily involves praxis. In working *with* our students (and *with* colleagues and administrators), we need to push each other to be rigorous in our reflective examination of our collective actions. We need to foster intersubjectivity and communion through the kind of love outlined by Freire and Marcel. We need to orient ourselves toward the future, to imagine what is possible so that we can transcend the limit-situation in which we find ourselves. We need to see hope as part of the process of an unfinished, rather than historically determined, world. We need to exercise critical hope even as we collectively try to foster and educate hope in ourselves and in our students.

The problem isn’t that we never mention hope in composition studies—hope is everywhere around us, so much a part of our conversa-

tions that we take little notice of it. The problem is that we rarely say what we mean when we talk about hope. However, in considering hope critically, I believe that we will be able to think more deeply about pedagogy, about our lives as educators, and about the relationships that form our communities. In its radical openness and possibility, hope *is* our vehicle for reclaiming agency in the face of despair. If we let it, hope can be a collaborative and imaginative process by which we overcome despair and reclaim agency in our pedagogy, pushing us forward to collectively reimagine the future and its possibilities.

*University of Windsor  
Windsor, Ontario*

### Notes

1. The idea of “community” has been usefully problematized in recent years. I use Marcel’s formulation of community while bearing in mind the ways in which we idealize this term that can be used in ways that work against the kind of hope I’m advocating here by promoting consensus at the expense of already marginalized voices. See Harris for a useful re-visioning of community.

2. In Chapter three of *Radical Departures*, Gallagher usefully summarizes the major critiques leveled at these theorists of critical pedagogy. For further critiques of this strand of critical pedagogy, see especially Ellsworth, and Luke and Gore.

3. See my article, “Beginning Where They Are: A Re-vision of Critical Pedagogy,” for a more detailed version of this critique.

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