Meaningful Hope for Teachers in Times of High Anxiety and Low Morale

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ABSTRACT

Many teachers struggle to maintain or build hope among themselves and their students in today's climate of high anxiety and low morale. This article describes and responds to those challenging conditions. It offers teachers and scholars of education a philosophically sophisticated and feasible understanding of hope. This notion of hope is grounded in pragmatism and grows out of the pragmatist commitment to meliorism. Hope is described as a way of living tied to specific contexts that brings together reflection and intelligent action alongside imagination and gratitude. Such hope is realistic and generative, rendering it well suited for teachers struggling in schools today. The article does account for some school conditions, including fatalism, passivity, and lack of persistent motivation, that pose obstacles for achieving pragmatist hope. The article closes by describing specific actions teachers can take to build and sustain hope in their schools, including developing supportive communities of inquiry, cultivating habits of hope among students, and practicing confirmation.

ONCE DUBBED THE "discipline of hope" (Kohl, 1998), teaching is a career that both employs and cultivates hope and yet is also one increasingly entrenched in circumstances that quash hope. Teachers in many schools must balance difficult teaching conditions, including frustrations with student discipline, low pay, and inadequate resources (Liu & Meyer, 2005), while working hard to produce schools worthy of the increasingly popular title "schools of hope" (Brentwood High School: A school of hope, 2010; Guggenheim, 2010). Though links between schooling and hope seem to be more and more common, especially when made a part of public discourse through films like *Waiting for Superman* (Guggenheim, 2010) and *The Lottery* (Sackler, 2010), relatively little work has been done within recent scholarship on education to flesh out exactly what hope means in the context of schooling (notable contributions do include Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Edgoose, 2010; Giroux, 2006; B. Halpin, 2003; D. Halpin, 2003; Kohl, 1998; Post, 2006; Rielea, 2010). Teachers may struggle to sustain a vague sense of hope, while educators and researchers are unable to identify and provide a clear and useable notion of hope to guide them. Yet, Kathy Hytten, in her American Educational Studies Association 2009 presidential address, argued that one of the most important roles of scholars of education, especially within the foundations of education, is to cultivate hope within teachers (Hytten, 2010, p. 160). This article responds to the difficult, and sometimes hope-crushing, situations faced by teachers today as well as to the need for more sophisticated explanation within educational discourses about hope by offering teacher-educators and scholars of education a philosophical understanding of hope that can be usefully shared with and adopted by teachers.

We begin by painting a picture of some of the challenges to hope faced by many teachers today. We then turn to defining hope in order to ascertain how a teacher can employ and live by hope even within these challenging circumstances. Recognizing that contemporary discourses of hope are often propelled by broad assumptions, we distinguish characteristics of hope, separating our definition from more naive or faulty notions. We argue that pragmatism offers the best and most useful understanding of hope.

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In grounding hope in pragmatism, we counter the ill effects of assuming hope is commonly held by teachers and understood by all, and we offer teachers a way to answer the question "why go on?" when struggling in today's school climate. To do so, we also address obstacles to achieving hope and explore means for hoping according to a pragmatist definition. Our aim is to provide a workable definition of hope that can be employed by practitioners, used to prepare preservice teachers for the struggles ahead, and referred to by scholars conducting research on the teaching profession in related areas such as job satisfaction, efficacy, and burnout.

A Difficult Setting for Hope

To craft a defensible notion of hope that is feasible in today's world and to champion its role within the lives of teachers, we must begin by addressing situations in schools that make hoping both difficult and necessary. When morale is low and anxiety high, as is the case for many teachers today (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009; Byrd-Blake, 2010; Hanson, 2006), what does hope offer? To sustain practice, one must believe in the efficacy of what one is doing as a teacher (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). It is essential, however, to recognize just how difficult sustaining this belief can be, given that teaching is a profession rife with challenges. Raising awareness of the many challenges faced by teachers and recognizing their persistence, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently set out on a speaking tour across the country in a big blue bus with the message "Courage in the Classroom" plastered on the side. Such a seemingly positive message, however, may feel ominous to teachers returning to their classrooms this fall. A call for bravery seems fitting in today's school climate, especially when teachers are increasingly alarmed by student misbehavior (Liu & Meyer, May 2005), but the slogan seems to offer little to sustain teachers already struggling with low morale and high anxiety. This is especially the case when those struggles are magnified by some of Duncan's policies, which place increased accountability (often experienced as blame) on teachers and which pit teachers, districts, and states against one another in order to secure school funding or pay increases (Anderson, 2010). These pressures are related to the urgent call for school reform issued by Duncan at the end of his bus tour. Reflecting on his mission to "elevate the profession of teaching" and proclaiming his "renewed sense of hope," Duncan concluded the tour by briefly celebrating the "extraordinary" teachers he had met. From this brief acknowledgement of standout teachers, he quickly moved on to list the dire circumstances of high dropout rates, low graduation rates, and student unpreparedness for college and work (Duncan, 2010a, 2010b). Calling for an urgent address of the "civil rights issue of our generation," Duncan concluded his message with the implication that teachers need to do more to overcome those problems. It is not hard to assume how few hardworking teachers share his renewed sense of hope following this conclusion.

In a floundering economy where school budgets are being slashed, teachers' fears of being laid off are increased by new, and sometimes unwelcomed, policies that link job stability with student performance (Abramson, 2010; Courrégé, 2010). At the same time, teachers recognize that their efforts to work with underperforming students are often hindered by unstable home situations, discipline problems that result in students missing out on educational opportunities, and a lack of supplies necessary to employ best teaching practices (Liu & Meyer, 2005). In the face of these anxiety-inducing pressures, teachers struggle to balance conflicting societal messages. On one hand teachers are the celebrated heroes of movies (such as *Freedom Writers* and *Mona Lisa Smile*), leaving some teachers who fail to fulfill the inspiring savior role feeling inadequate and exhausted. On the other hand, the media continually portrays America's "failing schools" (such as in the 2010 NBC *Education Nation* series or the harsher ABC forerunner *Stupid in America* series), giving teachers the impression that they are never good enough and feeding public assumptions that teachers are not professionals worthy of commensurate respect or salary (Ray, 2010; Zhao, 2010). And when media attacks and heroic imagery are brought together in a film like *Waiting for Superman*, which is celebrated by Oprah Winfrey and acclaimed by underinformed audiences, teachers are replaced by stern administrators, like Michelle Rhee, who favor punitive acts against their teaching staffs and who celebrate charter schools that have limited demonstrations of success (Anderson, 2009; Ravitch, 2009). Geoffrey Canada and his Harlem Children's Zone is an admittedly more complex example. For sake of argument, we have chosen not to focus on his role here.

Yet the challenges of teaching are not the end of the story. As has been identified by Sonia Nieto, Larry Cuban, and Vito Perrone, respectively, "'hope is the essence of teaching,'" "'to teach is to be full of hope,'" and "'teaching is . . . in every respect a profession of hope'" (in Edgoose, 2010, p.387). In sum: "Hope is needed to continue . . . work as a teacher" (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007a, p. xvii). While these educational visionaries praise teachers as hopeful and place great hope in teachers, little has been done to substantiate what is meant by hope and to support teachers as they attempt to face doubt and uncertainty and still be hopeful. This lack of substantiation is apparent in the "Courage in the Classroom" slogan advertised through Duncan's bus campaign. Yes, teachers need courage, but what is this courage to be based on? Why even be courageous when overwhelmed by anxiety and low morale?

In part, little more than lip service has been paid this issue due to two assumptions. First, it is assumed that hope is a commonly understood concept with a common meaning. People casually employ the concept from political commercials to church pulpits. They speak as if everyone has the same understanding of hope and as though people who are hopeful act upon their worldview in similar ways. Second, it is assumed that teachers necessarily have hope (Birmingham, 2009). Somehow, despite recent media attacks, the very profession of teaching is thought to be one perpetually focused on looking toward the future with rose-colored glasses and seeing rising stars within every student (Kohl, 1998). Those who choose to pursue this career are believed by many to be naturally optimistic and cheerful, which sets up yet another moment of self-doubt for teachers who find themselves confronting pessimism and anger. In the next section, we aim to confront these

assumptions by clarifying a notion of hope that is specific and employable, while not tied to the supposed natural traits of a teacher.

Pragmatist Hope

Pragmatism is a form of American philosophy that arose around the turn of the 20th century and was greatly propelled by famed educational theorist John Dewey. Pragmatism continues to be adopted in its classic and contemporary variations by some teachers, educational scholars, and philosophers today, though most teachers know little about the philosophical insights pragmatism offers or how they might be employed in schools. Burdened with the day-to-day tasks of teaching, which limit teachers' time for outside reading, teachers could benefit from this article's audience of scholars of education and teacher-educators becoming more familiar with pragmatist perspectives so that they can effectively and efficiently convey them to the preservice and practicing teachers with whom they work.

Perhaps pragmatism's staying power stems from its firm grounding in the real-life struggles of daily living while it ardently strives to improve everyday life. Such an orientation is useful both for the profession of teaching, as one that works continuously to cultivate children into brighter and better people, and for the difficult circumstances faced by teachers today. Pragmatism houses one of the few sustained philosophical discussions of hope, tracing its origins to the meliorism of John Dewey and appearing more recently (and in much more detail) as social hope within the work of Richard Rorty (1999), Judith Green (2008), Patrick Shade (2001), Colin Koopman (2009), Robert Westbrook (2005), Cornel West (2004, 2008), and Fishman and McCarthy (2007b).[1] The resurgence of pragmatist discussions of hope within the philosophical literature suggests that this concept is ripe for discussion within multiple aspects of life today. For example, Green builds upon Rorty's sense of hope to offer Americans a guiding response to the tragedy of 9/11. Despite these significant recent writings, very few pragmatists have extended their work on hope to the realm of education, and it is this task that we take up here. Our extension of their work is guided by a close adherence to Deweyan pragmatism but also reflects the efforts of more recent pragmatists and neopragmatists, who locate hope within social struggles for a vision for shared social living. In the following sections, we define pragmatist hope and argue that our definition is better than the received one that teachers (and others) commonly use.

HOPE DEFINED

Pragmatist hope can be understood as intelligent action relating to a desirable, though as-of-yet unachieved, object or state of affairs. For example, Dewey's "object of his ultimate hope . . . is a society characterized by democratic relationships . . . a society that enables its citizens to grow. It enables them to develop flexible habits and lead creative lives as they work cooperatively with others to be more intelligently wholehearted about their beliefs, tastes, and choice of ideals" (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, pp. 20–1). Expectations that arise from the consideration of an event and action within that entail calculations of success. When one hopes, one considers the likelihood of achieving the desired object of one's hope. Habits, a concept central to Deweyan pragmatism, are predispositions to act and sensitivities to certain ways of being. "When hope becomes a stable part of our character, it becomes a habit" (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, p. 14). Hope relates to a central impulse of humans, namely growth and the desire to harmonize ourselves and our environment.

Hope, as is often assumed in descriptions of teachers, is not a trait held by individuals. Rather, pragmatist hope is a way of living that is enacted in a context. Three contexts of hope, identified by Shade (2001), are life, interaction, and activity. The context of life refers to how hope functions within the lives of humans as we engage with complex environments. Hope functions in the context of interaction, "involving creative integration of desires, habits, and intelligence, whereby humans pursue remote ends not promoted by their current environments" (Shade, 2001, p. 14). Finally, hope functions as activity. In this regard it is more appropriate to think of hope as hoping—a verb, an ongoing activity. This activity is centered in the relation between an organism and its environment. Through growth and expansion of abilities, "hope functions to energize and sustain the self as it reconstructs itself in the teeth of trying circumstances" (Shade, 2001, p. 11).

A pragmatist concept of hope is a better concept than the form of hope often assumed in discourses about teachers because, first, "wedding thought with action and of making practice more intelligent," a core of pragmatist philosophy, yields a hope that is practical and a wisely driven activity, as opposed to positing hope as a fixed trait that is possessed and wielded. Second, a pragmatist conception of hope provides "a fully conditioned and naturalist . . . account of hope" (Shade, 2001, p. 9). It is located within and grows out of the muddy and complex circumstances of everyday life, rather than simply is being applied regardless of circumstances, as is the case for a more typically employed notion of hope. Third, pragmatist hope is connected to life's activities, and hope can direct and grow these activities as outcomes of habits. In short, a pragmatist theory of hope is practical because it is realistic and generative. Pragmatism's commitment to contextualization and empirical method differentiates it from other traditions and renders its notion of hope more useful and meaningful. Discussion on these contributing aspects of hope, as well as other key pieces, follows.

Meliorism. Pragmatist hope, unlike the hope commonly assumed to be held by teachers, is not based in simple optimism, the attitude that things will work out regardless of current circumstances. Instead, pragmatist hope is based in melioration, essentially "the idea that at least there is a sufficient basis of goodness in life and its conditions so that by thought and earnest effort we may constantly make better things" (Dewey in Shade, 2001, p. 17). To hope pragmatically is to recognize the difficulty of current circumstances and to approach such difficulties with thoughtful action (Shade, 2001), for while meliorism has confidence that our efforts are worthwhile, the emphasis on effort must be made. "The success of democracy depends upon the hope by its citizens that the rapid changes and permeability of democratic societies will ultimately lead to better, rather than worse, conditions" (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, p. xvi). The success of education depends upon the hope by its teachers and

scholars that within the current system there is opportunity for change leading to better conditions. Meliorism lends itself to a full account of hope, useful for teachers, that goes beyond "Courage in the Classroom" bus tours and wishful thinking to action resting on "particular hopes, habits of hope and hopefulness" (Shade, 2001, p. 8).

Particular hopes, habits of hope, and hopefulness. When we can identify an object or state that we are actively trying to realize, we are engaged in particular hoping. For example, a teacher may initiate a peer tutoring program in hope that proficient readers will help struggling readers advance in their literacy abilities. It is essential that particular hopes be desirable and attainable and currently obstructed by challenges, such as a large classroom size that prevents teacher one-on-one time with each student. Particular hopes are the articulation of the desired objects for which one is willing to actively work toward achieving. This articulation and following action are essential aspects of pragmatist hope.

Persistence is an example of a habit of hope that leads to growth in agency and generation of solutions regarding obstructions. Habit, in accordance with pragmatism, is expansively delineated as "the formation of attitudes, attitudes that are emotional and intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding [mentally, emotionally, physically] to all the conditions which we meet in living" (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). Note, rather than programmed responses, habits of hope are attitudes that shape our interaction with the world at hand. Rather than focusing on obstacles, a helpful habit of hope is identifying possibilities. In the classroom, as an example of persistence, teachers manifest habits of hope when they learn what works through repeated efforts with those harder-to-reach students. Understanding hope as a type of habit offers an important distinction from hope more commonly understood as an outlook or belief: a habit of hope entails action, especially action that engages proclivities and attitudes that move us toward desirable objects or states of affairs. Habits tend to arise through the culmination of natural impulses, but they can also be intentionally cultivated, suggesting that hoping is an activity that can be learned and improved, rather than a supposed natural trait of certain types of people (Stitzlein, 2008).

Hopefulness supports both habits of hope and particular hopes by supplying the confidence that persistently facing obstacles for desirable goals is worthwhile and warranted. Particular hopes are supported by habits of hope; when these fail, we recover through hopefulness, supported by habits of hope. Particular hopes develop habits of hope, which sustain particular hopes. Hopefulness develops habits of hopes, which sustain hopefulness. Particular hopes and hopefulness are at times independent and at times dependent.

Achieving particular hopes, engaging habits of hope, and living from a place of hopefulness in the classroom necessitates, from a pragmatist perspective, an inclusive community of inquiry, founded in human unity, addressing teaching practice and moral matters with the future in mind while accounting for the past. Hope cannot be disconnected from life's activities, or it is rendered useless; rather, hope directs and grows life's activities as outcomes
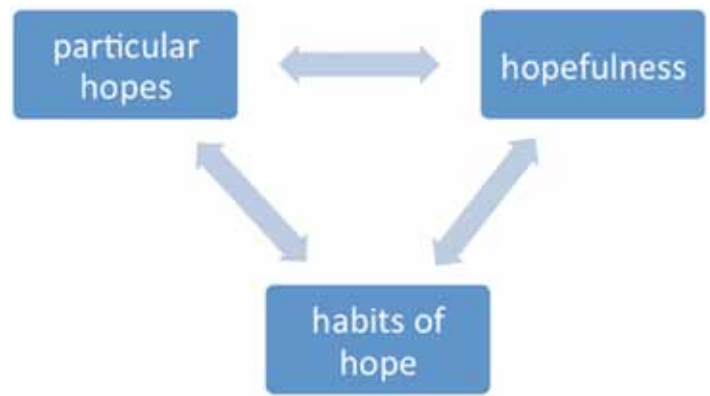

Image 1. Relation of dimensions of hope.

of habits. To the point, a pragmatic theory of hope can efficaciously sustain teachers in facing down low morale and high anxiety by demarcating hope as active and associated with formable habits. Pragmatist hope is hope able to be achieved by teachers. In looking at the realistic and generative senses of such hope, we further explore pragmatist hope in order to explain how it can be operationalized by teachers.

Hope as Realistic and Generative

Unlike hope conceived as seeing the world as through rose-colored glasses, pragmatist hope is realistic, because it resides within a world that is both horrendous and joyful. Dewey challenges educators to neither uphold the fixed nor seek only change. Instead, educators must see that the beginning of philosophic work, especially regarding hope, is anchored in the very real messiness of living and, in this case, educating. As Dewey said,

> *the significant problems and issues of life and philosophy concern the rate and mode of the conjunction of the precarious and the assured, the incomplete and the finished, the repetitious and the varying, the safe and sane and the hazardous. (McDermott, 1981, p. 299)*

The world must be engaged with itself as it is, both chaotic and orderly. Hoping in view of the difficulties of life, rather than in spite of them, is a part of hoping pragmatically—recognizing that the world, including education, does not have to be perfect to be wonderful, but to achieve wonderful requires active hoping. For instance, hoping as an educator does not mean striving toward a classroom without problems, students without issues, and an administration without faults. There are always going to be challenges in education. To hope pragmatically means envisioning the best within disordered classrooms, difficult students, and troubled administration. This, then, is the sense in which hope is realistic.

Hope is generative by its connection not only with the realities of the world but with ideals—it connects the human predicament and the potential for good. The ideal, or our visions of the best world, cannot rely on vain, empty musings. Hope guides us toward the ideal while remaining in touch with dire circumstances of past and present. Martin Luther King, Jr., employed generative hope when he proclaimed, "Even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream" (King, 1963). King, a leader well

situated to know travesties and hardships, passionately expressed an informed and yet utopian vision for what could be. This is crucial in sustaining hopefulness.

Beyond connecting the real to the ideal, hope is generative through democratic relationships, flexible habits, creativity, cooperation, intelligence, and growth, or "the cumulative movement of action toward a later result" (Dewey in McDermott, 1981, p. 484). Imagination is employed to direct growth in positive directions by encouraging teachers to dream of a better classroom. "Teaching the young (and old) how to request, be assisted by, and assist the agency of others" and teaching "them to understand differences, thereby funding the imagination in its quest for new modes of response and reconstruction" are ways in which schooling and hope meet (Shade, 2001, p. 209). Combining intelligence and imagination links pragmatism to utopian thinking, an unusual linking allowing for the comparison of visions of the future in accordance with pragmatist hope and the creation of purposeful plans of action (Giroux, 2006). This occurs when imagination manifests itself through utopian storytelling and we apply intelligence in order to evaluate such stories that can lead to action. Storytelling powerfully connects us to the past, present, and future. As education scholars, we must ask what story it is we want teachers to be able to tell regarding their time in the classroom. Intelligence lends itself to teachers' sifting through these stories in order to articulate best visions for their students and for themselves.

ENDS-IN-VIEW

In light of pragmatism, when we intelligently and imaginatively envision the future, it is paramount that the future envisioned is impending—we must pursue particular hopes articulated as ends-in-view (Shade, 2001). "Ends are foreseen consequences which arise in the course of activity and which are employed to give activity added meaning and to direct its further course" (Dewey, 1922, p. 209). Rather than problematically deferring hope to distant rewards and achievements, ends-in-view offer near and possible, though perhaps difficult, goals (Duncan-Andrade, summer 2009). For example, consider test scores as an end, a plausible example because test scores have been linked more and more to teacher performance and, ultimately, job security. While this is certainly not the only, or even a fair, marker for evaluating a teacher, it is plausible in today's environment of growing participation in performance-based pay and accountability that teachers desire higher test-score achievement by their students. Hoping for students to achieve higher test scores is an end-in-itself rather than an end-in-view, and this often leads to the setting of unreasonable goals of near-perfect passing rates and motivation by ends deficient of legitimate worth. This may be because test material is disconnected and irrelevant to the student's life, and focusing on mastery of that alone leads to stunted intellectual growth and underdeveloped good habits. Rather than teaching from an end-in-itself stance, teachers can approach every lesson by first attempting to connect it with students' lives, out of which comes material for improved comprehension and skill development, out of which comes students who are meaningfully engaged in the near future with enlarged understanding of or deepened transaction with the

world. In this manner, the teacher is attending to the daily learning of each student rather than letting the test dictate lessons. Fulfilling each end-in-view successfully sustains hope because it highlights meaningful headway directed towards ongoing growth. When viewing ends pragmatically, they are rendered ends-in-view rather than ends-in-themselves. As such, when achieved, action is not terminated but redirected, becoming a means to further ends-in-view. Because pragmatism is not trying to reach a final truth that is believed to objectively exist outside of human experience (James, 1907), pragmatists strive for ends-in-view that are flexible and socially formed and that lead to further fruitful activity. This is a key to hoping pragmatically. Actions of hope must be directed by ends-in-view.

EMPIRICAL METHOD AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

In its dedication to empirical method and contextualization, pragmatism stands apart from other traditions. This is also what contributes to its concept of hope being the most useful for teachers and education scholars. This is partially due to the centrality of inquiry to the empirical method. Dewey explained inquiry as "the directed or controlled transformation of an indeterminate situation into a determinately unified one" (McDermott, 1981, p. 237). This transformation involves, in part, truth in accordance with pragmatism. "Truth is an experienced relation of things, and it has no meaning outside of such relation" (Dewey in McDermott, 1981, p. 185). Rather than more traditional accounts of knowledge, which place all the error with us and all the truth in something outside of us, pragmatism clearly stands for truth that emerges out of our inquiry, inquiry directed at experience that we find fulfilling or nonfulfilling of our expectations given relations. "Truth . . . is a just name for an experienced relation among the things of experience" (Dewey in McDermott, 1981, p. 192) and a discovery of what works in and through these relations. The pattern of inquiry is connected to the past, present, and future. Hope's context is "in the life of *human* beings . . . as a complex mode of interaction . . . not as a private mental state, but as an activity belonging to an organism in dynamic relation with its environment" (Shade, 2001, p. 14). Prior experience encounters in us a recognition, desire, relevant need, curiosity, and perplexity of problem. We enter into an indeterminate situation with the desire and/or need to make sense of and change it, beginning the pattern of inquiry. Hope propels us through the empirical method and engages us in the pattern of inquiry. For teachers and education scholars, this is relevant on two specific planes.

The first plane regards each teacher's own experience of difficulties in the classroom. It is imperative that indeterminate situations and perplexing problems be identified so that teachers may, themselves, use the empirical method and engage in the pattern of inquiry. For instance, lack of parental support and involvement may be particularly troubling for a teacher. Once such a problem is identified, the teacher must gather information, plan, observe and intuit, consider possibilities, predict, reason, decide, try, and evaluate in order to better understand the lack of parental support and to test solutions. As Dewey said, "every gallant life is an experiment in different ways of fulfilling it" (Dewey, 1922, p. 110), or

in the case of educating, every gallant teacher experiments with ways of facing problems in the classroom and fulfilling their mandate to educate. Teachers must not stop at recognizing problems in the classroom but enter into the empirical method and with inquiry, try different means to addressing the problem.

The second plane involves teaching students to do the same as the teachers are doing: learning to face problems by using the empirical method and following the pattern of inquiry. In doing so, teachers may also connect student and curriculum with community. An excellent example of the process of inquiry in action in a classroom happened in a grade-13 science-and-society class in Parry Sound, Ontario. The teacher had been following the town's efforts to locate a new waste-disposal site. When he realized that the consultants hired to recommend where the new dump should be located were relying on criteria that was irrelevant to the geology of the local area, he knew he had identified a real problem and he knew he could engage his students to help tackle the problem. The entire semester became dedicated to addressing the problems of finding a new, appropriate dump site in the Parry Sound area and of showing how the consultants were mistaken. To address both problems took concerted efforts by all the students to research, plot, design, predict, act, and communicate their actions. Regarding the problem of showing the consultants were mistaken, through inquiry, the students successfully did so by submitting to the town a report the day before the consultants' report was due. The student report identified what the consultants would say was the best site, criticized their choice based on scientific research, and made alternative recommendations. All this was accomplished for the price tag of $125, in comparison with the consultants' $1.5-million fee. For that price difference, the town received nothing different from the consultants than from the students. Their report identified the exact dump site the students said it would. Based on the students' criticisms, the town rejected the consultants' proposal and hired new consultants to do work based on the students' recommendations. That was the one downside—the town didn't think a group of high school students was qualified to tell it where to build a dump. When learning is directed by a real problem, allowing inquiry to lead somewhere fruitful and enhance the learning experience, students learn the importance of actively dealing with problems through trying, evaluating, and trying again. In learning this, students learn to hope in accordance with pragmatism, for active hoping is based on the process of inquiry, which is based in empirical method.

NATURALIST ACCOUNT OF HOPE

In addition to use of empirical method and contextualization, "what most distinguishes the American hope of the pragmatists from that of others—and makes it so intriguing—is that it is hope without transcendent foundations" (Westbrook, 2005, p. 141); it is a naturalist account reliant on conditions (Shade, 2001). Recovering hope is about looking to nature to be reminded of a sense of belonging and sharing continuities with nature achieved by "adjustment, accommodation, and adaptation" (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, p. 17). Dewey saw "all human experience as having a natural origin and a natural end" (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, p. 32). Hope grounded in

a biological orientation is "faith in oneself and in the sources of one's being . . . [and] . . . communion—feeling a part of a larger whole" (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, p. 33).

SUMMARY

A pragmatist sense of hope leads to individual and group empowerment and promotion of positive action toward a better world by being realistic and generative; relying on the empirical method, inquiry, imagination, and storytelling, with human life as the context; and an understanding of truth reliant on experience. This form of hope offers teachers an achievable plan of action toward hope that is missing from common understandings of hope, which are more in line with wishful thinking or the presumption that teachers are somehow naturally hopeful. By identifying particular hopes that are possible but blocked and seeing these particular hopes as ends-in-view, teachers can use the empirical method and engage in patterns of inquiry to move forward in making the classroom a better place of learning for all. Habits of hope sustain the necessary action in pragmatist hope. Hopefulness helps teachers live with confidence that their efforts are worthwhile, even when the fruits of their labor remains elusive.

Obstacles to Pragmatist Hoping for Teachers

While the form of hope we describe may offer much guidance for education scholars and teachers in today's schools, it also encounters obstacles. In this section we address some possible problems that may face a pragmatist notion of hope in schools. Many school hallways and teacher lounges are filled with fatalistic statements. Some teachers are heard uttering, "This is the way it's always been and this is the way it always will be," or "We've tried that before and it didn't work then and it won't work now." Brendan Halpin, an urban high school teacher, chronicled nine years of such conversations in his memoir (2003). Some scholars attribute such statements to a larger climate of cynicism and pessimism (Grint & Hogan, 1993; D. Halpin, 2003; West, 2008). Fatalism works against hope insofar as it closes down possibilities. Fatalism is based on a passive and stagnant outlook on one's position in the larger world. It frees teachers from feeling obligated to try to change schooling practice because it makes situations appear fixed. It poses challenges to a hope that is future oriented, pursues opportunities, and seeks meliorism. Pragmatist hope may be stifled in an environment bogged down by fatalism. Its success requires an active confronting of such fatalism and exposing of its debilitating effects. Teachers may shy away from such confrontation when their peers endorse fatalistic beliefs, because those are the same peers whom they must turn to for support as they try to deal with anxiety and low morale. Confronting fatalism may not appear worth jeopardizing their support networks.

Passivity is at the heart of problematic assumptions about hope. During the 2008 US presidential elections, many voters were moved by Barack Obama's campaign slogan of hope. From their couches, many citizens smilingly endorsed Obama's hopeful vision of an improved American future, and some affirmed the message by donning Shephard Fairey's now famous Hope T-shirts. The problem is that this form of hope doesn't involve sustained action.

During the election, hope was a pretty passive thing for most couch supporters, while approximately eight million others responded to Obama's call for collaborative and citizen-led social progress (through Organizing for America and the Corporation for National and Community Service). For passive couch supporters, a person *had* hope but didn't *do* anything about it beyond casting a ballot. For those who joined Obama's ranks, only about 5% remain active just two years later, despite a $30-million effort to revive Organizing for America (Newton-Small, September 9, 2010). As outlined in our pragmatist definition of hope, hope must be acted upon in present and sustained ways. Teachers who have adopted the more passive or short-lived understanding of hope embodied by many supporters of the 2008 presidential campaign may carry over this problematic interpretation into their jobs. They may struggle to understand that hope is an active, effortful process that requires intelligent reflection and engagement as a person strives to reach ends-in-view—and then begins the process again. They may find themselves disappointed when passive hoping, perhaps better described as simple optimism, is not sufficient for achieving their vision of educational success.

Hope, many people assume, is an appealing and motivating trait. But pragmatist hope, with its requirement of effort and persistence, may lack the appeal that teachers need to initially adopt it or sustain it in the long run. Such hope may be exhausting and may lack the immediate gratification that some teachers seek. As Cornel West aptly says, "When you talk about hope, you have to be a long-distance runner" (2008, p. 215). People must be able to sustain themselves and delay gratification. Some teachers may struggle with such endurance, given the overwhelming and relentless challenges they face daily. Perhaps the large numbers of teachers who leave the field of teaching may partially be succumbing to exhaustion or may find it just too difficult to maintain hope.

Pragmatist hope also poses problems related to the close encounters it requires with the messy, unjust, and otherwise unpleasant aspects of lived experience. Nurturing hope entails confronting despair and other bad things in the world, which can cause frustration and anger. David Halpin recognized this possibility when he warned, "Hope often creates discontent, inasmuch as a person's hopes for the future may make them very dissatisfied with things as they are presently, especially if they get in the way of making progress" (2003, p. 15). These emotions and the realities that provoke them can be difficult to deal with, especially if a teacher mistakenly understands hope to be a straightforward source of comfort. Related, when teaching exposes students to suffering and injustice in the world, some teachers may struggle to face their own complicity in those situations, while other teachers may be guilt ridden by their realization that they have not done enough to end them. Finally, teachers may struggle to sustain their own hope in their students when students let teachers down or don't put forward the effort that teachers desire. Each of these instances can seriously strain hope. All of the obstacles addressed in this section may raise complications for practicing or sustaining hope but, as we show, each can be overcome.

Means to Pragmatist Hoping for Teachers

Having looked at a pragmatist definition of hope, which is realistic and generative, based on inquiry-centered empirical method, and relying on a naturalistic foundation, and considered obstacles to hoping in a pragmatist manner, we now turn our attention to means of hoping for teachers. The first area to consider is that of particular hopes. Teachers must remember to hold specifics in light of Dewey's ends-in-view, which must be flexible and which are "not focused solely on an object or state of affairs to be attained, but equally on the development of those abilities necessary to attain the object or state of affairs" (McKenna, 2001, p. 98). In the case of a teacher hoping students will positively impact community, hoping would also be focused on developing traits and abilities, like concern for the public good and working knowledge of local community organizations or government, which could also be used in future community-building activities that are not directly tied to the immediate goal. This approach increases opportunities for further growth of the students as individuals and as part of their communities.

Thoughtful action, rather than wishful thinking, is necessary to bring hopes into fruition or into reality. To achieve hope, we must rely on a combination of facts (which may mislead us), imagination, intelligence, and acting. Acting reveals limits and generates new conditions and abilities. A way to act thoughtfully is to employ the empirical method. This method helps us confront the stagnation of fatalistic thinking. When we have a problem, we typically move into a gathering stage. We need information and we need a plan to help us determine a solution. This involves drawing on objective (observation of variables or facts) and subjective (intuition, creativity) sources. We consider possibilities and make predictions. Once we have applied reason and chosen the best path, we must test our ideas and plans, or do what we need to do in reality to see if our determinations work and/or satisfy. We evaluate and reflect to see if we have transformed an indeterminate situation into a determinately unified one.

Within the classroom, one means of establishing particular hopes coincides with the common practice of establishing a classroom behavior contract. The contract is typically rule oriented and formulated by the entire class; rather than a teacher imposing rules on a group of students, this process invites students to collaboratively identify rules by which they wish to conduct themselves. The outcomes of such a process are in line with Dewey's ideas on social contract. When the rules are articulated in community they are more likely to be upheld by the community. Though the responsibility ultimately lies with the teacher to ensure that the contract is followed, if done well and with "buy in" by all students, then responsibility is shared. This process can be expanded beyond rules by including particular hopes for the year. One way to facilitate this discussion is by asking students what it would take for each of them to exclaim that "this class was the best class I have ever been in. I have learned more than I imagined and look forward to coming to school each day." Follow-up questions explore what achieving this type of classroom vision requires of both students and teachers. There is much that is imposed upon teachers, both in performance expectations and in curriculum expectations. It is

important that particular hopes be articulated not only by students but by the teachers themselves, so that teaching may be fulfilling. Articulating and working together to live hopefully in a classroom counters many factors that challenge morale and lend to anxiety for teachers, because it places possibility and power in the actions of the teacher and the students, rather than leaving the teacher entirely subjected to externally imposed pressures.

Habits of hope, such as "persistence, resourcefulness, and courage" (Shade, 2001, p. x) uphold hopefulness and help overcome passivity, transforming hope into being action oriented. Persistence is sustaining and entails patience, attentiveness, commitment, and consistency. To assess his or her persistence, a teacher might ask, "Do I use time to expand or endure?" One who is persistent will continue, even in the face of obstacles, to expand, both in capacity for living hopefully and in seeing and reaching for various avenues to achieve ends-in-view. Enduring may seem like a more feasible modus operandi in today's climate, but enduring, in the sense of putting one's head down and trying to get by, counters a pragmatist notion of hope that demands action toward bettering the situation one is in. "Resourcefulness is thus the ability to *connect* means with ends, both in thought and deed" (Shade, 2001, p. 89)—resources such as our agency, imagination, social dynamics (love and interaction), native abilities, experience (specific kinds) and technology can be helpful or harmful in regards to hope. "Hoping thus requires the courage to change, grow, and take risks" (Shade, 2001, p. 114). Not all hoping results in hopes achieved. Pragmatism makes clear it offers no guarantee that if one actively and thoughtfully engages in hoping that the results will match one's hopes. However, the teachers who actively, persistently, and resourcefully engage in living hopefully develop habits that are more likely to help them overcome future problems, even if immediate efforts fall short.

An essential means of hoping from a pragmatist perspective is a community of inquiry, where teachers work together to understand and ameliorate school problems. A potentially tremendous barrier to building or partaking in such a community is competition and merit pay, both of which possibly deteriorate cooperation and social interaction. This deterioration is a direct result of placing teachers in comparison with one another (Goldhaber, 2009; Gratz, 2009; Marshall, 2009). When such comparisons among teachers are made, a line of false and detrimental thinking ensues, namely that if one teacher shines, the work of other teachers is dimmed. Some contend that merit pay encourages just such thinking. Teachers who experience great success in the classroom—are favorably received, enjoy popularity with both administration and parents, are well received by their students, witness their classes produce excellent test scores—may experience jealousy from, feelings of being ostracized by, and even passive-aggressive attempts to undermine their successes from other teachers. Changing this type of harmful thinking includes recognizing that if one teacher experiences great success, this in no way limits how much success another teacher may experience. If instead teachers could learn to feed off of one another's successes, view one another "as potential allies, not inherently adversaries" (Hytten, 2010, p. 163) and have "productive dialogue across

difference" (Hytten, 2010, pp. 163–4), then communities of inquiry, and ultimately of hope, are feasible.

Hopefulness requires friendships that foster hope. "The backbone of hopeful living is membership in the face-to-face, voluntary cooperative associations" (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, p. 67). Coming together collaboratively over issues of mutual concern with a spirit of inquiry increases hope in group members, helping teachers become the "long-distance runners" necessary in a pragmatist version of hope. An example of just such a forum for cooperative association is found at Briercrest College (Saskatchewan, Canada). Briercrest faculty come together voluntarily once a month for a book club. The books, such as *Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer, are chosen to bolster and provoke thought on the profession of teaching. The regular meeting is a means to gather and share concerns and struggles and to celebrate success as well as to quest after being better teachers and improving education at the college. More than just communal gatherings, the monthly gathering fosters friendships that promote hope, relating to Dewey's view that hope necessarily rests on the social aspect of life. A key to this is in having a friend that can mentor you. It is important for teachers to connect individually with someone who has weathered many storms in teaching and who is willing to guide the other. As well, each teacher should extend friendship to a less experienced colleague for the purposes of giving while receiving from the mentoring relationship.

In communities of inquiry, willingness is needed not only to form hope sustaining friendships to face challenges together but also to engage in issues beyond those that are local. It behooves teachers engaged in hoping to look beyond themselves to the larger context within which they are hoping and to investigate issues at a more global level. Engaging the empirical method on a larger scale offers greater numbers of options to satisfy problematic situations teachers encounter at the local level. Seeking these options can lead to development of new relationships with others elsewhere, who share some similar experiences, thereby broadening a teacher's community of inquiry and network of social experience. Given the pervasiveness of high anxiety and low morale across the teaching field today, engaging in large-scale conversations with peers elsewhere may work against feelings of isolation, debilitation, or insurmountability by uniting secluded efforts in an empowering coalition.

Another means to hope is seeing students as capable and trusting in them by taking "hope from students' potential" (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, p. 74). One means of doing so, as this can be challenging at times, is through what Noddings puts forth as confirmation. Confirmation means looking to the best reason to explain a student's action. Homework not done? Rather than guessing the student was out goofing off, confirmation means trying to imagine the best realistic reason. In doing so, "we confirm him; that is, we reveal to him an attainable image of himself that is lovelier than that manifested in his present acts" (Noddings, 2003, p. 193). This does not mean ignoring the wrong, but attempting to correct it with a spirit of care and confirmation. This helps not only the student but the teacher as well, for when a student doesn't live up to expectations, a teacher can place this disappointment within

a context of confirmation, understanding that there is more to the student than present manifestation.

Three conditions, according to pragmatist thinkers Stephen Fishman and Lucile McCarthy (2007), for living in hope are: "gratitude, intelligent wholeheartedness, and enriched present experience" (p. 4). Gratitude gives us a sense of belonging and purposefulness, intelligent wholeheartedness provides faith and reassurance, enriched present experience regards engagement and unification. Gratitude involves recognizing what is good in our lives and that "our individual habits are links in forming the endless chain of humanity" (Dewey in Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, p. 5). Though simple, one means of recognizing that for which an individual should be thankful is by keeping a gratitude journal. By engaging in the practice of writing five good things from the day, a person is able to open his or her eyes to what has been achieved during the day regarding ends-in-view, as well as producing a record of cumulative goodness. A teacher could do this as an individual practice directly related to the classroom at the end of each day, or a teacher could involve the students in keeping a classroom record of five good things that were achieved each day. Whatever the means, achievements should be acknowledged. Intelligent wholeheartedness is "a way of making choices and acting on those choices" (Fishman & McCarthy, p. 9), and when that has been done, a person must not live too narrowly tied to outcomes. Enriched present experience means, as Dewey said, that "we always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future" (in Fishman & McCarthy, 2007b, p. 11). In part this means integrating yesterday, today, and tomorrow, as well as integrating success and failure—living with neither excessive anxiety nor regret.

Conclusion

In an educational climate where teachers face increased anxiety and lowered morale, hope is necessary not simply to endure the present situation but to envision and work toward an improved alternative. While many assume that teachers are hopeful, some teachers and education scholars proclaim hope without a thorough working understanding of it. Education scholars and teacher-educators need conceptual tools in order to successfully cultivate hope in the teachers with whom they work. It is our contention that understanding and employing a pragmatist notion of hope—namely, hoping through actions aimed at unrealized objects in a realistic and generative manner based on particular hopes, habits of hope and hopefulness, characterized by imagination, intelligence and gratitude—enables teachers to better confront current challenges and to collaboratively pursue improved alternatives. When upheld within a community of teachers, pragmatist hope can employ resources to critically and realistically encounter today's educational problems with imaginative reflection and intelligent collective action. In sum, even though hope is conditioned by an environment of anxiety and low morale, hope can transcend some of the limitations posed in schools today and can provide the long-term approach necessary to chip away at those that cannot be immediately tackled.

Note

1. Post offers a discussion of two other philosophical analyses of hope found in the work of Gabriel Marcel and Ernst Bloch (2006), and Carrie Birmingham traces roots of hope within the work of Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas (2009).

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