

WRITING THE TRUE SELF:  
CASE STUDIES OF ENG 101 STUDENTS  
RESPONDING TO A PETER ELBOW-INSPIRED CURRICULUM

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

My fulfillment in life comes through helping others develop their potential, work through their troubles, and follow their dreams. I have found that my college students embrace this aspect as I teach them expressive, author-involved writing. Peter Elbow's work asserts that this type of writing fits into his theory of personal development, which is based on common ideals of self, belief, and voice. I have written instructional materials for introductory college composition courses that follow Elbow in these principles. I believe this course, "Writing the True Self," and its accompanying philosophy strongly resonate with students attending Brigham Young University–Hawaii. Having been brought up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as LDS Church or Mormon Church), these students come from a cultural literacy context in which authorship and personal development are related. Therefore, in this research project, I examined student development in my English 101 classes at this church-sponsored university where 95% of students are Latter-day Saints. Particular attention was paid to changes in each person's articulation of consciousness, core values, and higher aspects: the "personal *logos* of the heart," or "true self." The case studies were based primarily on two of their five assignments, impressions of their class participation, and transcripts of student-teacher conferences. They are portraits that suggest overwhelmingly that class members, in response to this curricular approach were gaining a deeper understanding of themselves.

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*Students at all levels instinctively talk and think  
about voice, or their voice in their writing,  
and tend to believe they have  
**a real or true self—**  
despite the best efforts of some of their teachers  
Peter Elbow, *Voice in Writing Again**

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

College teachers of Freshman Composition find that some students do not write convincingly, and some feel it has to do with their background. The culture that most students come from, although increasingly word-based through e-mail and instant messaging, is not particularly literary. The students who become good writers must somehow filter out unimportant messages, unthinking reactions, and the shallow media representations of their generation. They must learn to make meanings personal.

A standard way writing teachers dislodge students from this comfortable, yet vapid place is presenting curricular topics that are familiar, but have substance. Some teachers supply an idea or controversy and allow students to choose a topic within a theme. Others focus on a genre, and encourage students to explore a work from the genre that connects with them. Conversely, some choose boring themes such as birth order because they are “safe” and will not create controversy in mixed groups. Teachers must understand their student demographic to make these decisions.

My dissertation is based on the assumption that an ideal curriculum would relate to the students personally and form a compelling sequence with increasing engagement and student investment throughout the semester. A course based on Peter Elbow’s precepts does this, encouraging student development in writing and in general, implicitly claiming that expression containing belief, voice, and identity can cause personal growth or development. My study considers curricular content that I developed for my classes based on this method of teaching writing, to see if it works in a culture that steps back from the superficial aspects of our society. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), people are encouraged to become

spiritual, intelligent, compassionate, and courageous by learning the doctrines of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, and literacy is a primary factor in their education.

To explore these assumptions further, this qualitative case study examined both personal and writing development that occurred in students attending my English 101 classes at Brigham Young University–Hawaii in fall 2008. In contexts with competing, divisive ideologies or with students who feel they have reached a developmental plateau, this method may not work very well. The BYUH students, on the other hand, came from an LDS cultural context, which teaches that sharing convictions enables gradual growth over a lifetime. Teaching these students using the exploration of preferences and beliefs as suggested by Elbow resulted in personal growth and improvement in writing. The influences of LDS literacy culture, my teaching philosophy, curricular themes, and writing instruction worked together to promote excellent student writing, participation, and interaction.

### **Statement of the Problem**

**Peter Elbow’s writing philosophy.** One major direction in the teaching of English composition is the expressivist philosophy, specifically as understood and practiced by Elbow, an iconic figure in writing. Never part of the scholarly mainstream, and often marginalized by them, Elbow has conscientiously spoken to writers and teachers in practical and encouraging ways. I was initially influenced by Elbow in 1998, in the Rhetoric program at Brigham Young University-Provo. My personal copy of “Writing with Power” suggests I had read pp. 1-60 at some point. I had highlighted (ugh) encouraging phrases to inspire my teaching: “[You] already have many of the crucial skills [you] need” (p. 8); “invest yourself and be believing” (p. 9); and “some passages grow out of . . . simultaneous creativity and critical thinking” (p. 10). I suppose that the idea of personal empowerment and particularly freewriting (p. 13) resonated deeply with

me and “stuck,” because although I did not stay in rhetoric—spending a couple of years each in programs of applied linguistics, Russian literature, and finally curriculum and instruction—I used it consistently in the classes I was teaching at Parkland Community College. However, I did not understand the depth of Elbow’s philosophy until the winter of 2007, when I was preparing for my Ph.D. qualifying exams. As part of this process, my advisor, Dr. Witz, read an essay from one of my students and was somewhat perplexed. He asserted that my grade considered whether her writing matched my overall perception of the student. He asked, “Who taught you to read like this? Who taught you to teach writing like this?”

My eventual answer to these questions was Elbow. He explains that writers must begin with their personal writing voice, which when inhabited fully can then move to include audiences and cultures (Elbow, 2007, p. 176). Reading-based philosophies have dominated recent teaching in English, to the extent that decentering authors from their texts, removing the “I” pronoun, and trying primarily to please one’s audience are now common writing practices, but he insists that authors should have a stake in their writing (Elbow, 2000, p. 142). Students are experts in their own life experience, and can become more proficient in deriving convictions from their associated feelings and opinions, so this should be a valid topic for writing (Elbow, 1968b, p. 123). Sharing convictions furthers the almost universal psychological and educational goal, which is that writers become powerful, confident in their means of communication, and sophisticated in their command of writing resources to meet their individual goals. Instruction as envisioned by Elbow should relate to students on the personal growth level, and it should be visible in their writing as their voices engage in more comprehensive ways with subject and audience.

**Rhetorical theory vs. practical reality.** The current alternative to the expressivist philosophy is James Berlin's "socio-epistemic" theory. He claims to balance aspects of argumentation, author, audience, text, and context. A social-constructivist, postmodern philosophy, it claims that an author's knowledge is based on discourse that is observational, culture-bound, and tied to material existence (Berlin, 2000, p. 488). I disagree with this theory because I tend to think it gives too much power to culture, but I recognize that it reflects academic discourse about writing. Rhetoric scholar Peter Mortensen recently said, "The audience for any kind of theory even in the academy is really small, and there are lots of ideas that drive curriculum more" (Mortensen, personal communication, 2008). Berlin's relativistic formulation does arise in the syllabi and practice of well-trained teachers, and it can cause students to disconnect their writing from their inner life of meaning. In order to show that in practice, a radically different formulation of the sort suggested by Elbow can be effective among many students, a study must be done.

Opponents of the expressivist philosophy and particularly the aspect of voice claim it is an incomplete and self-centered concept. Elbow recently noted that although in scholarly journals there have been few non-ironic uses of the term voice in recent years, "yet the concept of voice (without quotation marks) keeps not going away" (Elbow, 2007, p. 170). Darsie Bowden particularly opposed the use of this term: "I rail on it in my courses, [but] the term invariably emerges, often sheepishly from one of my students and, more frequently than I'd like to admit, from me as I stumble over my own inability to describe what I mean." (Bowden, as cited in Elbow, 2007) It seems that a social-epistemic focus on a community's determination of personal meaning may be a less effective strategy. Indeed, most students are naturally critical of whole meanings or cultural metaphors. When proponents of this type of theory say that a voice-

centered approach is not effective, perhaps it is because they do not have a sufficiently clear understanding of the specific population under observation.

**Unified writing develops the self.** As I delved deeper into Elbow's work and philosophy, I located a unique point of view on teaching writing, which has interesting implications for student character development. He emphasizes expression that contains belief, voice, and identity, and he asserts that writing connects magically with the self (Elbow, 1981, p. 370) when core beliefs are communicated through voice and lead to action/ reflection in identity. The state of the self in this action is the mental/ spiritual/ characterological condition (Elbow, 1981, p. 357). Elbow supports each aspect in various ways, freeing the mind in freewriting (Elbow, 1981, p. 13), encouraging belief through the believing game (Elbow, 1998, p. 163), and advocating truthfulness. Of the final aspect, he says, "If you succeed in really believing your tale is deeply important, you already and automatically believe in magic" (Elbow, 1981, p. 360). What his approach tries to achieve is a writer who has achieved self-unity. In his theory, writing can lead to personal development, and his common-language admission that higher aspects were present in a process of empowerment was one reason why I was attracted to Elbow initially.

**Effectiveness of Elbow approach varies with group.** Elbow has tried out a syllabus based on his ideas in the past, and he experienced different effects depending on the population. The first group he taught to write consisted of conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War, who had failed to convince the draft board that they were sincere, and who immediately connected with the idea of identifying the beliefs that truly motivated their actions (Elbow, 1968a, p. 990). Fearing that implementation of these methods at his Cornell University day job would cause his dismissal, he shifted his efforts towards a YMCA adult journal-writing class (Elbow, 1998, p. ix). Later, in his own rhetoric classes at an experimental college, he noted that many students

simply said what they thought he expected to hear, and that there was nothing compelling in it (Elbow, 1968b, p. 123).

I experienced a similar variability of effect when I tried to use Elbow's approach at Parkland Community College in Champaign, Illinois. Many of my students succeeded, but others did not resonate with this way of learning to write. The assignments, which related to such things as personal identity and group inclusion, did not seem to affect a few of my students because they were already writing well, from a position of self-awareness born of unhappy life experiences, and they already had voice. Other students just wanted to get through my class because they did not feel convinced that personally oriented writing was relevant. There were institutional barriers as well, as the curricular focus on popular culture was a good source for assignments, but the scope was too limited, a sea of possibilities with all the depth of a puddle. I had to find a way to follow my beliefs, and fate intervened. I received a lectureship at Brigham Young University–Hawaii, where the match between LDS cultural values and my developing philosophy was perfect. I quickly came to realize that finding the effect of a course employing Elbow's insights on LDS students would be an interesting possibility.

**LDS culture of development through writing.** The Latter-day Saint culture supports the claim that personal development can occur through writing, as it is dedicated to the principles felt to be laid down by the Lord. Old Testament prophets were often called by God in early adolescence, such as Samuel, who learned the will of God and wrote about it in wonderful verses. Joseph Smith, who the Mormon Church claims restored the church Jesus organized while in mortality, was no different. Dallin H. Oaks said, “Overarching the Prophet Joseph's entire ministry were his comparative youth, his superficial formal education and his incredibly rapid acquisition of knowledge and maturity” (Oaks, 1996, p. 42). In the 25 years between his first

vision of God and his martyrdom, Smith became a dynamic, compelling leader. His development was facilitated by the literate activities of translating, authoring, and interpreting scripture and communicative actions of preaching, corresponding, and journal writing. People wonder how his personal growth took place in the relative absence of formal schooling, some calling him a genius, some a prophet. Most would agree that he made religious history and the messages he wrote transcend his times.

**LDS principles and practices connect with Elbow.** Elbow's ideas find fertile ground in LDS culture, particularly the ideas of finding core values, making a deep commitment, expressing oneself, and acting according to beliefs. These concepts are discussed in slightly different terms, in the third and fourth Articles of Faith, which are accepted as a basic statement of LDS doctrine:

We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel. We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the gospel are first, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, second, repentance, third baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and fourth, the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Smith, 1999b, p. 60)

Faith relates to finding core values; repentance is a deep commitment; baptism is an expression of convictions; the gift of the Holy Ghost motivates belief-centered actions. These principles are put into practice in the lives of committed Mormons.

In the LDS church, taking charge of one's actions through a commitment to principled and covenant living is a prerequisite to salvation. This commitment is obvious to sociologist Richard Stark, not a Mormon himself, who feels it demonstrated by the missions that young Mormons serve, where "years of preparation attending seminary sessions each morning before school" meet doctrines "at the gut level of how they inspire the individual" (as cited in Duke, 1998, p. 57). During this period, missionaries read and interpret scripture, apply them, talk about

convictions, and write about their challenges in letters home and diaries. These written records witness personal change in this crucible of refinement. This is part of the “remarkable socializing effect” of missions, whereby missionaries return “far more self-assured, polished, mature, and above all, confident” (Duke, 1998, p. 57). Because some of the students at BYU–Hawaii are returned missionaries, and others intend to go within the next couple of years, they have a level of commitment to these ideas, and learning through writing sounds familiar to them.

**LDS support of literacy activities and aims.** BYU–Hawaii students are likely to accept Elbow’s approach to writing because the LDS church promotes principles of literacy in its writing culture through its activities and aims. The activities include public speaking and discussion, always with a written textual component, journal writing, and reading the scriptures. No paid ministry exists in the church, so all members are expected to teach or present at some time, and most read the speech they have written. This starts with short presentations in Primary, the church’s children’s program, at age three. Journals are a perennial theme in the LDS context, partly because of the amazing efforts of Wilford Woodruff (1807-1898), official church historian, avid record-keeper, and fourth President of the Church (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, p. 125). Almost all Mormons with ties to the pioneer exodus to Utah have family journals full of tragedy as well as hope. Journals are also an important part of church-sponsored addiction recovery and young women’s personal progress programs. Reading scriptures is the center of LDS learning, which students in grades 9-12 attend supplemental seminary classes (often at inconvenient times) to pursue. If any member or convert cannot read, the LDS Relief Society is called upon to assist, and church-authored literacy materials are utilized in this regard. These activities make for a very literate culture.

The second aspect of LDS writing culture is aims, which are partly temporal and partly eternal, and all of which correlate to the activities listed above. Issues such as succeeding at work or school are very important, but the aims of temporal awareness are more comprehensive. For instance, aside from his advice for children to study, Gordon B. Hinckley, President of the LDS Church 1995-2008, articulated the need for understanding of culture and history. He promoted “becoming acquainted with history and the great minds of the past . . . read[ing] the daily newspaper and [gaining] knowledge of the vast and intriguing world” without which the functionally illiterate are “condemned to poverty, hunger, and ignorance” (Hinckley, 1992, p. 4). Other aspects of importance are eternally oriented, like maintaining family continuity in the faith, learning one’s personal conviction from scriptures, and sharing one’s witness with others. However, these are not seen as distinct categories, because the eternal aspects are believed to infuse vitality and meaning into all temporal things. For instance, if one dedicated one’s life work to God, one could experience its higher aspects. The “dream job” at Brigham Young University–Hawaii offered this opportunity to me, and the idea for my research project was born in this way.

**The personal *logos* of the heart.** In the months before my position at BYU–Hawaii began, I wanted to establish something significant from my teaching as the basis of my dissertation work. It took a lot of discussions and contemplation, but I wrested “pop culture” out of my syllabus, and centered it instead on the idea of “Discovering the Personal *Logos* of the Heart.” This has at its basis my implicit understanding of and dedication to a mass of principles I learned on my two-year ecclesiastical mission, and which I abstracted into a logical series of statements about the writing task. I believe these principles hold true to the expectations of traditional English classes, to the spiritual aspect at the core of LDS literacy, and to the author-

oriented aspect that Elbow has championed. They are a representation of the values at the core of my philosophy, curriculum, and teaching (see Figure 1).

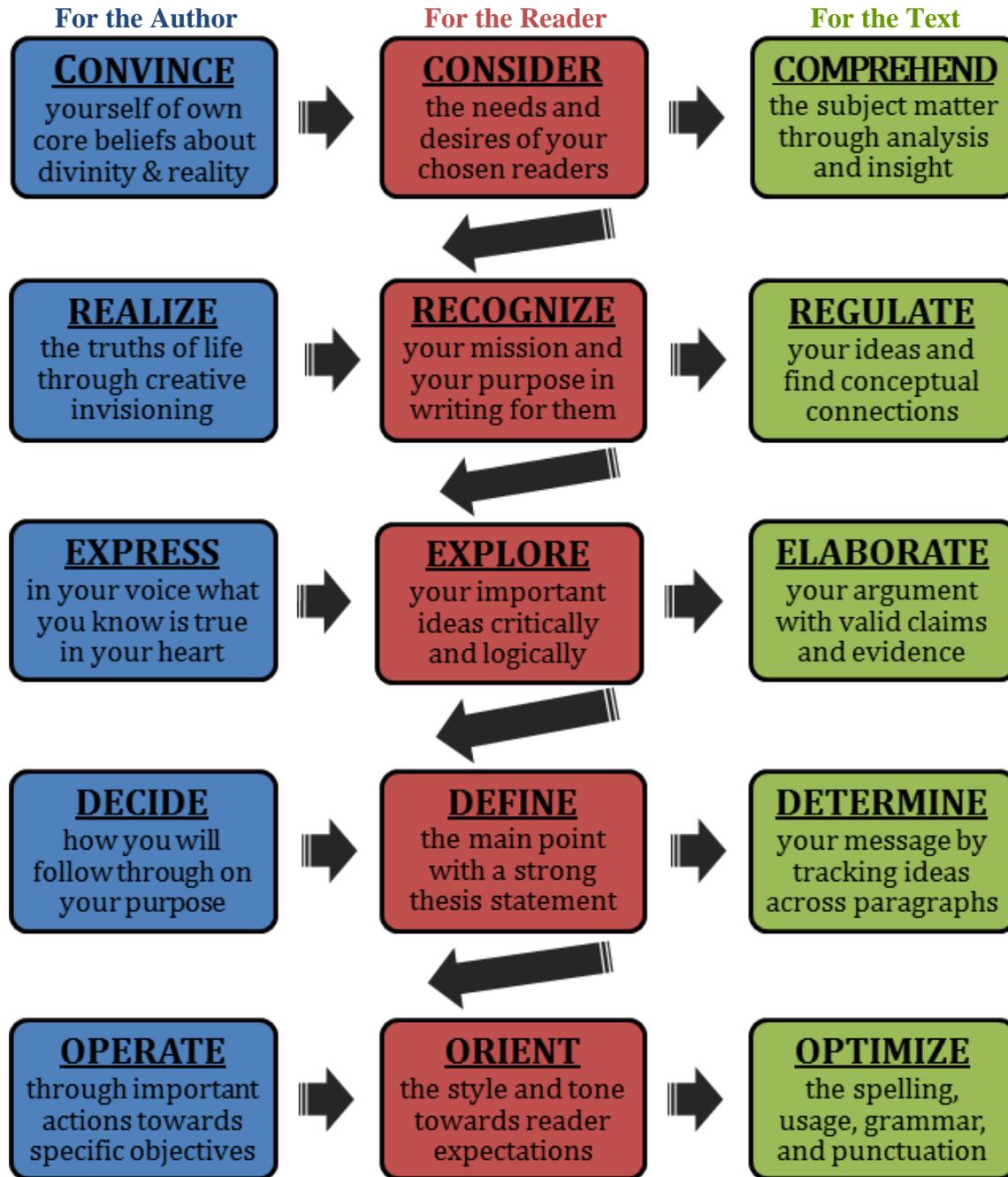


Figure 1. Principles of writing.

**The syllabus.** The preceding series of principles was the basis for my English 101 syllabus (see Chapter III) development. I also created these materials consciously and

unconsciously based on LDS values and Elbow's ideals. My syllabus relates to writing and development and it reflects my own curricular preferences. Although most of the units in my syllabus had been developed over several years at Parkland College, they were organized to relate to successive phases in the students' search for meaning. In the past, I have used shallow topics like advertisements as well as meaningful ones, like identity. But in the re-envisioning of my syllabus for BYUH students, I have returned to its idealistic roots.

In the beginning of my course, students describe their personal preferences for a particular favorite song and identify the convictions implicit in it. This allows students who are self-conscious to reveal themselves slowly. In the second assignment, they are called upon to realize and describe their core beliefs. Next follows a thematic unit on fantasy writing, which I thought would be a chance to explore voiced expression. The vision unit is experimental, and relates to making decisions about the future. The final research unit allows students to develop a point from their belief essay, in order to take action on specific objectives. All of these units were intended to evoke belief, voice, and identity as grounds for personal growth or development. Having developed these units and my curricular approach, I passed my qualifying exams, proposed my dissertation research, wrote the first three chapters, and defended them. The ENG 101 courses went off without major problems, and provided ideal information for my dissertation. Only the first two units in my syllabus would eventually prove to be universally effective, and are the only ones that will be discussed in depth.

**Origin of "true self."** Looking back on my dissertation journey, I found that I had to make a significant change that was not initially apparent. There was simply too much going on with the principles, the journey of self-knowledge, and the voice idea. More troubling, there was no clear way to connect all of this to Elbow. Granted, the curricular approach was "Elbow-

inspired,” because I wanted to make students into empowered writers, but I used my own ways of doing things. Furthermore, I had beliefs that I could not ascribe to anyone else, such as developing core values and practicing them in life and writing. I needed a better term that would engage the commitments I explored in my research.

This idea was eventually clarified in my second year of teaching. I decided to take a walk and talk with one of my ESL learners, to see how he was doing and what he thought about the class so far. The young martial artist said very seriously, “You’re teaching us to write the *true self*.” I felt the impact of this and asked him to explain. “This is real Kung-Fu, not hitting and kicking like the movies. At the center is the *true self* and source of real power.” I later recognized that I had read it before.

Students at all levels instinctively talk and think about voice, or their voice in their writing, and tend to believe they have a *real or true self*—despite the best efforts of some of their teachers. (Elbow, 2007)

This was golden—a natural-language way of communicating the intent of all of my previous expressions. So my course title shifted from “ENG 101: The Search for Truth and Meaning,” and the title of my research project changed from “Discovering the Personal *Logos* of the Heart.” They both became “Writing the True Self.” Changing from the second name had the added benefit that no one would think “*logos*” was referring to Izod® or the Red Sox®. Using the term “true self” reflects my general feeling that I have to some extent outgrown Elbow in my syllabus and approach, allowing me to relate with, but not be totally defined by his philosophy.

**Process of writing the true self.** Although I did not use this formulation in the class, I will subsequently refer to my syllabus as “Writing the True Self,” and to the goal of student expression as the “true self.” Notice that there is no colon—writing is not a product that measures the trueness of self, relative to something else like lived experience. Rather writing is a

process whereby the true self can be realized gradually. With this formulation, I am certainly advocating for the concept of “True Self,” and the truthful discovery of self takes meaningful action. This conscious uncovering and diligent exploration of the true self is considered as important as to render irrelevant any interpretation by a particular rhetorical theory. It could be adopted by any conscionable teacher regardless of “-ism.”

A study of “Writing the True Self” with an idealistic, believing, developmentally oriented group of students yielded very positive results. Ideas about development, author-identity, voice, and writing found fertile ground among young adult members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because there was an overlap in the value systems. The students in my class felt a connection to their true selves and gave me their confidence as I taught them. Nevertheless, even in my classes at BYUH, there was a very small minority of sophisticated students who came from all of the benefits society had to offer, and who were initially willing, but ultimately reticent to believe they could learn anything substantial about themselves and their relationship to the world from me. However, the majority of students were humble, having left their families with limited means, desiring education out of the genuine need to help others in their home cultures. My focal students wrote their true selves into being, finding their beliefs, expressing themselves compellingly, and taking action, following the logic of LDS first principles.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this qualitative case study, I researched the effects of writing the true self on personal development in the LDS context. In doing so, I examined both personal and writing development of my English students at BYU–Hawaii. My philosophy of teaching, syllabus themes, and class instruction interacted to improve student writing.

## **Research Questions**

The guiding questions of this study were, “How did writing the true self work in the BYUH population?” “What were the effects of writing the true self on student writing?” What were the effects of writing the true self on change and student development in character?” “How did the students who wrote their true selves demonstrate their personal development in writing through their journals and essays?”

## **Limitations of the Study**

Because this study takes as an assumption the shared culture of literacy and a mass of other supportive principles in the LDS church, its predictive value may be lower in other contexts. However, writing is a universal aspect of communication related to maturity and development, so this research is expected to be relevant to many environments. There is no way to account for other personal or public factors that may have influenced the outcomes. Denzin holds on principle, that “The search for causal ‘whys,’ causal paths, causal chains, and causal antecedents” would not be possible in the present kind of inquiry, and would in fact be “detrimental to the study and understanding of directly lived experience” (Denzin, 1989, p. 44). Therefore, this dissertation presents a number of case study portraits and an evaluative overall discussion. It will act as a model for other evaluations of instruction and also attempt to show the viability of this teaching approach for export into other instructional settings.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **LDS Role Models**

I initially discussed Joseph Smith as a stellar example of what an LDS church member could hope to achieve in his or her own development. A simple indication of the prophet's development is the change in his writing. In *Doctrine and Covenants*, his ability to communicate what God told him improves dramatically. In the first section, an adolescent Joseph quotes three Bible verses and adds eight extra words, clarifying a doctrinal point (Smith, 1999a, 2:1). This was an important message, but not an impressive piece of writing. In his last revelation at the age of 38, Smith wrote,

The conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment . . . have an end when men are dead. (Smith, 1999a, 132:4-7)

By grammatical measures, this is sophisticated writing. In its content, it constitutes a new contract with God, its verses dense with scriptural allusions. Although most members of the Church would say that revelation from God was the catalyst for Smith's growth and development, they also are likely to agree with the proposition that the right sort of writing could similarly lead to growth and development of the writer.

#### **LDS Doctrine of Eternal Development**

Development is even more important to members of the Church because of a doctrine about the divine destiny of humankind. According to LDS commentator Erik Eliason, the doctrine that sets this church apart from all other Christian churches is "that humans, angels, and

gods are of essentially the same species of physical beings but are in different stages of development” (Eliason, 2001, p. 2). The general membership of the Church would say the same thing in slightly different words, namely, that all are children of their Heavenly Father, and can become like Him by following Jesus Christ. This aspect of development becomes central to worship.

This doctrine is also supported in practice, as attested by sociologist Rodney Stark, who commented that the Church is successful in part because of the “LDS Ethic,” a combination of a “can-do spirit” and teachings about the nature of knowledge. Whereas “Christians [generally] feel guilt when they sin, while Mormons [i.e., Christians of the LDS persuasion] often seem to feel disappointment and impatience,” which he surmises is the result of a larger vision of eternal destiny that includes “aspirations to divinity” (cited in Duke, 1998, p. 58), which brings everyday weaknesses into perspective. But in addition to overcoming inappropriate desires through accepting Christ’s grace in one’s heart, Mormon doctrine “stimulates achievement by placing a premium on rationality and intellectual growth” (cited in Duke, 1998, p. 58). Joseph Smith taught:

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come (Smith, 1999a, 130:18).

LDS church members believe that religious as well as secular learning leaves its mark in eternity, so they tend to pursue college degrees and encourage success in school. Because God understands all of his creations, LDS people also aspire to knowledge, which interfaces well with the objectives of a writing classroom.

## **Introspective Meditation**

In order to produce effective personal writing, students should build upon their everyday lives and reach towards higher aspects. One exceptionally effective, but little-discussed practice to take students to that next level comes from D. Gordon Rohman. His 1964 Project English mandate was to discover how to build on the experience of ideas that precede good writing. Therefore, his directives are appropriate for students determined to discover more compelling prose. He states, “Writers set out in apparent ignorance of what they are groping for, yet they recognize it when they find it” (Rohman & Wlecke, 1964, p. 106; see also freewriting). Rohman claims that good assignments allow a student writer to discover two contexts: (a) the “‘subject context,’ or some *things* about a subject,” and (b) the “personal context: that special *combination* of words which makes an essay [one's own.]” Consequently, “good writing” enables a writer to discover the personal context and the concomitant “integrity to dominate his subject with a pattern both fresh and original” (Rohman & Wlecke, 1964, p. 107). Rohman also discussed his conception of writers, which are the type of writers that my method fosters.

In addition to helping produce a better result, a good method of writing should also affect writers who follow it in a positive manner. Rohman called these adherents of the practice “conscious, responsible, willing persons,” whom teachers assisted in the therapeutic practice of self-actualization through writing, “enlightening them concerning the powers of creative discovery within them” and enabling “mental healing” (Rohman & Wlecke, 1964, p. 108). This resonates with the LDS ethic. Rohman asserted, “Writing grounded in the principle of personal transformation ought to be the basic writing experience for all students at all levels” (Rohman & Wlecke, 1964, p. 112). Rohman's students began with daily personal journals to discover topics. They continued with introspective meditation to experience “being in a place with the topic.”

Finally, students finished with analogical play to develop these ideas “on the basis of their ability to evoke a common affective response” (Brett, 1963, p. 638).

Rohman's model came from Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957), a well-known English essayist and humanist who worked to define a Christian aesthetic for creative endeavors. In her approach, she encouraged writers to “convert an event into an experience . . . from a thing that happens *to* us into something happening *in* us, which we can then express to our own mind, and then to others” (Rohman & Wlecke, 1964, p. 108). This was the act of introspective meditation, as prescribed by Rohman in step two. Sayer's method recognized that “hearing a voice” required active envisioning, or as Dewey said, “finding the organization and connections within experience” (Rohman & Wlecke, 1964, p. 109). Introspection, envisioning, and freewriting were helpful tools to elicit meaning in my students.

### **The LDS Journaling Tradition**

The LDS journaling tradition has its roots in the Puritan spiritual movement where it was used as a means for self-awareness, critique, comparison, and conversion with the Lord. Drawing inspiration from the Bible verse, “And Moses wrote their goings forth, stage by stage, by the commandment of the LORD” (Numbers 33:2), John Beadle penned his *Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian*, in which he proposed all believers write in a “constant diary of all God's gracious dealings with them” (as cited in Webster, 1996, p. 38). Tom Webster points out that diary writing became a significant part of devotional practices among the Puritans, intended to “self-fashion” a “godly self” by “turning the ephemerality of action and speech into an artifact,” removing individual subjectivity, and producing “a material site for the past self” (Webster, 1996, p. 40). This process therefore defined aspects of a Puritan's life, such as personal sins, evidence of God's goodness, and experience of God's judgments, and contextualized them into a

meta-narrative of gradual conversion (Webster, 1996, p. 43). For anyone who believes God responds to individual prayers, it is not a stretch to emulate the prophets, whom God commanded to keep a record of His answers for posterity.

Spencer W. Kimball, twelfth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (from 1973 to 1985), was a keeper of voluminous personal records. Following the example of his mother, he wrote daily in his own journals. In advice to young people, he said that journals are “the literature of superiority.” He advised that journal writers will “become superior in [their] own humble lives” (Kimball, 1975, p. 4). Personal development here occurs as the writer recognizes the significance of experience from God’s perspective. Kimball admonished youth to write about their “real self and not what other people may see in [them]” (Kimball, 1975, p. 4). This is a call to think reflectively and to consider their true natures. Participating in this important activity, LDS youth write so they may know themselves better as they grow up, and to take actions in harmony with their destiny.

Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor to the current President of the LDS Church said that a large part of the benefit of writing in a journal is in remembering what had occurred during the day, and learning how God was manifested therein. Nevertheless, in this excerpt it is also clear that “remembering” is not a simple recall test, rather an active, creative process. It is building worlds of meaning out of the recent past, and pointing out connections that comprise wisdom:

I heard in my mind—not in my own voice—these words: “I’m not giving you these experiences for yourself. Write them down.” . . . I took out some paper and began to write . . . how I had seen the hand of God blessing our family . . . so that my children could have the memory someday when they would need it. I wrote down a few lines every day for years. . . . As I kept at it, something began to happen. As I would cast my mind over the day, I realized that trying to remember had allowed God to show me what He had done. More than gratitude began to grow in my heart. Testimony grew. I became ever more certain that our Heavenly Father hears and answers prayers. I felt more gratitude for the softening and refining that come because of the Atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ. (Eyring, 2007, p. 67)

Eyring describes writing as assisting him to grow spiritually. Eyring learned to observe better, to reason more, and to be more humble and loving as well. Development and maturity came for Eyring in seeing the details of his experience. He engaged in metacognition, placing choices inside the larger framework of God's commandments. He was creating in his mind connections between issues previously perceived as disjointed, and finding larger evidence of cause and effect. He also wrote with loving consideration of his audience, that his family could relate to them and feel his life a part of their own, an exercise in synthesis. This is a self-reported study of how writing focused on a spiritual aspect lead to personal learning or development. He has also taught many of his descendants and followers from these stores of wisdom.

### **Voice for Growth**

Student essays with real author-awareness or "voice" increase self-awareness and enable the writer to grow. Elbow talked quite a bit about the voice's ability to change a person's unified self, which he called the "mental/spiritual/characterological condition" (Elbow, 1981, p. 357). In his first publication, he said that "underived first principles and premises" come before "thinking and action" (Elbow, 1968a, p. 991). Because of this point, I would re-order the first two elements. "Spiritual" relates to core values of the heart, those felt "in the gut"; "mental" suggests full commitment to them, "*really* believing" (emphasis original); "characterological" is the moxie or "spunk" to make things happen (Elbow, 1981, p. 369). "Condition" requires a certain level of awareness of the three factors and their integration in the self. Development would indicate progress in each area.

Because I saw growth and development in my students, and I am convinced that actualizing core beliefs leads "not just to learning, but also to growth or development" (Elbow, 1981, p. 284), I believe teachers should help students to identify core beliefs, encourage them to

make commitments, and support their actions when the time is right. Ideal students are constantly “engaged in learning, seeking, and being incomplete” (Elbow, 1986, p. 149). If a student does act with character and makes progress in life, overcoming some challenge or solving some problem, then “with . . . success comes belief and with that comes a sudden infusion of new power” (Elbow, 1981, p. 369). This personally motivated power is self-confidence, so-called “daring, courage, and belief in oneself” (Elbow, 2000, p. 82). But Elbow does not talk about self-growth independent of the vehicle of communication, the voice that develops concurrently with the self.

**Beginning of voice.** Voice contributes to student uplifting and growth in the self, and it increases in power concurrently with that growth, changing into “something the student likes better” (Elbow, 1998, p. 7). This implies that the longer a writer explores his or her voice, the better match there will be of actions with core beliefs. However, the first step self-delusion to self-awareness and self-growth is rejecting the platitudes that “made sense to others,” or positions they “felt [others] could assent to” (Elbow, 1968b, p. 121) and deciding to move towards deep commitments that resonate in the self. The journey involves leaving behind false premises and embracing belief.

The main thing about a perception or thought that prevents growth is that you don’t see it, you only see “through” it like a lens. It’s not so much a thought as a way of thinking. You can see most of the thoughts you think or sights you see. But it’s hard to see the way you think and see. (Elbow, 1998, p. 46)

To the extent that [students] begin to listen to my feedback and try to produce [writing with voice], I think I see a lot of things begin to happen. Students begin to like writing more often about things that are more important to them, and thus to feel a greater connection between their writing and themselves. I think that this process leads not just to learning, but also to growth or development. Searching for more voice starts them on a journey—a path toward new thoughts, feelings, memories, and new modes of seeing and writing. (Elbow, 1981, p. 284)

The goal of teaching writing is to develop the self. My voice is my true self and my rhetorical power. Writing with a strong voice and sincerity is good writing. Everyone has a real voice and can write with power. (Elbow, 2007, p. 168)

If students truthfully connect with their inner voice, commit to it, and try to find more of it, they will achieve quick results. Even though the writing may be raw, the force behind it will be palpable. Coming into better harmony with core beliefs helps to diffuse false premises or self-delusions. Thus, student growth is related to transcending, focus, creation, and expression, the spirit and power of selfhood, which “tends to start them on a train of growth and empowerment in their voice—empowerment even in relating to people” (Elbow, 1998, p. 294). Student actions resonate with commitments as they recognize convictions and act courageously.

Students who accept the invitation to write with voice realize on some level that writing gives them the chance to develop. If they find and write a belief that occupies a central place in their life, students will encounter self-doubt, but if they push through that initial doubt and pursue a course in harmony with that belief, they will activate their own personal growth. Elbow described the outcomes of that, which he witnessed often in his students and especially in conscientious objectors seeking to explain why they opposed war. When a writer put his true beliefs on the line in front of others, he would find that

Beneath his vague uneasiness [is] something solidier than he had dreamed of. In facing his doubts, he is set free to feel more deeply, to think more cogently, and above all, to act more courageously. (Elbow, 1968a, p. 993)

Because we have already established that “thinking and action is necessarily based on underived first principles and premises” (Elbow, 1968a, p. 991), the way to personal power is on the search for truth and meaning, in order to “know more about themselves than they knew when they started, and become far more committed and activist” (Elbow, 1968, p. 990). So for students

who are interested in self-discovery, a crucial phase in their journey is the beginning, in which they seek for their own articulation of values and convictions.

**Developing voice.** When students continue to use voice in their personal writing, they discover meaning and fulfillment from the resonance and cohesion between their beliefs, commitments, and actions. The unity attained in writing through voice occurs as the author achieves a state of deeper truth/belief in this condition. In *Embracing Contraries*, Elbow says that recognizing the inner writer was a prerequisite for growth. “I can grow or change, but not unless I start out inhabiting my own voice or style” (Elbow, 1986, p. 221). He describes this as a dynamic, freeing process: “Not trying to fill a pond with water; trying to get a constant flow in and out—through—till the contents of the pond are what you want” (Elbow, 1998, p. 195).

Students can experience holistic through honest, voiced writing:

I am talking about the sound or feel of a believable person simply in the fabric of the words. The most intimate revelations can be put in words that are not alive and have no self; and conversely, the most impersonal reasoning—in lean, laconic, “unrevealing” prose—can nevertheless be alive and infused with the presence of a person or a self. The notion of judging an essay solely on whether it contains conviction and a self will set some teachers' teeth on edge. . . . But maybe it's necessary to go through conviction and self rather to go than away from them or around them. Maybe the quickest path to good reasoning and decent sentence writing—and we must admit that we haven't yet found quick ones—is through learning better how to write words that reveal conviction and a person. (Elbow, 1968b, p. 123)

In the institutional context, it is unlikely for any teacher, and certainly not me, to grade any essay “solely” on the above issue. However, as one of several important normative criteria, voice has an essential role in the effect of writing on the person. Through this process, students step into the subject position in their lives and become aware of their basic beliefs, tenants upon which every decision and reasoning has been based. They discover them in the writing journey, as they discover themselves through their words. Recognizing that the best writing emerges from the lived experience of a topic, students can become successful when they deeply experience,

leaving themselves open to surface representations, but also to the underlying logical, spiritual, and ethical values. It also need not conflict with other expectations, as indeed other aspects of writing such as organization and logic tend to improve along with voice.

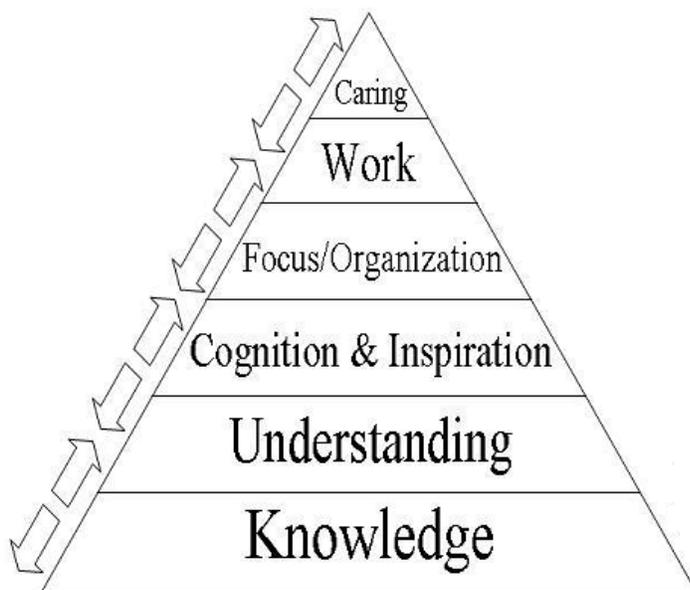
**Attaining real voice.** Although some moments are brighter than others are, the best manifestation of voice in writing is called by Elbow “real voice” (Power, 1981, p. 309). This type of expression is characterized by words that have the “transfixing” power of “The Ancient Mariner” to give the readers a compelling experience (Power, 1981, p. 280). In order to do this, the author forms a mystic or magical alliance with his writing, which “resonates” with his personality and character (Power, 1981, p. 295). All students can gain this power, which flows through the self, strengthening and refining it. The teacher must recognize “authentic” work and ask for more, which causes a student to enjoy his process, construct works that are more important to him, and “feel a greater connection” between his work and himself (Power, 1981, p. 284). When these conditions are met, learning is significantly connected to a student’s self-development:

I think this process leads not just to learning, but also to growth or development. Searching for more voice starts them on a journey—a path towards new thoughts, feelings, memories, and new modes of seeing and writing. The process affects subject matter . . . helps students to remember new things. . . . [And] leads to experimentation in swings of style and mood and mode. Though some of the new memories may be painful, my invitation usually leads to more pleasure in writing. (Power, 1981, pp. 284-285)

Real voice is therefore an opening up of the true self that enables greater feelings of potential and more joy in talents, in part because the emotion or pain of past inadequacies was faced. When the student creates from a core of personal conviction, it brings his self into the open. The writing “sounds real,” having “come from his center” (Power, 1981, p. 300) and connecting with his soul. This type of voice resonates on a deep level with my own philosophy. Specifically, in the search for real voice, one’s core beliefs build into commitments, and these are

actualized through writing and action. Learners recognize their beliefs as they find voice, which guides them in their education. In overcoming the problems of coercion and self-doubt, voice is a crucial aspect of the integrating self, a mediator between thought and action, and the field in which developing student learners develop a differentiated but interconnected self.

**Starting with principles.** It would seem that the path to true voice could occur almost anywhere a conscientious person might look for it. But at the core, at least for me, was the heart's understanding, inspiration of the spirit, and caring motivation. I saw writing as a recursive envisioning of oneself, following the principles listed below. Some of these ideas came from Bloom's taxonomy (1956), while others were my own (see Figures 2 and 3).



*Figure 2.* The beginning.

I used this model for two years, occasionally receiving feedback that it was not helpful. After reading Garrison's discussion of one-to-one tutorials in community college writing (Garrison, 1974, p. 58), I surmised that much more was going on (e.g. "Work").

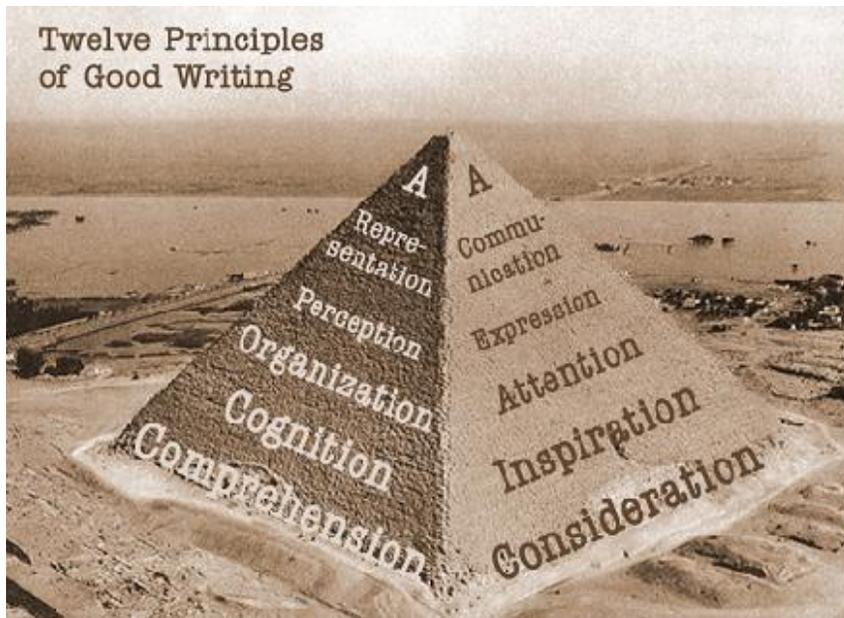


Figure 3. Principles web graphic.

This web graphic pyramid was a way to introduce my updated philosophy, but it still was not particularly useful in teaching students to write, so I developed it further. I realized they were actually a process of five steps in an author, audience, and subject aspect (see Figure 1).

The author-centered principles in my schema can be seen in terms of Elbow’s writing, beginning with the first: “Thinking and action is necessarily based on underived first principles and premises” (Elbow, 1968a, p. 991). Therefore, the first authorship principle is *conviction*, a belief before logic. Later, he referred to a “committed” person whose “meanings are blended at a finer level, integrated more thoroughly. Not merely manipulated by his mind, but rather sifted through his entire self” (Elbow, 1998, p. 8). So the second principle is *revelation*, or realization, the inner knowing. Rhetorically powerful writing is voiced, or “alive in this primary sense—it contains not just propositions but a person” (Elbow, 1968b, p. 122). The third principle, then, is *expression*. Writers who find their voice will “know that they are *on their way* to more than mere non-offensiveness” (Elbow, 1998, p. 303). This is the fourth principle, *direction*. Finally, writing must be connected to life: “If ethos is nothing but implied . . . it loses all power” (Elbow, 2000,

p. 214). Therefore, the final principle is *operation*, which is action towards specific objectives. Following these principles, a writer “is set free to feel more deeply, to think more cogently, and above all, to act more courageously” (Elbow, 1968a, p. 93). These principles are at the core of my course, and I consider them crucial steps in the search for voice.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Overview**

In the current project, I explored the type of development that occurred in seven students attending my English 101 classes at BYU–Hawaii in fall 2008. I have investigated how these students respond to my invitation to write their true selves. This method felt familiar to them because of their background in the LDS culture, particularly because college is a context for development, and writing is a vehicle for that change. I gathered their essays and journals electronically and recorded conference interactions, which I have transcribed. The curricular approach resulted in student growth, as evidenced by these essays, journals, and transcripts. After I determined the effects of the culture, philosophy, theme, and instruction, I wrote case studies of each focus student and developed a cross-case discussion. In each case study, I indicated how they developed their True Selves through writing, the majority of them finding significant growth opportunities.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the LDS church uses literary activities such as reading scripture, writing in journals, listening to sermons, and bearing testimony to prepare members for conversion, school, work, and life. The student body at BYU–Hawaii is almost entirely Latter-day Saint, as am I, and the principle of literacy is implicit in this shared culture. My curricular approach emerges from a teaching philosophy that values student belief, voice, and identity. These aspects support credibility and commitment, values highly esteemed in LDS culture. “Writing the True Self” explores developmental themes of discovering values, clarifying beliefs, considering one’s life mission, and defining personal meanings. It also touches on writing

principles explicitly, focusing on the author and culminating in the “real voice” that I believe those who pass through these stages can discover.

This chapter is organized in the following way: First, I will describe “Writing the True Self,” the approach I used with my BYUH classes in fall of 2008. For the purposes of this study, I will only use the essays from the first two units, which are “Song” and “Belief.” The other three units, “Fantasy,” “Vision,” and “Research” will be described, but will not appear as part of this study. Next, I will discuss the BYUH site, including its location and institutional identity. Following is a section on participants, recruitment of which relied on volunteer self-selection, which gave an initial number of 16 participants. During the portraiture write-up, I considered those subjects that seemed most compelling, which reduced that number to twelve subjects, which had gender, age, and home area criteria exactly representative for the BYUH student population. Because of time constraints, the writing of five of those participant portraits was deferred until the book publication of this study. After this is the data section, which describes a variety of electronically archived written and recorded data including student papers, journals, and transcripts of teacher-student conferences. Finally, I will talk about my method of preparing the case studies and the cross-case discussion, which will use Bob Stake’s directives on case study research in a loose way (1995).

### **Thematic Units in the Syllabus**

In my years of experience teaching English to university and college students, I have found most undergraduates relate strongly to thematic units that are young-adult developmentally oriented, but also encourage personal sharing. My BYU-Provo students loved the writing philosophy I used there, and I developed it further at Parkland College and BYU–Hawaii. Students simply wrote better when they connected their written expression to their own

lives, whether through song, story, or issues. At Parkland, magazine ads, television shows, and popular films generally did not elicit excellent writing owing to excess of consumerist propaganda and lack of character dynamism. So when I was able to work at BYU–Hawaii, I decided that the student population there was ideally situated for a re-imagining of my syllabus, filtered through my convictions and structured to be in greater harmony with the principles I believe. In the following sections, I will relate my curricular themes and show how they work.

**Song.** The first unit is “Song.” Originating from my Parkland pop-culture focus, it quickly establishes rapport. To break the ice, I sing for my students in rap and country styles, showing them that I am comfortable with differences, have a sense of humor, and really desire to engage with them. In Essay 1, students analyze a song of their choice in the personal context of their lives. Students often believe in their favorite songs, and are sensitive to an audience’s different viewpoints. Having thought about this music quite a lot, students start with expertise, a far different feeling of authority than most English classes evoke. Because half of my students will not be Americans, the cross-cultural discussion of their favorite songs will yield wonderful, interesting ideas. This topic succeeded at Parkland because it showed what students hoped to find in their lives, what brought them comfort, what they desired.

**Belief.** The second unit is on “Belief,” a theme that came out of a discussion I had with Peter Mortensen, a member of my dissertation committee and specialist in rhetorical theory and movements. I mentioned an interest in character-based writing and he said that some teachers were using the NPR series “This I Believe” as a text. I read it and found the confessions of faith human and warm. I had taught a similar Identity Unit at Parkland following the prompt, “Talk about your life and relate it to an important issue.” My students wrote on profound topics, and I could see the authors alive in their work. Essay 2 is about students’ personal beliefs in a life

context. Belief emerges from inspiration, and grows by sharing it with others. The essay assignment required the living aspect, which is that the belief actually is rooted in real, personally experienced life episodes of something perceived as divine, spiritual, or inspirational by the participant. I invited students to post them online at NPR.com.

## **Site**

**BYU–Hawaii.** The site for this study is Brigham Young University–Hawaii, a four-year private institution sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and located on the North Shore of Hawaii, at Laie. Its purpose is to educate young people to become an influence for world peace. Spiritual realization was desired by all of the students, and was likely among the top three reasons any of them applied to this campus. BYU–Hawaii awards BA’s and several types of certificate to students, 50% of whom are foreign nationals. Over 96% of the student population comes from the Mormon faith, with foreign-born students hailing primarily from Asia and Polynesia. Most of the students work at the Polynesian Cultural Center to pay for their schooling. Many students from all groups also have completed a 1½- to 2-year ecclesiastical mission. These two factors translate to an excellent work ethic and enthusiasm. They are not typical freshmen.

BYU–Hawaii is geographically removed from the capital of Honolulu, and it is culturally even further from the metropolitan area. The Polynesian Cultural Center, where most BYU–Hawaii students work, provides a glimpse of the past. The Center is the premier tourist attraction on Oahu, so the students have many opportunities to serve others. Tipping is discouraged because the attitude is one of honor. With the LDS temple and visitors’ center adjacent, all are invited to learn about the church. Historical and spiritual links between the seven Pacific islands

of Polynesia serve as a metaphor for the connections between all nations and people of the world.

**Department.** The Department of English has taken a strong, unique stance when it comes to the teaching of writing. In the freshman composition classes, writing is taught as a medium to explore literature chosen by the faculty members to reflect their interests, personal involvement, and investment into the course. They are presented not as “writing classes” but as “reading, writing, listening, and speaking” classes, with a focus on largely defined “themes” and including poetry/short story in English 101. The coordinator said that my idea, “The development of beliefs, ideals, and convictions through the exploration of personal issues in a public forum,” would be an excellent theme. There is an expectation from the General Education committee that the students learn some aspects of literary criticism, as part of critical analysis, argument, etc. But it is all situated in the devoted life of belief, as a beloved and lately departed BYU–Hawaii English department professor, Lance Chase was known to tell his students, “Education is an Act of Worship” (Peterson, 2009).

**Courses.** BYU–Hawaii classes can be understood as individuals interacting within an established spiritual tradition. The aspect of personal caring is evident in the respect that students and teachers have towards each other. I used the three ENG 101 classes I taught at 7 a.m., 8 a.m., and 2 p.m. as my data sources. In my role as the class teacher, I collected the students’ essays and journals online and met with students in writing conferences, which were recorded and transcribed, enabling me to see how the themes of core values, higher aspects, and consciousness emerged. Students trusted me and put themselves into their class participation, interactions, journals, and essays.

**Conferences.** A central aspect to the “Writing the True Self” method is holding writing conferences with students. With my particular syllabus, it is necessary to coordinate the mass of 80 mandatory office appointments four times throughout the semester. There was plenty of time in my schedule, because I was required to have five office hours per week. Instead of scheduling meeting throughout the units, I met with students at the end of each unit, when they had some writing already finished and were motivated to finish their essays. I essentially took a vacation from office conferences during most of the course, but cancelled the Thursday and Friday classes subsequent to the Monday due dates. On those two days, I held two 10-hour office conference marathons: 40 students per day, 15-minute sessions. It was not possible to reduce this to 10 minutes, in most circumstances. I personally prefer the frenetic rush of this schedule to spacing out appointments more judiciously.

## **Participants**

**Population.** The population at BYU–Hawaii has a profound ideological unity despite varied cultural backgrounds, largely owing to the consistency of the LDS Church worldwide in promoting spiritual and humanistic development. Most freshmen desire the opportunity to explore who they are and take pride in their work. Inside the faith community of Latter-day Saints, emphasis is placed on personal accountability and depth of conviction, especially as students begin their independent lives. Most students are 18-22, and all of them are pursuing their first degree. They reject the frenetic college “party” lifestyle with its nihilism, laziness, and excess. These students have established personal meanings through their involvement in church, and are reminded of their commitments to them through ritual and observances, so they have few of these otherwise common, self-destructive tendencies. They are, however, coping with late adolescence and adopting adult roles and values, especially involving romance and courtship.

Other problems my students faced were anomie, restlessness, and apathy, and the idea of writing helping to resolve these problems was intriguing to them. The students live near campus in a global community, sometimes representing 15 nationalities and cultures in one classroom. Many of these students had sophisticated and complex things to say about literature, so class discussions were enlightening. The dynamism inherent in this population added considerable depth to this study.

**Recruitment.** As mentioned above, in fall 2008 I taught three sections of English 101, the first half of the required freshman composition component. After the first week, a colleague handed out forms for my students to self-elect to participate in the research. Sixteen elected to participate, so I did not narrow the subject pool initially. According to the student demographic report, created by the BYU–Hawaii office of Instructional Review, a representative sample would be 2 Pacific Islanders, 2 Hawaiians, 4 Americans, and 4 Asians (2/2/4/4). The total percentage of male students is 44%. Statistically, only 4% of BYUH students are non-LDS, so there are no non-LDS students in the study. Insofar as part of the study intends to see the effect of LDS culture on the uptake of curriculum, it would not be appropriate.

Thanks to the thorough institutional review process, I had an elaborate scheme for finding a representative sample from the many who would volunteer for this study. It involved shuffling the volunteer forms to remove any seating bias, beginning with the first class and choosing the first four students who volunteered from each class, skipping a volunteer only if the quota was reached for their demographic. This did not work because only three people volunteered from my 7 AM class and three from my 8 AM class. Ten people volunteered in my 3 PM class. Of these 16 participants, I excluded four in order to achieve the 7-5 female-male (.42) ratio in my sample. All of them were women from the US, which reduction also made the sample

representative of BYUH's diverse student body. There is one Pacific Islander, an Australian, two Hawaiians, four Americans, one European, and three Asians. One of the Hawaiians is of Asian lineage and the Australian is a Pacific Island dancer, so I see this as meeting the quota for each of those categories. Those were the only people who volunteered, so I consider this representative sample exceptionally fortuitous and believe that it increases the research reliability while remaining true to the study's original intent. At the end of the semester, an IRB-required "Participant Debriefing" form was provided to the students. Because nothing was withheld from students as part of their participation, this form simply repeated information from the recruitment form.

I took measures to avoid perception of favoritism or bias. For this reason, I did not notify the students which of them were selected for study until after the semester was over. This was withheld because I did not want it to become a factor in their class participation and I wanted to avoid the situation where a student might feel entitled to a higher grade. In this way, they did not feel singled out to do anything more than normally expected. I recorded the office visits of all students who self-elected to participate, to maintain the confidentiality of the participant's identities. I only retained the recorded information of focal students.

**Secondary exclusion.** Although the participant pool was exceptionally diverse, in the end I had to exclude five more students in order to finish the dissertation in a timely manner. Because I had representative students in each of the major effects, I decided to stop writing about the rest of the participants in the minor portrait pool. There was something compelling and important about each of them, but I had used up all of my time on students for which I had strong initial impressions. I still consider these students' interactions as part of the sample, and I intend to develop their portraits completely and incorporate them into the book form of this dissertation.

## **Data**

In my own practice, a holistic sense of students comes through many channels. So I gathered a variety of data that I believed could be compiled into a correct, coherent picture of a student's development. The written data were final versions of essays, student journals, and transcripts of the audio recordings of student-teacher writing conferences. Essays indicated final formulations of ideas while journals showed connections with daily experiences. Conferences regarded how the student's life related to the theme unit and paper. Although I initially planned to write in an instructor's logbook and follow-up with interviews with focal students, this did not occur.

**Final versions of student essays.** For the purpose of this study, I read final versions of two student papers, the song and belief essays. The student's song analyses usually pointed in the direction of their core belief papers. I read these papers as they handed them in through the Blackboard website, assigning grades and giving feedback. As I looked back on these essays, I primarily focused on in-depth reading. Through the voiced passages, I saw individual growth, experience, and truths.

**Student journals.** The second source of student output was their journals, approximately 25 pages each. I wanted to see some effect of the course materials, as well as allow students to freewrite. I set up folders online where students were expected to write their feelings in a post-class reflection. Entries were auto-graded for completion and the compiled versions were turned in at the end of the class. I used the journal entries only if the conference indicated that they related to one of the two papers. If an idea was unsubstantiated in other student writing, it did not appear in a portrait. The final papers and my recollection of their course participation provided plenty of pertinent material, so the journals were used very rarely.

**Audio records: Student-teacher conferences.** As mentioned previously, I used conferences as part of the general teaching method for the entire class, but I also utilized them with the participants in order to provide an audio record of the students' writing agendas. People often say much more than they mean to say, and communicate far more directly than in writing. These were to be 10- to 30-minute writing conferences, held with each student at the end of every unit before papers were due. With 16 volunteers, the total corpus of recordings was several hours, but I only oriented to the focal students. These discussions allowed me to give final directions and to hear what the students really thought about their topic. The transcripts generated from these audio recordings provided substantial evidence to the effect of the course. In fact, they had a far greater impact than was initially considered.

## **Analysis**

**Preparation of case studies.** My mission in this project was to discover what really went on inside the students, in the class, and how they felt about the growth they experienced. So I wanted an overall image of progress based on data. I believe that I found this image because I have dealt with people in a servant capacity for a long time, through my adult life as a missionary and as a teacher. Because I am casual and humorous, my students enjoyed interacting with me. I could break through their barriers as they allowed me to know them more honestly. I helped them to describe important things from their lives in specific ways. I invited them to explore their identity, and I did not betray confidences.

Each element of the case study images was tied to the treatment. I interpreted the data sources using grounded theory and relying on my sense of how the students wrote their true selves. I kept in mind what the students seemed to be going through in their lives, attempting to see through the surface issues and find a meaningful vision of their course progress. In writing

the case study portraits, I created a coherent story from the information I received about them in their song and belief essays, and which I clarified in the office conferences. If a passage was primarily informational, it could be used as introductory matter for a portrait, while if it was voiced and powerful, it could be used as proof of the student's development.

**Primary aspect of methodology.** The primary aspect of my methodology was "Participant as Ally" as part of essentialist portraiture. I used my subjective understanding to select important fragments from the student work that had "Real Voice," and then discussed them in terms of larger issues and relevant contexts. I looked at the data, motivated to "see the nature and essence of the phenomenon under study appearing in the experience and consciousness of each participant," and to "obtain more general insights regarding the phenomenon by trying to see an essence when looking across cases" (Witz, Goodwin, Hart, & Thomas, 2001). I tried to have a specific image or essence of student development with the curricular philosophy, providing insights into each student's conceptualization of their writing task, personal beliefs, relationship with me, and background. Although it was important to understand the students' *past* experiences, the essentialist portraiture methodology directed their use to express something about students as they were *in that moment*.

This "Participant as Ally" method goes deeper, even to the core of my personal teaching philosophy, which is a total respect and reverence for students trying to find the true aspects of their character. I am similarly moved by the desire to help the students achieve unity in meaning, because they should have something they can feel proud of. For this reason, when I am in a conference with students, I tread very lightly when I have a different interpretation of something for which they have established a meaning. Students are at the center of their respective work, and questioning their definitions or premises tends to confound their meaning and frustrate them

personally. For these reasons, knowing when to intercede goes to the heart of the teacher-student relationship. I will intervene if their characterizations are flawed or if the interpretation has other internal inconsistencies, but only when they are harmful to the goal that was determined by the student in the essay. One must consider the desire in each essay and weigh the consequences. An opposing viewpoint could be interesting, but the issue of relevance becomes important—should a student leave the office conflicted or inspired?

As I wrote the case portraits, the possibility of causing confusion and other harm was a primary reason why I stayed away from criticizing and analyzing students and their behavior. Instead, I began from a belief perspective, constructing case study narratives of how students wrote towards their true selves. In the write-up, I evoked each student's home culture and life story in my discussion. Each of the six primary portraits is approximately 20 pages, rich, dynamic records of holistic, fundamental involvement and development. The minor portrait is seven pages, comprising a single real insight into a character. Four non-portrayed participants were briefly profiled with some general comments. In doing this, I assumed a lot of freedom in evaluating student progress and relating it to others. Safety being a primary concern in writing the true self, I respected and paid close attention to the beauty and unity in each participant.

## **Timeline**

This study took place in the fall semester, 2008. On August 29, students began attending class, and the end of the course was December 10, when I graded the final research papers and assigned a grade for the students. I used my initial readings and class interaction as the basis for my first impressions. I continued to analyze the data from 2009-2011, finishing this draft in mid-December, 2011. The final version of this document was completed in mid-March, 2012.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Portraits of Participants**

Of the 16 students who had volunteered to participate in the study, I made seven written portraits, six large and one small, of those subjects that were compelling. Essentialist Portraiture has no particular method for choosing one subject over another, except that the researcher must feel an essence of the participant. Some of the subjects I wrote about initially seemed resistant but were actually quite interesting upon further examination. The amount of writing dedicated to each student is based largely on the amount of data I had for each one. For instance, the subject in the small portrait simply did not speak very much.

Four young American women were removed from consideration in the study, in part to make the sample representative of the BYUH demographics. But the main reason for their exclusion was that they each were experiencing something that made it difficult for them to commit to the class, which I did not know at the outset of the course, and which was actually difficult to determine. Their character states varied widely, but something common interfered with writing their true selves. It is a major aspect of the college environment, relating to one extent or another to several participants.

These four participants, Ilsa, Linda, Justine, and Holly were all too distracted by love relationships to deeply engage in writing the true self. All of them were 18 years old, and love was a primary concern of theirs. These subjects could not fully commit because they were emotionally involved in other things. They took the class seriously and were active on this level, but they played out the scenarios mostly as a writing exercise. Because they passed the class with A's and wrote in a variety of genres, I feel that they did learn to write better. They saw some

benefit from the methodology, having lively, voiced moments in their writing. They seemed too busy or did not otherwise have resources to make a commitment to the course philosophy.

Romantic love and longing for a mate affected each of these students in different ways according to different stages of their love relationships. Justine was a child of divorced parents, a young woman saddened by her first break-up and still coming to terms with her feelings. Holly was an introverted, working-class woman who was culture-shocked by Hawaii, undergoing significant changes without her support network, and not dating anyone. Linda was above average in looks and seemed casually interested in dating, but mostly in making friends. Ilsa was most involved of the four, having a wealthy boyfriend who flew her to the mainland every other weekend, but she was putting off engagement. Without diagnosing this any further, a .44 male-female ratio at BYUH means that at least 12% of unmarried women are either not in love or in unrequited love. There is a lot more to all of their stories, none of which is related to the coursework or my class.

I mentioned that it was difficult to track down this emergent category, which is in part speculative, because some students mentioned it as they discussed their song essay, but others never did, and it certainly was not my place to ask. Nevertheless, this youthful searching for love and companionship is expected to greater or lesser degree in all of the unmarried participants. College is, after all, the place where intelligent people find a suitable spouse. Whereas in other contexts, education involves putting family “on hold,” at BYUH students want to have it all—job, school, family, friends. Romance is certainly important to them, not only because the pool of potential spouses is bigger and more diverse than at home, but also because they are commitment-minded. However, because the institutional and LDS contexts are rather formal and because the vast majority of them were brand new to the university, dating life was not a topic of

discussion. Most of them in those first few weeks of school would not have had much of a chance to even chat privately, much less date.

### **Introduction to the Portraitees**

The participants who were chosen as portraitees had some type of shift occurring in each of them, and the intent of each portrait is to describe the shape and tenor of that shift. The shift students underwent ranged from significant to fundamental. The six participants who underwent substantial, fundamental change were described in major portraits consisting of 15-24 pages, which have true depth and full breadth. I became aware of a few of these shifts through the process of teaching, conferencing with, and analyzing the writing of these students. The student who only experienced one or two significant effects was described in the minor portrait of seven pages. She had something that at least caught my eye, and I could show an insight into her. In most cases, I discovered the shifts in participants after the course was completed, and the major and minor portraits are organized in the order that the participants began to make sense to me.

The seven portraits have an objective organization and feeling about them that facilitates reading and comprehension. The first three major portraits regard participants who responded to the curricular invitation to write their true selves by describing how they re-established a spiritual self after being hurt by elitist peers, other women in the church, and an ex-boyfriend. The next three students wrote their true selves as they tapped into their voice and vision to overcome a gaming addiction, chronic depression, and homesickness. The minor portrait is about a young person utilizing the course assignments to dispel her fears. This compelling series spans a whole spectrum of common issues as well as establish some incredibly detailed records of participant struggles and concerns.

Each participant is featured in a personal portrait, from my earliest impressions in class through the first two essays and subsequent office conferences. The portrait introduces each as an individual, with distinct mannerisms, style, and class interactions. Information is taken from the other data sources to fill in some of the backstory of the participant, and some explanation of relevant contexts and themes is given.

### **The Major Portraits: Curricular Focus Helps Re-Establish Spiritual Self**

For the first three students, a common theme emerged—past hurt that affected their sense of individual worth. All three of them are outwardly very confident, and it bothered them that they were still carrying the pain, but they became determined to deal with it. Each extended forgiveness and a deeper truth helped them to be at peace.

#### **Roman**

**Kamehameha vs. Ko’olau Loa.** In his childhood and early teen years, Roman experienced the conflict between two very different cultures. For his first eight years, he was raised by family, church, school, and friends in the rural Ko’olau Loa District of O’ahu. At age 9, one variable changed—he began attending King Kamehameha School, an elite, all-inclusive K-12 private school for Native Hawaiians. He went there until high school, when he was expelled, enrolling later that year at Kahuku High, the unified public school for Ko’olau Loa District, where he still lives. Roman feels at home here, and in this context, he has made all of the important decisions in his life so far.

The Ko’olau Loa District is a rural area located on the opposite side of the island from the City of Honolulu, both physically and culturally. The last monarch of Hawaii, Queen Liliuokalani said that she saw in that place a reflection and rebirth of original Hawaiian culture.

On the windward side of O'ahu, it consists of Ka'a'awa, Punalu'u, Hau'ula, La'ie, Kahuku, and Pupukea. Long before these towns existed, in the early 1840's, an LDS missionary purchased 6,000 acres in this region and governments have ignored it ever since, except when they started taxing beach parties, which stopped tourists from "Going to the Hukilau." The Polynesian Cultural Center's fearless Tongan fire-knife throwers, dynamic Samoan drummers, and hip-swaying Tahitian dancers perform in La'ie, a town that has never received public funds for paved roads or modern sewage systems. Kahuku, with its long-abandoned sugar mill and depressed economy, is still the Pride of the North Shore. Its high school leaves a mark on those who spend their "glory days" there, and its highly successful Red Raiders sports teams bring Ko'olau Loa *Ohanas* (families) together to celebrate victories.

If football and the physical body is king over Kahuku and Ko'olau Loa, then academics and the intellectual mind is lord at the Kamehameha School for Boys in Honolulu. On an island where only 13% of *Kama`aina* (locals) attend college, this school serves over 5,500 native Hawaiian students. Established in 1887 by a member of the Hawaiian royal family, and with an endowment greater than Brown, Dartmouth, and Johns Hopkins Universities combined (2008 figures), this school has resisted white culture for over a century, admitting only two non-Hawaiians since 1965. The school administration recruits from throughout the state, preparing children to *'Imi na 'auao* (seek enlightenment). Before daybreak on cool mornings, busses skirt the perimeter roads of O'ahu, conveying children in bright blue uniforms to class. With extracurricular activities followed by a long bus ride, many students arrive home at twilight. Educated Hawaiians believe attendees of this school are also respecting and embracing their mother culture, in part through years of mandatory language instruction. Televised graduation

ceremonies at Kamehameha are full of ceremony, native chants, and bright class presidents shouting belligerent things fluently in the tongue of their ancestors.

The more one discovers about Ko'olau Loa and Kamehameha, the more stark the differences become. In Roman's hometown, native Hawaiians live by the ocean where they gather crabs for dinner. Children practice fishing in the storm drains, and run to the corner market to buy nickel candy. Most of the residents have lived in the area for many years, through economic prosperity and turmoil. Many of the homes were built by the people living in them, often three generations living in one household. This lifestyle resembles that of many other rural places, but in Ko'olau Loa this traditional way of life sets it apart even from the rest of the island. Perhaps most significantly, between Ko'olau Loa and Kamehameha, there are conflicting conceptions of the role of Hawaiians in the world. Kamehameha prepares students to become global citizens, and after they succeed elsewhere, they are expected to return and serve their Hawaiian people. In Ko'olau Loa, *Ohana* (family) is everything, and success is an immaterial side-effect of the right way to live. No one cares if residents wash or fix their cars, because a vehicle is not a reflection of who a person is; it is just a thing to move your *Ohana* away from home and back again. In the community, children feel such family unity that they address even unknown adults as "Uncle!" or "Auntie!" without bothering with names.

Ko'olau Loa and Kamehameha come into clear contrast in Roman's life, as he discussed it in his belief essay. When he was nine years old, Roman's strong feeling of connection to his *Ohana* could not be overcome by the good intentions of his sponsoring school.

In the fourth grade I was accepted to one of the elite private schools on my island. Sure, it was a great opportunity and my parents were pleased but I didn't feel excited for this opportunity at all. Going to a private school meant I had to leave behind my public school friends that I so adored and get my education in that city on the other side of the island.

When it was time, my parents dropped me off at the bus stop so that I could go to school. It was six 'o'clock in the morning, the sun had not yet risen and the only people around me were a few other kids who I did not know waiting for the bus too. The bus ride was long and hard on me. On the way to my first day of school I cried all the way there, getting my brand new royal blue uniform wet with tears.

Arriving at this new school was a shocker. Everything was so nice, the kids were all well behaved and there were new computers in every room. I didn't even need school supplies because everything was provided for me including lunch and snacks. I had never felt so misplaced and spoiled in my life. This is because at that time of my life I was the country boy who played it a little rough and didn't care for the worldly toys that everyone else had. The cloths [sic] on my back were enough for me and here I was; at this new school with new cloths [sic], and new shoes, which was a new thing for me since I was used to just running around the neighborhood barefoot. (*Belief Essay*, p. 2)

This feeling of abundance resonated little with Roman, who had no cares for what he wore, and even now does not spell "clothes" properly. This "country boy who played it a little rough and didn't care for the worldly toys that everyone else had," was overwhelmed by this material culture, especially the shift from "barefoot" to "new shoes." His free world was being enclosed by an overwhelming presence. Roman knew that his *Ohana* felt like him, easy-going and fun and he recognized when something felt totally different from him. He explained this conflict,

When I was in private school, I couldn't be myself. Over there it's always like, "worldly things," and over here it's like, in elementary school, I'd just run. You just go to play and run with bare feet and go home with ripped shirts. (*Transcripts*, p. 4)

The rural lifestyle that Roman was used to sharply contrasted with the culture at Kamehameha School. The term "worldly things" is significant, referring not only to material objects like "cloths" and shoes, but also the connection to them. The "well-behaved kids" showed Roman that "being [him]self" was inappropriate, so this new school had definite rules of conduct. It's also significant that when Roman talks about home, not only does he shift out of individual voice, from "I'd just run" to "you just go to play," bringing me into his experience, but also shifting to plural, not running "barefoot" with a "ripped shirt," but "with bare feet" and

“ripped shirts.” Assumed in his play is a community made up of his friends, the pure feeling of connection with his *Ohana*.

I have all of my friends here from when I was little and I had to go to this new school and kids are different. They act different. And I thought, “I don’t want to go to this school.” Every year, the new school year would start and I would just cry and tell my mom like, “I don’t want to go back there!” . . . My mom was like, “No you’re still gonna go over there. I don’t care what you say!” (*Transcripts*, p. 2)

Because Roman went home on weekends, he did not lose “all of [his] friends here from when [he] was little,” so every Monday, he was reminded how the private school “kids [were] different” and how “they act[ed] different.” On a larger scale, “every year,” when summer vacation in Hau’ula ended and “the new school year would start,” culture shock began all over again, causing Roman to “just cry.” Although he does not provide concrete details, one can imagine Roman and his rascally friends on a hot July afternoon “running with bare feet,” jumping off footbridges into creeks, and sneaking around closed construction sites.

Given his idealized reality, it makes sense that Roman did not want to “go back there.” Roman’s mother had a typical response to his childhood rebellion, “I don’t care what you say!” because she truly believed she was right. So he still had to “go over there,” to “that city on the other side of the island.” (*Belief Essay*, p. 3) Despite his mother’s insistence that he attend, Kamehameha School never became a real place for him.

But Roman “was able to accept this new chapter in [his] life and pursue [his] education career during elementary and middle school through the private route.” (*Belief Essay*, p. 2) Even the tone of Roman’s writing shifts as he discusses academic culture, adopting its rhetoric that school is a career to be pursued, not a place “you just go to play and run with bare feet and go home with ripped shirts.” Roman did not, however disassociate from his background, which eventually became a major conflict.

When high school hit, the huge commitment of time away from home and the “different lifestyle” (*Belief Essay*, p. 3) of his Kam-school peers caused Roman to feel “perplex[ed],” “regret,” “hardship,” “stressed,” and eventually “tortured.” (*Belief Essay*, p. 2) Therefore, against the wishes of his parents and on his very own, Roman revolted.

I had to go through drastic measures to direct myself into the “happy” path. In fact, I had to neglect doing homework, accumulate numerous detentions and refuse to go to school just to get out of the private school life. Most people would think I was throwing away the best education and opportunities possible but I was not happy and that made up the whole difference to me. (*Belief Essay*, p. 2)

These tactics paid off and he was expelled. When he enrolled at Kahuku High later that year, his school day went from 15 hours starting at 5 AM to a normal seven-hour routine. Roman spent his teens playing Red Raider football, baseball, and soccer. He “was happily able to finish [his] high school career with a smile on [his] face.” (*Belief Essay*, p. 4) Gaining a deeper understanding of the repercussions that this shift in existential reality had and would have on his life was the primary effect on Roman of his writing and conferencing as my student.

This gives a sense of the sort of person that Roman was at the beginning of the class, and in his song essay, this image deepens and becomes much more complex. An adult Roman becomes visible, one familiar with life and sensitive issues. Particularly, he connects with conscientious rap icon and hip/hop mogul Tupac Shakur (1971-1996). Roman finds the issues that Shakur addresses very familiar, albeit in different intensities based on the situation in Ko’olau Loa, and it is a normal extension of his current belief system to discuss them at this level.

As in all first-hand accounts, and especially in the stories that my students told me, Roman disclosed many important things fully while leaving out other things he did not consider relevant. The focus of my dissertation is not an investigative inquest into all possibly pertinent

aspects of Roman's past, but rather how he explored his true self through writing. People change over time, embracing or rejecting certain aspects of their past, and similarly Roman's "realization" or "making real" of himself in writing has a definite value orientation, a criteria according to which certain things would be shared and others would be left behind. In Roman, his childhood has a beautiful, almost divine aura, and it communicates to him always a sense of the way things were as being very closely associated with the way things should be. Upon reading Roman's song paper, one sees images of his ideals imposed upon an external reality. These images bring the picture of Roman into sharper view: "Standing up," "reaching out," and "staying true."

**Roman/ 2Pac community advocacy.**

*Standing up.* Roman understands Tupac because they both are voices in their communities speaking to specific problems and trying to affect them in a real way. Tupac Shakur died some time ago, but he still lives on because he addressed serious social problems that threaten to disintegrate the community. While many rap artists rely upon "magical thinking," denying reality and focusing on wish fulfillment, Shakur does not follow this marketing strategy. Because it embraces realities and the ambiguity of life, Shakur's music has larger significance for many in the black community. His song "Changes" has a message of anti-establishment rage and a feeling of individual weakness against social problems. It is not totally clear what he means by the last lines, "Some things will never change." It may be the struggle of individuals to effect what seems inevitable. Roman begins with this idea because it reflects his own journey.

I have gained much of my respect for Tupac because of his straightforwardness and this is one of my key reasons for admiring the song "Changes." Artists today and throughout time are hesitant to go into the public and speak their mind because of the persecution and criticism that may follow their remarks. Tupac on the contrary would say what needs to be said not because he was naïve or stubborn but because he believed that there needs

to be change in this world and that he could help make this change through his rap music. (*Song Essay*, p. 1)

Roman had transferred back to his high school, standing up for his home, and was not “hesitant to . . . speak [his] mind” in the face of “persecution and criticism” from family. He had said “what need[ed] to be said” in order to leave the private school life. Roman had “believed that there needs to be change in [his] world,” and he took conscionable actions to make that change happen. What he admires in himself as “straightforwardness” was perceived as “naïve or stubborn” by counselors. For these reasons, Roman’s voice resonates in Tupac.

***Reaching out.*** Roman identifies so strongly with the ethos of Ko’olau Loa that he has very strong opinions about the way things should be, and when his culture is threatened by social problems, he cannot idly stand by. Due in part to economic reasons, but also because of normal human frailty and hypocrisy, the culture of Ko’olau Loa is in decline. The culture of drug abuse tries to associate marijuana with the easy-going feeling that is at the heart of Ko’olau Loa, replacing the support of extended family with a focus on self-indulgence. Nevertheless, Roman resisted this shift, lamenting the degradation of his home as addiction took hold of many friends. Just as Tupac says, “more black than white is smokin' crack tonight,” Roman estimates that over half of Kahuku High-schoolers have tried marijuana.

I have witnessed firsthand why marijuana changes people’s lives. Many of my friends would often bum money and skip meals so they could buy drugs, and because they smoked too much, many of them became too unintelligent to keep up with their schoolwork. I also noticed that it was hard for many of them to focus on anything else besides weed, because the addiction became too strong for them to handle and they couldn’t start or end the day without getting a high. That would mean that depending on how heavy their drug use was, they would spend ten to forty dollars daily on their addiction. Because of drugs, many of my friends are now bums living at home and too involved in drugs and their little “gangs” to do anything else with their lives. (*Song Essay*, p. 3)

In marked contrast, Roman values “The priceless feeling that you get after each day of work when you look at the jobsite and say to yourself, “I helped do that.” (*Belief Essay*, p. 5). How difficult it must be for a hard worker like Roman to reach out to friends who would belittle his efforts! It also takes effort for Roman to give an intelligent overview of their issues, being engaged without becoming involved in the extremes. Roman judges that although marijuana is a “generally mild drug,” his pot-smoking buddies have become addicted to their own human natures, succumbing to physical laziness, mental weakness, and crime (*Song Essay*, p. 3). The laid-back lifestyle that makes Ko’olau Loa District such a pleasant break from the bustle and churn of congested, over-run Honolulu made it a prime target for marijuana’s apathetic effects.

*Staying true.* Roman always takes a careful attitude when it comes to the important issues in life, striving for honesty especially regarding his culture and heritage. Tupac diagnosed racism as a significant social problem, especially in the inner city, but race is a different issue in Ko’olau Loa. Whites are the minority, and this part of Hawaii belongs to Hawaiians. Roman’s honesty, dusky good looks, and baritone local accent always got him out of traffic tickets, so he was thankful to be “local,” but he still took preferential treatment cautiously. “Some Hawaiians have developed disgust for white people” because of the American colonization of Hawaii (*Song Essay*, 2), but Roman does not identify with them. He sees that racial prejudice leads to injustice, and although Roman has never been in a gang, he offers this overview:

Polynesians may seem as one, but racism also plays a big role on the people of Polynesia. . . . I have noticed that many of these [racist] acts are usually gang related. For example, at the high school that I went to there are many gangs and the major ones are divided between races. . . . At my high school, the gangs were spread out on campus. The left side of the cafeteria is where the TCG’s hang out. They are made up of Tongans and TCG stands for Tongan Crip Gang. Blue is their color. On the right side of the cafeteria is where the La’ie Boys hang out. The La’ie Boys are usually Samoan and their color is red. The NSB’s hang out on the lawn. NSB stands for North Shore Boys but they have no color. The NSB’s are made up of Caucasians. The last two gangs are the Hau’ula Boys who claim H-Building and the Kahuku Boys who claim A-Building. These gangs have no

color but are made up of Hawaiians and mixed blood. These gangs are usually friendly and respect each other's "territory" but at times it may get out of hand and some fistfights may break out to settle matters. As you can see, racism is everywhere. Even in the small islands of Hawaii. (*Song Essay*, p. 5)

Gangs come across as the guardians of an ideal, but they are a corruption of and the antithesis of *Ohana*. Roman stays true to his family even when he disagrees with them, and he refuses to join with people who are lying to each other about the reasons for their problems. Instead of shared values and sacrifice for love, gang members share vices and blame others out of hate. As Tupac put it, the "wasted" develop "misplaced hatred" that "makes disgrace for races." Although Roman has seen it happen in his neighborhood, he manages to stay engaged.

One passage from "Changes" resonates so much within Roman that even though he did not quote from it or write about it in his paper, one can see his life story superimposed on the text:

*Learn to see me as a brother  
Instead of two distant strangers.  
And that's how it's supposed to be.  
How can the Devil take a brother if he's close to me?  
I'd love to go back to when we played as kids,  
But things change, and that's the way it is.*

Roman manages to "stay true" in an environment of drugs, hatred, and violence. Inside the context of moral choices and desires, this passage is an extension of the family struggles in Roman's life and the need for mutual support. Reflecting this desire, Roman calls himself a "souljah," following Shakur's maxim, "Wars come and go, but my souljahs stay eternal." This misspelling of "soldier" has two aspects, being faithful to his friends and turning his "soul" in loyalty to "Jah" or God. In this sense, the primary struggle is a spiritual battle of conscience, so Roman has not abandoned his "wasted" friends, and they enrich and give meaning to his life.

The song essay is valuable for its clarity of insight as Roman responds to Tupac's "blunt, thought-provoking, disturbing" call to "take the evil out [of] the people." From the above evidence regarding the pre-existing integration of themes from Tupac's music in Roman's consciousness, it is reasonable to assume that Roman experienced no significant personal change in the song paper. His life negotiating the conflict between different cultures and conceptions of Hawaii had infused within him an internal "litmus test" for honesty, so "Changes" was easy for him to read. As directed by the assignment, as well as by his self-concept as a person of integrity, Roman relates to the issues of his favorite song within the context of his life, revealing a grounded perspective on existential realities that indicate great sensitivity to issues in his community. The issues from the song paper were already fully integrated into his true self because of his high school friends. Roman was simply describing a place he already occupied, communicating a concrete, non-emergent reality.

**Growing towards happiness.** Roman had opened up with me about a number of issues, but while discussing these things may have helped me to be his friend, they did not indicate an area of significant growth. The main effect on Roman's perception of life occurred in his belief essay, where he struggled with fundamental conflicts between his two cultures, particularly having to do with happiness. Happiness in Ko'olau Loa comes from the easy-going, self-assured, authentic Hawaiian lifestyle. In the small towns, everyone knows everyone else. There is little automobile traffic in the smaller side streets, which allows easy walking through the neighborhoods. Most locals walk with the flow of traffic, not facing it, perhaps because they do not worry about being hit. What mainlanders call the "hang loose" sign and associate with surfers actually originated with a local man who lost three of his fingers at the Kahuku sugar mill. But he was such a friendly, happy person that everyone started waving at each other with

their three fingers down, which is called “shaka,” out of respect for that man. A place to live and love each other. A beach park to pitch pavilions, have luaus, and camp out in nature. Good fishing and swimming spots. Frequent reunions and family gatherings. These simple things bring happiness.

Happiness in the culture of Ko’olau Loa has very little to do with external measurements of success. According to national benchmarks, public schools in Ko’olau Loa District are not very successful. Well-qualified teachers are put to work educating the 10-15% of students who intend to go to college. For average students, endemic shortages of books and other supplies is a significant hardship. Families with children of average intelligence must explore all available options to improve their learning experience. Roman’s mother understood these problems and her solution was to get him as far away as possible, as soon as possible. To her, the sacrifice of time and energy, over twice that of his peers, was worth it for the long-term outcome of a successful life. When Roman transferred back to Kahuku, she told him he was “gonna throw [his] life away. Throw [his] future away.” (*Transcripts*, p. 3) She believed Roman would not be able to attend college with a Kahuku diploma, and differences in teacher preparation, per-student funding, educational ideology, and prestige could be seen as evidence of this. She thought that his success in life was not a realistic goal without extreme measures.

The preceding discussion has identified Roman as he was before he came to the class. What follows is a description of the growth that occurred in Roman as a result of composing meaningful, personal prose in his belief essay draft, the subsequent conference, and the final essay. This was the primary effect of writing his true self. Roman was a good candidate for this type of growth because of the conflicting definitions of success and happiness that emerged from his two cultures. The process of writing his beliefs got into his mind and heart, evoking a deeper

reality with which he had not yet come to complete terms, and ideas of which he had not yet grasped the magnitude. The means whereby Roman progressed through this writing process can be described as five formulations of his thesis. The first two are found in his draft, the second two emerge from his conference, and the fifth formulation appears in his final paper, along with the others integrated in that document.

**Formulation one.** Roman attempted in his belief essay to discuss his internal conflict of cultures and philosophies as an aspect of goal making. In the draft, “Goals of a Lifetime,” he asserts that he “feels obligated” to be at school or work, but he must choose how to handle it (Formulation one).

We control the manner in which we handle our lives for the better or the worse. I do not have to be sad, mad, or angry but I choose to be. In this instance I could also choose to be happy, fun, and delighted. I control my own emotions and how I live my life. (*Belief Essay Draft*, p. 1)

Roman here is reflecting on the way in which he took control of the situation when he decided to change schools. He “d[id] not have to be sad, mad, or angry,” emotions which had previously compromised his ability to make the right choice. For Roman, “choos[ing] to be happy, fun, and delighted” enabled him to “handle [his] life for the better.” “Handling” has meant for him both adapting to a new circumstance and taking control of it. He adapted to Kamehameha school and “beg[a]n to accept this new chapter in [his] life” until he eventually thought, “everything was fine.” (*Belief Essay Draft*, p. 2) However, this was only after significant struggle.

In the fourth grade I was accepted to one of the elite private schools on my island. Sure it was a great opportunity and my parents were pleased but I didn’t feel excited for this opportunity at all. Going to a private school meant I had to leave behind my public school friends that I adored and get my education in the city on the other side of the island. Soon it was time for me to go to school and because my new school had their own bus system that goes around the island my parents dropped me off at the bus stop so I could go to school. It was six ‘o’clock in the morning,

the sun had not yet risen and the only people around me were a few other kids who I did not know waiting for the bus too. The bus ride was long and hard on me. On the way to my first day of school I cried all the way there, getting my brand new royal blue uniform wet with tears. (*Belief Essay Draft*, p. 2)

Even before Roman set foot in the school, he had a feeling that it was the wrong place for him to be. An intense feeling of “this is not me” welled up within him. In Roman’s world, tough boys with torn shirts who play rough do not cry. After friends, family, and culture faded away, and he was thrust into the company of strangers, he experienced intense sadness. When he reflected upon his problems later, he realized he would have to stand up for himself.

**Formulation two.** Roman’s basic belief in individual choice had enabled him to adapt, but at significant personal cost that eventually became unacceptable. Throughout his time in private school, especially on the long bus rides home, Roman had thought a lot about how he could change his life, and felt in his heart what the desired outcome of his life should be.

(Formulation two):

My two greatest goals in life are to be happy and successful. It is important for me to be happy because when you’re not, it is exceptionally easy to make regretful decisions and by being happy it is much easier to live life and reflect on the positive. I am also exceedingly zealous to be successful in life because I want to raise a big family and don’t want to cut them short of anything because of my financial welfare. (*Belief Essay Draft*, p. 3)

Roman wanted things to be the same, only better. He wanted happiness that he remembered from his early childhood, so that he could “live life and reflect on the positive.” He also wanted a feeling of love in abundance, “to raise a big family” without “cut[ing] them short of anything.” He believed that both of these things were achievable and he was working towards them. Happiness enabled him to “reflect on the positive,” “make [good] decisions,” and “live life,” which were major attributes of Roman’s “exceeding zeal” for “success in life.” Thus,

although they are initially presented as co-equal, first comes happiness and then success can be found later.

Roman looked forward to personal change because he believed that in his future was a big Ko'olau Loa-style *Ohana*, which required him to reconcile happiness and success. Although Roman had chosen to be happy in some very sad situations, being at home with friends made him happy. Self-derived, situation-independent happiness enabled him to see how natural, situation-reliant happiness could be achieved.

**Formulation three.** When we later met together in my office, I could tell that something was missing for Roman. I asked how the paper was coming along and he acknowledged difficulty finding the conceptual center of his paper. After I asked him directly what he was actually trying to say, he replied the following (formulation three).

What I'm trying to say is, like when you feel strongly about something and, like you set out to do it, if you, like stick to it and you follow through with it then, like everything will be okay. And if you feel it's right for you, don't let other people influence what you do. Just stick to what you feel is right and do it. That kind of thing. Like, people are easily influenced by others, people they look up to, or media or whatever. (*Transcripts*, p. 2)

The more Roman talked, the more I sensed conflict within him, because of his body language and his reticent attitude, with "like" tokens indicating insecurity. When he shifted from I/you speech to "people," he was removing himself from the picture. I asked him who tried to influence him, so he talked about his life at the two schools:

You know, have you kind of, felt the school pride around here, since you've been here? Well, it's like a big thing! And like I have all of my friends here from when I was little! And I had to go to this new school, and kids are different. They act different. And I thought, "I don't want to go to this school!" Every year, the new school year would start and I would just cry and tell my mom like, "I don't want to go back there!" (*Transcripts*, p. 2)

He had a crazy schedule, which pushed Roman to make a drastic decision.

My mom was like, “No you’re still gonna go over there, I don’t care what you say.” So I went to my counselor, and my counselor was like, “No you should stay!” And I said, “No, I’m done with this.” And my mom thought pretty much if I don’t go to Kamehameha I’m gonna throw my life away. Throw my future away. Like, for me I knew that my goal was to be happy and successful in life, but I was not happy at all. And I knew that going to a public school it wouldn’t prevent me from being successful or getting into college or anything like that, so I made up my mind that I was just going to go back to, you know, public school again and, you know, as long as I do decent, I’m still gonna get into college. (*Transcripts*, p. 3)

Roman and his mother had not only conflicting definitions of success, but also of the priority of success relative to happiness. I talked through some thoughts, subordinating success to his identity by grounding Roman in his culture. I told Roman that his story was, “having a sense of place. It’s about reaching your goals without sacrificing your identity.” Roman answered,

I think it’s because like, when I went to private school I couldn’t be myself. Over there it’s always like worldly things and over here, it’s like in elementary school you just go to play and run with bare feet and go home with ripped shirts. And over there it’s all nice and neat and it wasn’t me, so I had a hard time fitting in. They have all of the technology and all of the new stuff. And I was kind of like, what’s the big deal, and whatever. (*Transcripts*, p. 4)

Roman did not need things to make him happy and material definitions of success did not interest him. In Ko’olau Loa, natural happiness came from real experiences of friendship and fun. When embraced, these feelings helped make the right choices, which gave him a sense of success. In the foreign culture of Kamehameha, sadness was a price to pay for success in life, as measured by college admissions and a high-paying job. Then the material benefits of an outwardly successful life would lead to happiness. Roman's home represented happiness to him, whereas Kamehameha represented success. He had to distance himself from the material culture of success so that he could experience happiness uncomplicated by measurable criteria.

**Formulation four.** Roman connected happiness with a sense of being in the right place, with the right people, and feeling accepted. To be a success, on the other hand, he always had to push hard and struggle in order to get somewhere else.

I'd have to wake up at five o'clock, catch the bus at six o'clock. Then go to school, go to practice, get home like eight nine o'clock and still gotta do homework. And you gotta do ch(ha)ores, and then you wake up the next morning and you start all over. I was like, "Wow this is too much for me!" You know? I was like I couldn't focus I was so tired and my mom was like, "No, you're still gonna go over there! I don't care what you say." So I went to my counselor, and my counselor was like, "No, you should stay!" And I said, "No, I'm done with this. (*Transcripts*, p. 2)

For so long, Roman had been going non-stop, and never feeling that he actually arrived anywhere significant. I tried putting into words the things I read from Roman's essay about being the right type of person and being in the right place. After I pushed him, Roman said his belief in the following way (formulation four), which would later become an anchor for him.

A sense of belonging. Kind of like . . . Be who you are. Be who you want to be and not what everyone else wants you to be. (*Transcripts*, p. 4)

Roman said "a sense of belonging," which became his new title and which says everything about his Ko'olau Loa childhood and connections. He knew that Kamehameha would never give him the fulfillment that he was missing.

However, in the same moment, Roman was still caught up in the conflicting image of his identity as provided by Kamehameha. He was still struggling to get away from "what everyone else wants [him] to be," and I may have been a member of that group, because I represented the conservative values of education. Regardless, Roman could not get away from his authority figures' expectations of success in order to find the pure aspect of the real thing that would bring him happiness. After his "be who you want to be" retreat into formulation one, I asserted, "But it was connected to this place!" (*Transcripts*, p. 4). He was still thinking about succeeding, so for the next five minutes, I tried to articulate what he meant. This tactic failed to provide results.

*Formulation five.* Roman was thankful that I cared enough about his thoughts to try to help him find the right thing to say, but nothing I said connected with him deeply. I had to stop trying to tell him what to say and remind him that he did not need me to tell him.

I know that you can write. You wrote an amazing essay about Tupac. You wrote really well, and you wrote really convincingly because you wrote about something that you believed in. You have to believe that I want to hear what you have to say. [Um hmm.] I'm not at all convinced that you're a goal-oriented person. [Ha hah (smiles).] I feel like you want to allow things to grow naturally and for it to feel right before you do it. [Yeah.] And that might give you like a hint of what's coming but that hint of what's coming isn't going to overcome your sense of wanting to belong, to feel that it's a part of you, to make a difference today. (*Transcripts*, p. 5)

I had to take the step back, re-establishing our relationship by saying what I knew, not what I could try to figure out. I reassured Roman, "I know that you can write. You wrote an *amazing* essay about Tupac." This recognized and complimented him, implying that he could do it again. Next, I said, "You wrote really well. You wrote really *convincingly* because you were writing about something that you *believed* in." I needed Roman to say what he actually believed, not just something that looked convincing. "You have to *believe* that I want to *hear* what you have to *say*" means that he should put away his shyness and let the text emerge. The connection between author, text, and audience would work if he were honest with me.

Roman should have been feeling confident at that point, but he was not the person who needed convincing: "I'm not at all convinced that you're a goal-oriented person." Roman's nervous laugh and smile showed surprise; In spite of my belief in him, I was saying he did not know how to say what he believed. I tried to break it down without recourse to "goals." "I feel like you want to allow things to grow naturally and for it to feel right before you do it." The moral choice, which Roman associates with motivation, happiness, and action was still his, but his life would unfold naturally. Roman said "Yeah" with a tone of realization. "And that [right feeling] might give you a *hint of what's coming*," an aspect of the future, but tenuous. "But that

hint of what's coming isn't going to overcome your sense of wanting to belong, to feel that it was a part of you, to make a difference today." His need for belonging, authenticity, and daily activity comes first, and the reality emerges from those things, not from a "goal."

Roman responded without hesitation as if he was answering a long-familiar question, "Like you don't know where you're going, but you know you're in the right place now, or you're not" (Formulation five; *Transcripts*, p. 5). I confirmed that this was the right phrase and that he should write it down immediately, which he did. We then concluded our session.

*The new paper.* Roman made some wonderful changes to his essay as a result of our conference. The most significant of these is related to the breakthrough he had in formulation five. This came out almost as a confession—Roman did not really "know" where his life was going in the concrete, cognitive sense that a "goal" implied. But he did "know" in an intuitive, experiential sense, that "knowing" in his heart that had pulled him back home. This brought depth to his discussion.

I am a simple person and all this schooling so far away from my home was affecting me a great deal mentally and emotionally. I thought about this numerous times and I decided for myself that it was no longer worth it for me to continue this any longer. *Most people would think I was throwing away the best education and opportunities possible but I was not happy and that made up the whole difference to me.* I also felt extremely stressed and that I was being affected in a negative way by continuing my life in this fashion. *This was not my scene, nor the place for me to be.* (*Belief Essay Draft/Final*, p. 3)

Roman is nothing close to being a "simple person," but perhaps more specifically, in a world that expects concrete judgments and outcomes from "the best education and opportunities possible" he was intuitive and sensitive in his ways, which enabled him to seek the "happ[iness] that made up the whole difference to me." Moving away from optimistic goals to the happiness of intuitive moral decisions enabled Roman to approach his real motivation. Roman says, "This

was not my scene, nor the place for me to be,” giving due diligence to the real conditions from which his beliefs emerged instead of the conceptualizations of “choices” or “goals.”

Roman took other things we talked about to heart as well, bringing depth and truthfulness to the writing. Roman had come to a deeper appreciation of his belief system, which improved his writing, freeing him from the constraints of old rhetoric that did not explain what he felt. Roman paid tribute to Ko’olau Loa with the title of his essay, the “sense of belonging” which he could not find at the private school. He stopped talking so much about “goals” and began talking about “beliefs,” focusing on happiness without recourse to exterior definitions of success. In his paper, Roman did not explain his return to Ko’olau Loa through the positive-thinking “goal” schema, but through his feelings of home. He wrote about his school experience in much greater depth. It is probably not a coincidence that he also wrote about his work, itself a reflection of his integrated character, building homes for people to live. Whereas earlier he had said, “I control my own emotions and how I live my life,” his final paper suggested prudence and self-examination:

If we aren’t ecstatic and confident with where we are going in life, it’s because we aren’t sure with ourselves. I believe in a sense of belonging because when you have that feeling of closeness and unity with the people around you, we are happy to do things such as work and school. I also believe in being in the right place because when I am I can honestly say, “I don’t know where I’m going but I’m in the right place and I’m happy about it.” Being in the right place makes all the difference because tasks in life may not always be easy but when you have a sense of belonging you know that those around you will be there to support you. (*Belief Essay*, p. 1)

Roman’s “sense of belonging” and knowledge that he is “in the right place” allow him to be close with childhood friends, classmates, and co-workers. But he gives equal weight to the metaphysical aspect of being comfortable with his sense of purpose and self-worth. Because he belongs, he can feel confident about finding success eventually, in its own time.

Because Roman had been focused on “goal” achievement, he discussed his lifetime goals of happiness and success at the conclusion of his essay.

By pursuing my goals and doing my best to achieve them I keep myself on the right track that will never alter. When you have an idea in your mind and you stick to it, it becomes extremely difficult to falter. This is what I did and this is what I do. My beliefs have proven themselves so far and I expect them to for an eternity and beyond. I cannot tell where my goals will take me in the future but I am currently in the right track to be successful and happy in life. (*Belief Essay Draft*, p. 4)

Roman is excessively positivistic here, “the right track that will never alter,” especially because he is usually a humble, albeit fun-loving person. Although he mentions success in the “goal” section, there was no story to prove that it was his goal. After our conference, Roman only talks about one “goal” of happiness, which is not long-term but requires an immediate choice to go down “the happy path.” From then on, he always uses the word “belief.” Whereas originally Roman had tried to find an existing public category and populate it with examples, when he moved away from “goals” he was able to open up about his real feeling of fulfillment at work, which totally transcends “a goal of success.”

I am currently still working in the construction field. My co-workers may do things that we [LDS] consider less than righteous but that is not what matters to me. I enjoy construction and I feel that I have a connection with the people around me. The sense of belonging that I feel is what gets me up at five or six ‘o’clock every morning wanting to go work. I may challenge myself physically every day but the people that surround me make all the difference because at work no matter what the task is we are always laughing and joking with each other. There is also the priceless feeling that you get after each day of work when you look at the jobsite and say to yourself, “I helped do that.” Being in the right place allows me to enjoy what I’m doing and be happy with my life. (*Belief Essay*, p. 5)

Roman finds complete fulfillment in working with a crew of like-minded men to make his home a better place. They do not share his spiritual values, but these men value hard work, giving him a place to feel comfortable and appreciated. His non-judgmental symbiosis with them makes him a great addition to the team. Whereas some construction workers in Hawaii are high-

school dropouts who avoid blueprints and guesstimate measurements, Roman remembers details about every building he has ever worked on and maintains a loyalty to form and craftsmanship. He is a hard-working, trustworthy individual who makes his crew better because of his association with them. Of course, they also have a good influence on him because he needs the people who are his new team, his new friends. It is not clear whether Roman would have been able to discuss this collective aspect of his belief without turning away from individual, goal-oriented dreams.

At the end of Roman's essay, he pulls together the best things he gathered from the whole. He tries to have his cake and eat it too, leading to the strange phrase, "achieve a belief."

By pursuing my beliefs and doing my best to achieve them I keep myself on the right track that will never alter. Anatole France said, "To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe." Beliefs are important in life because without them you're just a leaf floating in a pond with nowhere to go and there is no current or wind to guide you in the right direction. Beliefs give your life meaning and without them it is easy to make the wrong decision. When you have an idea in your mind and you stick to it, it becomes extremely difficult to falter. This is why I believe what I do. My beliefs have proven themselves so far and I expect them to for an eternity and beyond. I cannot tell where my beliefs will take me in the future but I am currently in the right track to be successful and happy in life. I wish that everyone one day will have ambitions to be in the right place where they have a sense of belonging so that may be happy in life. Annie Dillard said, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." I do not have to be sad, mad or angry but I choose to be. In this instance I choose to be happy because that is how I want to live my day and especially how I want to live my life. (*Belief Essay*, p. 5)

Roman here moves into the profound, removing any doubt that "goal" is simply "acting towards a plan." It involved dreams and beliefs, particularly ones that motivated correct decisions. He even puts "a place with a sense of belonging" in the context of "ambitions to be happy in life," which is the real focus of the essay. In this sense, he returns to a focus on desires, goals, making choices, and discovering happiness in life.

Roman had attempted to describe a complex mass of immediate feelings, hopes, desires, beliefs, dreams, and he initially thought that “goals for a lifetime” could cover it all. As it is, the phrase “sense of belonging” does not really do it justice either. I think his essay should be titled, “Choose Today the Path to Happiness” or “Decide Now to be Happy.” It incorporates the idea of making a decision, which is so important in goal setting, as well as the feeling of the present moment, which was what I intended with a focus on place. Happiness can require all sorts of things, like feeling of belonging, having the right friends, doing what you love, making the right decisions, and other issues that were brought up in the essay. He communicates all of those ideas through the stories and sees that he is dedicated to them.

Roman shifted in his high school years to embrace his culture, friendships, sports teams, and values. He mentioned to me later that this shift was also marked by a change in his residence—his mother kicked him out of the house and Roman went to live with his grandparents, who were more traditional and did not share his mother’s vision. He did not give details, but said that he was able to hang out more with his old friends, even the occasional weekend sleepover at a friend’s house, which was never allowed before. He turned from the self-centered, personal achievement at-all-cost attitude that he associated with Kamehameha culture in favor of the Ko’olau Loa community values. He began working construction to rebuild and work on homes in this community, and kept contact with his friends to help them work on their lives, seeking happiness as he did so. This situation was ripe with potential, and Roman has made better sense of the important aspects of it, through his writing in this course.

Roman writes his true self, evoking deep feelings within him and causing him to think about his past. He is in the process of creating a new personal awareness through allowing his past to speak and listening to his childhood voice. He is still at the level where he does not

realize the totality of his shift from Kamehameha to Ko'olau Loa and what it means. However, his clarity in writing the belief essay draft shows that he understood the philosophy of personal expression leading to growth and accepted it, completely in synch with the objectives of the course.

## **Mariah**

**From hurt to genuine voice.** Mariah is a 25-year-old woman whose main participation in the course moved her from hurt to genuine voice. Writing the true self helped her to explore hurtful episodes from her past in a creative and therapeutic way, through humor and irony, to find this voice. The themes she discussed coalesce into an image of this personal progress through the course. Specifically, she focused on her major issues: rejecting appearances, finding true love, thinking positively, serving compassionately, and improving her self-esteem—the kinds of issues that quite a few students have at that age, but within these issues, she is showing definite progress in maturity, in terms of elaborating her higher values and commitments. In this portrait, I will follow the chronological organization of the papers and conferences in the first six weeks of the class, showing a process of personal integration in the song and belief essays. To begin her journey, Mariah analyzed a song about true love.

***Your soul is worth sacrifice—the song essay.*** As mentioned previously, the song essay assignment was intended to encourage students to discuss the personal impact of their favorite song. In the prompt, I direct the students to “choose a favorite song and write why it is important . . . and why [it] is so great.” As they did so, they were to find themes, make claims, and support these claims with evidence from the lyrics. However, I had left out the most important instruction, which I had to say during class: they were to discuss one of their favorite songs within the context of their own life experiences, especially if at a certain time, the song had taken

on some special meaning for them. This struck home with Mariah, because her essay contains some deep, personal reflection that shows progress within her, in response to the writing assignment.

In her song essay, Mariah analyzes Sandi Thom's ballad, "Superman," which deals with the search for true love. In the first verse, Thom observes that while some people look for fulfillment by "reaching for stardust," or "digging for gold," none of this means very much "on a mountaintop when the wind reaches out for your soul." The ephemeral, temporary things that masquerade as happiness become pointless after we encounter a higher force in the soul, or divinity. In the chorus, Thom sings, "I don't want the sun/ Don't want you to run/ Don't want superman/ Don't need wonderland/ Just want you to love me." When your soul is summoned by the voice of life, materialism fades away and true love becomes the only significant desire.

Mariah identified the song's central theme of the quest for love, but she begins her analysis by explaining its superficial manifestations in a public, non-personal arena.

The allure of having our pictures in the tabloids or having screaming fans following us around appears to be rather strong. . . . People expose themselves in horrific ways and seem to be happy to take others down with them. Why do so many people who have these things end up in rehab for being addicted to drugs and alcohol? Having the things of the world may appear to make people happy, but we don't always see what happens when the doors are closed. (*Stardust*, p. 3)

Based on this, I expected the paper would consist of a moralistic rejection of the rock-star lifestyle, with a few insights. Mariah begins her analysis by decrying the superficial hypocrisy of fame and wealth, "reaching for stardust" and "digging for gold." She rejects the unrealistic images Sandi uses to describe ideal love, "Many women have thought how fun and exciting it would be to date Superman, and many people wish they could have their own Wonderland," a perfect romantic getaway. However, far from renouncing everything, she respects the deeper reality of the heart. Her own desires for love had once been identified by shallow and self-

satisfying tendencies, but she had discovered “real desires are deeper than they appear” when she went through an eye-opening experience, and in this essay, she “intends to prove” it.

That experience was preceded by a normal-seeming relationship, which Mariah presents in her introduction, albeit in an aloof, disinterested fashion that does not reflect the significant aspects that come later. She tells a “tale about a girl . . . who had everything under control” until she started dating a close friend.

I must forewarn you; this tale does not have a happy ending. The girl began to fall for the man, but she was unaware as to how far she had fallen. She was used to being in control of her life and so believed that she was fully on top of the situation, but things had changed. Suddenly she had less time for her friends, and her workload increased. At the same time, she felt like the relationship with the man was moving too fast and felt overwhelmed by it. There was so much she had planned for her life and he didn't seem to fit, so she ended the relationship. The tale may sound somewhat sad so far, but this is not the end. For as I have said, the girl had not realized how far she had fallen. It was not until she had lost the man that she realized she actually loved him. In case you couldn't tell, this tale was about me. I was the girl and this is where my song choice comes in. (*Stardust*, p. 1)

Typically, when lovers realize their true feelings for each other, this comes at the climax of their romance. In Mariah's case however, she had felt a desire to turn their friendship into love by embracing his concerns as her own, but because her neatly planned future started changing, she doubted her feelings and broke things off. She denied him a deeper commitment in part because he was not an ideal partner, which she later saw as an example of irremediable selfishness. She only recognized her boyfriend's value after he was gone, which is tragic because man-woman love is a major part of her fulfillment in life. She did not “look beyond [her]self and end[ed] up hurting [him], whether intentionally or not.” She was pursuing the wrong things, letting unimportant considerations like appearance, predictability, and having fun overwhelm her prospects for genuine love, which is of far greater significance. So far, this seems like a typical, low-level sentiment: “I made a mistake and I want him back.”

Fortunately, in Mariah's life, as in Sandi's song, a remarkable thing happened: she was "on a mountaintop," alone in a contemplative, receptive place. She felt "the wind reaching out for [her] soul," and all she could give it was superficial, false images. When Mariah glossed this line in the song, she presented a profound visual image that speaks to an inner reality she must have experienced: "In my mind's eye, I see [myself] holding [my] soul in [my] hands with [my] arms outstretched, waiting for the wind to accept [my] offering." But the Lord was present in her hour of need, listening to her silent prayer. She opened herself to Love, offering her all with "a simple plea," and she received a revelation. Her false perspective on love was replaced with a profound, truer concept, a significant development in her capacity for compassion.

One might expect that Mariah would recognize that she *had* loved this man, which would only indicate awareness of what was already there, but that is not how this story goes:

The tale may sound somewhat sad so far, but this is not the end. For as I have said, the girl had not realized how far she had fallen. It was not until she had lost the man that she realized she actually loved him. (*Stardust*, p. 1)

Mariah "realized" that *now* "she actually loved him," a depth of feeling that was possible only after she truly opened her heart and received a gift of insight. Her failed relationship was the temporary context for this clarification of her higher values and commitments, but her change was successful, fundamental, and long-term in her character. She had found the way towards truer perception of others without judgment and this essay helped her to become that true self.

In the middle of the paper, Mariah shifts from analyzing the song's lyrics in the verses to explaining the musical qualities in the chorus, which is more impassioned.

While the verses themselves sound sad and add to the impression that what most people want doesn't bring happiness, the chorus gives a sudden burst of emotion. It is here that you realize she is singing to the one she loves and it is as if she is pleading with him to love her. (*Stardust*, p. 3, ¶ 2)

The change from “sad” superficiality to enraptured depth parallels the change Mariah experienced in her heart. Torn by the mistakes of her last relationship, she explored this new depth in her soul through Sandi’s music. At this point, I started reading for her *voice* in the commentary at the end of her paragraphs, which is more universal and future-leaning.

The song is [Sandi’s] way of offering her soul not to the wind, but to the one man she truly loves and wants to love her. It is her declaration of love and devotion. There is nothing obsessive or uncertain about the love she feels, this is just a simple plea.  
(*Stardust*, p. 3, ¶ 3)

Although it is not totally clear from her wording that she has gotten over her attachment to her ex-boyfriend, this sentiment goes far beyond the normal type of infatuation that one expects at this age, and we can say that Mariah invited genuine love into her heart. She is ready to give up control, forego priorities, and devote herself completely, all sacrifices she could not make before. But she would be happy to do all of these things because of her metaphysical commitment to the higher aspect of love that she embraced during her moment on the mountaintop, specifically that “Love isn’t about what you can get or what you want, it’s about what you would give up.”  
(*Stardust*, p. 3, ¶ 5) In this statement, Mariah repents for misjudging her friend by recognizing her false desires and embracing sacrifice. This beautiful gesture, if reciprocated by her future beloved, could serve as a foundation for their happiness.

Mariah believes that “no matter what comes her way in the future . . . all that really matters is the love of that one special person in her life (*Stardust*, p. 3, ¶ 5).” This requires a new “resolve in her heart” to love deeply and truly, and she is ready so that in the future she will be able to put into proper perspective that all-encompassing love. At this point, Mariah takes the reader (“you”) to the moment when she found that “it takes a personal experience to find perspective . . . not to love someone for what they are, but for who they are: “

It's a very strange feeling when you realize that you love someone. For me, it was as if a light was turned on. My whole perspective had changed. Things that seemed important before suddenly didn't seem to matter . . .

I know what it is like to only want a special person to love you . . . I would have given up just about anything, and actually didn't want anything else other than to just have him love me. I no longer wanted a knight in shining armor, as he was enough. I no longer needed to spend time with random people, as he was all that mattered. What hurt the most was that I knew that he had loved me and that I had made the mistake of giving that up. I never realized what I had until it was too late. (*Stardust*, p. 4, ¶ 1)

I firmly believe that love changes everything for everyone; it's human nature. You can have your life flipped upside down by someone you don't even see coming. The only advice I could give is be open to love and love others along the way. (*Stardust* 4, ¶ 2)

Though “human nature” had made Mariah subject to the admiration of others, realizing the higher elements in her feelings only came after the moment on the mountain, when the “light was turned on.” She had stopped paying attention to the “things that seemed important,” such as the superficial appearance of a “knight in shining armor” and instead “only wanted a special person to love.” Her discussion of exclusive man-woman love seems to be no longer stuck on a particular person; rather she was asserting how an ideal relationship should be. The “light” she saw was no simple infatuation, but she had realized and embraced the existence of a higher level of fulfillment in love. At that moment, her “whole perspective had changed.” This passage shows a unified whole within Mariah, a reflection of her consciousness, where she found a higher, truer level where there is no judging.

The final paragraph of Mariah's song paper (*Stardust* 4, ¶ 2) is the result of her focused thinking on the issue of lost love and her meditation on Sandy's song. In it, her statement “to be open to love” shows a level of perfection that she is searching for. In this case, this means that we should invite others into important positions in our lives, despite the disruptions that these relationships bring. “Love others along the way” is a different type of invitation, however. It

does not suggest a series of romantic partners; rather we will see in the next paper that this refers to her insight to serve others through love in action.

It seems that this reading of Mariah's song paper does illustrate Elbow's claim,

Sometimes when someone speaks about something that is very important to him, the [real voice] he produces has this striking integration or coherence. . . . The meanings have been blended at a finer level, integrated more thoroughly. Not merely manipulated by his mind, but rather sifted through his entire self. In such writing you don't feel mechanical cranking, you don't hear the gears change. When there are transitions, they are smooth, natural, organic. It is as though every phrase is permeated by the meaning of the whole. (Elbow, 1998, p. 8)

These things describe Mariah's writing. The true aspect of love is the most important thing to Mariah, replacing in her heart "things that seemed important before," which now "suddenly didn't seem to matter." It is intelligible, without questioning. Her experience "changed everything . . . flipping her life upside down." Mariah presents her ideas at the "natural" level of experience and the "whole" level of insight. Whereas some writers utilize conflicting rational perspectives to generate a level of insight, Mariah achieves a thorough exploration of her values in writing because the unified consciousness or true self within her receives peace.

*To love means hurting no one—The belief essay.* In the syllabus, I explain that the belief assignment gives students an "opportunity to share . . . salient aspects of their identity, . . . tell[ing] stories that they relate to, giving commentary, refining these ideas into a sophisticated form, [and] connecting convictions with public language that compels others to believe." The belief essay assignment defines credos as "personal expression of a core belief, based on life experiences." These beliefs are "influenced by faith, family, and culture, and express themselves in daily actions." Mariah's essay has five phases, each of which is generated by a different type of thinking and being.

Unlike some of the other students, who move straight into their story, Mariah uses the same type of introduction in her belief essay as she did in the song paper, setting up a hypothetical situation. She gave her essay an unexpected title: *Death by Six-Year Olds*:

If all the adults in the world today were to behave the same way they did when they were six years old, the world would most likely come to an end! . . . Procreation would cease, and the population would come to an end. However, I'm sure human life would die out before this as I doubt there are many six-year-olds who would . . . go out to work almost every day. Imagine the world's Presidents, Prime Ministers, Kings, Queens, and other world leaders throwing a hissy fit every time they didn't get what they want. It's fair to say that the thought of this is really quite ridiculous. (*Six-year-olds*, p. 1)

What is Mariah doing describing such a crazy world? This introduction is unique, motivated perhaps by my repeated requests to make it interesting. Her way of thinking here is sarcastic and playful, setting up a clearly ridiculous scenario to stress an important issue. The first three paragraphs were specifically constructed as front matter for three main phases of the paper.

In the next two paragraphs, Mariah takes on a much more serious way of being and she moves to logical, process-oriented thinking. She explains the developmental process whereby children grow up and how they should act as adolescents and young adults. "We learn a lot in our first 6 years of life. We learn to walk and talk, some very basic reading and writing." But adolescents must look "beyond themselves" through direct experience in life's classroom, where love is the lesson, and character is the outcome. They gain maturity as they develop control over their "behavior, thoughts, actions, temper, and childish tendencies." Emotional learning and character development happen through love relationships, and our spirituality and individuality comes from making difficult choices within our peer group.

The next paragraph of Mariah's belief paper shows how LDS church membership affects her personal progress as she relates and interacts with the church society:

Our ability to adapt to change is really quite remarkable. I often take a step back and look at my life and how I have changed in the past year or past months. Sometimes I like what I see and sometimes I don't, but it is a wonderful thing to do to keep your life on track. One of the great things about the church I attend is that we are all striving for the same goals. We have the same values and same guidelines to help us reach those goals. Knowing what you want from life makes it much easier to see if your life is on track when you look at yourself and where your life is heading. However, we don't apply this same principle to other people. When we meet people we haven't seen in a long time or even people we see regularly, we don't take a step back to look at them and see how far they have come or see how much they are struggling. There seems to be an automatic judgment that even though we can change other people can't.

This comes across as an integrated unity, a striving for harmony in a world of constant change. Mariah describes "our" change potential as "remarkable" and "wonderful." She understands her change inside the unified image of the church within her, and she moves from individual insight to communal voice and application without transitioning. Mariah is absorbed in the desire for perfection, church service, and community motives, so this is not a false move. She sees the whole community not only changing together towards positive goals but also judging others unjustly. She speaks coherently about "striving for goals," which the church's youth programs encourage, but also reflects the community's doubts, "Even though we can change, others can't." At one with the community, she finds maturity in compassion and accountability. This particular maturity of voice is important to keep in mind as Mariah proceeds to the next section, in order to avoid misunderstanding both her intentions and her values.

Next, Mariah tells stories from her young adulthood. She shares four phases of her life, at age 6, 16, 21, and 25. Of her early years in Primary Sunday school with her brothers, Mariah recalled little, but she "had been told that we were quite the handful, and many teachers dreaded having us in their class, as we were pretty uncontrollable." When she was sixteen, a former Primary teacher came up and announced to her friends, "She's a bad example and nothing but trouble. . . . [It] was almost meant as a joke but with real venom behind it." When she went on a

mission at 21, a different woman told some of her fellow missionaries, “all about [her] and how terrible [she] was,” also based on her childhood. Mariah “really couldn’t and still can’t imagine why she felt this was an appropriate action.” At age 25, she became a young women’s leader, and on a trip to the temple, the holiest of LDS sanctuaries, the same Primary teacher, now the wife of a prominent church leader, “point[ed] out how horrible I was once again.” Mariah “tried to talk to her as a civilized human being but got nowhere. She had made up her mind.” Along with these episodes of hurt is the observation that as a child of a bishop, leader of a congregation in the LDS Church, she was judged more harshly and considered a troublemaker. Because of its free-flowing narration, this section must have come from her freewriting on Sep. 22.

Mariah is here undertaking to share something personal in order to draw her connection with, and therefore begin to explain or testify to something more universal. Viewed on its own, it seems to imply that Mariah is still stuck on her feelings of being hurt. However, although the hurt has affected her voice, it is part of the unity of the preceding paragraph and cannot be understood apart from this context. It would be a mistake to look only at this report of hers on its own, categorizing it as a “hang-up” or “baggage” and taking from it the force of her introduction and discussion, in an attempt to show that one “really” understands Mariah. This story is as dependent upon context for its meaning as a volume of air. In a person’s lungs, air represents a potential, while in an empty bottle it represents an end; in a child’s balloon it enables a pleasing shape and form, whereas in the atmosphere it is formless and neutral.

In the same way, a reading of this statement outside of its context in her larger self, the image of which she represented in the introduction and discussion, makes it seem shallow and full of the memory of hurt. In fact, if one considered this the primary aspect of the paper, it would not be a true belief essay because it invites a cynical reading. In this sense, Mariah would

seem to call attention to herself as “a civilized human being” victimized by small-minded women. But this reading is called into question by the unity of the preceding paragraph, which suggests that Mariah has a larger aim in mind. Furthermore, the small amount of sympathy that these stories of hurt could evoke in peer readers, or myself for that matter, does not justify the risk of describing “the damage [those women] were doing.” Most single students avoid talking about hurt because they do not want their teacher to think of them as a “problem student.”

Mariah could have proposed any type of superficial topic, but instead told the truth.

In the concluding paragraphs of Mariah’s essay, she extends that truth to others in what I hear as an invitation. The voice that comes across is amazing, showing her progress in the belief essay, and providing inspiration to others.

Growing up is hard enough for children without being put down by those who supposedly know better and are more experienced. What does an adult gain from putting down a child in front of their peers? What do any of us gain from putting someone down or gossiping about them? No good comes of it, not the individual who is attacking or to the victim of the attack. [2] *I believe that we should be encouraging our youth and not trying to get revenge on them for things they have previously done. This does not apply only to kids but also to everyone we meet in our lives. As a church, we believe in repentance and forgiveness. We know that when we do wrong we can make up for it, we would be lost without it, and we are happy when we receive it. So why can't we apply the same principle to other people? We should not judge other people unless we are willing to accept the same judgment.* [1] I find that I change by degrees each day sometimes for the better sometimes for the worse. The changes can be subtle and can go unnoticed. It is much the same as when a child grows physically, it happens little by little and sometimes those closest to the child do not recognize how much the child has grown until it is pointed out or they take a step back and really look. People who do not see the child that often should be able to see more easily the change in the child. [3]

I would like to see people take a step back from themselves and notice the changes in others around them, whether good or bad. However, before commenting on the changes think to see if what you are going to say will be a help and encouragement or a hindrance and insult to the person. For those people you see less regularly, the changes should be more apparent, however if you don’t see a change, perhaps your view is clouded by previous opinions. To these people I say, step back and really look at the person. The chances are, they are not the person you remember, they have changed, and so have you. [4]

This section resonates truthfully, confirming the previous analysis of Mariah's story: she has progressed personally beyond these hurtful episodes. They also confirm and extend the analysis to this point. Perhaps most importantly, Mariah uses "we" phrases to suggest the crucial nature of these values to the church community around her and to the church that she carries within her heart. She presents in everyday language a humble, mature commitment to higher aspects in terms of "what we believe." There are constant personal insights within the "I" examples, but also a very strong "We" presence. She has unity within herself individually and in the spiritual unity of the whole community, which caught up in the joy of growing towards perfection.

Numbering the passages, [1] begins with "I believe that we should be encouraging our youth," which indicates a charitable attitude towards those who are growing the most. Given this idea, it would be impossible to "get revenge on them for things they have previously done," because this is a deliberate move to hold them back. She extends this ecumenically to "everyone we meet in our lives," because this larger unity of growing and developing is universal. Mariah then moves to the thing that negates individual revenge, which is "as a church we believe in repentance and forgiveness." In general terms this can be seen as that same issue of judgment, but now in service to this universal aspect of individual human progression, the "all-growth."

Everything about this passage moves to support the universality of her ideas. She asks a rhetorical question, "So why can't we apply the same principle to other people?" This is a subtle tactic to underlay the claim of universality; it is not a question of why we should—there is no good reason why we should not. And she ends with a piece of Gospel truth: "We should not judge other people unless we are willing to accept the same judgment." This measure of true perception and discernment has worked its way into the implicit system of fairness that oversees

the progression of all people, and indeed all educational endeavors. No one is exempt from overview and discretion, and it likewise is a universal aspect of the “all-growth”—one must see the flaws or rough spots in the work in order to construct something refined like a person. False judgment concerns her because it attempts to destabilize the larger unity of human progression, which is her highest aspect. It enables her second highest aspect, conscientious or open love; only through love do humans progress, and that for Mariah *is* life.

In this powerful example of compelling voice and higher aspects, Mariah’s detractors are nowhere to be found. She is not discussing this issue at the personal level; rather she talks about perceiving children in the context of their development, not judging them as troublesome individuals. This higher perspective is fundamental.

But even deeper than the invitation to kindness is her extending the Church’s invitation to forgive, which to me as a member of the Church has a compelling unity that could be considered the heart of the entire matter. “*As a church, we believe in repentance and forgiveness. We know that when we do wrong we can make up for it, we would be lost without it, and we are happy when we receive it.*” The first phrase, “as a church we believe,” establishes community and spirituality, “in repentance and forgiveness” which form a unity of God and humanity reconciling. Mariah then indicates all of the important aspects of repentance and forgiveness that “We know:” complete faith, wrong action, active restitution, feeling lost, receiving forgiveness, and being happy, in a complex run-on sentence. She uses “it” indiscriminately, first referring to “doing wrong,” second referring to “repentance,” and third referring to “forgiveness.” Nevertheless, the unity of her feeling is presented so compellingly that the indeterminate pronouns do not matter—we still get it. Mariah has embraced her hurt and lost it within the inner

we-perspective of caring. She has been forgiven before, and now she forgives the image of her accusers in her heart.

Passage [2] helps to close Mariah off from her hurt and psych herself up for her main statement [1]. One sentence before [2], she asserts, “I can only assume that we were not that disturbing as children, a little rambunctious yes, but not spawn of Satan,” using an obvious exaggeration to misrepresent her accusers’ claims. So she is on the defensive when at the beginning of [2] she says, “Growing up is hard enough for children without being put down.” In this phrase the pointed contrast between “growing up” and “put down” shows the residual feeling of “me, hurt” even as she generalizes her experience to “children.” She labels her opponents as “those who *supposedly* know better and are more experienced [italics added]” subtly and ironically questioning their credibility. By asking what “any of us gain,” Mariah then moves towards universal human progression which is her highest aspect. She puts attackers and victims in the same group to whom “No good comes of it,” and sets up passage [1] where, if these petty distinctions between people are erased through forgiveness, then conversely, “[All] good comes of it,” meaning the return of humankind to a state of eternal life.

After the character of passage [1], in which Mariah’s voice of mature oneness embraces all people in their weaknesses, in passage [3] Mariah turns into herself. “I find that I change by degrees each day, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. The changes can be subtle and can go unnoticed.” Mariah discusses her personal development with genuine feeling, respecting her part in the “all-growth.” She says, “It is much the same as when a child grows physically, it happens little by little.” The development of a child is the proper physical analogy to the continual growth experienced by all persons, even those whose bodies have started to decline. Just as parents closely and joyfully observe the changes in their child, watching the

continued growth of a young person, their curiosity, caring, and intelligence should be even more exceptional and wonderful to us.

After such a long paragraph, the motivation for shifting to the conclusion paragraph [4] is important. Mariah's final statement actually is not directed to the "we" of church members, rather at people who are not part of a community. This is a way for her to take responsibility for her own change and to share insights in a way everyone can understand. Mariah has overcome offense, and in this paper, she is articulating this in a new voice that hurting people need to hear. There are three invitations in the final statement: First, become less judgmental within themselves and "take a step back from themselves," to be more perceptive of others, "whether good or bad." Second, consider people as dynamic, growing individuals, whom they can "help and encourage or hinder and insult." Third, step away from the past vision of "previous opinions," to see changes in others and oneself, "They have changed, and so have you."

Looking over the instruction given during the belief unit and the idea log entries from those days, it seems very likely that the teaching process helped her find her voice. To help the students understand my expectations for the assignment, we discussed it in detail on September 19. I clarified that "many students have similar beliefs, but everyone's credo would be different." In her idea log from that day, Mariah talks about how this discussion helped her.

We are expected to write something new that people don't expect to hear and will change them. . . . This is another personal essay. Jon certainly likes us to look into ourselves. [He said,] "If I want you to fly, I first have to give you roots." We have to write without questioning ourselves. (Idea Log, Sept. 19)

Although the freewriting exercise on September 22 was only scheduled to take 15 minutes, I realized the class needed more time, so we spent 50 minutes on it instead. This allowed Mariah to activate her voice, which generated the ideas for her belief essay.

We are doing free writing and then discussing it with the group. My hand hurt by the end of writing. I got about four and a quarter of hand written pages [in fifty minutes]. I found it quite interesting as I started on one topic and drifted on to another . . .

What I believe is that people should not judge others on what they did in the past. Our actions from when we were young should not reflect necessarily on who we are now. (Idea Log, Sept 22)

Mariah's belief essay features this claim, which was generated directly in this session.

Becoming aware of her writing process, "starting on one topic and drifting on to another" is another important effect of freewriting. She becomes more powerful and self-confident as she writes herself truly, exploring increasingly deeper aspects of her consciousness. Furthermore, this translates into movement from one life experience to another, all connected by the higher aspect of a community of unconditional love. Thus, the freewriting was fundamental to finding her judgment issue, which enabled her to explore the larger theme of hurt and recovery.

Because of the freewriting activity, a dam inside Mariah broke, spilling a remarkable amount of free-style composition in less than an hour's time. She mentioned that her "hand hurt by the end" of this session, and I can picture her "stressing" about this topic, gripping the pen and writing furiously. The hurt inside was manifested in meaningful ways, and it gave her a present direction for the feelings that were otherwise stuck in the past.

Initially, I mentioned that Mariah's introduction was unique in the class and seemed to have been motivated by my instruction to gain my interest immediately. Her idea log of Sept. 26 suggests something from the lecture showed her how to do this. "We looked at how some writers used 'opposites' and 'contrasts' to draw attention. "Defamiliarization" is taking something common to people and making it strange." In fact, the introduction could be literarily classified as a combination of these two aspects. In her six-year old world, Mariah defamiliarizes the rational world in order to draw attention to typical adult/child differences. Establishing this

contrast between the adult and child perspective makes possible her discussion of kind treatment, child development, and the family-community context.

However, the important aspect of Mariah's belief essay that indicates personal progress beyond the judgmental hurt is the compassionate, charitable tone of her exposition. Although this is already inside of Mariah as a reality, her idea logs give an idea how writing her true self revealed it inside of her. On Oct. 6, she reflected that she "found [the belief essay] quite difficult to write." This indicates that she spent a lot of time thinking with relatively little written output, so she cannot be talking about the freewritten section of her paper. Rather, she is discussing the drafting of her essay that occurred between Sep. 22 and Oct. 6. Examining the classroom lectures, particularly the ones that she wrote down as important, could give some clue into the ideas that went into her writing process.

In Mariah's Sep. 24 Idea Log, she reviewed our lecture on "abduction," a concept taken from American philosopher C.S. Peirce. As opposed to deductive or inductive reasoning, which discovers conclusions by following a chain of dependencies forward or backward, abduction is the logic of revelation or insight, a leap of faith where unexpected truths emerge. "This is how we should be writing our credos." She also found a statement I made "very profound"—"Our belief in God allows us to believe in a whole lot more." These insights motivated Mariah, but a week later, on Oct. 3 she still had some concerns:

We were looking at critical thinking. "What should the readers do to respond to your writing?" Good question. I think I need to think more about this for my credo essay as I am concerned that my essay is going to sound like ramblings. I have been struggling to fill out 5 pages. I found the Reasoning assignment quite helpful. I think I will use my answers as more of a guide and not to copy straight into the essay. (Idea Log, Oct. 3)

In the class activity, I directed the students to answer at least two questions from each of the steps in the reasoning handout. This exercise breaks down the four phases of critical

thinking—analysis, interpretation, synthesis, and evaluation (Little, Brown Handbook)—into eight steps: (a) issue, (b) question, (c) information, (d) interpretation, (e) concept, (f) context, (g) perspective, and (h) implications. Mariah’s freewritten section can indeed be considered “rambling,” with her repeated claim that “bishop’s kids are trouble.” But the “implications” step in this exercise is designed to help her to find a direction for these personal feelings, which she does in the four “community values” paragraphs. This discussion section is the only one in which this critical thinking question could be considered “quite helpful . . . as a guide.” Mariah considers how church members should “respond to [her] writing,” and she articulates higher aspects in response to this question. Another question in this section encourages her to bring out the gentle, loving, conscientious tone, “How does this [experience] cause you to see things in a different way?” This evokes the type of pure insight that makes Mariah’s essay so compelling, and this is one of the reasons why she moves from hurt to wisdom.

    Mariah also discovered a meaningful outcome to her hurt feelings because of her experiences working over the past few years as a complaint specialist for a bank. Her work consisted of managing a couple of different teams that were tasked with investigating customer complaints. She would “answer the complaints, turn them over to the team which I ran, and make sure that we were following all the compliance stuff” (Conference 1). So in fact, Mariah is exceptionally well qualified to move from a “complaint” situation to thinking about what’s best for the church community, especially with regards to the explicit rules of behavior in that community. She shifts from a hurt feeling to an investigative query, but finds no answer, so she opens herself to the situation, just as she did in the song essay, and with an embracing tone, she takes a muted, subtle, yet powerful stand for love.

A beautiful aspect of Mariah's spirit that bears mentioning is her taking a stand against the women who wished to dominate her perspective about service. If she had allowed the negative women to taint her pure feeling about serving children, she would have been less effective. Her primary children were very rambunctious, and one of them even had ADHD, which is under-diagnosed in her country, so he would have been a real challenge. She served the people others said are too challenging, assuming important duties, and changing perspectives because of it. "I thoroughly enjoyed teaching my 4-5 year old class and . . . spending time with the 6-7 year olds as well, . . . even when the children were being children." This connects with her first paper and the idea of serving. The belief assignment itself and the subsequent lectures provoked her to think of the people she cares about in the place she is now serving. This makes the assignment useful and it shows her commitment to finding the true self.

Although the episodes of hurt still bother Mariah to some extent, she is able to look beyond the initial hurt and find the positive aspects to be learned from it. The evidence suggests that writing the true self has enabled her to find her voice. Hers is not a simple emotional reaction; she learns from hurts by shifting to universal terms in her writing. Mariah wants to increase the love in her church, so she actively follows the example of her Savior, "Not being overcome by evil, but overcoming evil by good." She believes that we must see others' hearts with eyes of love and forgiveness, reserve judgment of others conscientiously, increase our perception of their needs, and notice the positive changes in them. This is just a truer way to be, and it is beautiful.

Mariah identified the hurts from her past in her song and belief essay. Following my direction to move beyond these concerns, she wrote to liberate her inner self (psyche), finding her real voice as she reached out to the readers with a discussion of higher aspects in the

community and her personal belief system. I believe that Mariah was searching for divine love, connected with the larger view of life, the communal way of being and the recognition of inevitable change. We are to embrace all people and share their concerns, overcoming negativity with compassion and exercising perception without condemnation. This helped Mariah to conceive a truer image of her character as she would like to be in church and her life.

Earlier I called this an awareness of the welfare of the group, but this detailed analysis shows that she follows the feeling within her, making decisive moves from the self, the community, the other, and the Lord, in order to attain the new level of oneness that Elbow calls Real Voice. She emerges from a normal sort of voice, with “personality” that was beginning to lack motivation, and moves into the “humanity” of real voice:

Real Voice has the power to make you pay attention and understand . . . [And it] has nothing to do with the writing, only with the relationship of the writing to the author. [It] contains not just an explicit message, but also some kind of implicit message about the condition of the writer. . . . When the implicit message reinforces the explicit one in some right way, we get resonance or power. . . . The voice “sounds real” . . . or come[s] “from the center.” (pages omitted). . . . What’s important is not the message that is on the page . . . but something that is not on the page . . . namely the writer’s mental/spiritual/characterological condition or the way she wrote it. (Elbow, 1981, pp. 299-300, 357)

Mariah had a true response to this assignment, because it resonated with her implicit, existing higher aspects, and evoked her way of being. But this wonderful response did not occur in a vacuum. The class discussions and exercises along the way helped Mariah to compose it.

**Concluding thoughts.** Even though in her writing, Mariah is not totally, unambiguously clear about leaving behind her hurt, statements throughout her writing contain aspects of a deep, philosophical, non-judgmental love that she is striving to integrate into herself. In the course, she extended her conception of true fulfillment in love. This level of fulfillment has a genuine authenticity and it requires significant sacrifice. For her, love is not only a special concern that would invite loving deeds. It is also an emotional state that borders on the sublime. She embraces

love as a change of emotional perspective, and makes the choices to esteem others highly (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Love*). This is a major change from the superficial Mariah who turned her back on love because it was not attractive or convenient. Her “opening up” invites compassion, rejects superficiality, and turns Mariah decisively towards a life dedicated to love. Although she had already begun to make these changes, Mariah’s response to the essay assignments articulate these important aspects in a wonderful way which helps her to grow in purity, authenticity, charity, and devotion.

## **Cherie**

**A sister’s love is a force for change.** Cherie is a 19-year-old English major originally from St. George, Utah. She comes from a good home with several older sisters whom she adored and emulated. Cherie had significant interactions with women and girls in her ward, i.e., LDS congregation, by participating in the “personal progress” program, which is similar to Scouting in that it requires young women to seek knowledge, develop life skills, explore interests, serve others, reflect on their experiences, and communicate about their feelings. Pivotal in Cherie’s life was her last time at girls’ camp, the summer before her 16<sup>th</sup> year, when she moved away. Her advisors and friends said that her influence had made a difference in their lives, but that it was time for her to go and make a difference for the people in her new home. This invitation to serve her sisters moved Cherie profoundly and remained within her as a guiding beacon to encourage her caring endeavors.

Cherie moved across the country to live for two years in the South, where fewer LDS members live and ward boundaries are bigger and resources are spread thinner, so there are more opportunities for compassionate service. It was a new situation where she would be asked to sacrifice for others, serve them, and show acts of kindness toward them. The move was difficult

for Cherie, with new friends in a new high school, but her writing helped her through it, and it has continued to do so. As a faithful journal writer, she has a lively, truthful voice and feels writing is a part of her life. One might expect that everything she did in my college composition class would occur in context of her pre-existing “writing in me” ideology, and be bounded by that construct. However, this did not occur. Instead, writing became the vehicle for extended meditations about true love, which is the real goal of her learning journey that began with the song essay.

**Song essay *Blessings to Give*.** The country pop mega-group Rascal Flatts has remained a platinum-selling sensation for over a decade because they discuss real issues in their fans’ lives, particularly the love and relationships that form the core of the inner, personal life. With their youthful tone quality and upbeat performances, Rascal Flatts connects aesthetically with teens and young adults, a major part of their fan base, while encouraging open sharing, singing about specific personal problems, and trying to affect the listeners. Clichéd country artists rely upon “tugging the heartstrings” with little or no release afterwards, but Rascal Flatts realizes that the emotion of their music must connect with the real experiences of their fans and give them some closure. They sing about life struggles of young people for whom love and identity are the core problems in a diffuse, modern society. In their song “My Wish,” Rascal Flatts taps into their listeners’ shared conception of God and helps these young people to find a path into adulthood with their values intact. Played at farewell parties for service members, and at High School proms and graduations around the country, the song assumes that the listener, addressed as “You,” is at a critical moment of choice. Rascal Flatts wishes “that this life becomes all that you want it to,” some of which comes by right actions, and the other part only by faith and grace. In the same spirit as the traditional “Irish Blessing” (May the Road Rise to Meet you), “My Wish”

touches people at the transitions of death, parting, or transition into adulthood, and commutes them into God's care.

"My Wish" is Cherie's favorite song because at the beginning of freshman year, she is still coping with the breakup with her romantic attachment back home, whom I will initially call Jack, but she calls "my best friend." She discusses the details in her introduction:

The past few months before I came to BYU Hawaii, my best friend and I spent the summer in Provo, Utah. He was going to school, and I was living at my sister's apartment spending time with my family. We'd been best friends since the end of my junior year. We'd spent an amazing senior year together and all of it was about to end along with the summer. In heart-wrenching times, I tried to stick it out. He moved on to [BYU] college life, and I was stuck waiting for my future to come. I think about my best friend every day and miss all the little things about the relationship we had . . . and the compassion and love I have for him. The wish I would give to people in this world, I would especially wish upon him, even though I cried to him when telling him how much I miss the old Jack and he just looked at me blankly. Even though we haven't spoken for about a month, and I feel he threw our friendship away, I'd wish him every word of this song. (*Blessings to Give*, p. 1)

In this passage, we see the emergence of a theme of "boyfriends" representing a clichéd romantic relationship that has a beginning and an end, a present and a past, just like Cherie's "senior year and summer." Cherie talks about Jack as her "best friend," so she is not only distancing herself from the butterfly-feelings of the relationship, but also respecting the good times they had. She still thinks about him warmly "every day." Cherie had followed him from Georgia to Utah, but Jack could not follow her to Hawaii, and he felt devalued and left behind. This is clear from his reaction to her moving away, "looking at her blankly," breaking off all communication, and "throwing their friendship away." These "unloved" feelings overwhelmed him, and he coped stoically, which hurt Cherie's feelings. The romance was ended and its effects were suppressed, a necessary self-deception in the Mormon dating community. Cherie has not "moved on" to another boy, which is healthy for her, allowing her to be thankful for Jack and celebrate their friendship:

The song ‘My Wish’ sung by Rascal Flatts is a song of wishes and hope. It gives us three repeated reminders; to always have hope for the future, love others and yourself, and to make the most of your life and the chances you’ll get. It makes me realize where I’m going in life. It reminds me of the past, present, and future. The song speaks of blessings. It gives hope, and makes me think of people I love, and people who love me. It brings me to a place of warm compassion. I would love it if someone spoke the words of this song to me. It wishes for easy days, slow moments, meaningful choices, no regrets, helping people remember that they’re loved. It talks of dreams and aspirations, confidence, the beauty of a soul, and so many other things. (*Blessings to Give*, 1-2)

Cherie’s analysis helps her to consider her romantic feelings for Jack in a larger context of love throughout her lifetime. Whereas she may have preferred to focus on Jack’s love for her and her still-warm feelings, it is officially over now and Cherie should take on the active role, “to always have hope for the future, love others and [her]rself, and make the most of [her] life and the chances [she’ll] get.” This shift to a life perspective, “past, present, and future” enables her to think about “blessings” and “hope,” which refer to present and future happiness. This takes her mind off the past year alone and brings it to the “people I love, and people who love me.” This is her family, whom Cherie has counted on to help her. But then she moves to possibilities, “I would love it if someone spoke the words of this song to me.” Cherie still wants to be “the beloved,” but Jack’s feelings had changed—he fell out of love. Although Cherie still feels love for him, she wants “no regrets” about her past and “confidence” in the future.

Cherie next transitions into searching for the long-lasting, reciprocating love that her failed romantic relationship had come to lack. She found a “place of warm compassion” where she can experience “the beauty of a soul” at BYU–Hawaii. Cherie notices that at BYU–Hawaii, “people pass by and smile so warmly that [she] can’t help but smile back.” But she notices that her smile is not as “warm” and she wants to give “those kinds of smiles.” Cherie is looking for “warmth,” not passion, counting on “individual inner beauty” and “good intentions” to lead her. A major step in this direction comes when Cherie discusses the second verse, which

talks of never looking back on the bad times, but always remembering the good ones. It says to look back at the past and never regret. To never forget the people you've touched in the places you've been. It tells to always forgive and forget, learn from your mistakes, or they will turn into your regrets. It says to take the chances we get to serve others. It speaks of God and tells us to learn from our trials, learn of God and his hand in our lives, but lastly, to give more than we take. The second verse touches me because I have so many memories to choose from. I try to block out bad memories and the good memories are what keep me going sometimes. I think of my best friend and the regrets he might have, I hope he'll always think of me and smile. He is always so hard on himself I hope he find God's grace in every one of his mistakes. (*Blessings to Give*, p. 2)

This analysis of the second verse pushes Cherie into the past, but requires her to be selective. She remembers the love of family, friends, and God. Hurt feelings for her "best friend" are not acceptable; she must remember him with forgiveness, in order to "learn from [her] trials, learn of God and his hand in [her] life." Cherie seems actively to do this, reflecting on the "good memories" that resonate with her and which "keep [her] going sometimes." In choosing to think well of "her best friend," she allows him to not be simply dismissive and cold, but to have "regrets." In her mind's eye, she sees him thinking of her and smiling. Then he is "hard on himself," and he recognizes "every one of his mistakes," which leads him to "find God's grace" or forgiveness. Therefore, in this paragraph, she walks her mental image of her friend through realization and resolution. This rhetorical action seems to evoke a cathartic response within Cherie.

I think of when I moved away from St. George, Utah. The last girls camp I went to, at the testimony meeting all of the girls bore their testimony about how much they loved me and what a good example I had been to them. My young women leaders hugged me when I cried and said, "Look at all the lives you've touched here, now go and touch more in Georgia." That makes me think of all the people I've loved in my life, and all the places I've left them, I hope that their lives are fruitful because of the kindness and love they showed me at certain times in my life.

The verse talks about forgiving and never regretting things. These past few months, I've been humbled by how blessed I've been. And looking back on the hard times I've had, I'm so grateful for them and I know I should never regret them but think of them as bittersweet times. My future is full of chances to change, meet new people, and help others. This past Sunday I was called as the new Relief Society second counselor. I know

that I will be given opportunities to serve, and “My Wish” makes me think of always serving whenever I can. The blessings I spoke of before help me know of God’s grace and love. How he can look at my mistakes, love me unconditionally, and bless me beyond what I deserve. (*Blessings to Give*, p. 3)

Cherie has focused now on a new image of love in past, present, and future that is different from anything she has discussed to this point. It is a powerful, previous “encoding” of the meaning of love, and it is more powerful than loving, losing, or even forgiving “her best friend.” I am calling this “a sister’s love” or “sisterhood,” an attitude of character that has been passed down from Cherie’s older sisters and from the society of women and young women in the church. At a time of pivotal struggle in her teen years, Cherie feels the divine love of her sisters and is overwhelmed by it. She is invited to continue touching other lives in a friendship- and service-orientation.

For many young people, the sacrificial aspect of love gets lost in the excitement of romance and attraction, but Cherie did not date until age 16, so she could keep the types of love relatively separate. She eventually started driving and dating, but she also received a formal responsibility over the church class for 16- and 17-year old young women. “Once I was called to be the Laurel class first counselor, I knew what it required of me, a pure sacrifice, and the need to love them” (*Belief Essay*, p. 3). This sacrificial, sister’s love seems to have become the central, motive force in her life, removed from temporary attractions. Cherie talks about it in her present calling to be the new Relief Society second counselor. This is another important responsibility for Cherie, especially in a college ward with no youth or children’s’ programs. She turns to “God’s grace” to make her mistakes into blessings through unconditional love.

After this passage follows an analysis of the chorus, which Cherie appreciated because it reinforced the message of the whole song. However, because it repeats things already discussed above, we will move to the following paragraph. It begins with Rascal Flatt’s “my wish”

becoming “Cherie’s wish” as she puts her “best friend” into the chorus, “I hope your dreams stay big and your worries stay small.”

I hope my best friend’s dreams stay big and his worries stay small. I hope he knows I love him. I hope he is always himself and can have hope in his future, because he is such an amazing person. I think that this song means so much to me because of the hope and faith it gives me. It helps me look at my future with hope and love of the things that are in store for me. It makes me want to make a lot of my life. I’ve made a few of my dreams come true, and it has inspired me to keep on going to fulfill more of what I want to do in life. The little worries I’ve had in life have had little significance, and the song always reminds me that I shouldn’t worry about them too much. (*Blessings to Give*, pp. 3-4)

Cherie’s vision broadens into the past and future, with a cameo appearance by “her best friend.” This shows that Cherie isn’t merely trying to forget him, but trying to better understand his last words, implying that he was worried about “his future” and wasn’t “always himself.” Then she can continue to think of him as “an amazing person.” In other words, she forgives him without prejudice, in part because the artist’s perspective is still present in full force and she catches the redeeming truth of that action. This awareness inspired her to finalize her forgiveness of “Jack” in the essay. This allowed her vision of caring to be so clear that it opened up into her future:

My future is full of chances to change, meet new people, and help others. This past Sunday I was called as the new Relief Society second counselor. I know that I will be given opportunities to serve . . . to look at my future with hope and love of the things that are in store for me . . . to make a lot of my life . . . [and] to keep on going to fulfill more of what I want to do in life.

The choices I make will lead me to any future plans I aspire to have. The classes I choose to take, the people I meet, the boys I date, the habits I form, and any simple choices can lead me to a future the way I want it if I choose them carefully . . . I have an unmeasurable capacity to love. I would give people hope for their future, and tell them to love themselves and others around them, and make the most of their lives with the chances they get. (*Blessings to Give*, p. 4)

In these final paragraphs, Cherie responds to the wish “that this world becomes all that you want it to.” She sees the implicit message that it has much more to do with her choices than

whether Rascal Flatts wishes her well, but she recognizes that her family's love and support (and prayers) are with her, and this raises her up in happiness and thankfulness. She recaps some important issues already discussed, but also has the new assertion, "I have an unmeasurable capacity to love," which indicates that Cherie need not be so concerned with releasing "her best friend" from her heart. This belief would allow her heart to expand to people generally, "purposefully shared with the world." I could see this resonating with her desire to smile kindly to everyone and with her calling to be a sister to female members of her ward that she still hardly knows.

As the preceding discussion illustrates, the breakup with "Jack" enables Cherie to think on love more deeply, to see the true aspect of it that still persisted, and to express it in service to her sisters. Cherie has shown herself to be deeper than her years would suggest, particularly because she sees this divine value of sisterhood. In the following essay, Cherie will continue to experience this change in awareness of love, moving away from the time-delineated man-woman love relationship that her "best friend" represented towards one that is more long-lasting, which emerges from her family, her older sisters, church friends, "adopted" little sisters, and seminary class.

**Belief essay: Love and be loved.** In her belief essay, Cherie developed the core value of a deep, reciprocal love. In her introduction, she discusses the nature and conceptions of love.

I've come to learn that, to love and be loved is the greatest joy in the world. Lives begin with love. Memories awaken us of our early childhood and the beautiful first remembrances of love. Life continues to surprise us when thinking and pondering on the meaning of love. There are several types of love. It is to some, defined as a feeling of joy, compassion, peace, and happiness. In contrast to these opinions, I want to express that love is solely and undoubtedly a verb. Love is an invitation to action, a mighty force in all relationships, and a sacrifice. Love is included in all different aspects and kinds of relationships. It is truly a verb and can bring joy from doing . . . I think of my parents, friends, church leaders, peers, extended family and loved ones and know that any actions I've seen from them were acts out of love for me or others. (*Love and be Loved*, p. 1)

Cherie describes here her broader conception of love as “an invitation to action, a mighty force in all relationships, and a sacrifice.” In the first conference, when we discussed this paper, I had included “boyfriend/girlfriend love” in my list of possible categories; however Cherie does not organize love in this way at all. Man-woman love is only one of the “different . . . kinds of relationships.” In her list of her “loved ones,” none of them has a “romantic” type of relationship. When I asked what the core of this active love was, Cherie immediately knew—“the way that I show it, through the callings that I’ve had, [as I] learn to love the people that [I] serve.” She was being too general, so I shared a specific personal story about my father’s love, and she responded, “Oh, I just need to pick something *special* like that. And then I can go off on it.” Cherie was primed in her feelings. Then I asked, “What is the most meaningful service that you ever gave in your calling, and how did love make you more able to do that?” Her answer to this question developed into the first sisterhood experience in her Belief essay.

I believe when you act upon the feelings you get when you care for someone, they are acts of love. I know that the relationship I have with my friends is one of service out of love. In my ward in Georgia, there were three sisters named Danielle, Liz, and Suzanne. They are from Oklahoma and are very loud, obnoxious girls. But the other young women in my ward and I would tolerate it to keep them coming to church. They were in a tough situation because their dad was excommunicated from the church and their older brother was trying to keep them active. So we would help with the rides, sit by them in church meetings, and try to tolerate the loudness and disrespect. Once I was called to be the laurel class first counselor, I knew what it required of me, a pure sacrifice, and the need to love them.

I can recall every Friday night, I would be out with my friends, seeing a movie, or hanging out at my house, when my phone would ring. That black screen would say “Cole Girls” and I knew why they were calling. They needed a ride to a stake basketball game again. I wouldn’t have minded were it not for them living 30 minutes inconveniently the opposite direction, and their chances of annoying me beyond contentment. If you know me at all, you know I’ll say yes. So every Saturday I’d wake up 45 minutes earlier than I would have to, and drive the completely opposite direction and honk for those girls. They’d come running out to get into my dad’s [car]. They’d hug me, tell me all these loud stories about these boys, and ask me questions about my friends. They’d ask to stop and eat, I’d say no. They’d ask to turn up the music; I’d say no but eventually give in. They’d ask to use my phone to call a boy, and the list goes on.

Eventually, the conversations would come from both ends. I'd learn to give in to their questions and open up a little about my friends, the boys I was dating, and how I spend my time. Then they'd open up, and a relationship of trust and friendship gave way. I can still recall sitting in those leather seats, the top down, listening to music, and hearing those screaming voices sing along. I learned to love those girls. I learned to love the conversations, the laughter, and eventually I loved serving them. I loved how they would ask for my advice; I liked that fact that I could be their beacon of hope and trust. I love them and I know that I learned to love them through my actions of service toward them. If they took any of my advice to heart, it would be worthless in comparison to the lessons of love they unknowingly taught me. (*Love and be Loved*, pp. 2-3)

Those girls needed the fellowship of Sister Cherie in order to stick together through their “tough situation.” In Mormon families, home is the first church, and father is the priesthood leader. But an excommunicated father undermines faith in the home and shakes his daughters’ confidence in finding supportive husbands. So Cherie would not only model proper dating and courtship values, but also communicate love for her parents. This example of love through service became one of the most powerful ones in her essay, and it seems very important in terms of her personal growth as a kind, decent person and a good example for others. In the next example, this develops further.

When I first realized my true testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I wanted to act upon it. I knew that I loved the feelings I got, and still do every time I feel that amazing warmth. I bear my testimony to express the gratitude I have for my Heavenly Father. After all, how can you show gratitude for anything more than by using the gifts you're given? I love the sense of peace, and joy that follow my actions of service to my Father in Heaven. I know that my actions now show how much I love the Lord and how much I want to serve him. Tasting of the feelings the gospel brings has made many want to reach farther and do more. We do more, rise a little higher, and serve Him out of love. Every weekday morning, I'd get up two hours before the 2,000+ students at my school, and get ready for my early morning seminary class. I'd pick up at least two boys every morning and drive the 10 minutes past my high school to our seminary teacher's house.

We'd had a hard year my senior year of seminary. The attendance was low because the teacher was incredibly and unbearably dull. She was Chinese and did not know how to communicate with us. I remember sitting in class, waking up the freshman and trying my best to answer or get the other kids to answer her questions. There would always be those awkward pauses where she'd ask a question, and wait at least three minutes until someone would answer a question they didn't understand. I'd beg my mom to make her delectable

cinnamon rolls for us again and again and I'm sure that made a tiny dent in the attendance. Services to the Lord because of my love for him.

One night after [an activity] at my house, and after all the other youth had left, my bishop came to talk to me. He asked me how seminary was going. I knew that he was worried, as was our teacher and some parents in the ward. I told him that we were struggling but I was doing my best to give rides and get kids to be more enthusiastic. He then told me something that changed my whole perspective. His sweet words were this, "Cherie, I need you to be the student that makes the difference. One student can make a world of difference in a classroom. Ease my worries for this class." I knew from that night on, I was going to do my best because I wanted to show the Lord how grateful I was for the amazing ward and bishop I was blessed with. Just like when you magnify your calling, you do it because you love the Lord, and you learn to love those you serve. *Love and be Loved* 3-4

She talked about several sisterhoods where she was able to develop this love:

When you care for someone, you want to be everything you can for them. So you change. I remember watching my sisters get ready for dances, performances, and school in the mornings. I would always steal their clothes and try to emulate every action they would take. I loved them. I wanted to change to be like them. I would listen, as they would talk to their friends about their lives. I would follow them around the house being their "little slave" and answering to their every call or request. I would cook for them, clean for them, and run errands for them. When we would go on vacation, I would pack clothes to dress like them, do my hair the way they did, flirt with boys like them. I changed to be like them out of the love I had for them. I loved the way they carried themselves, the way they always looked so pretty and had such cool friends. I loved how they would always have such funny inside jokes and would carry on the most interesting conversations. My sisters to this day are my great exemplars, as well as the rest of my family.

In Cherie's life, the next time that she was in a significant sisterhood, it was in her young adolescence. It is talked about in her song essay, but it has a strong thematic connection and this is why it is presented here, as well.

I think of when I moved away from St. George, Utah. The last girls camp I went to, at the testimony meeting all of the girls bore their testimony about how much they loved me and what a good example I had been to them. My young women leaders hugged me when I cried and said, "Look at all the lives you've touched here, now go and touch more in Georgia." That makes me think of all the people I've loved in my life, and all the places I've left them, I hope that their lives are fruitful because of the kindness and love they showed me at certain times in my life.

When you love someone, in that person's presence, you should want to serve them. You should feel like you want to be a better person because of them. You should want to

expand your potential and become someone better for them. Love calls you to action and becomes a mighty force for change in the world. We need love. We need change. We need the growth that comes from change. And love requires courage. You must have the courage to feel full heartedly for another person. You must strive to be better, to never give up, and to know that love is always worth a sacrifice. You must know that love is worth the effort. Love does not consist of all of the feelings that follow it, but is an action. Show the feelings you have for someone, serve them. Love is a verb. Love isn't something that you receive. Love isn't something that you give. Love is something you do, it is a verb.

In this essay, Cherie would describe her breakup with Jack in terms of their “feelings.”

Those emotional, shallow, and artificial representations of love serve as a foil for the more substantial and truer love in her life.

Love could not be a feeling. Words like compassion and joy are feelings. Love makes people do stupid things. . . . A boyfriend I had over the summer cared so much and did so much for me. I knew we loved each other, and to this day still believe that that love was real. . . . One morning, I woke up with a hollow feeling in my stomach. I cried for two hours. The meaningful feelings of a beautiful relationship had ceased. I remember looking at myself, and realizing that nothing would be the same. I knew that a mighty force for change was needed. . . . I look back and know that change has been something I'm most grateful for. Love is a mighty force for change, a verb.

Cherie asserts that love as a feeling makes people do stupid things. Here she implies the emotionally vapid way Jack broke up with her, mentioned in her song essay: “I cried to him when telling him how much I miss the old [Jack] and he just looked at me blankly . . . he threw our friendship away.” This empty stare led to her “hollow feeling” of sorrow that marked the end of “meaningful feelings of a beautiful relationship.” This is different from the times when Jack *acted in love*, which is the way she still prefers to think of him. But it helps her to understand that this kind of emotionally shallow “feeling” of love was the basis of mistakes and heartaches, not the real, meaningful relationships that comprise her true loves. It seems that romantic love did not meet the deeper needs of her soul.

She shifted throughout the class, coming to understand her feelings more deeply and growing in appreciation and depth for the profound attribute of love as action. It helped her in a

directly therapeutic way, but it also helped her to grow closer to God. In the third conference, she discussed her “horrible” repeated treatment of Jack in each of her three writings. Cherie said that she had focused the whole class on an exploration of her last breakup, and she was frustrated by it, but that rewriting it in story form was “easy” because she could have “totally changed the story.” “I mentioned that writing about her unresolved feelings was therapeutic, and she said it helped her “make sense” of herself. This point was brought home for Cherie when she had recently read a portion of her high school journal.

I do go back and read things from when I very first moved to Georgia and how hard it was. And then all of a sudden I will have a spiritual experience. And I will think, oh my, wow! That like changed me into a completely different person. Like, I was just writing about. . . . It's funny, I was just reading [my diary] the other day. I was reading about this boyfriend that I had. And I thought about him all morning, blah blah.

And then I went to church and I had this whole, change! And the rest of the page is totally different. It is filled with . . . I don't know. I would drive home, and I would listen to EFY [Especially For Youth i.e. LDS summer camp] music. And I would just be like, it's insane how when we are growing up, everyone's minds change and we are all going through it together. And it was just like this whole huge thing! And I'm like, whoa! Ha, ha.

And like at the point I was at in my life, I don't recall ever having thoughts like that. I thought that I was really sad and depressed but then, I wasn't! And it's good to see that I was still learning. And it's cool to see how, like it changes you. It makes you into a different person and you're like, oh, that's why I think that way about things.

When Cherie says, “it’s funny,” she means “ironic” that she would read something that was so relative and connected to her situation now. This passage reinforces the core issue of “feelings” vs. real love, the agent of change. It shows a single-minded crush on an object of passion, in sharp contrast to the deeper love she felt at church, which is the same type of foil that Jack’s breakup provided for her. Cherie’s diary reminded her that she was not always controlled by immature feelings, and the voice of her spiritual experience feels more consistent with the person she has become. She had experienced romantic feelings before, but now she knew that a

sister's love, as represented by the spiritual music, the fellowship, and the experiences at church, was real and true. The "whole huge thing" that taught her, made her happy, and made her into a different person was her growing testimony or conviction of the Gospel. She had not gone to her journal to find such a mature voice, and she was surprised by it. She recognized in it the lesson that true, divine love was not the same as her giddy, shallow, and obsessive feelings of attraction. Even in its less-developed high-school form, her love is more giving and less corrupted by shallow attraction, growing into the sisterhood that she currently espouses.

In a common scenario that I hope would occur in all writing students, students should come to a deeper awareness of their beliefs as they find their voice. Cherie was already a mature author and committed to the idea of writing in her for personal development. But the change was not in her ability to write, rather in her awareness of the important aspects of love in her life, as she has come to see the active aspects in service to others.

The difference in Cherie that came from writing her true self was essentially an expansion or growth. She already had inspired ideas about writing, and I only had to encourage her to go further. The higher aspect of love has been present within Cherie from birth, as indeed her parents are described as exceptionally loving and kind. However, this love has grown within her and pervaded her consciousness through experiences caring for others, and it has become more powerful. Specifically, the love for her sisters is quite profound, as she followed the example of her older sisters, served and befriended the sisters in her home ward in Utah, and grew to love and be an example to her three surrogate sisters in Georgia. She has continued to love her sisters as a counselor in the Relief Society presidency and as a member of the BYUH cheering and dance squad. I hit upon these issues in her, and the lessons keep repeating themselves, as her memories of the details of those loving experiences faded away but the

essence of the idea of a Sister's Love is still present in her consciousness, or spirit. Cherie has an innocent, happy attitude about her, and she is an enthusiast about life.

In conference 3, she talked with me about her belief essay and gave some further insight into her invitation to be the best she could.

Cherie: We had a really good bishop.

Jon: (reads) "He said I need you to be the student who makes the difference."  
Wow. That was sort of a call to serve right there. How old were you when he asked you to do that?

Cherie: It was last year. So I was 18 years old.

Jon: And does it seem to you that you're still doing that? Trying to be the student who makes the difference? Or have you kind of slacked off?

Cherie: I've probably slacked off. Ha, ha. But, I don't know. It helps me a lot when I think about it. Just because he pointed me out and made me feel really important and really special. So that was good. Whenever I think about it, it makes me happy. He was a really good guy.

Jon: So in other words, it was really the relationship of caring that he had with you, and the fact that he cared about you enough to recognize that there was something in you that could be that example.

Cherie: Yeah.

Jon: Wow.

Cherie: (quietly) That's how it goes.

Her bishop helped Cherie to understand her individual worth, and helped her to see how she could influence others in positive ways. It helped Cherie to feel "really special," because the invitation to do the right thing was extended at the right time, for the right reasons.

Jon: So tell me a little about what you think about this idea of love as a verb and how it affects your life now.

Cherie: I have to say that I haven't really thought about how it affects my life now. But the talk that we had made it seem really interesting to me, you know, that you don't love someone until you serve them. Like you can't love a class, unless you're interested in a class and you make the effort. And you can't love

your friends unless you serve your friends. Unless you're being with your friends.

Jon: Right. That's true.

Cherie had been thinking about the service to her Oklahoma sisters being a core part of love ever since I suggested she use that in her belief essay in the second conference two weeks previously. It clearly resonated with a higher aspect in her heart and mind—a core value or idea imbedded in her spirit or consciousness.

I see the evidence of this change in Cherie's essays, and a consecutive view of those essays indicates the changing quality of love deep in her heart. The essay assignments brought out the important aspects of Cherie's growth, beginning a special, happy feeling of someone taking special care of her. Next, she saw the long-term effects of little kindnesses. Finally, she understood that service to others in and through love is the core of all happiness and godliness. I see the true self emerging in Cherie's writing, and also in her attitudes; she was exceptionally happy throughout the class, in her feeling that she was growing and learning.

### **Writing the True Self Taps into Voice and Vision**

In each of the following three participants, a strong sense of self and identity was evident. But they were all coping with internally oriented stressors, aspects of their personalities that were attempting to gain or regain dominance of their feelings. The philosophy tapped into their resources in different ways, channeling pure experience, relying upon creative impulses, and even rationally devising a plan.

## Clark

**Seeing through a rockstar.** In class on the first day, Clark told me that he went by his middle name because in his hometown, having his common first name “meant you were a ‘hick from the sticks.’” He wanted to seem more interesting, not a “good ol’ boy,” and his middle name, of Hebrew origin, showed distinction. It seemed like a good choice to me. Although Clark seemed like someone I could totally waste an evening with and have fun, it would not be doing the same old thing and it would be intellectually engaging in some way. At some point, I realized that he had a strong cynical streak, which is somewhat contrary to my nature, so I wondered if writing his true self would have any depth of impact, until I heard his real voice, which took some doing but was worth the wait.

Clark’s choice of song, “Life like Weeds” will make some sense for a critically thinking person, and he actually described it in those terms, as “a great tool for any listener to seek into deep thoughts on his or her life. It gives us many new perspectives.” So here are the song lyrics and an abbreviated life story of the artist:

In this life like weeds, you're just a rock to me. (Repeats 3 times)

I could have told you all that I love you.  
And in the places you go, you'll see the place where you're from.  
I could have told you all that I love you.  
And in the faces you meet, you'll see the place where you'll die.  
I could have told you all that I love you.  
And on the day that you die, you'll see the people you met.  
I could have told you all that I love you.  
And in the faces you see, you'll see just who you've been.  
I wish I could have told you all . . .

In this life like weeds, in this life like weeds.  
Eyes need us to see, hearts need us to bleed.  
In this life like weeds, you're a rock to me.  
I know where you're from, but where do you belong?  
In this life like weeds, you're the dirt I'll breathe.  
In this life like weeds, you're a rock to me.

(Repeat Chorus)

All this talking all the time and the air fills up, up, up.  
Until there's nothing left to breathe,  
And you think you feel most everything.  
And we know that our hearts are just made out of strings  
To be pulled, strings to be pulled.

So you think you've figured out everything,  
But we know that our minds are just made out of strings  
To be pulled, strings to be pulled.

All this talking all the time and the air fills up, up, up.  
Until there's nothing left to breathe,  
Up until there's nothing left to speak.  
Up until the data parts in space.

One can get a good sense of the artist's state through these lyrics. The singer in question, Isaak Brock gives the impression of someone who is ashamed and unsettled with himself. He has a huge "chip on his shoulder," and this comes through in his lyrics. As a young person, this singer had to live in a flooded house because his mother abandoned him to live with his uncle. Emotionally traumatized, Isaak's only creative outlet was learning to play music in his friend's basement, an environment where he was still trapped by empty words, "talking all the time" and manipulations of his heart and mind or "strings to be pulled."

On my initial reading, I thought that focusing too much on Isaak was keeping Clark from revealing himself in the interpretation, which is not true. I had considered Isaak's past and saw in the lyrics what many readers see: an image of complete condemnation. Isaak comes across as hurt or stuck, which could make listeners susceptible to his awful, reductive views simply through sympathy. But Clark's reading sees through and past the artist, finding phrases that hold extremely valuable insights for him. After some thought, I see that Clark uses the song lyrics as an opportunity to talk about his own core values as a counterpoint to Isaak's philosophy.

Clark begins his interpretation with an analysis of the phrase, “In this life like weeds.” He cites two dictionary definitions of “weed,” a tactic that proves useful. With the first, he interprets that “our lives” are “undesirable, unattractive, or troublesome,” but he goes no further. Clark does not blame life, as Isaak seems to do:

An alternate definition reads, “Weed: A plant that grows on cultivated ground to the exclusion or injury of the desired crop.” This definition gives us a lot more to play with. If a person is to “grow on cultivated ground,” he or she is growing up in a place that was prepared for something or someone to provide a profit. It is the exclusion and injury of the desired crop that makes the difference between the weed and the profitable crop. We can take a corporation like Target for example as the “cultivated ground” a person can use to grow stronger. Target provides many great financial opportunities for those who wish to work hard.

If a weed, or a person who excludes or injures the desired crop, chokes out the deserving crop, he or she is considered undesirable. Isaac probably saw much of the world this way. People, such as his mother or schoolmates, probably trampled on Isaac for gain and a better seat in the individualized worlds they lived in. He probably looked very bitterly upon those people and now sees his life as a “life like weeds.”

A far less dramatic approach on the definition of a “life like weeds” is, in my opinion, one that lasts a short while and is ever moving or ever changing. A weed’s life is a rapid spurt in the comparison to the other long lasting plants in the forest. It appears as though it does not know what is best for the long run so it overextends itself, often in weak soil, causing a short life with a lack of meaning. Our lives are but a short spurt in comparison to the life of the planet we live in.

With this level of detail given to the lyrics, Clark is taking a totally goal-directed and analytical method for interpreting the song. He discusses a worthwhile definition with personal resonances, uses Isaak as a foil to show his shallow intentions, and proposes his own way of looking at the situation. First, he gets deeper into the definition of “life like weeds” by shifting the focus from life to the individual. The feeling is very personal, relating to Clark’s desire to work productively in the real world. He wants to develop personally, “growing up,” “work[ing] hard,” and “grow[ing] stronger,” in a “place that was prepared,” a “cultivated ground,” a “corporation,” a “Target®,” in order to “provide a profit,” and have “financial opportunities” as

a “desired crop,” a “profitable crop.” But he also lays down a rule: “If a weed, or a person who excludes or injures the desired crop, chokes out the deserving crop, he or she is considered undesirable.” Clark is aware that “weeds” are the enemy of productive work, a theme that he considers extremely important—productivity amidst challenges.

Next Clark describes Isaak’s ostensible intent when he wrote the song, a type of foil to his own ideas. “His mother or schoolmates probably trampled on Isaak for gain,” as they tried to “exclude, injure, or choke him out,” and Isaak “looked very bitterly” seeing “much of the world this way.” This is a “dramatic approach” to Clark, who sees right through it.

Finally, Clark adds his “opinion,” an insight that seems much more personal, going away from his initial definitions, and responding to Isaak’s self-definition as a weed directly. Clark notes that the “life like weeds” is temporary and dynamic, not in for “the long run.” Isaak’s perspective is too much bound by this life, which is “rapid spurt in the comparison to the other long lasting plants in the forest.” A weed “doesn’t know what is best for the long run so it overextends itself, often in weak soil, causing a short life with a lack of meaning.” This is profound. Clark knows Isaak is a temporary distraction from truth, and he realizes that he could himself easily be a weed in “weak soil,” although he “knows what is best.” He sees Isaak’s “overextension” of his life as manic, self-consumed, and irrelevant. Clark here both relates to Isaak and rejects him in favor of a “far less dramatic approach,” the one focused on a long, sustainable life. Clark has seen through Isaak’s life as “temporary,” “over-extended” observations showing a “lack of meaning” with regard to “the life of the planet.”

Clark moves on decisively, “Now that we have fully analyzed the first half of the first line, we can move onto the second half of the line, which reads, ‘you’re just a rock to me’.” He leaves the interpretation open, but the effect of this phrase on the listener is elucidated. “The

song can now mean many different things and becomes more personalized because the listener just imagines a “rock” in his or her life, and thinks of it all the way through the song.” He then continues in a more concrete fashion:

The next line I would like to analyze reads, “and in the faces you see, you’ll see just who you’ve been.” Life is supposed to be a continual progression from birth to death. In that time a person can be several different “people.” Someone may start out as an immature little snob, who in later years suffers through several humbling experiences that change who he or she was. This person might not realize it until they see someone else behaving in the manner they used to. Somebody’s life could experience the personalities of many “people” over the course of his or her life. One day this person can see just who they’ve been by looking into the faces of others.

In this passage, I see a determined Clark who is searching for his identity. He has seen these possibilities, become aware of these types of engagement with others, and related it to his own life. It helps him to consider his own situation, and although he may not think much of his own “continual progression from birth to death,” I do think that he sees himself in others. I also think that he is setting the stage for change to happen through negative example. This essay does a good job of opening up Clark in positive ways, enabling reflection on his life.

In the conclusion of his essay, Clark goes back to his initial method of relating to Isaak. He gives a concise, detailed summary of his essay’s main points:

We started out by examining how Isaac had been trampled on and used throughout the course of his life up to this point. He expressed this perhaps by comparing human life to a life like weeds. Half way through the song he says, “In this life like weeds, you’re the dirt I’ll breathe.” This is a dramatic, but predictable change in the thinking of Isaac. Too much of his life he has been stepped on and abused by others, now it is time to change the tide and show everyone else who’s boss. Isaac seems to be claiming that now he is the weed, and everyone else is the dirt that he will breathe. It appears that the singer has climbed on a pedestal and is taking the opportunity to mock everyone who looked down on him previously in his life. He is criticizing all the people that made fun of him. It seems that Isaac has gone somewhere great and become a well-known character in society, while everyone else just stayed at home doing nothing with their lives. Those people are now just the dirt that he breathes. Unfortunately this just proves that stepping over others to get a better place in line is a breeding ground of revenge. Those who got stepped on are going to want nothing more than to get back at those who did them wrong. It has become an endless cycle with anger as one of its primary roots. Fortunately,

through Isaacs's bad example, the listener can better analyze and understand the cause of this phenomenon and use it to better their lives with happy interaction.

This conclusion is particularly useful in communicating the song's feeling holistically, as well as giving a specific, unified interpretation of the situation. Clark has gotten to know Isaak through his song, and can see positive meanings in spite of him. Isaak's blaming rhetoric just becomes a "bad example" of what torturous feelings can do to a person. Clark notes how twisted Isaak's ideas are, "mocking everyone who looked down at him." He thinks these ideas are worthwhile, explaining them as a way to understand the artist and others like him. His sensitivity to the "root" cause of "anger" suggests that he has felt left out or neglected, but he rejects Isaak's sarcastic irony as the right type of response to misunderstanding or poor treatment.

The song essay required Clark to use his own life as a context. However, Clark begins by using the artist's life, and then he relates it to his own sense of things, which becomes personal. Although in other students, the use of impersonal contexts compromises emotional awareness, this is not true in Clark's case. He interprets the feelings, but does not pity Isaak. Clark is not convinced, so he negotiates their meaning critically, giving an interpretation that is emotionally aware. Clark has remained faithful to the primary objective of the task, which has enabled him to focus his attention on his own transforming character and produce something unique.

Other students chose uplifting, idealistic songs that reflected their desire to be better, but Clark chose Isaak's song to show where he had been and where he was going. It was a good strategy, because until I really thought about Clark and read his paper carefully, I thought his personal writing was a tangent to his primary focus on Isaak. This seemed even more pronounced after I read the song lyrics and made my own interpretation. However, the parts of the song that were particularly troubling were not quoted. The phrases that Clark has used in his analysis were chosen very carefully, seemingly on the basis of whether they could be taken in a

positive way. Frustration, blaming, and hurt are issues in him as well, but he has learned to see through them. He has seen through Isaak, taking misdirected intentions to their conclusions and root causes.

Clark's conscientious treatment of this depressing song is just the sort of thing that Elbow was referring to when he said, "Real voice is not necessarily personal or sincere. Writing about your personal concerns is only one way and not necessarily the best" (Elbow, 1981, pp. 312-13). I chose personal writing assignments because they would conscientiously push the adolescent and young adult students towards reflection and self-awareness. Clark was able to see the light dissipating from Isaak's life, and it helped him to focus on his inner resources. He used general terms and conditions as the context for his primary interpretations. But Clark related to the artist, uncompromised by his gloomy perspective. For this reason, the Song Essay can be seen as both compelling and personal.

**The gamer's trap: Draft form.** Just as the Song Essay is most compelling in the conclusion, the Belief essay takes some time to develop. Clark would have been full of anticipation going into the belief essay. He connected deeply with Isaak's stuck, hurt feelings, but his "edges" tell him the solution cannot be as simple as "seeing what's wrong and not doing it." The first four paragraphs will be treated as its "draft form," because he identified this as his approximate page length in Conference 1. These paragraphs go at Clark's belief on a variety of levels, beginning with the obvious and progressing through profound awareness of his personal discontent.

I have spent weeks of my life practicing and training in online video games. I was a Colonel in the game Age of Empires and beat the game Call of Duty 4 in the veteran mode. Sound interesting? Probably not. Video games have their pros and cons like most things in this world. They lead to very boring conversations, but at the same time they demonstrate an innate desire to succeed. I believe in the gamers trap. The gamers trap is a rut in life where a video game inhibits one's ability to progress in productive life skills.

Clark's issue is immediately apparent; "I have spent weeks of my life" playing online video games. He has been victimized by the game, losing his life to it, but now he sees through it in a sarcastic way. His time was wasted, while others find him "boring." This is all normal setup until a sudden change in tone marks the dramatic statement: I believe in the gamer's trap. The momentum of the song essay, the tenor of my class, and the openness of the topic enabled Clark to develop an unreal amount of courage to reveal this problem as his belief. It shows that he is channeling all of his energies into interrogating this issue. It is not an easily comprehensible belief, rather something that has consumed his life. It also steps away from the traditional tropes used when sharing "testimony" at church, sounding more like a private confession.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 are a benign introduction to video games, designed to help a non-informed reader to understand why the issue is important. However, there is no depth of insight, so they will simply be summarized briefly. In the second paragraph, Clark dismisses the typical rhetoric around video games, which centers on whether violence in games causes violent behaviors. He says that despite the attention on this issue, the science is not there to back it up, and nothing gets accomplished. Potential test subjects are "all around us . . . wasting their days trying to advance to the next level." The implication is that they are not violent at all, "willing to participate in an experiment" with rules and controls for "some kind of reward." But wouldn't they just get addicted to the experiment?

The third paragraph defines video games as "the interaction between a human being and a motion picture video device." He delineates two contemporary types: Real Time Strategy Game (RTS), and Role-Playing Game (RPG). "They both involve strategy, but on very different levels," the first developing an economy, civilization, or other strategic operation, with various "opportunity costs" and potential rewards. The second type is a single-player game following

quests towards individual character development. Both types are massively multiplayer, which means that millions of people around the whole world are playing.

In paragraph four, Clark begins his confession. Things are not good in his life, and he describes three progressing stages of desperation: imbalance, abuse, and total abandonment.

Like everything in this world, a state of equilibrium must be acquired when spending time playing video games. I have a type of personality that struggles with obtaining this sense of balance. Whenever I begin playing a new game, I don't stop until I have had way too much. I feel I need to become an expert at it as soon as I possibly can. Before I know it I have spent every ounce of spare time playing a game that contributes to my future minimally.

I play video games like an addict abuses drugs. Fortunately there is no withdrawal and/or long-term cravings after I cut video gaming from my daily activity that one would get after quitting a chronic drug problem.

I could also compare my media activity with that of a hurricane season. So many times I have played a game intensely for a period of time, then realized that the only way I could stop was to cut it out of my life entirely. I just can't seem to find a balance between entertainment and my other priorities. This constant up and down of video game use has caused me to think on the matter for most of my life. I have pondered on what reasons would cause me to lose so much control of my life and have me at the mercy of a game.

The imbalanced stage of feeling begins with Clark admitting that he has no “equilibrium.” This is a very high-level analysis of his state of being. “Equilibrium” is a psychological reality that he needs within him but he cannot attain. Saying this is a cry of desperation—he becomes totally absorbed, sucked into the game. He wants to stop feeling so half-cocked and emotionally imbalanced. His objective is not to become a certain rank, to beat a powerful opponent, or to achieve prestige. Clark must “obtain” or “acquire” balance, but his “personality” was dominated by an overwhelming feeling or need—“to become an expert at it as soon as I possibly can.” His desire for balance is never satisfied, which is paradoxical because in other pursuits, attaining mature mastery of the game brings a natural equilibrium. It is not the player who achieves mastery over the game, rather the game achieving mastery over the players.

Next comes the admission that he is abusing video games like a drug, a severe self-reprisal that very few freshmen would say. Clark's life is so disordered and unharmonious, or "out of whack" that he suffers like a drug addict. He takes "play" to an extreme, "abusing" the game like a drug, with negative effects and side effects. He feels like a victim because he cannot stop. As a psychology major, Clark treats his addiction clinically, describing the daily habit, the cessation of it, and his "fortunate" feelings in place of "withdrawal and/or long-term cravings." He explicates his existential condition compellingly, but he does not have control of it.

He continues with the analogy that his activity is like a "hurricane season," a destructive natural force from which the residents must be delivered. This is a psychological desperation with his condition that comes from seeing his own mental and emotional systems being bound and inhibited, but not being able to do anything about it. But he sees a light at the end of the tunnel—promise of a deeper, fuller condition within him that must be liberated. So the powerful storm must end abruptly, with no calming-down required. "Cutting" is his objective, as nothing can remain to trigger a relapse. During his first conference, Clark admitted that after he uninstalled the game from the computer, he "had to cut the disc in half so he wouldn't be tempted." In ceasing to play, he is conscientiously attempting to find "balance between entertainment and other priorities." But he cannot. He is justifiably concerned about the "reasons [that] would cause [him] to lose so much control of life and have [him] at the mercy of a game."

Clark really does not know why or how he forfeited his will to the game. This game gives purpose to the time he spends and direction for the choices he makes, so it is tied up with the meaning in his life. He uses the game to share and define himself, which may be why it is so hard to extract himself from it; arguably it is the most significant context for "most of his life," his late childhood and adolescence. In his writing about the game, he is navigating through a

chaos of wonderful insights but he does not know how to bring order to those insights. There is no sense of difference between things that he can change, such as his own state of mind and those he cannot, like the game's effect on him. He is still searching for answers in his writing, but he must listen to his own anguished cry for help, must privilege his insights, and treat them with better care.

“Writing the True Self” has helped Clark get to this point. The song essay provides a prism through which to see his ideals, and the belief essay started small, enabling him to share in a limited, non-disclosing way. But then it grows to give him a forum to share his ideals and trials. Clark has put his feelings to paper with a powerful voice, perhaps for the first time, after thinking about it “almost his whole life.” All of these themes are ones that have occurred to him before, but he only does something about it on rare occasions. Now he is negotiating back and forth between his private love/hate relationship with the game. This passage has a flow and movement to it, transitioning freely between his multiple levels of concern: surface life, his unconscious feelings and desires, his deeper moral responsibilities, his higher purpose of life, the greater good. But it all is related to the experience of gaming, shared with millions.

I believe that paragraph 4 comes from Clark's freewriting in class. Fifty minutes of writing in the intense environment brought out this jumble of insights, and he went about organizing them. Writing the true self relies heavily on this activity, and tapping into voice set the stage for the questions, “What is your core belief? At the center of your consciousness, what issue relates all other things, brings meaning and makes a unity with your identity, your belief, your sense of the world?” How did the approach help Clark break through? Where else would he have been asked to be so self-revelatory?

I believe that coming to a deeper understanding of his strengths and weaknesses is one of the main reasons that Clark came to BYU–Hawaii. The entire curriculum is designed to teach on both the secular and the spiritual levels. On every level, he realizes that the spiritual truth that can take the place of his gaming obsession can only be found through deep, personal introspection. He knows he will discover answers to his questions as he feels safe, as he starts talking, and as he continues to find the meaning of his life.

**The first conference.** During the first conference, Clark admitted that his belief essay draft was about 2½ pages long, where the fourth paragraph ends. I read it through with interest and felt some connection to it, given my past and ongoing experiences with video games. While I was reading it, I asked him to talk me through the different issues in the belief paper. When I reached the part about games contributing to his life minimally (he could see where I was in the paper) he added some personal commentary that did not completely emerge in his final belief essay. He wondered,

What is it in the game exactly that is making me want to keep going? If I can translate that into a career hopefully in something and relate it along those lines so that I will enjoy it the same way? Something similar.

He is very concerned to find work that will not bore him, but he is looking for something in the game that will “make him want to keep going.” He has seen this desire for progression within himself, but he does not know how his old way of living relates to his new phase of life. Although I could not answer this question, in the first conference, Clark and I established a solid trust, exchanging ideas about culture, the place of video games, education, and teen psychology. I was fascinated by his essay, realizing that he had a vision behind it and a determination to follow through. The fact that it was more practical than idealistic was fine, because I had read his

song essay and considered it too connected with the artist's views, but now he was being personal.

At the end of this long, interesting, and informative session, I surprised Clark with my confession that I had experienced a similar video game withdrawal a few years earlier, after playing 780 hours in one year. We commiserated about how hard it was to remove the game from the computer. I took advantage of this feeling of connection, and he was ready to hear more, so I told Clark specifically what his writing needed to succeed:

Jon: Well I think you are going in the right direction. I think that ya, ya need to . . . develop it more? Um, you know? Just, instead of trying to tell people about an experience . . . or instead of trying to describe it, in terms of telling a person about it, try and show them how it is. Show them (simultaneously) how it feels.

Clark: (simultaneously) You mean like facts and statistics?

Jon: No. I'm talking about something from the inside.

Clark: Oh.

Jon: You have to describe your own feelings,

Clark: What it's like, okay.

Jon: The way it feels to be in the moment, to be enraptured by the game.

Clark: Yeah.

Jon: and you have to say it in such a way that it's compelling.

Clark: Um hmm.

Jon: And so that another person can say, "Oh my goodness!"

Clark: No wonder!

Jon: "I can feel."

Clark: Yeah.

Jon: "I feel where you have been."

Clark: Maybe not in the same way, but in something else.

Jon: Uh huh.

Clark: I've felt that way before.

Jon: Well, no! It connects with things that they have done in the past. So their past is some *context* for understanding it. But because you describe it so emotively, because you talk about your whole body being involved in the game, your mind, your heart, your soul. Your smells, your, your sound, your talking, your everything, is . . . you know the feel of the controls, the keyboard, the flashing lights going one way and the other. And it feels like you're in a real world. (Intensely) And that, *that* (points at the computer screen) is *you* (points at Clark)

Clark: Yeah.

Jon: in there. You have to take that same *feeling* that you get when you're *stuck* on a game and make the *reader* feel that.

Clark: Okay.

Jon: Relating to you.

Clark: Would it be appropriate to bring in facts? And like research

Jon: It's . . .

Clark: statistics and things? Or stay away from that and say my . . .

Jon: It's actually going to be better for right now to just try to describe your pure experience.

Clark: Okay.

Jon: Toss in a few little things here and there, but that's what the research paper is for.

Clark: Yeah.

Jon: So.

Clark: All right.

Jon: That's, that's my suggestion. All right?

Clark: Thank you.

Jon:        You're welcome.

End of Conference

This tutorial was given specifically at the moment when Clark needed it. He was writing, but he lacked focus to stay on his personal topic. He needed to write more but needed direction. I told him to take the feelings directly from his experience of the game. In my courses, I tell students about Dorothy Sayers, a rhetorical philosopher who said that the writer had to re-experience the past and feel it as it was to him/her in the first place. "It is not something that happened to you, but that is happening in you."

**The belief essay: Final form.** Clark had listened intently at the end of my conference, so I was thinking that he would write some interesting things. His first four paragraphs were good, but the next four are even better. As I mentioned earlier, because Clark said he had 2½ pages in the first conference, I am considering paragraphs 1-4 his draft. He added four more paragraphs to make the final form of the Belief essay. Other evidence for this is that I told Clark to use "personal experience" to further develop his paper, and paragraph 5 begins with those words. Paragraphs 5-8 delve into his perceptions about video games on many time levels, his everyday life, his immediate sensory impressions, long-term effects, and in the public sphere. These paragraphs amplify the effect of paragraph 4 tremendously. Whereas paragraph 4 has several levels of interest, paragraphs 5-8 each take on a particular issue.

In the fifth paragraph, Clark discusses his typical daily routine when playing an RTS game, developing a culture that would rise or fall in war and six hours of history.

Personal experience is what makes me wonder why more people are not focusing on this issue. I know I am not the only one who gets those strong cravings to play a video game. When I would get home from school, homework and chores become second priority. First priority of course is the video game. The routine was the same almost every day. First I would walk into my house after school. A quick snack was always of first priority because a vital mind makes for much better game play. I would sit down in front of my computer and be logged into a multiplayer game within a couple of minutes. Multiplayer

games are games fought over the Internet between several different human beings, not just the computer. This made for much more exciting and dynamic game play.

Other thoughts and stresses such as chores and homework would have left my mind entirely by this point. All I could think about is losing myself in the world of online gaming. The game that sucked me in the furthest and tempted me the most often would probably be Age of Empires. This is a RTS game where the player builds up a civilization to go to war. Each game would last anywhere from a half hour to six hours long. When so much time is dedicated to one game, it is hard to break oneself away from the computer to do such simple tasks like going to the bathroom. Each game mattered significantly since all online games were ranked. Everyone had his or her own rank and winning percentage for everyone to read. If one game were exited just to go wash the dishes, that game would be counted as a loss. My rank and winning percentage would be greatly affected if I succumbed to all these petty interruptions. Rank and winning percentage may sound trivial, but other players always checked these statistics before a game to see if you were good enough to play with them. These statistics determined whether or not you would play with other players that are considered a challenge.

Clark here specifies the previous paragraph in typical encounter, observing his routine in the first ten sentences, and then going inside of his head for actual experiences. This describes the remarkable hold of the gamer's trap in a typical situation. Reality takes the backseat to the game, if petty distractions like the dishes take Clark away from his directives. It is beneficial for Clark to say these things, but it does not actually help get him away from the trap.

In paragraph six of the essay, Clark goes way beyond thoughts, continuing the life focus of the previous paragraph, but at a close, careful level. It explains his desperation to be free:

Throughout my day at school or wherever I might be, my thoughts always seemed to end up with the video game. When I was bored, I would always remember the game and how fun it was going to be playing it at home that day. It was like a fix, similar to what many drug users say they feel when they have gone without their drug for a period of time. I just didn't get all the physical jitters and such, it was all mental and within my thoughts. Before I would even enter a game, the sense of satisfaction would stream through my body. When I would sit down at the chair a slight euphoric feeling would resonate through all my muscles giving me a sense of relaxation. I had finally made it to that place I had been thinking of all day and now I could get lost in my own little world and be satisfied with it. I knew what I had at my fingertips and what I could accomplish in the game. When a challenging game was won, it was equally as satisfying as when I would beat a formidable opponent at tennis (which I played at the time). Tennis may seem more important than the petty little video game, but the sense of satisfaction was close to equal. The video game just didn't require all the exercise and hard work that tennis did. The

video game allowed me to sit around lazily without leaving my home and feel the sense of satisfaction that I would get if I had won an important tennis match.

This is a lucid vision of his actual state in the gaming experience. Under an intense focus, Clark shares feelings, sensations, and ideas that lead to wonderful insights. Clark is reaching extraordinary levels and few people if anyone has described the gaming experience in this way. He has unlocked his feeling and potential, sharing with the reader openly, without fear of judgment. The effect is overwhelming—the reader feels the mental anticipation; the game is with him always; the promise is appealing; it leads to a discontented, victimized, “lazy” sense. He turned inward and reflected on his condition in remarkable ways, but he is still caught.

This paragraph and its resolution directly illuminate the concept of Clark’s gaming life as established in the previous paragraph. He realizes that the American culture and video games generally are cultivating basic, brutal ways of being, delivering satisfaction without effort and work. In the first conference, Clark specified this, “There is an age group of people that grew up playing those kind of games. Once they get into the bigger job fields, I think it’s going to start posing a bigger problem.” No work and all play make Clark a dull, cynical, unfulfilled young man. Clark takes this quite a bit further by personalizing his sensations and the “voice” within him gains power, emerging as compelling, specific, and very interesting.

In paragraph 7, Clark transitions from the immediate experience of gaming to the long term effects. It outlines the chain reaction of breaking the hold of a video gaming addiction.

If I were to let up my skills in the game would greatly diminish. If that were to happen I would stop progressing and just hit a plateau in my abilities. If that were to happen my satisfaction would go down and the game wouldn’t give me the same feelings it provided me with previously. Just writing about my feelings while playing the game brings back the vivid memories of how fun the game was and how good it made me feel. The brain is a very powerful tool and the video game takes control of it.

Here Clark begins to experience a type of withdrawal. He remembers how the gaming felt and he does not want to give up on it. This continues in the final paragraph, which I will not

quote. He steps out of his powerful personal voice and attempts to redeem video games by trying to make them teach more worthwhile things about social or economic issues.

In Conference one, I had found additional insights from Clark's comments while I read his belief essay draft. Similarly, in Conference 2, I had again asked Clark to talk about his final belief paper as I was reading it. When I got to the second page, the conflict between equilibrium and the gamer's trap, he described the pervasive effects of gaming, and what the change was in his life afterwards.

Video games suck a lot of people in and change social behaviors. Like in me, I've noticed when I'm playing videogames and when I'm not playing videogames, I notice a big difference. Like at school and stuff I wouldn't talk with so many people. My thoughts would be on other things. When I'm off of it, I don't know, things just started to flow more, I associate with other people, and I have better things to talk about. I have better things on my mind. It just kind of consumed my thoughts. And that, thoughts are everything, I mean.

This let me hear something that was missing from the paper, as Clark specifies and gives more insight to his credo. He clearly was considering these things, but they just were not manifested in the paper. This excerpt goes in a different way than his actual conclusion, and can be considered an "alternative ending." It is more hopeful and shows a shift in his thoughts. It simply occurred to him in the session to specify his state of mind in this way, perhaps because I was open and understanding. Perhaps it also shows a new level of insight, because he has an alternative of embracing a life with others, not simply living in his own mind.

With self-insights and confessions, Clark described how other people help him to live inside his head. When he is playing, he cannot really be himself because his thoughts are "consumed" in the trap. Things "flow more" when he is not playing games, he associates and talks with others more often, and he "has better things on [his] mind." And whereas before, Clark was trying to compose a report about a productive video game, considering time spent vs.

learning skills, now he knows that “thoughts are everything, I mean.” He not only cannot submit to the game, he has a lively mind and freedom of thought.

Clark comes away from the belief essay with the lucid realization that his gaming is cultivating primarily shallow, brutish desires inside him. A light within him shows he should not be wasting his time on the game. It is robbing him of the potential learning and growth that real mental activity engenders, forming a hollow, shallow, and meaningless satisfaction without connection to the world. He realizes that his drives are still caught inside “the gamer’s trap,” and he wishes that he could use his insights in a more productive manner. This is a true desire, a definite path that if followed could help to blunt the negative effects of video games. Clark has seen two directions: bring fantasy to reality by making the real world like a game, or bring reality to fantasy and make the game relevant to the world. He would like society to respond, scientists, educators, and developers collaborating to make a more ideal situation where playing games would be worthwhile.

In his belief essay, Clark followed the assignment because it was personal and connected to his real experiences; not two or three intense, important experiences, but years of them. Clark described setting up alternate worlds when the real world does not suit him, and he understood intuitively that the person he was becoming in that game world had few skills transferrable to the real social, historical, and economic contexts. I felt that Clark respected the curricular philosophy, even though its conscientious idealism occasionally conflicted with his personality. He took my writing criticism well, because he wanted to have a real impact and he could separate himself from his writing. Because we had differing perspectives, he often disagreed with me, but with the object of learning something productive.

The song essay, "If you were a Weed," relates directly to his addiction to online role-playing strategy games. This issue of conflict and bad feelings resonates inside of him because he is trying to overcome this addiction. Just as Isaak's life showed him that people were not judged equally, lusts ruled the world, challenges were unfair, and laughing at others was a way to cope, Clark has also spent time in the virtual "wild west," where anything goes. But it is all illusory. Clark is seeing through it as he sees through Isaak.

During the class, Clark had a real-world attitude about everything, and contributed often. He understood the ideas behind writing his true self, and he wanted to learn to inhabit his perspective and express himself so he could be an effective communicator. Clark demonstrates that this curricular approach could benefit people in transition. He is in there fighting, which is commendable. He recognizes that gaming is a trap, just like Isaac was trapped. Clark is trying to inherit an adult world, and he would love meaningful work, but he has not found it, so he retreats into a fantasy. He is unhappy with himself, and this a weakness that he cannot lick.

**Taking a step forward.** Did Clark get any further with this issue? At first sight, he seems to be still stuck inside the gaming world, in a virtual-world obsession, a psychological and emotional malady. In the second office conference, he indicated that his mind was more natural, with better desires when he was not playing games. In the fourth conference, he took this discussion of effect one step further, "People my age and younger, I think that's the critical stage, There's so much time that we've wasted, me and then all my friends. Spending half of our time doing something else, I could've learned two instruments or other things." Here Clark shows a level of awareness. He does not even try to compare what the game brought him to what the real world experiences could have provided. There is no comparison; it is simple waste. Now he talks about how he can escape the trap by learning things in the real world. This will work especially

if he follows the feelings of true significance that are important to him, “spending” time instead of “wasting” it.

Clark follows this insight with a diagnosis of the more pervasive effects of gaming on society. Particularly, in education, “we're kind of basing [school] around the game now. We have lowered the standards. It's made so easy that learning actual skills is hard.” This statement seems to conflict with his first desire to turn games into learning experiences, however I believe that his problem is not with games, but with wasted potential. Inside the “trap,” he had identified a positive aspect in him, a “desire” to succeed, but he realized that the game had deliberately placed him in an infinite loop. This is unacceptable for “Colonel Clark,” the incisive strategist with an advanced philosophical goal: equilibrium. This state could only occur if the outcomes were changed so that players learned productive skills, balanced their fun-to-work ratio, reached meaningful learning milestones, and eventually completed the course. He is speaking with authority and attempting to use the things that he has learned. Clark sees the game everywhere and he wants to be one who harnesses the power of games in some way, real or virtual, and work towards the social good—he wants to be, in a word, a *game-changer*.

These two essays and conferences show that there is a lot “growing” inside of Clark. Clark is maturing, gradually inhabiting a perspective that is authoritative and compelling. His whole person is emerging in different ways, coming to realizations and believing he can change. This may be why I thought Clark’s discussion of weeds and cultivated ground in the song essay was reminiscent of the Bible parable about the wheat and the tares. The “wheat” is the nascent, developing seeker of truth, while the “tare” is a poisonous counterfeit that grows alongside the wheat. As in the parable, the non-nutritive aspects of games are discarded as waste in Clark’s belief essay and conference discussions, through a critical, “winnowing” process. The nutritive

aspects combine in the essay's more poignant, sensory moments, in a refining of textures and flavors inside him; his ideas are "cooking," and he is developing personal commitments.

Elbow also talks about growing and cooking, in terms of writing. Instead of the mechanized steps of the writing process, he compares the creative endeavor to growing a garden and cooking the food (Elbow, 1998, p. 51). Intuitively, one would never begin cooking baby carrots before they have matured, yet many do this in their writing. Instead, everything one writes must grow up inside oneself, raw and dirty. The "messy" aspects of life help to fertilize the author's inner garden, so that it can produce during periods of freewriting and brainstorming. But the raw writing must be washed, prepped, processed, and cooked before it can become delicious.

Clark wants to become useful, and his writing is a manifestation of that desire. Perhaps he is using these essays as his "test plots," or "trial runs," encouraging his inner gardener and inspiring his inner chef to stop settling for corn dogs and popcorn and instead to seek for nourishment. He is developing Perspective, authority, refining himself to a certain extent. He is groping constantly for larger visions, and he finally has a larger vision, but a lot is still to come.

## **Annie**

**Sharing the joy and wonder of life.** Annie often playfully appends the diminutive suffix "-boo," i.e., the sweet, little one, to the end of her name. This must have been a term of affection in her family. Innocent and enthusiastic, she is always up for talking with her friends, "her best-ies." She has a smile to light up a room and a joy about her that is hard to miss. This makes her an exceptional performer and a great addition to the BYU-Hawaii Concert Choir. This ensemble performed at a Christmas concert later that semester. As they transitioned from a serious song to a happy one, Annie was the first singer to "loosen up" and dance a little with the music. Her

body language was contagious and the feeling spread to the rest of the group, which started to enjoy the performance more, and the audience felt the shift in emotion.

As Annie writes her true self, she experiences this same type of natural movement. So it is fitting that the theme of Annie's curricular interaction is sharing in the joy and wonder of life. She is sensitive on many interpersonal levels, so reading her motivations becomes a complex case. One cannot imagine Annie without knowing she is deeply into her family of origin. She loves her friends and extended family, too but that is not the end of it. Annie also relates in caring ways to society at large, and to well-known individuals and virtual strangers alike. Her joy becomes exceptionally clear with understanding of both essays, but with this awareness up front, we can see in these essays a sympathetic person who talks deeply about depression and uses the power of music to bless her life and others.

Her song essay, "Dealing with Depression," is a subtle, emotive masterpiece. In it, Annie analyzes "Rainy Days and Mondays," by the Carpenters, which serves as a mirror to this serious, yet overlooked mental illness. She quotes the whole song one verse at a time, interspersing discussion of its themes throughout. But the song analysis is primarily a device to help the reader see her main point, which is how she and several of her loved ones suffered with depression, even unto attempted suicide in some cases. As the assignment said, Annie has put the song into the context of her life, which is already very connected with her family and the world at large. With poignant questions and implicit arguments, she supports her conclusion so well that readers must agree. The following (1-16) is the entire essay. In Annie's introduction (1), the energy of life is exuberant.

**Song essay: Dealing with depression.**

1. Owen Wilson, a famous actor, seemed as if his life was going great. Nothing could bring this guy down. He had it all: looks, money, talent, ladies. What more could he possibly

want? My uncle too was a popular guy. He went out on lots of dates with his female friends, was incredibly talented with his music, and was so friendly to everyone. However these two young men had a secret. They both hid depression behind their façade of popularity. Unfortunately, depression led eventually to trying to commit suicide. One did not succeed but the other, tragically killed himself.

2. Many people may not know this, but depression is not that uncommon. Although it is so common, people tend to keep it hushed up. All around the world, people of all different backgrounds suffer from this. One might not know that the person right beside them on the subway has had enough with life and is ready to give. Keeping depression quiet does not help anything. On the contrary, it makes things worse. Putting on a smile and trying to get through it will not help one suffering get over it. They need help. The song *Rainy Days and Mondays* sung by Karen Carpenter is about depression. It holds a special place with me because some of my friends and family members as well as me have struggled with it. The three major themes that keep this song so truthful to the illness are giving up, keeping quiet, and feeling alone and out of place.
3. *Talking to myself and feeling old*  
*Sometimes I'd like to quit*  
*Nothing ever seems to fit*  
*Hanging around, nothing to do but frown*  
*Rainy days and Mondays always get me down*
4. One common sign of depression is giving up. The whole first verse of this song is about giving up. It is a familiar feeling for those who have depression. They are the ones in school who decide not to do anything because it is just too hard for them, when in reality it is fairly simple task required of them. "Hanging around" is showing the loss of interest one feels when they are depressed. They feel as if there is nothing to do and they stop doing the activities they love. Projects that once grabbed their attention are dropped.
5. When my best friend's mother started losing interest in music (which happened to be her favorite thing in the world), we knew something was wrong. She wasn't the same. Instead of sitting down to play the piano or flute, she would just sit around and do nothing. Even the animals on the farm that she loved so much were being neglected! Fortunately her husband is a doctor and knew what symptoms of depression to look for. He had her set up on a medicine in no time. Ever since then, she has been able to fight the sickness.
6. *What I've got they used to call the blues*  
*Nothing is really wrong*  
*Feeling like I don't belong*  
*Walking around, some kind of lonely clown*  
*Rainy days and Mondays always get me down*
7. The second verse of the song is about feeling alone and out of place. Feeling alone is something nobody wants to experience. When I was in high school, there were times

when I just needed to somebody to hear what I was going through. I wanted somebody I could talk to and for them to give me advice and comfort, but I felt there was absolutely nobody who I could tell. It was awful. Writing in a journal can only relieve so much pain. I needed someone to talk back to me and tell me everything was going to be alright; that it was ok to feel like this.

8. I would become so wrapped up in my weak mortal state that I would forget the fact that I had a Father in heaven who would listen to what I had to say and comfort me. Sometimes, I would feel so lost that I would question if he really cared about me. Wondering the whole time I was feeling this, if he truly loved me, how could he let me suffer? Now I have a better understanding of why any illness inflicts the body (physical or mental). Our heavenly Father has to test his children by giving them trials. Some trials may seem harder or easier, and even unfair. Whatever the case, he will not test one above their ability. Through the prayer and the power of the lord and his priesthood, one can overcome anything they are given.
9. *What I feel has come and gone before  
No need to talk it out  
We know what it's all about  
Hanging around, nothing to do but frown  
Rainy days and Mondays always get me down*
10. The last verse of the song talks of how the sickness is kept quiet. No one ever wants to talk about. Any physical kind of injury is, for the most part, accepted by society. One of my sisters has a rare disease in her knee that eats away at the bone causing her to have had 7 knee surgeries. After a surgery she would receive phone calls, meals cooked for her, and support from her friends, family, and ward members. My other sister however, has a different sickness: depression. On her mission it became very apparent that she needed help. Every day it seemed like a burden for her to wake up. On top of that she was also dealing with an eating disorder. Once she saw the psychiatrist, he gave her medicine to help her. In about one month she got better. I didn't even know this was happening till I overheard my parents talking to each other. They didn't want to tell anyone because they feared my sister would be embarrassed about it. Why is it that we must be embarrassed about mental illnesses and not physical? What is it about mental illnesses that make others look at that person with the illness so differently? Yet when no one knows they are taking medicine for it, they think nothing of it.
11. In the first line of the last verse, it mentions that the feeling has come and gone before. For me, this sentence is especially true. It comes and goes. Sometimes the pain is stronger than ever. Other times are not as bad. The first couple years of high school were the hardest. My parents didn't know what was wrong with me and instead of asking me or taking me to a doctor, they would just get angry with me (for that was the way I almost always acted with them). It did not help matters at all. Regardless of what I did, I would have two good weeks and two bad weeks. The feeling would come and go. I tried to be happy but it seemed to me that there was truly nothing to do but frown.

12. *Funny but it seems I always wind up here with you*  
*It's nice to know somebody loves me*  
*Funny but it seems that it's the only thing to do*  
*Run and find the one who loves me*

13. The chorus of the song is what I like the most. All the verses of this song are sad but in the middle there are these beautiful words that tell of someone that she has to go to. For me, this person is my heavenly Father. It is more than nice to know that my father in heaven loves me. These words are literally how I feel when I am down. In the end I pray to my heavenly father. I always wind up asking him for my help. The amazing part is that he does listen and answers my prayer.

14. In my family there happens to be a lot of people with some sort of mental problem. Not everyone is insane or crazy like what most people think of when they think mental disorder. Only one of my family members has been hospitalized for being insane (he was adopted). My younger brother however, when he was younger, did not have a lot of friends. My older sisters and I would tease him sometimes. Although we did not mean anything by it, we did not know the injuries we caused. It added to his already sinking depression till he was at the point where he wanted to kill himself.

15. Fortunately he is doing better now as well as everyone in my immediate family. Like the song says it comes and goes. The first step to overcoming a mental illness is realizing one has one. Once that step is covered, one may see themselves from a different light and get the help they need. This song rings true for me because I have been through everything in there. From wanting to quit and knowing nothing is really wrong to running to my heavenly father so he can comfort me and help the pain go away.

16. This song is a constant reminder to me that depression is real and it can hurt anyone. Instead of keeping it locked, we as a society should accept the fact that people around us are hurting. Instead of closing them out, we should open our arms and help them. Let them know that they are truly not alone.

Depression is the antithesis to Annie's "joy and wonder of life" and as such, requires total dedication and serious consideration. This essay has three major levels: the song lyrics themselves, the personal account, and the application to her family, friends, and others. She doesn't talk much about the song itself, aside from using its structure (v. 1, 2, 3, chorus) to organize her discussion thematically. She identifies a main idea from each verse and ignores other things that do not directly relate to her subsequent discussion. The lyrics are already there, so she does not quote them as much as use the same ideas. But what she does with those themes

is remarkable, personal, and even transcendental. I will begin with the second level of organization, a personal account from the essay's middle paragraphs, 7, 8, 11, and 13, which relates to the second verse and the chorus, respectively. These passages pack an emotional punch.

Annie begins her personal account by identifying her struggle with loneliness and estrangement (7). She “felt so lost,” “wondered” if God “truly loved” her, and thought, “There is absolutely nobody I can tell.” For some reason she did not accept that this was the way things should be, wanting “advice and comfort” and needing “someone to know what I was going through.” But Annie had to find her true voice in personal prayer, sympathetically listening to her own sorrow, and she had to stop using words as violence. She eventually rejected her “weak mortal state” and her relationship with God shifted (8); he was not “*lett[ing]* [her] suffer,” he was “*test[ing]* [her] by *giving* [her] trials.” With this came the conviction that “through the prayer and the power of the Lord and his priesthood, [she] can overcome anything [she is] *given*,” her “ability” growing through trials. She does not go into details, but it seems a tripartite relationship that totally relies on her—she must do something first. She came to believe that she would inevitably overcome her sorrows and grow in gratitude, joy, and wonder. This change began through subtle shifts in her spiritual life.

Annie still has some depressive feelings, but they are kept mostly at bay by her happiness with life, the spirit of music, and the love of her family (11). Her mid-teens were the worst as the depression “came and went,” cycling between anger and sadness in a self-perpetuating imbalance. No one could “cure” Annie of this inner conflict in her spiritual life. But in the chorus (12), Karen describes something incomprehensible to Annie’s depressed mind: It is “funny,” but “somehow” “the one who loves [her]” is “always” there. Sometimes this just happens and it’s

“nice to know,” but other times, she must choose to “run and find.” Annie says, “This is exactly how I feel” (13). She has also found an answer to her depression through love. Annie’s favorite passage in the song, “these beautiful words” tell her that her “father in heaven loves” her. When she is depressed, she “prays to [her] heavenly father, asking him for [her] help” (13). She is grateful for “the amazing part” that God plays: “he does listen and answers my prayer.” Annie does not point to a single conversion experience; rather she focuses on the way her faith in God enables her to find the joy in life.

Annie has gone through a tremendous amount of self-disclosure in the song essay, presenting her illumination so compellingly that one can assume she was already a skilled writer when she entered my course. Perhaps encouraged by the personal nature of the charge, she shared her life experiences without regard for social stigma (as in 10). Annie perceives the problem clearly, and responds only to the formal charge as it relates to her vision.

The rest of Annie’s essay is the third level, a framework or social context into which her own story fits wonderfully. In it, she turns to others and tries to respect and protect them, advocating for the ones who feel they cannot speak. She begins by stating that depression is almost universally denied. Even well-liked people can have a “façade,” which begins internally as a mask for their sadness, and projects as a larger-than-life image to hide this secret (1). She plays up the contrast between their expected and actual behaviors, surprising the reader that they would want to throw their lives away. Sufferers like Wilson and her uncle use overcompensation and deceit, but Annie has sympathy for them and thinks their situation is “tragic.” In (2), the public’s complicit role is revealed, “keeping depression quiet.” Annie stresses the magnitude of the problem: people “all around the world” and even “right beside [us] on the subway” are “suffering,” but we do not know how to react: optimism “does not help” and only “makes things

worse.” Annie’s implicit thesis is that readers must first *learn* depression’s symptoms: “giving up, feeling alone and out of place, and keeping quiet,” *then* help.

Depression is characterized in (3) by feeling self-absorbed, worn out, and uncomfortable. These private, shaming emotions can be controlled in public. “Giving up” is another “familiar feeling,” but it manifests as a “common sign of depression” (4). When students or loved ones seem to forget their abilities and “decide not to do anything,” “show[ing] the loss of interest” by just “hanging around,” it is deeper: they “feel as if there is nothing *to do*.” Nothing can be done, they can do nothing, and nothing can be done for them. One sufferer who felt this way was her “best friend’s mother,” a country doctor’s wife (5). This beautiful woman was always doing things for her family, but she was not immune to depression. When she stopped playing music and “just sat around and did nothing,” they “knew something was wrong. She wasn’t the same.” This is the first clue in Annie’s writing that music may be related to her own joy in life. The music had left her loved one’s heart, subtly transitioning into Annie’s trial, in which a lone soprano finds a listener in a seemingly empty church (6-8).

Annie’s subsequent theme is also her next level of involvement, “no need to talk it out (9).” Physical ailments are talked about freely, and everyone serves the valiant, beautiful sister who suffers, but endures (10). But because her other sister had a mental ailment, there was no story of her suffering, and secrecy kept her from the caring of her whole family. Annie only discovered the problem by overhearing her parents’ talk—sometimes the voice of pain carries further than one realizes—and (it seems) she demanded to know the rest. This placed a burden of responsibility on Annie; if her parents were afraid of shaming her sister, there must have been some grounds—her sister’s sorrow was to be inviolate. The lesson obviously “took.” Annie

asserts that physical and mental illnesses must be given similar care, in order for secret sufferers to share their feelings, and to save the lives of the desperate and downhearted.

In (14), Annie focuses on *another* person in her family who tried to commit suicide, after stating the obvious, “In my family there happens to be a lot of people with some sort of mental problem.” This time, however, she feels partly to blame, even though she “did not know the injuries [she] caused” her brother when she “would tease him sometimes.” They were a relatively normal family, and what was funny to one felt mean-spirited to another. Her uncle was independent; her brother is her responsibility. In (15), Annie does not linger on guilt or regret, thankful for the “fortunate” outcome of everyone “doing better now.” Her guilt has been transformed into compassion, and the “trial” has been “overcome (8)” with greater family love and unity. The assignment was to analyze the song, but it is now only one in a chorus of voices—“constant reminders that depression is real and it can hurt anyone.”

Annie has become a better person through this trial, and she makes a plea for “realization” (15). Her family was spared from death by suicide, twice. Her sister, her best friend’s mother, and Annie herself were each caught in depression’s lonely web. Whereas before, Annie did not know her own feelings, much less try to understand someone else’s, now she is more sensitive to their needs and to their issues (16). Her family was profoundly affected, and now Annie even tries to care about the “person sitting on the subway” (2). Everyone needs to be safe, not just family, or famous movie stars (1). If Annie can help people with her story and advice, she needs to try, because she knows life is a precious, vulnerable gift. She asserts that “opening our arms” (16) in a bond of love is all that will break through the disease. She sees the whole situation now, as someone who has transcended the illness through love. We see now

from her perspective, looking back on a time in her life when her gentle character emerged from the darkness of victimization into the joyous, wonderful light.

In this third level, Annie follows a higher charge that moves her from a personal perspective and takes her way beyond, not only putting the song in the context of her own experience, but also considering the problem of depression in her family, her friends, her favorite actor, and even the person beside her on the subway. Perhaps encouraged by the personal nature of the charge, Annie has gone through a tremendous amount of disclosure in the song essay, presenting her own experiences and those of her loved ones. When Annie wrote her true self, she accessed her unbelievable depth and clarity of perspective. She understands her emotional sensitivity and turns to others, with larger social implications. The voice philosophy enabled Annie to access unbelievable self-depth and clarity of self-perception, covering a range of deep and profound problems as she cogently deals with the issue of depression as others experience it, and as the reader should respond to it.

Annie is identifying very strong spiritual tendencies and she treats the whole curriculum in this way. Several things I did in class helped to communicate this philosophy and trigger some of this depth and self-revelation. From a silly rap I performed on the second day, to break the ice and establish trust, to a lecture on personal credibility, Annie saw that I was interested in realization and expression, conviction and action. I told her that students had written amazing things for me when they followed their heart, and their personal lives were a legitimate context for song interpretation. I suggested that stories would be a rich medium to connect with the reader about the things she believes in so deeply. These ideas all showed up in her song paper, a beautiful artifact from a caring individual.

When I read this paper, I felt it was wonderful and well written. I was a bit rushed, trying to coordinate the research. Some of the students, such as Clark, did not get their papers graded until the conference itself. I had graded it, but I was very light on the markings. I gave it an A+. I handed the paper back to Annie with the best grade I could give it, but now that I look back, I should have made more specific comments.

**The first conference.** Just a day or so after I graded Annie's song essay, we had her first conference. I asked what she thought about the belief unit and she said the following:

I'm having a bit of trouble, getting the five pages on my essay, uhm. But I thought of one experience that I'm gonna write about and so. . . . It should, once I go back and make everything, make all of my revisions, it should *equate: five pages*. But I liked learning about what other people believe and I *liked writing* about what I believe because you can be *passionate* about it, you know? You can put yourself into it. So, [You said that the first thing you wrote wasn't quite long enough, and you needed to talk about more experiences.] I think so. I think I could put in more *detail* into it, [Oh, good.] Because some of the experiences *had* detail and were really good and the other ones were just like, oh here's this story. And so once I go back and put more detail in it, and *add* that one more experience, I think I should be good.

The page length was proving to be a problem for her, and I can hear in her voice a frustration with it, having to use another strategy to finish. The paragraph she refers to adding is the only episode with music that falls outside of the established timeline of the paper, and begins "One experience in particular comes to mind." This was a significantly longer paragraph than normal. The experience she wrote about was one she had to be convinced to do. Although she received a beautiful spiritual experience, she seems embarrassed that she went into the situation with an unwilling heart. It reads like an example of Sunday "charitable service," with a moralistic aspect. The beginning of this paragraph and the beginning of the following paragraph (likely part of the same revision) sound off-tone as the only instances of self-deprecation in the whole paper. The rest of the essay was a whole piece, no justification needed, but these two parts

reflected on the “bratty kid” she used to be, and the “greedy child” she once was. So although it did lengthen the paper, this paragraph does not add anything extra to the discussion of Annie.

In the second session, we only talked about our experiences with music. Annie is an avid listener on that topic, and we were speaking the same language. So this office conference will not be discussed. The next blossoming of Annie’s heart occurs in the belief essay.

**Annie’s belief essay: The power of music.** Annie’s belief essay follows a similar development to the song essay, progressing through multiple vignettes. It is an excellent piece of writing for a college freshman. In it, she discusses how music acts as her intermediary to find and feel the joy and wonder in life.

As the wind blows, it makes a gentle whooshing sound. When the trees sway back and forth, one can hear the rustling that they make. All around the world, there are other sounds like these. Once they are put together in different ways, the sounds are called music. Music is everywhere. I cannot remember going a day without music since the day I was born. There is something so amazing about music that can change peoples’ moods instantly. In movies, music is played to create a desired effect for the mood of that moment. Music has the ability to cause feelings within us and have visions beyond our imagination. I believe in the power of music.

This first paragraph shows that Annie is grateful for natural soundscapes, which represent the most basic way in which sound exists. It is an essence and product of the life and forces in the entire world around us. Music directs her perceptions of beauty, tranquility, and imagination. In the first conference, I asked Annie to clarify, is this the “love of music?” She insisted:

The power of music. How it can affect you. It can change the mood. It can bring like, like, a different spirit into, you know, pretty much everything. That’s what music does.

The power of music unfolds as it progresses. It immediately changes a listener’s mood and “the mood of that moment.” Then it brings “a different spirit into pretty much everything.” Music “can affect you” more permanently, as it “causes feelings within us” and brings “visions

beyond our imagination.” This transcendent aspect is well in keeping with what we know of Annie, but the next story is more personal.

Growing up, I would always watch movies with my family. Every time the music would change, I would get this scared feeling. It was as if I knew something scary was going to happen. I would crawl up closer to my dad and bury my head in his chest. As soon as the music changed back, I would slowly peek over my dad’s arm and check if the scary part was finished. Throughout the entire movie, the music was leading all my actions. Because of the way it made me feel, I was able to determine what was happening without having to actually see it.

I believe that this is one of Annie’s first memories, and it is a very early awareness of what was to become this gigantic factor in her life. She was little “Annie-boo” and the world was big. Hearing music helped her to perceive truth about the world, to know what to do, to find love and security, and to know when the bad feelings were gone. Annie knows music has guided her in pervasive fashion always.

The rest of the paragraphs, stories arranged in a chronological fashion throughout her life, all invoke the power of *creating* music, not listening and following. The wonder that Annie has felt in her rich auditory environments becomes joy when she takes an active part. Her initiation into this world and the nurturing of her musical talent came through her family:

All of my siblings have learned to play at least one musical instrument. My father is a master of four and plays around with many more. The guitar is his specialty. Every time we go camping he brings his guitar. Just like in the olden time movies, we gather round the campfire real close to stay warm as our father plays our favorite songs. All of us join in song as we laugh and remember all the memories that the songs bring back to us. Our family favorite song for the campfire happens to be one my father wrote himself when he was sixteen years old. The catchy tune and subject of the song leaves us in uncontrollable laughter at the end of the song. That campfire song time is a way for our family to really feel close to one another.

My family and I have our own special way of bonding. We sing together. Michelle, my oldest sister, is a musical genius. She plays on the piano the songs from the musical “Le Mes” while we sing the songs together. My dad then takes over then so Michelle and I can harmonize with each other. Our favorite songs to sing are the ones with three part harmony. The time just seems to go by so quickly when we’re together like this. Often our whole family would be asked to sing for sacrament [service at church] and although

we all got extremely self-conscious, we would have so much fun practicing for it. After singing in sacrament, we were told by members of the ward that they could feel the spirit as we sang which to us, was the most important thing that could come from our singing. It didn't matter if people didn't like our voices; only that we had fun doing it and the spirit was there for us and others.

In Annie's family, feelings run very deeply, which emerges in several of them as depression, although "self-conscious" anxiety or fear seem likely diagnoses in the others (14). One positive aspect within these sensitive souls is the well of experience they each draw from in their music; everyone has the latent power of heartache and the spark of talent to make it into something beautiful. Those campfire sessions were certainly good medicine for strengthening their bonds of trust—the joy of life was exuberant there. Family taught Annie's about the inaction, loneliness, and silence of depression; they also showed how the power of music united their joyful voices in wondrous harmony and celebration. They also helped her to see the spiritual aspect of music that uplifted the soul.

In one of the most powerful paragraphs in the essay, Annie describes not only how she plays music, but also how she creates music in the moment.

During middle school, it began to be a way for me to release my tension. I would sit down on the piano bench and let the energy flow from the tip of my head down to my toes and out through my fingertips. It was incredible. I let the sound completely take me away to my own private oasis. Music helped me through everything. Whenever I was overwhelmed, whether with joy or pain, I would come to the piano. The sounds would fill my ears before my fingers could play them. Then the words would fill the song with the melody that was racing around inside of me. Once I was done with a verse or a chorus, I would feel so relieved: so alive. The music that I wrote was exactly what I felt. As I played a song filled with all my emotion to my friends, one could feel the atmosphere change drastically. Then I would play a bubbly love song and there was a whole new light brought into the room. Music has that effect.

To clarify, the power of music became a way for Annie to release her tension, not music itself. It was there in her ears before the fingers even touched the keys. The words also carried power, suggesting melody with their intonation contours. The creative act was like a birth,

because the feeling within came out. Writing powerful music that compels ones friends is a rare gift and not everyone has the faith to “leave everything on the stage.” But because of this release of energy, depression becomes expression. In personal moments of contemplation and creation, and shared episodes of performing and “atmosphere,” she became one with music and easily transcended the petty concerns that were trying to defeat her. Her depression, a “concave hollow on the surface,” was filled with rich soil, producing a garden of spiritual delights.

But Annie does not have to work alone or create something from scratch in order to feel that joy in life. Sometimes in her presentation of a well-known piece, the godly aspect is even more apparent to others.

Recently I was able to sing at a BYUH devotional in the schools concert choir. The spirit of God was so strong during the song “I Know That my Redeemer Lives.” After the devotional was over, my friends came to our choir in tears and thanked us for bringing the spirit there. However, in this situation, the only person one really needs to thank is our Father in Heaven for creating music. While practicing this song in my choir class, I found my throat would sometimes clump up and on the corner of my eye; a tear would start to form. The words and timing of the music fit together like a puzzle. At the end of the song, there is a huge crescendo and the soprano’s voices become like angel voice singing so high in heaven. To finish the song, we sang the words, “He lives” and held them out to fill the entire room with the spirit.

This type of experience is precious and worth remembering always as an act of sacred worship and an offering to the one who gave her life. Few performances can hold a candle to this magnificent, triumphant occurrence, perhaps only a few in each lifetime. But Annie is not just going to leave us in the rafters of her best church service. The last paragraph I will discuss is on community.

A lot of my friends are extremely musically talented. They play several instruments, such as, the guitar, the harmonica, the trumpet, the piano, and many others. On numerous occasions, we will get together with them on the guitar and me on the piano and create music. We get such an incredible feeling. When one of us gets a really good style going we will match it and sing about whatever comes out of our mouths. Sometimes it is about the weather. Other times it is about how happy something makes us. Whatever the case, we get this high off of our music. We get to forget entirely about the time or how much

homework we have or the terrible things that are going on in the world and just focus on the music.

In Annie's new "family," she is sharing the sweet bliss of music just as her family at home used to do. It is not a competition, not performance, not practice, not a solo contemplation, just friends together having fun and making music together.

Annie knows that the world can be a very sad place when the joy is gone. She also deeply desires that others suffering can find relief. Annie does understand that not everyone can follow the path she has gone down. For this reason, Annie has a lot of faith in medical interventions, counseling, and so forth. She loves that her brother, sister, and friend's mother all received help, and she knows that one person listening can make a difference. Annie wants everyone to be "doing better now."

In the first conference, Annie had said she was thankful that she would be able to share her belief with others, having thought about it so much, and now she could be passionate about it when she shared. She loves music and respects its power, feeling those familiar, wonderful feelings as she wrote out what she believed. It seems that Annie has taken her thrilling experiences from composing music and translated them somewhat into the essay. Like Clark, the emotions are just next to the surface, and they pulse through her with vitality and fervor. She loves to share the joys and wonders of life with everyone, and her aspect is open and inviting.

In Annie's case, contrary to my philosophy, making the belief paper longer did not actually make it better. It was forced to some extent, and she had lost some of the original motivation. Annie seems to be explaining herself, being conscientious, and psychologizing herself. Nonetheless, she was enthused, inspired, encouraged, empowered, and otherwise authorized in every conceivable way. She just did not know that I wanted the pure feeling as it came from her.

## Jocelyn

**Playing for love.** When I encountered Jocelyn on the first day of class, obvious impressions came across: an enthusiastic smile with the posture of an athlete. She had her best friend and teammate next to her, so they were constantly glancing at each other as I talked, referencing some running private joke, pointing and playing with their pens to dispel nervous energy. This soon changed. Later in the course, I saw her intense focus in our serious class discussions, poised like a mid-fielder or a striker lining up to intercept the ball. In fact, she later told me that she played both of these positions and knew all of the other ones, too. I now cannot recall a situation where she was caught “off-guard” and when I asked a question, Jocelyn did not take much time to think because she had apparently already been thinking about it. I saw in her not just good secular and spiritual education, but also proper training and discipline.

Jocelyn and I had some fun times together, too. During office hours, we spent a fair amount of time talking about the Stephenie Meyer book *Twilight* and what a BYU education could do for a Mormon housewife. She and some friends also “road-tripped” with me and the English club to see the *Twilight* movie premiere, seven college girls giggling about whether they liked Edward or Jacob better. Jocelyn told them that I had rapped for her class, so of course I had to perform it, gesturing with one hand, and navigating the twisty road with the other. Laughing, Jocelyn asked if I knew any other raps, and I said, “Only one, but it’s totally inappropriate.” She begged and pleaded, as did the rest, “Oh, we won’t tell, we promise!” So it was a minor spectacle as the minivan rolled into the theater parking lot, windows down, one tenor and seven sopranos gang-singing a “girl power” song from my senior year of high school: the rump-shaking classic “Baby got Back!” by Sir Mix-a-Lot. They had probably also enjoyed it when it was first

released, because toddlers love to dance! It was funny and ridiculous. Jocelyn got married recently, and her wedding shots are ecstatic. The groom looks very Edwardian.

**Song essay.** Jocelyn’s Song essay will be analyzed in two main parts. The first part will consist of three “life experience” moments, which are the strongest “voiced” writing in this paper, and how they related to the course content and her learning. The second part will explain Jocelyn’s general way of analyzing her song, and how the song analysis assignment enabled her to develop a “first semester plan,” the conclusion of her essay.

**Making the most of life.**

*Part one—The effect of experience.* Jocelyn began the song paper with a stream-of-consciousness narrative:

First time on my own. New step in my life—college! I’ve been waiting for this time for the past 18 years. I’ve finally made it! The only thing right now that I really miss is spending time with my family. When I was trying to find comfort in living on my own, I remembered one of my favorite songs “My Wish,” by Rascal Flatts. The words are very true when it says, “I hope you never look back, but ya never forget all the ones who love you in the place you left.” The themes and emotions in this song, along with the lyrics and music, relate with my experiences of moving away from home.

By jumping into her feelings at college orientation, Jocelyn began with something emotional, a point I made in several lectures. The “hook” works, as most college students can immediately connect with her experience of homesickness. I had taught the students the “hook paragraph” as a specialized type of introduction for 4-5 page essays, presenting the situation first in order to develop interest, and then getting to the thesis in the second paragraph. For some reason, Jocelyn stops the stream-of-consciousness, which disengages focus on her feelings, and begins in a more objective tone. She then changes tense, describing her close relationship with the song as something in the past, and finally says that it still relates to her current feelings.

I believe Jocelyn was trying to juggle several things at once, giving me everything I asked for, or playing all positions. I had said to relate the song to “life experiences,” comparing them, but also said to use cause-effect, citing times when the song had a real impact on their feelings. In doing so, I was hoping for them to tell me life stories and finding the important themes that they shared, which she does superficially. After doing both of these, she introduced the artist, the main point of the essay, and concluded with a phrase I had written on the board as what every song essay should say at some point, “The themes and emotions in this song, along with the lyrics and music, relate with my experiences of X.” She included it verbatim. In the first paragraph, she did several things all at once, which impressed me when I was grading, but compromised on her ability to further articulation of the consciousness in the first three sentences.

After some analysis of the song, Jocelyn moves to her second experience.

Deciding where to go to college was not an easy process for me. I was accepted at multiple schools and offered many scholarships, but I was not entirely sure where I needed to be. After praying and fasting about a decision I felt like I needed to be on the road that led to Brigham Young University–Hawaii. When it came time for graduation and grad night I realized that this was the time that I needed to grow up. The last event at grad night was a slide show of all the seniors and the fun times we had throughout the year. The song for the slide show was “My Wish.” One line said, “And if you’re faced with a choice, and you have to choose, I hope you choose the one that means the most to you.” This line really struck me; I just chose the biggest step in my life. I chose the college, through research and prayer, which meant the most to me.

Jocelyn had been following procedures, but her faith was not sufficient, and she was forced to “grow up.” This is a strong “cause-effect” moment that shows a real-world context, but because it is not a comparison, this passage may strike other readers as disingenuous, especially since the graduation committee “approved this message.” The excerpt also highlights a significant difference between Cherie and Jocelyn; whereas Cherie was speaking this “wish” as a gift of forgiveness to her ex-boyfriend, Jocelyn was receiving the “wish” from benevolent LDS

people throughout her very close-knit, 93% Mormon community. Further support for this point is Jocelyn's reticence to engage in current reality, "It's comforting even though I am so far away from home right now that I will be welcomed back by those who love me." She is culture-shocked and homesick, and the assignment's invitation to picture herself in the past is not helping, because there are not enough rich details coming out to justify the hurt.

Jocelyn continues with some more song analysis, and by the end of it, all of the loving forces in her life, high school peers, Rascal Flatts, her LDS community, Gandhi, and Jesus have all told her to get in the game. She needs to "help somebody every chance [she] gets" and "show the world the warmth of [her] smile." My direction to connect with significant aspects of her life encouraged her to share the caring words of her own father, which would have been considered biased or hearsay, and therefore inadmissible if this had been a formal song analysis piece. His guidance evokes a particularly powerful memory, perhaps the most important in the piece.

This past Thanksgiving, I was able to go to Vietnam to help build a school. We helped with the measuring, cement mixing, and brick laying. The kids of Vietnam were so grateful to have this school built so that they would finally be able to learn. This act of service helped me realize how fortunate I am, and that I should never regret the opportunities that I have in life.

Putting well-meaning advice aside, the Vietnamese children represent an undeniable truth in reality, that learning is the highest gift. Aside from this, Jocelyn is a very hands-on, engaging person who "love[s] getting muddy." If she had internalized the fact that I wanted to see her mixing the aggregate in the bucket, adding the sloshing brown water, ignoring the wet cement in her hair, and smiling as 8-year old Tien brought her a bottled water, she would have shown at this point that she was deeply moved by everything she did, in part because she was really enjoying herself while she did it. She would never look at things the same way again. As it is, I

believe the only reason why she did not share the hope and joy she felt from this is she thought I did not want it.

The song essay assignment was successful in bringing the absolute fact of the children's gratitude to Jocelyn's mind, and it helped with her eventual synthesis. The "true self" focus may have been less effective because I emphasized the song analysis too much with her, and Jocelyn did not comprehend that I wanted almost half of her paper to be comprised of "gritty" real-life excerpts. I had showed her all of the poetry analysis rules, hoping one or two would be taken as "suggestions" and work their way into the essay, while the excitement of the music encouraged vibrant life descriptions that drove the majority of the personal analysis. However, the technical analysis did have its own impact on Jocelyn, rather distinct from what others experienced.

*Part two—The effect of analysis.* This section will discuss the methodology of Jocelyn's song analysis and how she utilized it to generate insights about herself. Jocelyn understood the song in an unusual way that was generated from her more methodical, phrase by phrase analysis. It is exactly what I asked for, but no one else delivered on—a true mid-fielder at heart. Perhaps Jocelyn took my direction to include life experiences primarily in a conceptual way, "Use your life experience to understand the song." In her mind, the lesson of her life experience is that good people help others, which evoked her thinking in a clear, personal way. In her analysis, Jocelyn follows the direction of the song, and then describes those energies as they relate to her belief system.

When "one door opens to another door closed, I hope you keep on walkin' till you find the window." Door is also a symbol used in the first verse. It can be symbolic of the different options that each road leads to, like scholarships, sports, and friends. Windows allow light to shine, and is a metaphor used in this verse. Young people can relate to the window by letting their own light shine through. The better choices I make, the more light will shine through, and the happier I'll be.

The whole text of the song, every part of it, is dealt with in this explicative fashion. In class, I had shown all of the students how to interpret poetry, defining key terms and the line by line “close reading method,” getting to the word level. I also described how there would be two meanings, the generally accepted one and a more personal one. Jocelyn follows all of my directions to the letter, with levels of meaning and the implication of that meaning on her life. The message in her last sentence seems to have been already inside her, because it follows so naturally, but the assignment and process of textual analysis amplifies it. This also emerges in her striking conclusion.

The great things in life can come from very simple things and to go further I need to continue to have a good attitude and remember that there are many people who want me to succeed in life. If I remember to pray and make good choices I know that I’ll be put where I’m supposed to be. If I want to grow and be happy with my life I need to never regret.

Family is always going to be there to support me, even though we are separated by an ocean. Knowing that I can carry friends’ burdens and that they can carry mine, and that Christ is the biggest supporter that I have in my life, is extremely comforting. Now that I am at a new beginning of my life, I will take the opportunity to look back and gain courage from the well-wishes of my loved ones, to strike out on my own, find new friends and forge a new identity for myself.

The song assignment is purposely broad, and it invites many types of interpretations, particularly from exceptional people like Jocelyn. I had asserted that the song’s effect on her was important, and I had taught them that an effective conclusion would often respond to the intention of the introduction. The detailed description of poetic interpretation had stuck with Jocelyn, and its consideration invited Jocelyn to find a unique application of the song to her life. These may help to explain how “My Wish” filtered through Jocelyn’s analytical process to produce an explication of “My Plan.”

It is still a bit of a mystery where Jocelyn’s impetus to lay out this plan comes from, because no one else did anything like this. It may be because of her sports background, or

perhaps she is explaining her part of “God’s Plan.” Like the Vietnamese schoolhouse, Jocelyn’s life needed to be constructed carefully, and she did just that, diligently enumerating her goals: “knowledge,” “success,” “new things,” “the best for me,” and a “filled heart.” In terms of action, “gaining courage” and “forging a new identity for myself” are particularly significant and optimistic. She had recognized that the culture shock and homesickness would not go away; she had to change. No longer looking to her family for comfort, Jocelyn has proceeded to a deeper understanding.

Jocelyn used the song essay to work through her trial, but not in the emotional, cathartic way that many other students did, where expression of it made them freer. Who knows where it came from, but Jocelyn followed the close reading methodology to a tee and generated a very logical series for the effect of the song on her person: First, she identified a problem, her homesickness. Next, she explained the stakes, gratitude, and peace of mind. Further, she showed symptoms, her sadness, and anxiety. Then, she finds rules from the song and a variety of valid authorities, and interprets them in her own context. Next, she explored and rejected possible solutions, such as consoling herself with memories of home. Finally, she creates the above treatment plan to resolve the problem and prevent it from reoccurring. What a clinician! She will make a wonderful coach someday, and she will never seem to be ungrateful again.

### **The belief essay.**

*Preliminary preparation.* After class one day, Jocelyn had come to me with a problem: She did not know how to compose her belief. This is a close approximation of that conversation:

Jocelyn    I’ve freewritten about all of these different things, these talents that I developed, so I could be well-rounded. My brothers got me into playing sports and my parents convinced me to play the violin. But that’s only two things, and I know I need to talk about three things, but I don’t know what else to talk about or even how they connect together.

Jon: Well, what else does your family do to help you be well-rounded?

Jocelyn: One thing we do, even though I didn't write about it here, is the drama festival at Tuacahn. Every year my mom takes us to a couple of plays and it's usually fun for everyone.

Jon: See, that's playing too. That's playing with words; it's wordplay.

Jocelyn: So, my belief is in play? That's what my paper's about?

Jon: Yes. That's the organizing idea.

It was a bit of a stretch, but this slight expansion of the word “play” allowed Jocelyn to consider language, sports, and music all as things she played. I had actually mentioned finding a third essay topic in my in-class discussion of the Essay Template several days previously. Jocelyn had done the right thing in asking for my help, as I had already diagnosed her problem. We continued and she asked directly how she should write her thesis statement to include these things. So we did something that only rarely occurred in the class—I brought up her paper on the computer and co-authored Jocelyn's thesis statement with her. If it feels like it has an unusual marriage of two styles, one subjective, and the other objective, that is because it does. She had the final say, and changed the paragraph somewhat after the collaboration.

*Only play.* As in the first paper, Jocelyn quotes Gandhi for good measure, and then her introduction proceeds as follows:

In order for me to live the life I have imagined, which is an enjoyable life, I want to become well-rounded through the development of different skills. This is a difficult, time-consuming practice, but helps me to feel personally accomplished and appreciative of others' talents. This desire developed within me as a child, because my parents sincerely focused on it. One might think that this involved a lot of hard work, but that was not the case. They emphasized play, which helped me try new things and develop my talents. Specifically, all of the children in my family learned to play in different ways, first with words, next sports, and finally a musical instrument; I believe play leads to a more joyful life.

My first influence on this piece was helping Jocelyn honestly say what her parents were doing, putting their children in lots of different activities, “well-rounded through the development of different skills.” Next, I asked why Jocelyn would be focused on developing talents at that age, and I paraphrased her answer, “my parents sincerely focused on it.” I then explained the idea that conflict breeds interest, so I suggested, “One might think that this involved a lot of hard work, but that was not the case,” to create an opposition. The rest was hers, except for the words “emphasized” and “specifically,” as well as the idea to organize from the most basic type of playing to the most advanced. This was the most useful thing to her, because she could follow this rationale throughout the essay. She concluded with the belief statement.

The reader may be aware that the primary advocate for voice and my inspiration in this study, Elbow would not have done things this way. It is true that the most important aspect is the voice of the person. However, I have found that some people really benefit from being jointly involved in this way. Just as she did in the first essay, Jocelyn dutifully followed my instructions, expanding on the ideas from this thesis paragraph and using play as an analytical tool to structure the discourse of the essay. It is amazing that the thesis statement worked for her, and that it actually proved intuitive for her as well, encouraging explanation of many personal things that she did with her family on a regular basis, of which I had no knowledge. Even the Tuacahn festival excerpt resonated with the idea of “play” in ways beyond just “playing with words.”

My whole family loves to laugh and have a good time. My mom enjoys taking us to see theatrical productions to help us understand musical and language talents and to help us laugh. Each summer my family attends the Tuacahn plays in St. George, Utah. Complaining is the first reaction that is usually given, but when we are on our way home, all the children are enthusiastic about what they just saw. Every year at Tuacahn we see a light, humorous play, and a deep, more serious play. Each production helps me to understand the play on words. One summer my mom took me to the Shakespearian Festival in Cedar City, and even caught me laughing at the characters humorous dialogue.

The “play” aspect seems to be a significant aspect of the love these people feel for each other, and it hit a major chord or frequency in Jocelyn. Aside from characters on the stage bantering wittily, the play concept goes much deeper, into “laughing and having a good time.” It is also about learning to have fun at the theater. Even in the action of bringing unwilling children, friendly competition was at work, teen and child malaise versus the kindly, motherly advocacy of culture. That tension did not erupt into fights; it was pure enjoyment. It was play. The Shakespearean Festival was classic mom vs. daughter, and mom “won the game” when Jocelyn laughed and proved that her sensibilities were touched and affected.

The second type of playing with language was also very interesting.

Quoting movies in my family is one of our best traits. It is typical for us to watch a movie one time and be able to quote most of it. We all love to laugh in my family, and how funny or fast someone responds to the quote is a game we call “Top This Quote.” Monday night used to be my dish night with my brother, Jack. Sometimes, while doing the dishes or cleaning the kitchen we could have whole conversations only using movie quotes. Whoever could not come back with a quote lost the game. We once made the rule that the quotes all had to come from the movie *The Singles Ward*. I love the challenge of remembering and trying to come back with a new quote. I also have another brother, Kurt who is not scared to tell what he is thinking at any moment. It can be completely off subject, but very funny. At his kindergarten doctor appointment he made the doctor laugh when he told him that he “got skills” from *Napoleon Dynamite*. Exchanging words and laughing with the family helps to make life more pleasurable.

The assignment had evoked something rather beautiful in Jocelyn, which was worthy to be considered right next to her impressive specializations in sports and music. In her growing awareness of the writing process, Jocelyn has further expanded the idea of play beyond its typical categorization. Quoting movies during kitchen clean-up, a “chore” of hers, was play on an altogether different level. It also involves trying to get the upper hand through relatively more witty things. Furthermore, Kurt’s experience was not exactly Jocelyn’s, and she probably was not there, but heard about it second-hand from her mother. So it is more play vis-à-vis family,

which is an aspect of caring and meaning. But play still is present at the essence or core of her meaning, for the last time.

Paragraph four started to truly resonate with what I had seen in Jocelyn, who occasionally showed up late and tired with her friend because soccer practice went over, or said “Coach asked” if they could leave a little early to get ready for a game.

Sport is a competition and is another way my family is striving to live the life of our dreams. To help build the connections between each family member we all enjoy competing and playing. My parents also want us to be physically active and develop new talents through different activities. Cheering on brothers in football, soccer, basketball, baseball, and rugby games has helped me to appreciate the concept of play. Learning the rules of each different sport and watching my brothers compete has helped build a relationship between each of us. My brothers enjoy talking about what they are good at or what they enjoy doing and is that how we have developed a special bond. I enjoy learning the most I can about each sport, and enjoy keeping that connection strong with my family members.

This paragraph is not consciously about play, because the term “compete” has taken over. The only use of play, I am sorry to say, is insincere. In the same office meeting as before, I suggested to bring this paragraph into tacit agreement using the phrase, “the concept of play.” It should be, “Cheering on brothers in football, soccer, basketball, baseball, and rugby games has helped me to learn *the rules of each different sport.*” This makes more sense in terms of Jocelyn’s rich associations with play, which are much more concrete and detailed than conceptual. I had said to use strategically placed synonyms in order to increase subtle thematic resonance. The problem is that “compete” and “play” are not synonymous for most people, and when Jocelyn later attempts to relate them, it does not work.

The light-hearted aspect of family playing together was tapped out at this point, and “play” turns more serious, into full-scale competition, practice, and performing. I appreciated that the concept could shift so much, but it wavered because there was no solid center of focus, which I suggest is “love.” The belief essay assignment and the freewriting method had evoked in

relatively disparate, but living elements in her heart. She was in love with three very different things that appealed to different sides of her, family to her inner child, sports to her rebel teen, and music to her refined adult. The assignment gave her the freedom to share many different aspects of her character.

In the final analysis, however, Jocelyn's response to the belief essay lacks a solid "I" position and consistency of voice. She goes in and out of experience, always with the ability to discuss it objectively, and she does not have a language of wholeness. Whereas other students were able to pull from vast resources in experience, Jocelyn's stories each have different reasons. Family does not work as an organizer because although similar bonds are with her teammates, it is not what that makes her practice music into the night. She reads like a coaching manual on being a "well-rounded family," a "team player," or a "versatile violinist," totally objective. She has faith in my instruction, but she does not yet know how to get ahold of what is real in herself.

Jocelyn was reaching towards fullness, but it was not there yet. She accepted the categories and organization, taking them through proper procedures, and tried really hard. But this did not really open her up. She is looking for values in her awareness, but they are not coming through yet. Some song essay phrases establish love as a major motivation for action: "I chose the college . . . which meant the most to me." "I really miss my family. When I was trying to find comfort." "The kids of Vietnam were so grateful to have this school built." "Christ wants the best for me and . . . wants me to experience new things in life." However, the connection between love and its effects were sometimes interrupted by other concerns. Even though those were valid, like "through research and prayer," they were objective explanations. Goals as a motivation for action were all over Jocelyn's paper, but spontaneous love does not come through.

The Twilight trip proved that in Jocelyn's heart, playing in its non-serious, ridiculous, funny sense was very closely connected to her love for her friends. It seems to me that playing for love is the major theme and motivation for everything, both genuine happiness and analysis aligned with values of her school, church, and God. Although she has room inside her heart for these diffuse things, they sometimes get in the way of her true nature, which connects with play with love.

"My whole family loves to laugh and have a good time." "To help build the connections between each family member we all enjoy competing and playing." "Watching my brothers compete has helped build a relationship between each of us." [At] dish night with my brother, Cody . . . we could have whole conversations only using movie quotes. Whoever could not come back with a quote lost the game." "Playing an instrument helps me to . . . appreciate those who are professional musicians or those who truly have a passion for music." "Having performed from classical numbers to hoedowns . . . I am very grateful for my teacher, who was a great influence on me."

The unfortunate aspect in Jocelyn's case is that her genuine voice, "playing for love," was often mixed up with "playing along" with expectations. The ellipses present in many of the quotes show how her stories shift from heart voice to objective perspectives, and sometimes even change verb tense. The difference between her own, substantiated core values, her analysis of other trusted voices, and the objective presentation of those things for others is not well understood. One could joke that Jocelyn was play's daughter, sport's fiancé, and music's girlfriend all at once: A totally sincere heart with divided attentions. But she is on a path of resolution.

### **The Minor Portrait—Tilly**

**Writing to dispel fears from the self.** On the first day of my class, I asked everyone to introduce themselves, and when it came around to Tilly, she said, "I'm Tilly and I'm undecided." She meant that she did not have a major, but combined with her sitting in a far corner of the

room, she struck me as different. In class discussions, she did not speak unless spoken to, but when we had a lab on song essay ideas, she asked for help. Hers was different from anything I had seen, a “silly song” from the 1960’s—“My Boomerang Won’t Come Back!” I asked if it was really her favorite song, but she deflected this question, calling it merely “interesting.” I read over her paper and was struck by the lack of analysis. She was doing a simple summary with interpretation. I asked if it directly related to her life at all, and she said it did not.

We struggled over this issue, because Tilly was not accepting the requirement to get closer to the themes and relate it to some context. That was very important because it entailed more writing and application-level thinking. She wanted to write a simple paper her own way, and just wanted to get enough help to move on. Tilly was stuck with only two pages of material, and I had a clear understanding of her song essay, but not of the person behind it. I saw a shift in her attitude, and she started to make short, clipped responses. I had sympathy for Tilly and looked for a way to add her back into the paper in an indirect way, to help her reconnect with the topic and get the writing she needed.

It came to me. I asked if there was a group of people she had been a member of, which could benefit from hearing this song. She replied, “Maybe early-morning Seminary students?” This was the golden opportunity. Tilly had given herself a way to step back into the essay without being quite so personal. I put her in the “teacher” role, which increased her confidence, “Write about how you could use the song in the Seminary class to teach with, and pull out the lessons that the song has in it.” This had worked for shy students at Parkland College, who drew a real connection to their audience and brought themselves out subtly in their discussions on their behalf. I did not know just how helpful this would be for Tilly, who needed somewhere to hide until she could gain the confidence in me to share her biggest concern.

**Song essay: Relating the Gospel to a funny song.** When I looked at the essay initially, I simply attributed her well-organized essay to the additional time she was able to spend on it. But upon further consideration, I realized that I had spontaneously provided an additional element to help Tilly develop her paper in a personally meaningful way. Like Roman's "sense of place," Jocelyn's "it's all play," Clark's "use your senses," or Annie's "describe the flow," for Tilly, my direction was "pull out the lessons." This allowed her to step back towards her power, which was interpreting the meaningfulness of her song in-depth and towards a familiar context that had a set standard for moral interpretation. Considering the advice to "pull out the lesson" helped her to find deeper resonances. Although she did not share specific episodes from her life, as I directed her to do, she did take a significant step towards it. Like Clark, she was addressing herself through analogy.

Her song regards an Aboriginal youth who is kicked out of his tribe because he cannot throw a boomerang. After a slew of problems, it becomes clear that Mack was never taught to let go of it, and that he was now an expert thrower. By including the Seminary class context and the "lessons" outlook, Tilly related in more substantial ways with Mack from the Outback. The song essay showed her that insights could be left private. I am positive that there is not a simple one-to-one life comparison, but I see definite resonances, and there is an image of Tilly in Mack. The situation was private, but Tilly's fears and low self-confidence came from somewhere.

Because she stepped into the Seminary classroom, Tilly analyzed "My Boomerang Won't Come Back" from a moral perspective: Mack's situation is not just sad; it is wrong. She related each verse to a message: overcoming differences, improving talents, and persisting in the face of fear. In connecting with her "audience" of teens, Tilly could share without giving away secrets. She analyzed Mack's story as a whole-life metaphor for overcoming: faith, prayer, effort, risk,

discovery, and success. Like Mack, Tilly needed to “let go” of something, in order to stop feeling “left out.”

**Conference one: Building the relationship of trust.** In the first office conference, Tilly had the first word, mentioning that she had been “upset not to see any markings on her paper,” which she wanted feedback on. She also seemed to want assurance that it was actually a good college essay and met all of the criteria. I said that since the class was a prerequisite, the grade showed that she was on track to being prepared to write in her other classes. She had followed our formula and organized it exactly as we agreed, so it was an A+. She accepted this. But I did not want to leave the situation static, because she wanted more. I got more specific, giving the sort of feedback that she had asked for, and I interpreted “markings” to mean editing codes, so I talked in conventional ways about her text.

I responded in a thorough way, re-emphasizing that it was good, “It’s solid writing” and that the audience analysis genre was right. She had learned what I wanted her to learn from the paper, and I assuaged in these ways her major concerns with text, audience, and author. Then I moved to other issues: paragraph lengths, clarity of description, appropriateness of quotes, strength of voice, and a few comma errors.

This was what an office conference or meeting with a tutor should be, and it was a safe enough place for Tilly. Although I wanted her to talk about herself, I did not let it stop our interaction. She was a little uncomfortable about my criticisms of the text aspects, but she handled it well enough. I had to exercise discipline and formality because the natural ways I connected with others, eye contact, humor, small talk, seemed out of order with her. After the commentary, she ended the office session as soon as possible. It seems now that she was “checking” me, seeing if I was going to try to make the conference all about her personal

connection to the song, or whether I respected her questions and needs enough to warrant disclosures. I passed.

**Conference two: The belief essay draft: Fear.** In Conference 2, Tilly and I worked on her belief essay draft, which was two pages long. Tilly talked about the psychological results of being bucked off a horse.

When I came back to the ranch the next summer I must admit that I had my fears. That fall was not the first I had, but it had a lasting effect. I was timid and every time my mount would miss step I would tense up. This was not what I wanted. I was proud of the fact that I got back on the horse, but I was never as carefree as I used to be. Fear caused doubt in my mind, which in turn caused me to react differently in certain situations. You can't just stop being afraid. It is a process that needs to be worked on. Every time I get back on a horse I am a little less afraid than the last time I was on. Little by little I gain more confidence in my abilities. Hopefully someday, I will be able to conquer my fear completely.

After I read it, I asked what she wanted help with: "It's hard to expand my belief. I feel like there's not a whole lot to say about it?" I suggested that if she formed a positive statement of belief, not "fears are scary," she could relate episodes of her life more easily and discuss it in "straight-forward terms." I modeled one, "I have courage within me if I will realize it." If Tilly had taken that position, her paper could have had a resonant aspect. However, she was not at that position yet, still coping with the effects of her fear condition. She would have to use her own writing to get to the belief.

I asked her what her belief would be if it were positive. She quoted, "I believe fear shouldn't hold a person back." I rephrased, "So you believe in courage, taking chances." But this was the perspective of a person who had already conquered the problem and Tilly had not. She tried to abandon her topic at that point, because she "hated being like everybody else . . . writing things like "having courage" and stuff like that." She was writing herself conscientiously; even

though her “voice” was not there, she was struggling, resisting, and “testing her lungs.” I tried to get to the core of the issue, asking her what made her want to share the horse story.

Tilly: It’s just ‘cause I’m a real chicken sometimes and so I thought like that this paper would help me . . . motivate me to be a better. . . . Not . . . So these are just experiences of when I’ve been scared and I have actually done something about it.

Jon: Uh huh. Okay. (pause) I believe you should do something about it!

Tilly: Ha ha. Ha ha ha.

Tilly stepped out of “chicken” mode, and confessed a very important thing—she “that this paper would help [her] . . . motivate [her] to be a better” a better dancer, student, friend? No, just “better.” She could not even say what her future holds, but she believes. This was crucial evidence that she had integrated the voice philosophy and intended the paper to do something for her. She moved on to the important revelation: these experiences were ones where she “did something about it.” I confirmed that this was a good phrase. She believed in “doing something about it.” She laughed: it was so simple. Her own phrase began to unblock her voice, what Elbow called “priming the pump” (Elbow, 1981, p. 78). She had not incorporated this aspect into her life; she is just beginning.

**The Belief Essay: Fear—Do something about it.** In the Belief Essay, Tilly added a story about making friends at BYUH.

The first week of college is scary to all new freshmen. We are all new and we do not know anyone. I remember one day I was really hungry, but my roommate did not want to go to the café with me. I had thoughts go through my mind that were not very nice because I was scared to go alone. But my stomach hurt so much I had to eat something. I slowly walked over hoping I would meet someone on the way. Walking slower than normal I constantly scanned the campus for a known friend, but no such person came along. I walked into the café, my card was swiped and I made my way to the food line. I quickly search the café for a friend that I could sit by, I noticed a girl I had seen in my ward and I decided I would go sit by her. I am a very shy person so it is hard for me to initiate conversation. Finally the time came that I had to initiate the action I had to take, I got the guts to go sit by her. Everything turned out great. She is now one of my best

friends. Most the time we are afraid before we do something, but after the deed is done it was really no big deal in the first place. I caused my stomach to seriously ache because of my fear. I am a big chicken, but that day I did the thing that scared me and I am grateful I did.

This had some self-revelation in it, “doing something about the fear” but it does not bring out the inner core that I was looking for. Granted, she was not discussing something that mere words could affect. She needed first to “get some guts.” Tilly was aware of the voice philosophy but she had not experienced it fully by committing to a core belief. Her actions did show a realization, not articulated in words, that she was aware of her ability to work through this major life stressor. Opening Tilly’s life to examination, the belief paper encouraged her to follow “Mack.”

Although the belief essay did not encourage Tilly to express herself in terms of positive formulations that could represent her values, it did push her towards self-understanding. In the process of writing her true self, she encountered “crap.” There was no overcoming with honesty, which made it difficult for her to write anything more than her wishes. She had the faith to find self-confidence, but it is not found in the essay.

Several excerpts from the conferences confirm the interpretation of the first two essays, which is that Tilly is trying to get past fear that is holding her back. These “vignettes” offer a bit more light onto her attitude, which she generally hid from me:

The theme that I was thinking about writing about is mental freedom in the midst of captivity. So ways that the prisoners found to free their minds even though they couldn’t free themselves. I found an example where one of the inmates was having a really bad dream and [Frankl] wanted to wake him up but then he realized that no nightmare could be worse than this reality.

She would love to “free her mind” from the captivity of fear, and she sees that true compassion, as represented by Frankl, is one way to do this. He has remarkable inner strength to overcome the fear he lives through in a place of torment and suffering.

At another point, she discusses her concept for the fantasy essay:

At first I wanted to write a story about a rock and what it went through but not to tell the reader it was a rock until the end. But I couldn't get ideas about what a rock experiences. I couldn't get it long enough. It was going to have the best title, too. Life Rocks! But I didn't have enough time. It's just an ordinary rock. It gets in water, gets thrown through windows. I was talking with the rock in the first person. Going through the feelings, weightless through the air, then all of a sudden, crash! Ouch, that hurt!

Here is another desire for release, or freedom with a sense of control. The thing that cannot determine its destiny has feelings about life, perception of experiences, and even pain. She cannot get very far as a rock, and there is no real, alive connection to it.

Further on in the third conference, I asked what she wanted to do with her life, and she said, "Something hands-on, like a police officer or an EMT." I suggested that she "research the stages of calming fears in a crisis situation like tragedy or natural disaster or a wreck." I refrained from saying, "How will you be an EMT if you're a scaredy-cat?" Tilly is enigmatic that way, and she has some confidence that she will overcome fear.

Tilly was hard to read because she revealed so little of herself, and the preceding three excerpts have perhaps a bit more speculation than the more substantial things at the beginning. This is one reason why she is a minor portrait—I was reasonably certain of only one major issue—her fears—and I did not attempt any further analysis. In fact, I was tempted to exclude her until I really understood that she was sincere in facing her problems through writing. Compared to the other participants, "Writing the True Self" had a much more drawn-out effect on Tilly, as she explored here and there the ideas that others definitely handled in the first two essays. She showed how the approach can produce some significant results even when there is a fair amount of life "crap" or when the timing is not right. In the process of the class, the tables seemed to be turning in her favor, as her fears were being faced one situation at a time. A dim

view of eventual unity came onto her horizon. It seems that this would be a multi-year proposition implying a dramatic transformation of her consciousness in other ways.

## **Chapter V**

### **Cross-Case Discussion**

This chapter is comprised of four main parts. The first three are limited to the narrow spectrum of study participants from my fall 2008 English 101 classes at BYU–Hawaii, while the fourth is more general. In Part I, I discuss a variety of themes relating to participant demographics. Part II shows what the effects of the philosophy were on participants, based on their portraits. In Part III, I indicate aspects of the course that were seen to have a positive, or in a few cases hindering effect on participant growth. Part IV shows larger relevant factors that were involved because of the limitations of the study, but which reasonably could be expected in other contexts.

#### **Part I: General Patterns by Demographics**

In this part, I will show the established demographics (i.e. sex, age, nationality) of the seven featured participants as well as relate them to general trends that emerged after the portraits were completed. The first six are featured in major portraits, while the last one is a minor portrait.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Name	Sex	Origin	Age	Major	Belief	SES
Roman	M	Oahu	18	Undecided	Happiness	High/Low
Mariah <sup>a</sup>	F	Scotland	26	Psychology	All-growth	Mid
Cherie	F	Georgia	19	English	Love is a verb	High
Clark	M	Tennessee	18 <sup>b</sup>	Undeclared	Gamer's trap	Mid
Annie <sup>c</sup>	F	Oregon	18 <sup>b</sup>	Music	Power of music	Mid/Low
Jocelyn <sup>c</sup>	F	Utah	18 <sup>b</sup>	Sports Sci.	Playing for love	Mid
Tilly <sup>c,d</sup>	F	Australia	18 <sup>b</sup>	Undecided	Do something	Mid

*Note.* SES = child/teens. <sup>a</sup>Served LDS mission. <sup>b</sup>Lived with parents before class began. <sup>c</sup>8:00 a.m. classes, all others 3 p.m. <sup>d</sup>Shorter portrait.

There is a tremendous variety in participant demographics across the board in most categories, certainly more than would be expected from a typical Midwestern college. Note the two basic age divisions: most are 18 or 19, but one is older. The national origins are literally all over the map, western and southern U.S., Europe, Hawaii, and Australia. In addition, Socio-Economic Status (SES) varies widely, and some participant SES changed. Some have extensive experience in the world, while others are relative neophytes. Overall, it is a very interesting sample for study.

After the portraits were finished, interesting patterns emerged according to demographic similarities. The participants featured in the major portraits are all native speakers of English, and they tended to speak a lot in our conference sessions and in class. The participant in the minor portrait, Tilly tended to speak less in our conferences and in class. As mentioned earlier, none of these larger themes had any influence on the direction of the portraits, which were

developed strictly according to individuals writing towards their true selves, responding to the assignments and course philosophy, independent of grouping, association, or preconceived categories.

## **Part II: Individual Responses to Philosophy as Seen in the Portraits**

In this study, I have seen seven remarkable and expressive participants that support the effect of writing the true self on student growth. The beautiful perspectives of my participants who wrote their true selves prove that the philosophy can work in a course like this, especially if the topics are universal. The effect was subject to distractions, as in the case of the excluded participants, and went beyond the typical expected outcomes of an introductory composition course.

For the purposes of this study, I will not discuss effects related to learning new genres or rhetorical forms, or improving grammar or mechanics of writing, which students experience as part of any composition course. Issues of author “tone” or perspective are also not covered, because the essays are expected to be personal, subjective, and honest. The question of whether the writing is “stylish” or “lively” is left aside, because simple excitement is not the same as engagement with enthusiasm. If these issues had been the class’s sole purpose, many could have tested out of it.

The portraits suggest that there was a graduated response to writing the true self. Certain levels of response were more advanced than others. Not all participants experienced all effects. Some students may have responded to the philosophy in other ways not measured by this study, such as focusing on certain issues more in their roles in the church or student organizations. It is my sense that some students who desired a certain effect were prepared to revisit their issue later.

Table 2

*Responses to Philosophy*

Name	Dealing with my own crap	Seeing my unified self	Voicing my experience	Discovering my true nature
Roman		XX		
Mariah				XX
Cherie				XX
Clark			XX	
Annie			XX	
Jocelyn		XX		
Nathan				XX
Tilly	XX			

The syllabus and assignments encouraged bold, personal responses, and participants followed its direction to the effects shown in this table, which emerged from the portraits individually, and made a difference in at their class participation. The featured essays both had as their dynamic contexts the personal life of each student, including unfiltered aspects never shared with anyone besides family. In many cases, the song essay got participants close to their value, and the belief essay took them the rest of the way. “Dealing with my own Crap” was an initial category of curricular engagement for many participants. Others thusly influenced began “Seeing my Unified Self,” a significant envisioning of character attributes. The belief essay was primarily responsible for the third category of response, “Voicing Experience,” a particular way that two students wrote a stream-of-consciousness account of meaningful events in their lives. The belief essay and subsequent conference discussions were primary contexts for genuineness and honesty as students wrote and expressed their true selves. Several students responded to the invitation in

profound ways, “Discovering my True Nature” or “Finding Who I Am.” This was a substantial, lengthy written development of long-term convictions or higher aspects.

**Coping with your crap.** The personal invitations of the essays to discuss significant experience brought up the theme of “Dealing with my own Crap,” a term I used in class to describe their possible reactions to the assignment, which although a little inappropriate, was very true-to-life. The course engaged many participants to share both positive and negative things, especially in the freewriting activity, where nothing was filtered. As the portrait shows, this activity encouraged a performer, Tilly to reveal something embarrassing: “I’m a real chicken sometimes and so I thought, like that this paper would help me, or motivate me to be a better . . . \*sigh\*! Not . . . \*sigh\*!” She wanted to be “conquering fears,” but in her belief response, she could not commit to “controlling what I feel.” Although she was unfinished with the “crap in her life,” the assignment invited her to share, and she could describe her process of “facing fears.” For conflicted Tilly to share this secret was a major success of the “Writing the True Self” concept.

The belief essay assignment and its philosophy of open sharing invited another student, Roman to talk about another kind of “crap.” The freewriting took him back to pure and wonderful memories of childhood, and he told the story of his school days, which were tumultuous. The focus on his experiences helped him share vivid details, “his bright blue uniform wet with tears,” uncomfortably “wearing shoes for the first time,” and being dazzled and intimidated by “clean, white halls.” The song essay evoked a contrasting expression as Roman used rapper Tupac Shakur’s music as a lens to see his boyhood friends in “their little gangs,” with drugs, racial hatred, and hopelessness. Trained in elitist rhetoric, Roman otherwise would

not have shared these significant things. With my help in the office, he was able to shake off the effects of “crap” (see effect 2).

Both of the essays encouraged Mariah to be specific about some “crap in her life.” Because the song had to be personally meaningful, she chose one with a deeper perspective on love relationships, and she responded to it in the life context of a failed courtship attempt. She was “standing holding her soul in her hands with her arms outstretched,” but he was gone. The assignment did a service to Mariah in nudging her to resolve this issue and invite new love in. “Crap” came out in the belief essay as well, thanks to the freewriting activity. In the office, she responded to my question, “What was significant to you in this belief?” She replied that she “didn’t know that still bothered her so much” to be called “nothing but trouble,” a significant realization in the essay that pointed her toward her most powerful response (effect 4).

My curricular approach invited them and my advice admonished them to just be honest and not pretend it was an exercise. I asked them to let the true self out, to use the essays to articulate something meaningful and to accomplish something personally useful, because that is what they were at school for, not to play games. This had the effect of pushing students to divulge and even overcome the “crap” in their lives. They were encouraged by my words and “anything goes” attitude, and they took heart in my assertion that if they were honest, they did not have to fear sharing their bad feelings.

Almost all of the students followed this direction to describe day-to-day burdens. In the belief essay, Clark responded by discussing the common malaise and boredom that an unengaged student lives with continuously. Similarly, Jocelyn was encouraged by the song essay assignment and my specification of it to share a situation in which she used a song to affect her insecurity. Regardless of the nature of their responses, it was valuable because their voices empowered them

to succeed in the writing task. Their true selves responded to it, “My voice is the power inside me.”

**Seeing a unified self.** “Writing the True Self” encouraged participants, primarily Roman, Jocelyn, and Cherie to “See a Unified Self.” In response to the song and belief essay requirements, they reflected authentically on their pasts, owned their opinions and perspectives, wrote with self-perception, and began developing toward core values and ideals. As they connected with the primaries of their past and present experiences, they found courage and wrote a unified, future vision statement about themselves. This was a significant step beyond coping; it required engagement and personal commitment to the voice philosophy. The meditation and truthfulness required by the belief essay was a major contributing factor in the clarity of many student statements of true self.

Although the assignment initiated the participants’ introspection, for both Roman and Jocelyn, finding their belief was not a simple process and the prompt was not enough. It only got them about halfway through the belief essay, at which time they both came to me for assistance. Roman had already commented in his song essay about the importance of a unified self. Whereas he was able to begin the belief essay with the story of his school woes, certainly engaging his past and present values, he could not bring himself to complete it. I saw this as symbolic—a writer’s block showing conflict of character. He had tried an interesting tactic on page three, formulating a success-oriented, “goal” aspect to help evoke his future, and got totally stuck. We discussed in the office why his belief paper was only half done and the discussion turned to his heart.

1. You know, have you kind of, felt the school pride around here, since you’ve been here? Well, it’s like a big thing!
2. Over here, it’s like in elementary school you just go to play and run with bare feet and go home with ripped shirts.

3. Like you don't know where you're going, but you know you're in the right place now, or you're not.

It all sounds like the same train of thought, but between 2 and 3, I had called Roman out: "I'm not at all convinced that you're a goal-oriented person. I feel like you want to allow things to grow naturally and for it to feel right before you do it." The choice was his: being the right person, not becoming the right person. This individualized, personal direction entailed a major rethinking of his transition to the second half of his essay. Because I insisted that "being in the right place" was important, he revised his essay to show himself clearly as a hard-working team player with heart. It also affected him to see the unification of his forces in the future. He was living then with respect and dignity for the future love of unborn children in his "big Polynesian family."

Another participant who was affected by my suggestions to see a unity within herself was Jocelyn. Her response to the belief assignment showed her active, working towards self-enrichment and family bonding, orienting to rules and social organizations. The main goal in her paper, her value in "knowing all the positions and being versatile" overwhelmed me. Jocelyn admitted the same in an informal conference with me, "I don't know how to relate these things together in my essay." Even though it seemed to be just semantics, everything meaningful in her life actually involved competing, cooperating, evaluating, or playing, so I said, "It's all play." To be clear, Jocelyn's sense of play is non-trivial and exceptional, promoting feelings of community and compassion. In an unexpected way, "playing for love" organized her essay and her belief statement. But the song assignment had already invited this value into her. After she thoroughly analyzed an insightful song and applied it directly to her current situation, she formed a comprehensive action plan for herself, which ended with the charge to "forge a new identity for myself." In her writing, Jocelyn was seeing a vision of her unified self.

The song assignment's invitation to reflect upon and extend the meaningfulness of a personal connection to a favorite song set the stage for Cherie to commentate upon her life, which towards the end of her essay naturally turned towards her future and a unified self, as indicated in greater detail in her portrait. Her vision of herself was, "I have an un-measurable capacity to love." Whereas Roman and Jocelyn saw the image of unity, but did not achieve it, Cherie did. Whether it was because she knew already how to distill personal truths from her journal or because of the sweet spirit that she carried with her, she eventually fulfilled the unification that she desired (see effect 4).

The writing was real in those participants who saw their unified self, their character and higher commitments. Expressions and expositions grew out of a real situation, reflecting real virtues, speaking to real needs, and showing real challenges. The essays were unified with a sense of direction and mission. The overwhelming evidence suggests that these students were on the way towards achieving a unified attribute of heart-mind-spirit, engaging the self. However, in some participant essays, the unified self was still mixed up with the rush of experience and a mass of ideas.

The aspect of seeing a unified self went significantly beyond coping with crap, and was above all, honest. Other external engagements needed to be put on hold for this type of vision to emerge. If "voice" can be considered a natural category, then the unified self would be like the "singer's stance," a solid orientation to the topic and audience, and the foundation of "breath support." Jocelyn, Roman, and Cherie were seeing their unified self and inviting the desired clarification into their writing.

Because many of the participants had minor "coping" issues that they overcame, it seems that they also saw a unified vision of themselves, through faith. They used moral commitments

in their overcoming, wresting themselves from confinements, initiating countermeasures, and gain deeper insights about themselves. To the extent that participants involved themselves in the curricular approach and philosophy, writing their true selves, they were close to their core values. Each student engaged with those values in different, sometimes profound ways.

**Voicing my experience.** A primary purpose of “Writing the True Self,” although fulfilled dramatically in only two cases, was the development of voice. I have termed the most striking examples of this phenomenon in portraits of Annie and Clark, “Voicing Experience.” In the office visit, I said that Annie had not given voice in her belief essay draft to the experience of writing music. Her response to this was the profound “music composition” excerpt, “I would sit down on the piano bench and let the energy flow from the tip of my head down to my toes and out through my fingertips. It was incredible. . . . The sounds would fill my ears before my fingers could play them. I would feel so relieved: so alive.” Sharing the flow of life energy from her soul in written form showed Annie’s faith in the intention of the assignment and her trust in me. Exposing the power of music in her private teenage moments, took her beyond genre and class expectations to show a true aspect of music. This uplifting essay shows that more than turning depression to happiness, composing music was a conduit to the real power in Annie’s life.

In Clark’s belief essay, he wrote in mostly public terms how video game enthusiasts fell into “The Gamer’s Trap.” In the office, I reenacted what his gaming experience might feel like to him, with all of his senses active. He responded in kind, “When I would sit down at the chair a slight euphoric feeling would resonate through all my muscles giving me a sense of relaxation. . . . I knew what I had at my fingertips . . . the sense of satisfaction that I would get if I had won an important tennis match.” Not happy with this false reward, Clark’s description of his gaming prompted him to connect it to something more real. Writing this was significant as it provoked

insights of displeasure with his current state. The belief essay charge required a positive value. Clark went beyond voice to find this advanced spiritual concept, “a state of equilibrium,” but did not commit to it, as others did to their core value or vision of unified self.

Because the belief essay gave them the location to do it, the freewriting gave them the raw material to get started, and the conference with me showed them how to channel all of the inner experiences, these two students produced extraordinary, evocative passages demonstrating states of being, which were full of vivid, rich detail. In the essays, one hears in unbelievable voice what one might expect from a Mozart biography, but who has given voice to the true gaming experience? Annie had effects across all of the categories, while Clark was opened up dramatically by this essay.

These students awoke to their possibilities when I encouraged them with all I felt about meditation on the past, introspection, reliving the significant sensations, and putting them to paper. They collected their inner forces and used “Real Voice,” which is “organized on a higher level, beyond logic, having been lived with for some time and filtered through the self.” It reads like stream of consciousness, with rich description and pure feeling. It is my general impression that other students had developments in their sense of self as they expressed themselves. The two passages referenced show an emergent category within voicing experiences: creative vs. consumptive energies.

**Discovering my true nature.** Aside from things in my course that invited a quality response, there was my underlying philosophy resonating with institutional values, for students to discover their true spiritual nature. Several of the students took “Writing the True Self” to its fullest extent, “Discovering My True Nature,” particularly Cherie, Mariah, and Annie. These participants were on a transcendent path of total selflessness.

For Cherie, the aspect was pure love. Instead of being hurt, Cherie used her failed relationship as a locus for pondering. She found the part of love that still lasted and invited her to forgive the boy.

When you love someone, in that person's presence, you should want to serve them. You should feel like you want to be a better person because of them. You should want to expand your potential and become someone better for them. Love calls you to action and becomes a mighty force for change in the world. We need love. We need change. We need the growth that comes from change. And love requires courage. You must have the courage to feel full heartedly for another person. You must strive to be better, to never give up, and to know that love is always worth a sacrifice. You must know that love is worth the effort. Love does not consist of all of the feelings that follow it, but is an action. Show the feelings you have for someone, serve them. Love is a verb. Love isn't something that you receive. Love isn't something that you give. Love is something you do, it is a verb.

This passage shows Cherie turning her concept of love towards higher aspects. She evidenced this with episodes from her life, sharing the caring with her young women's group and "obnoxious" girls she felt called upon to help. She mentioned that she was a Relief Society counselor, so there were other current locations for that love and compassion as well. This was manifested at moments of greatest personal investment and engagement.

In Mariah, discovering her divine nature was a reaffirming of what she had known for some time, despite being bothered slightly by people who misjudged her. She knew that service to others made her happy.

I believe that we should be encouraging our youth and not trying to get revenge on them for things they have previously done. This does not apply only to kids but also to everyone we meet in our lives. As a church, we believe in repentance and forgiveness. We know that when we do wrong we can make up for it, we would be lost without it, and we are happy when we receive it. So why can't we apply the same principle to other people? We should not judge other people unless we are willing to accept the same judgment. I find that I change by degrees each day sometimes for the better sometimes for the worse. The changes can be subtle and can go unnoticed. It is much the same as when a child grows physically, it happens little by little and sometimes those closest to the child do not recognize how much the child has grown until it is pointed out or they take a step back and really look.

Mariah is here advocating for all of the people who have been misunderstood, especially by those who should have been more considerate. She describes something very close to her divine nature, the sense that all are growing, not just the children, who require special considerations, but everyone in one direction or another. It is a beautiful statement that carries with it all of her service experiences, which led her to believe that she can be a positive influence in the world for her young friends.

Participants were discovering their true natures, one truth at a time. They were feeling the effects of the unified self as seen by other participants. The core values had been actualized throughout the person, and a unified aspect had emerged within their characters. This sort of person engaged the course in confident, definite ways.

**A process of unfolding.** Each of the four primary effects was present in many members of the focus group, sometimes to greater, and sometimes to lesser degrees. Because many students moved from category to category, this suggests a process of unfolding that occurred from basic effects to more sublime ones, according to the preparation, diligence, and willingness of the student writers. As the participants opened themselves to their experiences, they were able to confront their past conceptions of these issues and replace them with versions that are more refined. The effects are both beneficial and worthwhile, even if particular participants did not experience them fully.

All of the students who experienced significant growth found their voices to a certain extent. Some of them already knew where they were, while others had to be shocked into letting them out through freewriting. Relying on their personal experiences, which they knew intimately and through-and-through, they wrote themselves into existence, finding their voices and becoming more aware of their identity. Their writing provided the means to attaining a more

unified self, “playing in” their voices to achieve full resonance in their instrument of life. The portraits bring out this aspect in a holistic manner that allows all of the depth and breadth of their humanity to show itself. Behind every paper was a person, and some of them were so evocative that I could see them clearly before me, speaking in their own tone of voice. I imagine that this is a more intense version of what is commonly experienced when one picks up the phone and identifies the speaker after only a simple hello.

On the first day, I saw simultaneously beautiful people ready for learning and “a bunch of kids” struggling with college life. I saw both aspects in many of them. But they shifted in my perspective as I grew to know them more personally, becoming aware of the wholeness of each person. I saw emerging in them something connected with their past that made sense of their life story. The portraits show the fundamental things that put each participant on an individual path of growth and development. This related to the idea of perfection, which members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints see as a relative thing. One can be perfect, or have a perfect moment, which only means that the person has filled the current bounds of his or her creation. It is an idea of being actualized or realized. This is the way that these church members understand the admonition of Christ, “Be ye perfect, even as I am.”

These aspects emerge from the portraits in the voices of the participants, and they take various forms in each of the subjects. I was surprised by many things I discovered in the portraiture process, and I was pleased that so much of the effect was tangible, real, and discernible for those not of the Christian faith or specifically members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They were a reaffirmation of the nature of personal things, which is that if a person is totally honest, pure in intention, and expressive in aspect, the issue becomes

less personal, more universal, and there is a connection made possible with all conscionable people who desire to understand (Cooley, 1956 [1909], p. 21).

In fact, their human responses drew them closer together in my mind and made it easier to generalize their particular cases. It also helped to identify a general effect that was present, to greater or lesser degree, in all of their responses to the coursework and assignments. It may be that writing the true self does, with some students, help them to inhabit a place of trust and to take a leap of faith, speaking the name of their problem, wresting control away from their fears and desires, and turning their voices towards a higher aspect.

In many of the cases I encountered in this project, I arrived as an outsider to an unknown process. I was not sure that anything fundamental was going on. Even as I began to read the papers and later to write the portraits, I was judgmental, thinking students were having emotional, selfish reactions to being labeled a troublemaker, an ice queen, a geek, a scaredy-cat, or a diva. Then I started reading for awareness and the ideas expanded before me. All of these ideals appeared, and my initial picture was not right. As I wrote the portrait, I discovered that the participants had inner forces of the soul, virtues, and values within them, and they only remembered those particular struggles because they were drawing attention to and clarifying character attributes about which they felt most deeply.

Writing the true self begins when students have faith in me as a teacher and what I represent, that they believe me when I say that their own writing is unique and important, and they start getting engaged in the direction that I am showing. My students knew I considered them unique, important, and interesting individuals before they started putting pen to paper. Almost all of them believed me and totally accepted this. They understood that they were the most important product of the class. I asked for a real person and inner commitment to the

writing, true participation in the lexical-creative-artistic endeavor, or “engagement.” This was a primary phenomenon in all of the participants, although the range of engagement varied. I will attempt therefore to give a nuanced discussion of the whole spectrum in my students.

In a majority of the case study participants, their voices were engaged in my class, and their writing succeeded as a result. At the onset, they took a vested interest in the course. Their inner selves got some encouragement, change, or illumination, and were awakened to some extent. For many of them, it brought clarity into their lives as they used their voices to describe their song preferences and core values, in the context of their significant experiences. Their voiced writing shows that they implicitly understood that these essays could not be “phoned in” but would require commitment and conviction of character. I always attempted to project this spirit of enthusiasm in my teaching and explained how the assignments channeled it. With personal expression, their voices emerged and made their writing and lives better. Certainly, this is true for all of the seven major and minor portraits.

### **Part III: Effect of Writing the True Self**

When I developed “Writing the True Self,” it was the entire course, five units taking a significant path towards determining truth and meaning in life. Each of the units and all of the data sources, essays, journals, and conferences had a major personal component. I had new belief and prison narrative units that I had never done before. I had a holistic vision of the students’ growth potential, and the syllabus followed it. I also believed that a truthful person would have power beyond mere rhetoric (Elbow, 1981, p. 213). I implicitly communicated this *ethos*-center, which affects everything else in the class.

When I started to write and analyze the portraits, I discovered there was a difference in curricular effects. Most of the evidence of student growth was occurring consistently in the first

and second units, “Song” and “Belief.” While the third, fourth, and fifth units were worthwhile in teaching the students to write, they were inconsistent for measuring growth through voice. So I decided in this project only to focus on the two universal assignments. Because I conceived of and taught the entire course to all of the participants, it is worthwhile to speak in brief terms about the way I saw the class proceed and the way students responded to each unit. Accordingly, in part A, I will discuss my subjective impressions of the whole, and then talk about the perceived effect of essays 3, 4, and 5, in case anyone is interested in using them. In part B, I will objectively describe what I established through data analysis in the portraits, which is that the first two assignments are particularly effective, strictly in terms of the evidence I presented. They have a larger, universal validity and could be adapted into a variety of contexts.

**Part A: My impressions of course effectiveness.** Initially I called my ENG 101 course “The Search for Truth and Meaning.” My philosophy in organizing the course units was eclectic, and correlated to what I believed were perennial values in composition, in the order used in a typical writing process. These values formed the acronym C.R.E.D.O. (Latin for *I believe*). The authorship values were Conviction, Revelation, Expression, Direction, and Operation. The song assignment was intended to bring up unquestioned convictions. The belief assignment required revelation (or realization). I thought the fantasy story or personal myth would be a pure form of expression. I intended students to derive from the analysis of Viktor Frankl’s prison narrative a life direction; and the research paper was an operation, i.e. objective-guided action involving an important conflict in their field of interest. Although this theme was less successful in application to this study, it was still beneficial for teaching purposes.

***Diagnostic essay on personal style.*** Although it is not being considered as part of this study, part of the curricular effect began with a diagnostic essay, which simply asked students to

describe their “personal style” in three attributes. I did not read them too carefully, but it gave the students a sense that I was interested in them individually and wanted to get to know them better. It also established that their opinions or preferences were considered valid topics for essays and implied that we would be starting with things that were easy to write about and interesting to share with a teacher who cared about who they were. The shift into a personal song essay and then a belief essay made some sense to them. But for many students the next transition felt totally off-the-wall.

*Fantasy.* I had used folktales in my Parkland College courses as simple texts for symbolic interpretation and analysis. However, I found that students jumped at the chance to write a fairy tale. I believed that fantasies would tap into the students’ voices because they could allow their imaginations to roam, their fictional protégés saying and doing things that they never could. As it turned out, many of my BYUH students did not like writing folktales, for whatever reason.

Initially, I was eager to see how students raised on an expansive LDS cosmology used this opportunity to author their own hero journey. However, the “Fantasy” unit had variable effectiveness. I did see some wonderful stories, but they did not relate to anything specifically in the student, unless the author personally clarified it. The writing was inconsistent, with some students like Mariah writing a wonderful story that apparently meant a lot to her, while other students like Clark and Tilly wrote confusing or thematically inconsistent stories that did not relate to them at all.

As I explored these essays, I saw that once the fantasy and imagination were evoked, the participants’ desires for love, recognition, power, etc. made the stories difficult to analyze in a compelling, believable way. They became personal documents whose connection to personal

growth and correlations to reality became mere conjecture. There were many other problems, too with curricular and philosophical consistency. Some students did explain their fantasies quite compellingly in the office conference, and they seemed to fulfill an interesting need, one student even giving the story to friends as a Christmas present. Therefore, this unit may be a focus of subsequent study, and I might reuse it in a fantasy writing class.

***Prison narrative.*** In the fourth unit, I pulled out all of the stops, piloting a totally new unit that I believed would have substantial effects, emerging from my own compelling readings of two classic works. I called it the prison narrative unit because we read Dostoevsky's autobiographical novel *Memoirs from the House of the Dead* and Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. I enjoyed the first book because I had written a paper about it in college, focusing on the "Secret of Life" in his introduction. The second was compelling to me because logotherapy has helped me to reflect on the meaning of my actions. The assignment was an analysis of either book, concluding with a statement of life direction that the reading helped to evoke. The rationale for using this was that through example, the students' personal mission statements might be opened to class discussion.

Many of the students said that this unit was like other English classes they had attended, essentially reading a book and finding themes. Only one of the participants, Donna, read *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*, and she loved it. Of course, she had spent time with Siberian prisoners as a humanitarian aid worker in Mongolia. So that connection was a clear coincidence. The participants enjoyed Viktor Frankl's book, and felt they learned something from it. However, the themes that emerged in the Song and Belief Essays did not continue in any form in their reaction to Frankl's book. Mission statements did not emerge, and the consensus among students was that this unit had transgressed the overall course theme. Part of the problem

was how much work it took, and perhaps if the workload was reduced and the participation changed, it would work better.

**Research.** The last unit was required by the department and the General Education committee because a previous course specifically regarding research had been dropped from the curriculum. But the topic was at my discretion, so I asked students to reprise an issue raised in their “personal credo” theme in much greater depth, with sources. Researching an aspect of what the students personally believed enabled them to take their convictions to the world. I also added that it would be a good idea to be self-serving, to research something that would be related to their major or future. With the students, it was a hit, difficult, but worthwhile even at the semester’s end.

I was very interested in how the students perceived my course, and on the last day, I asked about it. The response in the three sections varied. They had started enthusiastically with the Song and Belief essays, taken a few steps backward with the Fantasy essay, and gotten lost and off track with the Vision essay. They perceived a returning to topic in the Research essay, finishing strong, but feeling that they had not utilized the entirety of our time in useful pursuits.

Many students commented that their initial energies from the first two units would have been better spent if they had immediately proceeded to the Research essay. In the portrait write-up, I saw that most of their research essays did not contain meaningful developments, even though they were more specific. They essentially found people who agreed with them. For my purposes, it added nothing, and the belief essays were invariably purer and full of conviction with voice. I am not convinced that moving the research to the middle of the course would have helped with this issue.

Given the experience of students and the experience of writing the portraits, I concluded that the primary effects of writing the true self were in the first two units, and I decided that the other three units would not be the focus of my investigation. This reduced the number of data sources by 60%, cutting down the amount of time and effort in analyzing them considerably, and making the effect of the curricular approach much more palpable. I saw the two retained units as more universal, amenable to different teaching interests, and applicable to many student-centered contexts.

**Part B: The song and belief assignments as universal tools to introduce the true self in other contexts.** As mentioned previously, the song and belief assignments require students to tell meaningful stories about their lives as a context for understanding (a) someone else's expression, and (b) their own core values. These stories were doubly applicable because I told them I wanted to know who they were so I could help them learn. In many ways, the meaning of the song and the belief essays are reflected in and evoked from the student's own raw life experiences, an exceptionally "authentic" approach.

*The song essay assignment.* Through the portraits, I established the proposition that the song assignment was useful to garner student interest, evoke their voice, elicit their core values, analyze the lyrics personally, and apply the artist's vision to their life situation. The song texts and music that were chosen often commented directly on the participants' own life, as in Roman's sensitive discussion of Tupac Shakur's "Changes." In her discussion of Rascal Flatts, who "was just speaking to [her] directly," Cherie's voice emerged, "I have an un-measurable capacity for love." This situated her whole course participation within a significant life context, real love. Annie's treatment of "Rainy Days and Mondays" also shared powerfully, but on the negative side, "I wanted somebody I could talk to and for them to give me advice and comfort,

but I felt there was absolutely nobody who I could tell. It was awful. Writing in a journal can only relieve so much pain.” The assignment was bringing out true aspects in the students.

Core values and deeper commitments were also present in the song essay analyses. Despite his necessarily cynical reading, even Clark pondered the value of an expansive character, as it kept one from petty bitterness. Jocelyn did an incredible job analyzing the lyrics of her song and pulling out specific, detailed aspects of its value system. In Mariah’s essay, “Is your soul worth Stardust,” she was able to envision herself at peace “when the wind reaches out for [her] soul.” These songs evoked their life issues and gave insightful perspectives into their beliefs and attitudes. Many students, especially Roman uncovered the aspect of the artist inside themselves when they interpreted the lyrics. He internalized the attitude of a “souljah” speaking out against the terror, the hatred, and the lies. This feeling also helped him to understand his life.

As a result of the song essay topic being so close to their lives, the participants wrote very truthfully in their essays. As Clark said, “Stepping over others to get a better place in line is a breeding ground of revenge. It has become an endless cycle.” The song choice seemed sometimes enigmatic, but as it was to be the students’ favorite song, one that they cared about and really enjoyed listening to, if the student was a bit of an enigma like Tilly, then a song like “Mack from the Outback” makes sense. Even though her analysis was strictly song-oriented, it was possible to see an image of Tilly in Mack. In other participants, the song connected in significant ways with episodes of their lives. This was certainly true of Mariah, through several themes of loss, heartache, belief in love, and perspective discernible through the lyrics.

When the participants shared their life stories, the assignment became a significant location that served to clarify and respect some of the most meaningful things that ever had occurred to them. For Cherie this was certainly true, her boyfriend’s love occupying such a big

part of her life that she moved to be near him. It was also true for Jocelyn, as getting the first semester of college right was very important to her. Especially for Annie, comparing the song to her life, the artist's perspective helped her to relate to the crucial, "run and find someone who loves me." Both Tilly and Clark wrote from a critical perspective and discussed aspects I could connect to their experiences, such as the fear of exclusion and the pain of being left behind. This certainly helped to reveal something more about them as people. The evidence in these portraits indicates the significance of these curricular effects.

This close treatment of the song essay effect on participants suggests that the topic is completely universal. The reactions I described show the beneficial interaction between the voice of the listener's heart and that of the artist as an undeniable educational good. Music is a major organizing element in the architecture of the mind, heart, and consciousness. People of widely different backgrounds, with totally different perspectives all can relate instantly to the idea of a song affecting or relating to their life. The vast majority of people enjoy music, and there is at least one song with online lyrics that evokes clear comparisons to episodes and themes from any life. The song paper is an extremely useful, generally universal tool to approach the idea of a true self in a natural way. I believe that it can be exported to other introductory-level composition, speech, popular culture, or general humanities classes without consideration of anything else. It also presents some personally compelling, common concepts that could be held more deeply than the student realizes, at the level of a core belief.

***The belief essay assignment.*** The participant's curricular interaction evidenced by their drafts, office visits, final papers, and informal conversations, establishing the relative success of the belief assignment now becomes the primary goal. This essay proved to be very effective, showing students their underived premises, solidifying their confidence, helping them to be

grateful, uncovering their “crap” in life, opening up their voices, generating a unified vision of self, and even revealing their divine natures. Whereas the song essay could be assigned in any class, the belief essay may require some scaffolding, viz. the NPR “This I Believe” book and some sharing of personal convictions.

Having finished with the song essay and expressing aspects of their personality that they had not realized were there (a work ethic in Clark? A dreamer in Roman?), the students were primed to seek further for their unconsidered beliefs. Particularly, Clark was caught up in his “Trap” and only saw “equilibrium” as a possible core value after considerable discussion. Roman knew that a belief in God was common, but not what really counted when visiting his depressed friends and sharing ideas from his life. Particularly, he had to reconcile conflicting versions of his future, and he did. This broke through his writer’s block and enabled him to represent himself as a confident laborer. Annie already knew her love for music, but needed to tap into significant creative experiences in her life to distill the essence of the virtue determining it: The Power of Music. This yielded a thankfulness that influenced all of her course participation: “It’s like I’m talking about the same thing over and over, but music is my life.” All of these effects produced engaged, internally focused students who learned significant things.

Not all of the experiences were as transcendent or profound as Annie’s music composition, and in fact, a fair majority of people wrote about “crap” in their lives during the freewriting hour in class. Particularly Tilly opened up and shared about her fears. Falling off horses and having stage fright are understandable, but fear of sitting alone at lunchtime is downright embarrassing. Still, she owned them and shared her plan to get over her fears. On an opposite track, Cherie was grateful for her negative experience and found the good aspect of it that would outlast the next boyfriend and which would explain the peace outside of boy-girl love

that she saw in her journal. In “Love is a Verb,” she used her voice to share honest episodes, from girl’s camp, the “Cole girls,” and her bishop’s invitation to “be the difference.” These developed into a unified vision of a sister’s love that resonated profoundly and evoked her character vividly.

In some cases, a core belief was clearly there, but it was so much a part of the participant that I had to help them to see it as an aspect that correlated important memories. Particularly with Jocelyn, she was so effective that something was clearly responsible, but she “couldn’t relate it all together.” When I said “play” was the key, she included episodes that spoke directly to her sense of self. She did not name the unified vision of self that she saw in both the song and belief essay, but I did—“playing for love.” The belief narrative signified the higher aspect present in Mariah’s life and gave meaningfulness to past experiences. Indeed, she said that she “hadn’t thought about that (hurt) in a long time, and [she was] surprised that stuff was still bothering [her].” With these now-significant evidences of Mariah’s countenance, the essay coalesced to reveal her divine nature as a servant-teacher committed to eternal growth. In both cases, the belief essay allowed participants to be thankful for the experience of writing it and the life it came from. In all of the participants, the belief essay helped to identify an exceptionally significant, under-considered area of their consciousness that they would continue to enlarge with time. It held the higher aspect that they had accepted into their hearts at moments of exceptional, life-altering experience.

It now almost goes without saying that the personal context and invitation to write as they spoke, especially the freewriting activity was also beneficial in evoking stressors from past or present. I said that the exercise would generate some “crap,” and that like from an old water pump, the first stuff that came out would be muddy. Sometimes, it was bad writing, but other

times it was, “I can’t stand my roommate snoring.” and so forth. I assured them that “crap” was what fertilized gardens and they would see beautiful things growing up (Elbow, 1981, p. 113). Negative memories often drew attention to the presence of an inner direction that they were sure of, and which strengthened. This endeavor, leading to higher aspects and the true self was of great importance to all of the students. In almost all cases, it helped the students to take strong positions in the research essays.

If any of the outcomes described in the above portrait evidence are valued in an educational context, the belief essay may be considered a viable topic. Although some would call writing a belief essay a fundamentally “spiritual” endeavor, I would counter that finding the true self is an aspect of being human and an intrinsic part of the humanities, arts, and social sciences. For instance, where I work now at Belmont College, the faculty listed “accepting accountability” as a primary objective in General Education. It makes sense that if one asks good people about their priorities, then something of this sort will come up. However, accountability implies a commitment to something important and a deep belief that one can follow through. Insofar as average students hold unquestioned beliefs as guides and teachers have an obligation to engage in dialogue on this, searching for vision and voice in writing, and seeking for beliefs that help to define the true self is a valid way to pursue this and other similar goals.

**The office conferences.** At this point, ignoring the effectiveness of the office conferences on the essay writing would be like ignoring the 2000-lb. elephant in the room. This is evidenced in several of the portraits, as students were about halfway finished with their essays when they spoke with me personally, and their subsequent writing shows a major shift to the concern we discussed. Roman’s shift to happiness at home and Jocelyn’s addition of play to her essay occurred in my office. Clark and Annie both shifted into the Voiced Experience mode after I

dramatically reenacted the things they were talking about more conceptually. Because of the office visit, Cherie started thinking about the Cole girls and her church service. Tilly took my conference advice to develop her song essay, “making it a lesson” and to take her belief essay and “do something about it.” Only Mariah did not seem to need suggestions, but our conferences built shared trust and respect.

I was able to meet with my students for ten or sometimes even thirty minutes to talk about their essays and get clarification. When I designed the study, I was not aware of the overall importance of the conferences, and the focus was on the syllabus, the essay themes, journal preparation of ideas, and the essay charges. I intended to use the conferences to get conversational material from the students for the analysis, but there was no awareness that they would significantly improve the students’ ability to perform in writing. In the majority of cases, the most effective writing was not evoked by the general instruction in the class, the slightly narrower directions in the essay assignment, or the guidelines for writing on the handouts. It came from my office, where in many circumstances I was not “telling” the students what to do so much as dramatically re-enacting their experiences, evoking their memories. When I focused too much on analysis or conventions, writing conformed to those expectations.

**Cultural orientation.** With my awareness of cultures, I could understand many of the participants. For instance, I understood Clark’s addiction to gaming in-depth because of my experience playing online Role-Playing Games. I knew about Siberian prison work camps from my Russian Literature background, so I could connect with Donna. Because I knew popular songs, I could relate to the students who chose relatively mainstream or classic popular music. The country genre worked best, and Cherie and Jocelyn actually wrote about the same song. This makes sense because of Rascal Flatt’s orientation with definite spiritual themes.

#### **Part IV: The Mormon Context**

Writing their true selves caused many participants to look at things, write about issues, think and feel, evoke contexts, consider experiences, and relate to people in a variety of unique ways because of the generally influencing factor of their membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I will use the common term for church members, “Mormon” interchangeably with the full name and the terms LDS and the Church. Instead of “culture,” I use the term “context” to signify not only religious practices but also a mass of influences that comprise the entire lifestyle. The Mormon Context has wide-reaching effects on participants that would be different or not present at other religious (Christian) or secular institutions.

Particular effects of the Mormon context emerged in a number of portraits. Roman felt conflict in his work and social life because many of his friends had different values. Mariah developed her entire belief essay around a Mormon ward and mission. Cherie had significant influence from her involvement in the Church’s Young Women’s program, learning the active love that was the theme of her course participation. Annie’s strong Mormon family was central to her confidence in dealing with depression and sharing her musical talents. Jocelyn grew up in a Mormon family that conscientiously developed her talents and taught her to work and play hard. Tilly used her seminary class as an analytical context in her song essay, which invested her with power. Only Clark seemed to have been engaged in a type of denial or “push-back” because no trace of his Mormon affiliation was in his essays.

Belief in God is the ever-present undercurrent among Mormons, but they consistently desire to believe in principles more deeply. The basis for interaction and caring is true religious experience, not merely a social engagement. Although there are different aspects regarding family values, seminary, ward, Young Women’s and Relief Society, missions, and an aspect of

eternity, they add up to something profound. Mormon young adults as a group tend to be well raised and mature beyond their years.

**Strong family values.** As many of the portraits practically shout off the pages, families are important to LDS men and women. Strong families are considered fundamental to all things in the church, the first responsibility of all conscientious people, and their primary stewardship. Mormons surmise that after this life is over, Jesus Christ will personally ask each person, “How did you treat your family?” Family has always been an important aspect of LDS doctrine, but it was emphasized in 1995 by an official “Proclamation on the Family.” It defines family as “central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children,” as an entitlement of all children, and as “the fundamental unit of society.”

This belief in family is certainly visible in the portraits, as evoked by the belief essay, particularly. Annie said that her family helped her with depression and they were close, camping out, and singing together. Writing the true self caused Jocelyn to externalize her gratitude for a family that taught her sports and played as a way to trust. Also so affected, Roman shared that he was taken in by grandparents when he was 16, and a big Polynesian family was his dream. Mariah had to share her father with their ward, but in her essay, she was grateful for her family life. The assignment evoked in Cherie deep appreciation for the family that encouraged her to serve, giving her the nice car to pick up girls for church. The writing task brought up problems for Clark and Tilly, but for some reason they never mentioned their families.

The familiar attitude towards fellow church members is the reason Mormons call each other “Brother” and “Sister,” so I was “Brother Stansell.” Use of this title was a doorway into our proper relationship; I was to be a kind family member to them. Because of strong family values, students enter BYU–Hawaii expecting to be treated with love, to have their worries

assuaged, and to find like-minded people to bond with as extensions to their own families. Of course, Mormons are not the only religion emphasizing strong families, as this is a necessary aspect of all cultures who intend their lifeways and values to persist. With all of these things considered, I believe that these effects achieved in my classes are possible in other contexts, especially with participants who feel they are part of a strong family or community.

**Literacy, seminary, and journals.** Although all of the participants emerged from the LDS culture of literacy, its effects were too diffuse to be measured directly. Generally speaking, the LDS church has certain cultural expectations involving literacy in general and writing in particular. All children have to give presentations from the time they are four, and these are written down. In their classes, they read and comment upon scriptures, which prepares them for literate activities, but none of the students mentioned learning significant reading/writing skills at church.

However, Cherie and Tilly mentioned a significant effect from the seminary program, one of the most fundamental aspects in a young Latter-day Saint's life. This is a demanding, early-morning scriptural education that all youth 14-18 attend throughout the school year. Among significant life experiences required in the belief essay charge, Cherie had recruited for her seminary class despite having an ineffective teacher, because she knew it was religiously worthwhile. Reading and responding to sacred texts and words from church leaders, seminary students take a major step towards mission preparation. When the song essay charge proved difficult, I suggested that Tilly find a familiar context. In her mind, the idea of a seminary teacher was so salient that she immediately took this role and treated her song as a parable. For Cherie, seminary was a place to practice charity, while for Tilly it was a place to learn lessons. Attending

these classes also helped my students to see philosophical inconsistencies in my curricular approach, because they were attuned to personal truth.

The LDS church encourages all members to write in a journal daily, which is in essence writing towards the true self, seeking important and worthwhile insights. Because only significant things were asked for by the belief assignment, no one mentioned that journal writing was particularly helpful, citing real experiences as being more profound. It is not clear how many of the students actually had written in a journal, except for the two who particularly mentioned it. Annie said that she wanted to have conversations about her issues, and “Writing in a journal can only relieve so much pain.” For her, writing music was more significant, and if one looked back at her high school years, the memorable events would likely be in a songbook. But in a conference with Cherie, when I mentioned having vivid memories that drove my impressions, she said that she had a profound experience with her journal just the previous day. She explained that it was a location for spiritual consideration, giving insight into important parts of her life, in particular her teen years. When teen Cherie thought about spiritual things, she was not as “boy-crazy” as she had thought she was. Insofar as writing in a journal or diary is fairly common, the effects from this practice would be expected in any student who had engaged in it.

**Ward.** All of the students in the study were members of a ward (congregation) that gave them friends and fun times, as well as rituals and responsibilities. These were specifically organized single adult student wards without classes for children or teens, because there was none. About 250 students comprise a typical BYUH student ward, with seasoned members from nearby local congregations serving as the Bishop and his counselors. These units meet for three hours each Sunday for a worship service and classes. As in all churches, members are admonished to obey the commandments and try to be better people.

Many of the participants specifically wrote their true selves with reference to how they lived their lives in accordance to their beliefs and LDS church customs. As mentioned previously, Cherie, Mariah, and Tilly all participated in service and learning related efforts at church. Cherie tolerated, and then loved “obnoxious girls to keep them coming to church.” Mariah considered the ward her foundation, as they were “all striving for the same goals. We have the same values.” When Tilly was afraid to sit alone in the lunchroom, she “noticed a girl [she] had seen in [her] ward . . . got the guts to go sit by her . . . [and] now she’s one of my best friends.” Even in seemingly minor trials, wards were the support they really needed.

The participants were encouraged to discuss their beliefs, and they shared that church also brought out their talents. Annie said, “In my ward in Oregon, I was asked to sing for a woman who had cancer and was very ill . . . I felt a burning so strong inside me that I could not deny that the Holy Ghost was there.” Similarly, singing with the BYUH choir in a church service was a primary spiritual event in her life. Jocelyn mentioned playing her violin at “various church activities.” In the remainder of participants, church values are internalized and their personal lives are the over-arching concern.

Like other young adults who attend a weekly service or a ministry, all of the participants had a place to discuss spiritual things together. This is a definite source for inspiration and insights on higher-level spiritual issues. It shows that membership in a Mormon ward or a comparable faith organization has a positive effect. Sociologists have done specific studies on the Mormon ward, with some exceptional results. However, I have attended a fair number of other churches and the young members were sincere about how the organization promoted their well-being. Given a “belief essay” assignment, I am sure they could share a belief just as well. Insofar as many of the students in any given class would have some religious activity, they could

rely on a similar type of support with this kind of assignment. Considering these issues, the belief unit is readily adaptable to other teaching situations.

**Young women's personal progress.** Although I am sure that more would have discussed it if called upon, only two of the participants mentioned their involvement in a church youth program as significant to their lives, the others citing work, school, sports, gaming, and family as significant. These two participants are no surprise: Mariah and Cherie. Both of them wrote their true selves with reference to significant experiences in the Young Women's program. Mariah was a teacher, and Cherie was a class president. Both of them at the time of the study had been called to be in the presidency of the Relief Society, the Church's organization for adult women. It provides fellowship and renders compassionate service. It is assumed that the lessons learned by Cherie and Mariah in Young Women's and from my class about love and learning filtered into their Relief Society leadership obligations, which included fellowship visits to other women, preparing lessons for Sunday classes, and providing service, e.g. taking a meal to a sick person.

Young women in the church have personal enrichment opportunities through their respective classes, which meet on Sundays and one weeknight per week. In her essay, Mariah was encouraged to share her diligent participation in those classes both as a youth and as soon as she turned 18, as a teacher and advisor. Central to the course is the Personal Progress program, which requires girls to work on projects associated with the seven YW virtues and their practical goals, e.g. learning to draw or plan an event. Advisors like Mariah perform a significant role in this endeavor, becoming as close to the girls as an aunt or best friend. They have special "girls' camp" for one week a summer in order to work on their goals. When prompted by the song essay assignment, Cherie described in vivid terms her experience of becoming committed to loving sisterhood around the campfire, as the significant women and girls in her life shared their

feelings and bid her farewell. In the belief essay, she described moving to Georgia and becoming the president of her class. A girl's work, learning, faith, and diligence leads to the Young Woman's medallion, which both Mariah and Cherie wore often, as a reminder of their special commitment and achievement.

This involvement does not seem to be particularly comparable to any other, even the Young Men's program, which is engaged in Scouting and trying to connect with rough-and-tumble boys. Neither of the men who went on missions mentioned YM as significant to their growth. Nevertheless, I consider that it prepared them for it. I cannot see many programs for young women, for instance a Girl Scout troop or even a church class in another context having the type of effect that comes across in reading Cherie's account. It is easy to draw comparisons without understanding, but the proof is that Cherie and Mariah went to the furthest extent observed in this study, "finding my divine nature." One reason is that when young women graduate from this program at 18, they are considered emotionally and spiritually ready to be married, to become a wife and mother, heart of the family, the "fundamental unit of society." Among young people in a non-denominational college, this type of religious background would be rare. Having said this, the belief essay does not assume any sort of particular expertise. The moral compass being an almost universal endowment, albeit calibrated in various ways, I have seen students with no religious background rely on personal experience to generate a core value that was meaningful to them and gave insight into their lives.

**Mission experience.** As previously stated, there was a relative magnitude of adoption and a certain percentage of participants who followed the ideas of voice and expression to clarification of their personal values. One factor that had a significant influence on this adoption was the completion of an LDS mission. That is a "call" or appointment by the Church for an

eighteen months or two-year term of service for young people to proselytize often in radically different cultures, societies, economies, and language areas. High moral standards must be observed prior to the call and, of course, during the service period. Although two more of the non-portrayed participants, Darius and Viktor served a mission, Mariah was the only one of the portrayed participants who had done so. In his belief essay, Darius described coping with significant trouble in his family at home while he was on his mission. The voice philosophy effected Viktor as well, who shared about difficult interaction with companions on his mission who showed him the value of prayer and love, “conquering himself.” In response to the song essay, a meaningful event from Annie’s life was two of her sisters serving missions despite significant mental and physical difficulties. Both the song and belief essay required a level of commitment from Mariah that naturally drew on her mission experiences. Even though the song essay is about losing love, the spiritual perspective and priority is pervasive in Mariah’s voice. The belief essay encouraged her to share negative experiences turned over to God. The mission experience is a crucible where character is tested and forged, and where voice is evoked daily in interactions at the doorways of strangers who had little but their words to judge them by. Indeed, it takes a leap of expression to begin speaking of one’s own subjectively ascertained convictions and then bridge to universals that invite the stranger into a faith community.

These interactions were the experiences upon which further expression, writing was founded. These three students were particularly aware of their personal growth regarding literacy because all missionaries write letters home, letters to their mission president, and journals of their mission experiences. This is one of the primary means whereby lessons of the mission are internalized and made meaningful. All three of the missionaries took the course seriously, realizing that personal reflection could help them to determine their course in life. They also

recognized the part that writing would play in helping them to recommit to the values they learned on their missions.

From the Broadway play, “The Book of Mormon” to the autobiographies of Mitt Romney, Stephen Covey, and J. Willard Marriott the overwhelming consensus is that the LDS mission is a “million-dollar experience.” In other words, “I wouldn’t trade it for a million dollars, and I wouldn’t do it again for a million dollars!” That is just a joke that returned missionaries make at the dinner table, because many missionaries do go back after they have retired. This experience is absolutely exceptional, and there is not another program like it for young people, not the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, nor any other volunteer work. The effects that Mariah got from her mission were significant, and it suggests that anyone who adopts “Writing the True Self” will need to plan for time to discuss the belief essay with each student individually, because she was the only one who discovered it single-handedly through the process of writing the essay. Teaching the belief essay will work in other contexts, but the level of personal effect will be concomitant with the level of consideration and commitment.

**Orienting to the eternal.** The final category is significant because it adds an extra layer of meaningfulness to all of the assignments. The significant majority of participants were sincerely concerned about the welfare of their souls in eternity. I see an influence of the eternal in Roman’s core value of happiness, unifying disparate narratives in his essays, and continuing to be his motivation and joy. The participants had a genuine sense that what they were doing had consequences in the hereafter and that their learning was eternal too. Especially Mariah was encouraged to share—growth would continue in the next life. Caught up in the moment of writing, Annie desired to learn the mysteries of music from her Eternal Father. In her essay,

Jocelyn accepted the maxim, “knowledge is the only thing I can take with me in the next life.” These students wanted happiness *ad infinitum*, and anything else was unacceptable.

**Conclusions.** The overall effect of the Mormon context was fairly significant, but aside from the three higher levels, the strong family unit, scripture study and journaling, and ward membership could all be replicated in other places, and therefore would not be considered exclusionary factors for the curricular effect in a secular setting. Although divorce and unfaithfulness takes its toll, strong family values still inhabit a significant place in the American cultural landscape. There may be more broken families, but strong families tend to be larger and more generally influential. The strong family effect on developing values and beliefs would likely be present in roughly 40% of students.

The literacy effects of studying scriptures and writing in a journal is also possible in a person’s young life without being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In fact, church members in Communist Czechoslovakia held a “school of wisdom” with a great books program, yoga retreats and journal writing, under explicit government threat of imprisonment and persecution if they mentioned religion. Hundreds of people came through this program from 1974-1990 and experienced personal enrichment. For them, this was an extension of a caring community. Of course, about 200 of them secretly converted to the LDS church and were baptized in the wilderness. That said, I do not believe that entertainment like TV, dime-store novels, video games, or Facebook would do the same. It takes significant work, and to the extent that others have put in the same time, they would feel these effects.

The relatively common effects of ward membership are also visible in other organizations. I was in Scouting for ten years, had plenty of interaction and activity with non-religious units, and saw benefits from it. The Masonic youth organizations were also open and

supportive in my experience. Sports teams and other clubs or skills-oriented classes in school valued individual contributions highly, not to mention numerous programs put on by the YMCA or parks district. Any active community has outlets for creativity and bonding if a student so desires, and one could expect similar types of expressions with students who had participated in these activities. “Writing the True Self” could be expected to bring out these student voices and visions effectively.

The last three levels of the Mormon effect are not considered universally applicable, even in contexts where a fair proportion of participants have religious backgrounds. The LDS Young Women’s program, missions, and the eternal aspect are unique and particularly contributed to the last effect, “recognizing my divine nature,” which will only rarely be found in a secular setting, although I did have high-level spiritual engagements with two students among the thousand that I taught over six years working at Parkland College. Many who adopt my curricular focus do not agree with the concept of inner divinity, so it may be preferred that this effect not transfer. The other three effects are certainly sufficient for connection to personal motivations, one’s voice and vision, and a sense of one’s power in writing.

Insofar as beliefs and values are immediately beneficial and totally valid in this life regardless of one’s faith perspective, the belief unit is enthusiastically recommended for the aspect that it gives to what some people think is just another topic. Learning wisdom from one’s life is spiritual: some say it is why we have obstacles or hardships, what in class I lightheartedly called “crap,” in life; others feel it’s how we cope with “crap” in life; a few think it’s how we cover up “crap” in life. Regarding the last category, I recall a student who was a prospective mortician, and whose value of “selfishness” promised to help her cope with weepy relatives. I questioned a minor point that her self-deception relied upon, “Do you really think others are so

simply motivated that you can judge them so shallowly?” This helped her to open up a bit and improved her ability to reserve judgment. Although she was very irreligious, she wrote a research essay about death traditions in major religions, so that she could be more sensitive to her clients, which would increase her autonomy, the original intent of her “selfish” belief in the first place. Even people who are not particularly “nice” can still become more successful in their lives by expressing and discussing their core beliefs.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The significant results of the “Writing the True Self” curriculum, as explained in detail throughout Chapter IV, and their possible replication at other sites, as suggested in Chapter V lead one to an invariable conclusion, or “big picture.” This project has presented a vast amount of deeply personal data, which has been interpreted with an eye to participant awareness and holistic states. For this reason, readers may question certain issues: “What is the data? What is subjective understanding? What is the truth?”

To answer these questions, one must turn back to Chapter IV, which shows portraits painted of the participants’ own words and behaviors. These portraits have a life unto themselves, and they portray as accurate a representation as one could expect of what was happening with the students, even considering the observation bias and the general difficulty of participant self-awareness. These portraits are presented as true representations and are instructive generally. Chapter V contains a logical and thorough treatment of connections between these portraits, and of factors that may have played a role in the particular response to the curriculum observed in these classes.

The primary conclusion of this study is: in the featured BYU–Hawaii English 101 classes, the “Writing the True Self” curriculum did resonate with the focal students, who produced quality writing and insights into the true self. The “Writing the True Self” syllabus has had a significant impact on the learning and life progression of all focal participants in this study, which confirms a voice-central teaching philosophy and motivates a discussion of integration in various institutional and course settings. The rest of this chapter consists of a discussion of two crucial types of integration: (a) at four levels of post-secondary education: the technical college,

community college, liberal arts college, and a four-year university; and (b) in different courses: pop-culture, literature, and public speaking. This discussion also contains suggestions, not for how this study should be replicated, but how the curriculum could be modified in different institutional settings and in courses in other areas considered. The conclusion regards contemporary education generally, particularly that it tends to be assessment-driven, and suggests that assignments which evoke the true self could provide a needed balance to multiple-choice exams and quantitative measures.

### **“True Self” Integration by Institutional Level**

**The technical college.** The first adoption context that will be discussed is the technical college, where the main objective is developing student interests while maintaining institutional rigor. My research strongly suggests that my focal students were engaged by “superficial” issues (song choice), but moved on to more liberating insights (core belief). Although technical colleges feature industrial programs of study, the true “liberal arts” agenda in my ENG 101 course would seem to meet institutional objectives for student motivation and self-confidence. Indeed, the portraits suggest that the essays were both “artful” and “liberating” for several of them. As noted at the beginning of this chapter (based on the discussion in Chapter V), although the LDS context was a large aspect in many participants, one could reasonably expect these effects in a general student population.

As of March 15, 2012, the “Writing the True Self” curriculum has now been adopted by the English department at Belmont College, my current place of employment, as the official ENG 101 course for our semester conversion. The beautiful essay topics have proven to work for my English students, moving them past standard expectations, fulfilling normal student needs, and even raising consciousness. To help with adoption of this course into the particular

institutional framework, I have created a course syllabus covering the two units featured here, and adapted other units to help students focus on their careers. For instance, instead of a “fantasy story,” in my current ENG 101 course I have students write a “career story.” Instead of researching their core belief, I have them add career to the mix, and ask, “What can a person with my beliefs stand for, in my chosen career? On what crucial issue should I take a stand?” This has yielded personally motivated, yet career-situated and relevant responses.

**The community college.** In the second context, the community college, expectations of page length are more on par with college and university guidelines, but the curriculum may be oriented to a “pop culture” or other thematic approach. This is the type of institution that the “song unit” came from in the first place, so it may be totally copacetic with students already. The substantial effects from my BYU–Hawaii participants show that they understood the two units intuitively and connected quickly with them. I recall that students responded similarly at Parkland College. This factor helps not only students but also adjunct instructors who are often hired last minute with little training.

**The liberal arts college.** A small liberal-arts college tends to have higher student-teacher interaction and more out-of-classroom time than the two previous types of institutions. It also has strong collegiate values and incentives that push faculty satisfaction higher and increase investment. Regarding the first issue, this is a prime opportunity to utilize office conferences. Instead of having an office conference “marathon” as I did, others may need to consider modifying this to their own preferences, abilities, and individual availability. For several participants in the BYU–Hawaii English classes that I studied, these one-to-one meetings evoked sometimes dramatic improvements from draft stages to final essays. When teacher motivation

and commitment is high, writing conferences also could help students to “catch the vision” of their place in the institution.

**The major university.** At major universities, the focus is somewhat different, more global, and less personal. This makes problems for freshmen, who often do not know or do not connect with their departmental advisor. A personal connection with the English composition instructor could make the student experience less threatening. These two units I used in the BYUH classrooms studied are also amenable to the almost endemic conflict in Rhetoric between department philosophy, state requirements, and a professor’s interests, as an alternative but not a response to them. This study looked squarely at the students and their response to the coursework, not a pre-set agenda. With the larger number of international students at universities, these topics would also help to bridge the gap between L1 and L2 students that are sometimes given very different “flavors” of English 101, which is not necessarily good, but may be necessary depending on language skill.

### **Use of the True Self Philosophy in Other Classes**

As the preceding section shows, not all ENG 101 classes are equally constituted and care must be taken to particular issues in each context, in order to ensure total curriculum and philosophical integration. This becomes even more important when instructors attempt to use the True Self philosophy in other areas. I have personally used this philosophy in three different types of course units: Popular Culture, Literature, and Public Speaking. Other areas in Humanities and Fine Arts, such as Dance, Vocal, Creative Writing, Mythology, and History also could have a stake in the “vision and voice” insights from writing the true self.

**Popular culture.** There is a cultural reality surrounding us that most students find engaging. Study of this Pop Culture can give them insights into their responses and connections

to media outlets. Many freshmen spend more time writing posts on social media than they do writing their essays, and even in the chitchat and “likes,” they are looking for personal visions and personal voices in their circle of friends. So why not teach them in a structured way to consider issues like their favorite song and the experiences that led them to believe things that distinguish them as individuals? They are persons; advocate for personal writing. It is possible to see deeper values in popular songs, and to some extent, in certain films and compelling examples of consumerist propaganda. Above the popular babble, it is possible to hear how conviction unites us more than it divides.

**Literature.** In my experience at BYU–Hawaii, I had to present these two units inside the departmental philosophy that the English classes would be focused on the professors’ preferences in literature, particularly poetry and short works in ENG 101. Songs are a type of poetry, and therefore I chose *Songs of Innocence and Experience* by William Blake as a required reading. Over a couple of class periods, I showed the illuminated manuscripts and gave instruction regarding deeper, line-by-line close analysis. The belief unit was presented in its terms as a literary genre, the credo statement, and the NPR book was required reading for the unit. I also had the students pull out the attributes of particularly good statements that made them effective and we had discussions of theme, imagery, contrast, and other literary aspects. These units could be integrated into any literature class focused on shorter works.

**Public speaking.** The “voice” aspect correlates particularly well into a public speaking context, because so much of confidence and projection comes from voice identity. In my current Speech 105 class, the song analysis works well because other students know the song lyrics. This breaks the ice and allows them to continue with the belief topic. In subsequent ENG 101 classes at BYUH, I changed the Frankl assignment into an oral one. In this context, I wanted to complete

the speeches in one hour, so I had them present before a small peer group via laptop computer. All of these could be used in any public speaking class, “Speaking the True Self.”

### **True Self vs. Regulations in General Education**

Particularly now, education is being overwhelmed with regulations and testing. There is a natural disconnect between the assignments generated as an interaction between students and their instructors and the assessment committee member who looks at them post-hoc. The subjectivity of these essays is a bane of the testing enterprise, so multiple-choice and standardized tests have gained popularity. However, just because assessment is difficult does not mean that it should be left to a standard form. For instance, the profound shifts visible in Roman, the difficult expression of problems in Clark, and the developing voice in Tillie could be turned off like a switch, if students are not taught and assessed according to individual needs and capacities.

This dissertation supports the contention that although quantitative measures are necessary, they are not sufficient to answer questions of curriculum quality, virtue, and integrity. Nor should these issues be left to theory or conjecture, essentially a response to whatever immediately preceded in the rhetorical discussion. Although I believe this is the first time a study of this type has been done, the outcomes in the focal students suggest that the syllabus should be used in other contexts and this research should be replicated in other institutional, philosophical, stage-of-life, and age-specific contexts.

Students should be sharing the significant things that they have learned in class, and they need the option to share from their hearts. Writing essays from a position of personal power enables students to do this. The sensitive discovery and explication of our shared educational and cultural values is central to creating assignments that provoke these types of worthwhile student

essays. Ever since the infusion of middle-class students into higher education and the subsequent re-envisioning of Harvard curriculum at around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, teachers generally have been committed to the furthering of individual student worth regardless of their background and developing their characters according to the virtues of their hearts. The true self must be re-engaged in the philosophical and conscionable aims of higher education.

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## Appendix A

### Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study that investigates curriculum effectiveness. My name is Jon Weatherford Stansell and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. I am also your ENG 101 teacher, but these two roles are separate and do not effect each other, nor will they effect your class grade. The study is done under the direction of Dr. Klaus Witz (kwitz@uiuc.edu), who is my advisor and will not be present at any time, though you may contact him with questions. There will be **4 study participants in each of my 3 classes.**

If you decide to participate, your conference visits with me in the sixth, ninth, 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> weeks of the semester will be audio recorded. These visits will last ten minutes. These audio files will be an important data sample for this study. You will also allow the final versions of your essays and journal entries to be analyzed for this study. After the third week of class, I will **randomly choose a representative sample** of students based on background and gender. So you might not be chosen for this research project. In this case, your audio files and journal files will be deleted at the end of the semester. If you are chosen, I will tell you at the end of the semester and will meet with me for a 30-minute audio-recorded interview.

There are **no known risks in this study** beyond those of ordinary life. However, it is possible that you might sometimes talk about personal matters, and you might therefore feel uncomfortable with being taped. If this is the case, you may ask the audio recorder to be turned off. This will not effect other recording sessions, but it may cause you to be excluded from the study at a later date, if the information shared seriously disrupted the integrity of other data. The potential benefit of this research is to deepen our understanding of writing curriculum. No compensation will be made to individuals in this study.

Please note that any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will **remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.** All audio files will be transcribed using codes so that no personally identifying information other than your image is on the videotapes. I will keep all electronic files on a password-protected computer on a secure server. The results of this study will appear in my dissertation, and many are anticipated to read it as a public document. If this study proves to be very useful, I may do some secondary analysis at a future date.

**You must be 18 years old to participate.** Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will not affect your grades in this course, or current status/ future relations with Brigham Young University or the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. You are under no obligation to participate in the study. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them. You can reach me at \_\_\_\_\_. Should you have any questions about research subject's rights, you can contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board Office, (217) 333-2670; e-mail [irb@uiuc.edu](mailto:irb@uiuc.edu), or the BYU-Hawaii IRB office, (808) 675-3457. You may call collect if you identify yourself as a research participant.

You are making a decision whether or not to volunteer. Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above and have decided to participate. **You may**

**withdraw at any time after signing this form.** You may keep the attached participant's copy of this form.

Signature of  
Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions by checking off the yes/no responses and by signing your initials:

I grant the investigator permission to use excerpts of the **audio** recordings at professional meetings and professional publications. Any name or place references will be changed.

\_\_\_\_\_ Initials Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ Initials No

I grant the investigator permission to use excerpts of **my journals and essays** at professional meetings and professional publications. Any name or place references will be changed.

\_\_\_\_\_ Initials Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ Initials No

## **Appendix B**

### **Participant Recruitment Script**

You are asked to participate in a research study involving curriculum effectiveness. There will be no difference between the participation of focal students and non-focal students. No one is required to participate, and no one will know who the participants will be until after the class is over, because your teacher will randomly choose 12 students at that time.

He will only select from those students who volunteer. He will base the choice of students partly on home area, so 2 will be Pacific Islanders, four will be from Asia, 2 will be from Hawaii, and four from the Western US. with a 7-5 female-male ratio. This is exactly the ratio of BYUH demographics. He will choose at random four students from each class to participate.

All students will have their 10-minute conferences audio recorded, except for those who request otherwise, and these students will be excluded from the study. Students will likely meet with me more often than this, but these meetings will not be formally recorded. All student writing will be turned in electronically, with no difference between participants and non-participants.

After the semester is over and grades have been submitted, your teacher will contact the participants for a 30-minute interview in which they will discuss their progress through the class as they then see it. He will follow up on themes from the essays and encourage them to discuss their life context. He will delete journal records and conference audio files for all but the focal students.

Please read the form in front of you and sign if you wish.

## **Appendix C**

### **Conference Question Guidelines**

- 1—What do you think of the readings in this unit?
- 2—How do you feel about your class participation in this unit?
- 3—How do you relate to the curriculum theme in this unit?
- 4—What was your biggest writing challenge in this paper?
- 5—What do you think you will take away from this experience?
- 6—We're almost out of time, but you get the last word. What would you like to say?

## **Appendix D**

### **Essay Assignments**

**Song essay**—Choose a favorite song. Divide the song into verses and find the primary themes from each part. Then relate each theme to your life, alternating from song to self, comparing and discussing why it is important to you particularly, and to the fans or listeners generally. Remember to 1) quote a few words from the song to support your points, 2) discover themes and ideas, and 3) make claims that are interesting. The paper is to be a minimum of 5 pages, double-spaced and typed, in Arial 11 point font.

**Credo essay**—A Credo is a personal expression of core belief. Everyone’s beliefs differ, based on life experiences. Your beliefs may be is influenced by faith, family, culture, and other influences. The beliefs express themselves in almost every daily action, but come out very clearly in the personal experiences and significant stories we tell ourselves and others. Write about these issues in a 5-page paper, beginning with a story to anchor the belief, then an explanation of it. Double space and type the paper, using Arial 11 pt. font.