The Right Time for Process(ing): Trauma-Informed and Student-Informed Care Pedagogy in FYC at the Two-Year College

By

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Dedicated to my husband, Jay Blaisdell, for being my rock and partner in writing and in life. And to our son, Robin, for inspiring me to lead first with curiosity and joy.

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I use a qualitative interview study to explore the student experience of writing about personal trauma in first-year composition (FYC). Based on my ten study narrators, all community college students who chose to write about a traumatic experience for an essay in FYC, I consider that FYC may be perceived by some students as a kairotic space -- the right time and right place -- to write about a trauma, perhaps for the first time. Because students may choose to write about a traumatic experience, whether or not we invite it, I also consider how trauma-informed writing pedagogy may help instructors respond in due measure. To highlight the kairotic nature of their experiences at key points during the writing process, I organize narrator quotes according to a chronological sequence: first, when they decided to write about their topic (Ch. 2: Opportunity), second, when they worked through the drafting process (Ch. 3: Process), and third, when they received feedback and grades from their instructor (Ch. 4: Response). I analyze their quotes alongside composition pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy. What separates my study from other trauma-informed writing pedagogy scholarship is that it centers student voices, highlighting the ways in which student experiences align with and depart from established pedagogy. Based on my study narrators, I propose that allowing students to write about trauma -- if they choose to -- and supporting them during the process can motivate students to achieve FYC rhetorical outcomes, cultivate academic belonging, and promote the relevance of composition in their own lives. Rather than a healing pedagogy, my last chapter offers a trauma-informed and student-informed care pedagogy that aims to support the wellness of students while sustaining ourselves.

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CHAPTER 1: IS FYC THE RIGHT PLACE AND THE RIGHT TIME FOR WRITING ABOUT TRAUMA?

Three weeks into Spring semester, I received an email from my student's sister telling me that Ana[1], who was in my Comp I course (first-semester composition), had attempted suicide, was now safe and recovering, and that she would be returning to class soon. I immediately thought of the narrative draft Ana was working on, the one about her depression. When she returned to class two weeks later, Ana told me that she wanted to continue to write about her experience with depression and research how families can support and advocate for loved ones suffering from depression. Her proposed research topic alarmed me, as I was concerned about her psychological well-being and also my ethical responsibility, knowing the vulnerable position she was in. However, I also wanted to support her agency in choosing her own topic. In an abundance of caution, I spoke with the director of the Access Center, a member of the college's Care Team[2], who was familiar with Ana's case. She said, "This can go in one of two ways. It could be traumatic for her, or it could be deeply cathartic." She told me that if Ana wanted to write about this, then that meant she must feel safe in the class—that she could be viewing this as *an opportunity* for her to process the experience. She advised me to have a conversation with the student to make sure she felt comfortable, but that ultimately, the student could make that choice for herself. Based on her advice, I spoke with Ana after class one day. I told her that I was glad

[1] All student names are pseudonyms.

[2] According to their webpage, "The CARE Team at Nashville State Community College is a collaborative effort among the Access Center, faculty, Safety/Security, and the Associate Vice President of Student Services and Student Life to address the emotional health of our students."

she was doing better and asked if she felt comfortable writing about her experience. She said that it was all she wanted to write about, that it would help her to write about it. I emphasized that if she changed her mind to just let me know. Ana continued to write and research about depression throughout the semester and ended up doing well in the class.

That same semester, Nyah chose to write her first narrative about the sudden death of her mother when Nyah was only seventeen years old. We both cried when we went over her paper in our conference together. Thinking back to my conversation with the director, I asked if she felt comfortable sharing her writing with her peers, and Nyah said she was looking forward to it. I asked if she felt comfortable being graded on this assignment and she said that she did. Later in the semester, Nyah's personal narrative turned into a research paper about the grieving process. At the end of the semester, Nyah met with me and expressed some disappointment at not getting the grade she wanted, but she told me that she did feel that she had grown as a writer. Then, she thanked me for giving her "*the opportunity"* to finally begin to process her grief, several years after her mother's death. She credited this to writing out the story, hearing her peers' similar stories, and learning, through her research, about the psychological effects of grief—thereby validating her own feelings.

What strikes me about these two episodes is their framing of their Comp I narrative essay assignment as "an opportunity" to process a trauma. While I, as well as many of my colleagues, have mentored students through writing trauma narratives, I had not fully realized the potential of students viewing the writing classroom as a chance to face powerful emotions. In fact, some students might perceive the Comp I class, most often taken in the first semester of college, as the right place at the right time to address a trauma. This move on the student's part—to take advantage of the opportunity a writing assignment presents—can be seen as a kairotic moment.

According to James Kinneavy, *kairos* can "provisionally...be defined as the right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something" ("*Kairos* in Classical" 58). A narrative writing assignment can therefore create the ideal rhetorical situation for some students to address a trauma. The composition classroom is uniquely situated as a space that both potentially offers students an opportunity to work toward processing their traumatic experiences (if they choose to do so) and an opportunity to benefit from listening to others' stories. In the structure of an essay, they can imbue their story with meaning. In a supportive peer group, they can be heard and validated. In the scaffolding of an assignment, they can gradually translate unproductive thought loops into critical reflection.

This kairotic moment for addressing trauma has recently deepened in significance due to the shared traumas of the past couple of years: the pandemic, national and local protests against systemic racial injustice and police violence, the ongoing trauma of fentanyl and addiction, and, at least in Nashville, the destruction and twenty-five deaths caused by a series of overnight tornados in Spring 2020. Some students want to write about their traumatic experiences associated with these events.

This opportunity to write about trauma might be felt even more urgently by community college students, who, according to a study by Samantha Anders et al., generally report more cumulative traumatic experiences than university students (455-456). Their study also found that exposure to cumulative trauma "was strongly related" to negative outcomes in life satisfaction, mental health, and grades (456). However, according to psychologists like Pennebaker and Smythe, self-reflective writing, which can help people translate thoughts into language and bring order to traumatic experiences, can improve health issues or academic performance impacted by trauma.

Writers are not the only ones to potentially benefit from trauma narratives; when students share their stories, their peers have the opportunity to learn from them. For example, one of my Black students shared a racist encounter that she had experienced with her peer review group. A white male student who was in her group wrote in response to her narrative: "I learned about problems other groups of people have to face. Sharing these stories opened my eyes to some injustice in the world I hadn't realized before." This was significant because these students were friends from high school; they had known each other for years. Yet, he had not realized that his friend had had to deal with such overt discrimination until she wrote about a traumatic experience and shared it. According to his reflection, that story changed his understanding of this issue and humanized it for him.

The first-semester composition classroom, especially at a community college, can be the kairotic time and place for many students to write about their trauma and share it with an affirming audience. For this reason, instructors should be prepared to support student writers and readers kairotically—that is, responding in the "proper measure" (Kinneavy, "*Kairos* in Classical" 58). To address this, my project merges trauma-informed writing pedagogy with a qualitative study of community college students who wrote about a traumatic experience for Comp I. For my qualitative interview study, I invited ten NSCC students to discuss why they chose to write about a traumatic experience for a Comp I paper, what they expected from this endeavor, and what the experience was like. Grounded in this study, my dissertation analyzes the student experience of writing about trauma in the context of the writing classroom and offers pedagogical recommendations–including limitations–that are both trauma-informed and student-informed.

Trauma Writing in FYC

In this section, I first overview composition theory around lived experience composition pedagogy in order to demonstrate how the composition classroom environment and writing opportunities could be interpreted as invitations to write about trauma. Next, I establish current thinking around trauma-informed writing pedagogy and how it offers a more clinical approach to support students who write about trauma both ethically and psychologically. Lastly, I review scholarship on *kairos* in order to establish that the first-semester community college classroom can be seen by students as the right time and right place for them to write about a trauma. Pulling these threads together, I show that the student perspective needs to be a bigger part of this conversation and propose that exploring this perspective can add vital insight into how we meet students in this kairotic space in the right measure.

Lived Experience Composition Theory

The first-semester composition course at a community college is ripe with opportunities to explore identity and personal experiences in juxtaposition or alignment with other narratives. As Mahala and Swilky establish, lived experience is epistemic in itself; it is critical knowledge, which can empower students to see themselves as an authority on their topic within a larger conversation (369-370). Common assignments where students can explore this include literacy narratives, journaling, reflections, and research essays. These kinds of assignments can reveal to students the threshold concept that "writing is linked to identity"; it shapes who we are, especially in regard to our identity within a community (Roozen 50-51). If the writing classroom then becomes a place "where different narratives meet, struggle, and possibly even align–we might also create more opportunities for students to share their experiences and be heard" (Hsu

164). Because sharing narratives helps students engage with diverse perspectives, it can help to build connections that contribute to a sense of belonging.

Any time students are invited to share personal experiences, it is inevitable that some of these experiences will be traumatic ones, and yet these can serve an epistemic purpose as well in the context of a collaborative classroom. Traumas are often considered disruptive to self-identity, and expressive writing has been found to help people assimilate trauma into their experiences and, especially with an audience, affirm their identity (Pennebaker and Smythe 122-123). Because of this view of the power of writing, students may view composition as an opportunity to write about a trauma, to organize it into language and share it with others in a way that gives it meaning. Because compositionists recognize "writing as a social act," first-year composition, perhaps more than other college courses, prioritizes collaboration with an audience, offering students the chance to ask their peers, "Can you relate to my story?" (Adler-Kassner et al.). This collaborative construction between writer and reader can be empowering, helping students gain confidence with taking control of their own narrative, even a traumatic one, and understanding diverse perspectives of others.

Furthermore, key concerns for composition scholars include empowering and reclaiming voices and languages that have been historically oppressed—and because this exclusion is embodied, it also affects the psychological (Canagarajah; Royster; Inoue). In June 2020, CCCC/NCTE published "This Ain't Another Statement!" as a demand that calls on language educators to decolonize academic language and validate Black Language in the classroom (Baker-Bell et al.). This call for anti-racist pedagogy is another way to foster psychologically safe classes. According to neurobiologist Mays Imad, trauma-informed pedagogy should, in part, ask instructors to "consider how racialized communities may experience trauma more severely

due to the impact of intergenerational traumas and *ongoing* oppression and marginalization" (Imad "Leveraging the Neuroscience," emphasis in original). Attention to safety and inclusion in composition classes, and readings related to these values, may inspire students to disclose their own personal experiences and traumas.

Safety also comes in the form of process. Compositionists value the normalization of the often-messy process of writing and thinking, deemphasizing perfection. Cognizant of the writing anxiety that accompanies many first-year students, compositionists use freewriting, poetry, and other playful exercises to reduce writing paralysis and demystify what happens behind the scenes of good writing (Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*; Bizzaro and Baker; Micciche). Writing requires some vulnerability, but working past these initial fears can help students not only build confidence in sharing their writing and getting feedback from others, but it may also help students feel more confident in the content, such as painful memories, that they decide to disclose.

To address trauma writing in first-year composition classrooms, scholars have considered how "writing as healing" pedagogy aligns with composition's learning outcomes, how to grade essays on trauma both empathetically and academically, and how to support students who write about trauma in conferences (Batzer; MacDevitt; Lucas). In *Composition Forum,* Benjamin Batzer writes, "the therapeutic potential of writing, which has been largely neglected in the academy in recent years, can influence the ways we teach transferable writing skills" (par. 1). He also notes that a writing-as-healing approach can promote critical thinking and inquiry in writing. Social psychologist James Pennebaker, "the father of the 'writing-as-healing' movement" was even interviewed for his work in *Composition Forum,* where he offers advice for translating clinical study of trauma to educational settings (Moran). He argues that self-reflective writing

about traumatic experiences can improve learning by helping people integrate new ideas with their experiences; improve college student grade outcomes by reducing cognitive load and increasing focus; and improve well-being when there is also an affirming audience. Based on their studies, they claim that because self-reflective writing allows people to translate thoughts into language and bring order to experiences, it has health benefits (Pennebaker and Smythe 10-11, 65, 67). Through writing and sharing that writing with a classroom audience, students may have the opportunity to be validated and challenged, critically reflecting on their own difficult stories.

Trauma-Informed Writing Pedagogy

Not all compositionists are comfortable with students writing about lived experiences with trauma for class. Susan Swartzlander et al. characterize assigning trauma narratives as a "shockingly unprofessional" practice, which is ripe with ethical concerns with grading and retraumatization (B1). In "Death Gets a B," Marlowe Miller demonstrates the multifaceted ways that personal writing, including trauma, can muddy the grading waters and course objectives. Taking another critical angle, Carra Leah Hood argues that these kinds of criticisms focus on the content of the essays rather than on the motivations of students and suggests that students may write about a traumatic experience, or even invent one, in order to "please" the teacher. Certainly, writing instructors need to ensure that an *invitation* to write about trauma does not mean a requirement to do so. In fact, as demonstrated earlier, instructors may even more often try to dissuade students from writing on such topics because of the potential psychological risks.

However, the question may not be *whether* students should write about trauma, but how to respond *when* students write about trauma. A trauma narrative can be seen as an "urgent matter" that requires the appropriate response from the instructor to support the student (Bitzer

2). The possibility of retraumatization may be less a result of the student putting the trauma into words and more about how the instructor responds to that offering. Missing the window of opportunity to respond with compassion could result in an inadvertent retraumatization. According to psychoanalyst therapist Dori Laub, "If one talks [writes] about the trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to, the telling [writing] might itself be lived as a return of the trauma—*a re-experiencing of the event itself*" (Laub 67, emphasis in original). Instructors must be ready to respond in the right measure.

Trauma-informed pedagogy, a framework that considers the clinical perspective of how trauma impacts the brain and thus well-being and cognition, offers several strategies for recognizing and responding to trauma in students. In her article, "The Pedagogy of Healing," Mays Imad emphasizes the significance for bearing witness to empower students. She and other trauma-informed pedagogues advocate for classrooms that center personal experiences, transparency, flexibility, equity, and collaboration (Day; Marquart and Baez). The pandemic has only brought more urgency to their voices.

Some compositionists have proposed how these principles can be shaped specifically to the needs of the composition classroom through trauma-informed writing pedagogy (TIWP), which is distinct from writing as healing. For example, compositionist Michelle Day criticizes writing-as-healing scholars for "overemphasizing the place of a single writing classroom in promoting healing, which neglects ecological perspectives on trauma/resilience and practical considerations for ethically interacting with survivors," instead suggesting that the field embrace a more clinical perspective that would help normalize supports inside and outside the classroom (13). Day uses her interviews with several composition faculty members to propose a TIWP campus framework that would include an ecology of classroom and campus supportive structures

that prioritize emotional well-being as a necessity for learning, and support both student safety and writing faculty self-care (148-168). Students need to feel safe because writing requires some vulnerability–opening oneself up to criticism, disclosing potentially personal memories, embracing process rather than perfection–in order to make cognitive gains. To do this work, TIWP acknowledges that instructors also need to take care of themselves by creating boundaries and connecting students with necessary supports.

Similar to Day, Melissa Tayles frames TIWP as universal design, inclusive support for all students. However, she focuses her seven principles for TIWP specifically for the community college composition classroom, arguing that the most important principles for community college instructors are to provide psychologically safe spaces and to act as a "buffering role model," a person in authority who can model self-regulation and provide a sense of stability (302-303). Students who feel safe in a composition class that values personal experiences, encourages peer connections, and is led by a supportive instructor may feel encouraged to share a traumatic experience in an essay. These principles are also helpful for students who are exposed to trauma narratives from their peers because the instructor can model a sensitive response. However, sensitivity does not mean less rigor. As Kendall Gerdes writes, "A more sensitive rhetoric would seek out ways of teaching and persuading that equip students with the rhetorical resources to respond, even to difficult, painful, and/or traumatic texts" (20-21). Helping students engage with narrative experiences that are different from their own supports common composition objectives related to diverse perspectives.

TIWP also addresses assessment. As a counseling center psychologist and composition instructor, John MacDevitt offers unique insight from the cross section of these disciplines in his *TETYC* article, "Responding to Student Traumatic Writing." He advises instructors to respond

with empathetic "I" statements ("I felt uneasy after reading your essay") to acknowledge the emotional weight of the content before moving to concerns with organization and grammar (139-140). While these kinds of conversations may be uncomfortable, composition instructors have an ethical responsibility to prioritize the students' well-being but also to help them tell the story that they have chosen to tell as effectively as possible.

The literature around addressing trauma in the classroom offers recommendations for how instructors can invite students into critical discussions about trauma, how they can help students mindfully (and, many argue, beneficially) write about trauma, and how they can support them (from pedagogical and clinical viewpoints) in these endeavors (Laub; Batzer; Day; Tayles). However, little attention has been paid to why *students themselves* see the writing classroom as an opportune place to write about their trauma. Some scholars have shared anecdotal evidence of students articulating their desire to disclose traumatic events. For example, V. Jo Hsu was "worried that the class's enthusiasm [for including more personal scenes in a student's revision] would create a whole new set of pressures to disclose. In the student's own words, though, writing became a 'way to process the things that have happened'" (153). As Janet Lucas writes in her *TETYC* article, "One of the questions that remains mostly unanswered in scholarship on self-disclosure is why. Why do students continually write about the deaths of their grandparents, a friend who committed suicide, molestation, substance abuse, or death wishes and prison terms?" (370). She reflects on the vulnerable space of the contact zone—where instructor meets student disclosure—and offers a window into one student's perspective via a series of transcripts from their conferences:

> "This is a lot of personal stuff, Stephen. Are you sure you want to share it?"
>
> "I have to share it," he says. "Then I know it really happened." (372).

While examples like these shed some light on the student experience, this project will create a space to center more student voices regarding their experience writing about trauma so that we can answer why students choose this time and place to disclose trauma. As Day notes, getting more nuanced student feedback is necessary in continuing to improve TIWP:

> Even though the (TIWP) principles described above are research based and designed to benefit all students, we can also learn from students how they understand principles like safety and what aspects of the class promote/compromise safety. Even though clinical research indicates principles and practices that work across contexts to benefit all students, individual perspectives contain nuances that may further enrich those how we enact those principles/practices in a specific university and classroom context. (168)

What do students hope to achieve by writing about traumatic events? What was the experience of the writing process like and how did it affect them? Did they feel supported by their instructor, classmates, or college? By interviewing several community college students who have written about a trauma in a past composition class, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of why students choose to write about trauma and how trauma writing impacts them in their first interactions with college.

Kairos *in the Classroom*

Before conducting this study, I hypothesized that students who write about a traumatic experience do so because they see the first-semester composition classroom as a kairotic space. According to Kinneavy, *kairos* is "the appropriateness of the discourse to the particular circumstances of the time, place, speaker, and audience involved" ("*Kairos*: A Neglected Concept" 84). *Kairos* is concerned with not only the ethical, the "in due measure," but also its epistemic nature within the context of a community (Thompson 76; Foster 2). These aspects of

kairos can be applied to the community college composition classroom as it relates to trauma in several ways.

Because the majority of community college students enter their first semester with cumulative traumatic experiences (Anders et al.), asking students to write about their past lived experiences, such as in a literacy narrative which is common in composition classes, means an invitation for the student to potentially write about something traumatic. Anders et al. report that the majority of both university and community college students enter college with some history of trauma. However, community college students reported more cumulative traumatic experiences–including both those experiences that *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* would categorize as traumatic (such as death of a loved one or physical abuse) and those experiences that are considered potentially traumatic (such as being bullied or discriminated against) -- than university students (Anders et al. 449). For example, they found that community college students experienced 20% more (54% vs. 74%) traumatic experiences associated with psychological or emotional mistreatment than their university counterparts (Anders et al. 453). This means that community college students are very likely to enter college with a history of cumulative traumatic experiences that may yet be unprocessed -- put into words and assimilated into memory (Anders et al.; Pennebaker and Smyth). Students may see a writing assignment as an opportunity to tell a traumatic story *and to be heard*, perhaps for the first time.

The community college itself may feel like the opportune place for some students to address trauma because of the various resources and supports that may not have been available or as easily accessible to the student before. At NSCC, where I taught, students have access to free counseling, a Campus Cupboard, Success Advisors, advocates from the Access Center, and academic resources, such as tutors and librarians. Students who take advantage of these

resources are more likely to build a sense of belonging that stems from connections they find trustworthy (McNair et al. 567). Some community college students carrying a history of trauma, such as those with experience in the foster system, may even view their college professors as "mini counselors" (McNair et al. 56). Because of this, conferences and written assignments may "provide avenues" for students to discuss traumatic experiences, which "would allow faculty an opportunity to counsel and direct students to institutional resources" (McNair et al. 56). In other words, first-semester students have an opportunity to form relationships with faculty who can then connect them with resources that they either did not have access to before or felt uncomfortable approaching. NSCC's "Achieving the Dream: 2021 Annual Reflection" confirms this in one of their key takeaways: "It doesn't matter how many supports you have to offer students, if they don't have a connection to a person who can direct them to those supports…. Relationships matter!" (Whitehouse 10). Writing classes may especially lend themselves to this relationship-building because of their emphasis on peer collaboration and instructor conferences, as well as their often comparatively smaller classes and enrollment caps.

The rhetorical situation of a writing assignment also provides manageable constraints and built-in witnesses that might encourage students to share a traumatic experience that lives at the forefront of their mind (Bitzer 6; Caruth 4-5). The structure of an essay allows students to frame an experience around a distinct introduction, body, and conclusion. Students have the opportunity to take perhaps yet-unprocessed experiences and critically shape them into a narrative with a specific length requirement–and to choose how to frame its meaning. Composition essay assignments include at minimum an instructor as an audience and may expand to classmates, peers, and tutors. According to Imad, "One reason peer support helps us [deal with trauma] is that it allows us to connect with others who can bear witness to our story as

we bear witness to theirs" ("Pedagogy of Healing"). This audience may be perceived by the student as witness to their trauma, and those readers, by providing feedback and affirmation, can even help them put their story to words. Oral historians view testimony as an epistemic construct between narrator and listener, which can also apply to the epistemic construct between writer and reader (Portelli 72; Laub 57-59, 62, 70-71). In writing about a trauma for a composition class, students will have the chance to encounter instructor feedback and reader responses that can help them feel validation and clarify or shape their own attitude toward their experience.

The exigence for this study is clear. Anders et al. not only found that community college students experience more trauma than university students, but that "individuals who reported more lifetime [traumatic] events also reported poorer outcomes in a range of areas, including greater PTSD symptom severity, more general distress, lower life satisfaction, poorer general health, and lower GPAs" (456). At NSCC, the baseline rate of students who earn zero credit in their first semester is 18%. The pandemic, with its attendant stresses and traumas, has only exacerbated these impacts: in Fall 2020, students earning zero credit in the first semester rose to 24% (Whitehouse et al., "2021 Annual Reflection" 4). If the community college mission is to improve the quality of life for the surrounding community, then community college faculty have an ethical obligation to acknowledge the potential traumas that their students carry and their impact on college success—and to respond in the right measure when students disclose trauma in person or in writing. To begin to do that, we need to look at trauma writing from the student perspective to understand how it affects them and what they need.

Methodology

My study invited ten NSCC students to discuss their experience of writing about trauma in a former Comp I class. I focused on NSCC students because I was a member of the English

faculty there from 2010-2023, and therefore am familiar with the composition curriculum, student populations, and student services that are relevant to this research. I invited some of my own former students to participate, and I also recruited by email[3]. I focused on Comp I (first semester), rather than Comp II (second semester or beyond), to capture the experience of the kairotic first engagements with the institution. None of the students I interviewed were students that I was teaching at the time.

Since bearing witness is a key component of my purpose as an interviewer, I used the intersection of feminist research methodology and oral history methodology to inform my process. Feminist research methodology, in part, values collaboration between researcher and participant, self-reflexivity and attention to power differences, and "taking responsibility for the representations of others…by assessing probable and actual effects on different audiences" (Schell and Rawson 9; Kirsch *Ethical* 4-5). These principles align with oral history methodology in several ways. Whereas feminist research methodology offers a framework for an ethical approach to the interview study; oral history methodology, because its scholarship origins are borne out of a reclamation history of trauma narratives from the Holocaust, offers a more nuanced structure for attending specifically to trauma narratives. There are several overlapping principles between these methodologies that I find useful as a researcher interviewing trauma survivors:

1. **Narrator Agency:** I refer to the students I interview as "narrators" in order to emphasize their agency in telling their story and their intrinsic value to this project. In her oral history project in her composition classes, where Deborah Mutnick refers to students as

[3] IRB 22-2071 7vi approved 12/20/2021

narrators, she argues that the term reclaims student voices that have historically been diminished (629).

2. **Intersubjectivity**: I approached this project being mindful of the narrators' comfort, which meant that I engaged them in a conversation rather than a formal interview, divulging some of my own experiences as well (Anderson and Jack 178-191). In transcripts, I incorporated some of my own quotes when appropriate in order to be transparent about how my own words contributed to the shaping of the interview.
3. **Shared authority**: It is important to me that narrators feel a sense of ownership over their own story. To this end, I shared drafts of my chapters and invited narrators to offer feedback on my interpretations (Borland). I discuss the feedback I received in Chapter 5.
4. **Bearing witness:** While oral historians (Portelli; Anderson and Jack) emphasize the importance of listening with awareness, Dori Laub notes that this responsibility is even more important when interviewing survivors of trauma who can potentially be re-traumatized simply by telling their story to a listener who is not empathic. From his perspective as a psychoanalyst, he notes that the process of constructing a narrative allows survivors to externalize an event and share the burden of the trauma with the interviewer, who also bears witness to the trauma. Most importantly, I will give my narrators the benefit of the doubt—not questioning their experience--so as to effectively bear witness and not retraumatize them (Laub 67-68).
5. **Critical reflection:** Throughout the process of preparing questions, interviewing narrators, and interpreting their words, I engaged in self-reflexivity to ensure that I was attending to my responsibilities as a researcher (Kirsch *Ethical* 28).

As a researcher who does not share many of the obstacles to higher education that my participants may experience, I worked to develop my ethos as a researcher through an ethic of care lens, which Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor argue should "stress the ways people are linked to each other and larger communities through responsibilities" (28). Narrators knew that I was an English faculty member who is supportive of students writing about trauma in composition. I shared some of the positive learning experiences I (and my students) have had in classes where we have dealt with trauma. Yet, I understood that there was only so much that I could do to prepare them for the interview, so I clarified that narrators could exit the interview or the process at any time.

Following in the footsteps of other compositionists who interview students, I centered students' voices, and they played a key role in shaping the themes and focus of the dissertation (Keating; Silver; Wilson and Post). For example, my initial plan was to dedicate one chapter to narrator voices. However, as I analyzed the rich data that was a result of the interviews, I realized that their voices should ground three chapters, focused on central themes related to their experiences before they started an essay, while drafting an essay, and getting responses from their instructor and other readers.

I interviewed narrators either virtually or in my office, whichever they felt more comfortable with, and recorded the transcriptions via Zoom. Interviews were semi-structured and guided by prompting questions. I coded their quotes based on patterns identified in their qualitative answers. Because of the range of participants and real possibility for retraumatization, I wanted to involve someone with clinical expertise in trauma and in reading signs of retraumatization. I contacted NSCC's Student Resource Manager, who is an MSSW (Master of Science in Social Work), to seek her recommendation. She offered to serve in this role herself,

and I was happy to have her support in the study. Having this buffering clinical expert, who also reviewed my interview questions beforehand, gave me more confidence in engaging students in interviews related to their trauma, especially those students I did not already have a rapport with. When I scheduled the interviews, I also scheduled an optional check-in with the resource manager either directly after or soon after our interview. I let narrators know that the check-in was optional and had no bearing on the interview. While I learned either from the resource manager or narrators themselves that some took advantage of this option, I did not seek out this information, so I do not know how many met with her.

In sum, I invited ten narrators to share their story but was mindful of their well-being and autonomy by (1) allowing them to exit the process at any time, (2) reminding them that they do not have to respond to any question they felt uncomfortable with, (3) sharing my interpretations (Chapter 5) with them in order to get their feedback. In this way, I wanted them to feel empowered by having agency over their story and also by having a platform to share that story with an invested audience—namely, writing instructors interested in supporting students who are writing about trauma. Overall, this study investigates possible answers to my larger research questions:

- How can trauma-informed writing pedagogy be applied to best practices for supporting students in writing essays about traumas?
- How does writing about trauma in Composition 1 affect student writers?
- How can instructors support students psychologically, ethically, and academically when they choose to write about trauma?

Overview of Chapters

Because I am approaching trauma-informed writing pedagogy from the student perspective, each chapter honors narrator stories. I organized narrator quotes chronologically to highlight the kairotic nature of their experiences at key points of the writing process: First, when they decided to write about their topic (Ch. 2: Opportunity), second, when they worked through the drafting process (Ch. 3: Process), and third, when they received feedback and grades from their instructor (Ch. 4: Response). Analyzing their quotes alongside composition pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy, I explore why students choose to write about trauma, what the experience is like for them, and what they need during that process. What separates my study from other trauma-informed writing pedagogy scholarship is that it centers student voices, highlighting the ways in which student experiences align with and depart from established pedagogy.

Chapter 2: Invitation as Opportunity

In this chapter, I reflect on my process in engaging narrators in this study, demonstrating the parallels in response to the invitation to interview and the invitation to write—as both offered the opportunity to share their stories with a listening audience. (Anderson and Jack; Portelli; Borland). This chapter compiles narrator experiences related to deciding to write about a traumatic experience for the first essay of their first semester of college. Through the narrator voices, this chapter explores the relationship between writing and identity and the motivation of having a real audience and writing for a meaningful purpose. Perhaps most importantly, it supports how student writers may write about trauma as a way to assert themselves as knowledge-makers within the relatively new terrain of academia. This chapter, which grounds

the study in composition pedagogy, sets up how student writers may interpret trauma writing as inherently aligned with composition objectives.

Chapter 3: Process as Resilience

This chapter, which focuses on the narrators' experiences during the drafting process, uses composition spatial metaphors (Reynolds) to analyze how narrators perceived boundaries, both material and metaphoric. For example, they discuss how they determined when to invite readers into their experiences and when to protect them from their experiences. Braiding their experiences with composition principles related to ways of knowing, rhetorical choices, and belongingness reveals an undercurrent of resilience. Resilience is central to a trauma-informed pedagogy.

Chapter 4: Response as (Ethic of) Care

This chapter focuses on how the narrators perceived instructor responses to their writing. Through an ethic of care lens, it explores the trauma-informed concept of the instructor's potential to be a buffering role model. It also looks at the wrought implications of grades connected to deeply personal and painful experiences, and the relationship between care and assessment. Finally, it acknowledges the systemic limitations of grading, including the impact of administrative constraints and faculty workloads.

Chapter 5: Trauma-Informed and Student Informed Care Pedagogy

Based on the findings from the interview study, this concluding chapter pulls together trauma-informed pedagogy, composition pedagogy, and student experiences in order to summarize trauma-informed and student-informed pedagogical recommendations before, during, and after the first (personal) essay of the semester. According to Michelle Day, "TIWP views education as its primary goal and student emotional safety as a necessary condition of learning"

(158). Grounded by Day's TIWP principles (based on the intersection of clinical perspective and instructor perspective) and by Tayles' identification of TIWP principles as universal design for the community colleges, I show how the student perspective contributes to validating, challenging, and elucidating current trauma-informed writing pedagogy. To prioritize student well-being as an academic necessity, I offer expanded TIWP recommendations for assigning personal writing essays, assessing trauma narratives, and modeling responses to trauma narratives. Based on the narrators' interviews, I offer joy as an additional consideration for trauma-informed classes. Joy is a positive emotion that touches many of the themes of trauma-informed pedagogy, including care, meaning, connection, wellness, and purpose. Instructors must be able to sustain themselves as they do the vital work of supporting their students. One consideration may be to create environments that support mutual joy.

CHAPTER 2: INVITATION AS OPPORTUNITY

"I remember being in the empty library [at my previous college, several years ago] with almost the exact same topic [about domestic abuse] and just sitting there staring at my computer for hours and restarting and restarting and just continuously not finishing that specific paper to the point that I actually dropped that English class because I couldn't do it. But this time, I was given the same opportunity and I just felt that I was ready for it, and I think it was just maturity, the environment, and just growth that I was able to finally express that." --Jen

In this chapter, I will analyze the themes that emerged related to the narrators'[4] motivations to write about trauma. Using coded quotes from my interview transcripts, I explore the academic value of writing about trauma for those students who see an assignment as an invitation to write out their story, many for the first time.

My study centers the experiences of ten narrators who wrote about a traumatic experience in first-semester ENGL 1010 classes, and who together represent three different instructors (a full-time instructor, an adjunct instructor, and myself), at least three different assignment prompts, and course sections from 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. Because of their generally positive experiences with their personal essays, which was likely a motivation to participate in the study, this is admittedly a self-selected group. Still, their discussion about their experiences in my class and others offers a window into the student experience of trauma writing and a way to reflect on my own pedagogy. In their interviews, narrators shared candidly with me about their

[4] I use the term "narrators" rather than "participants" to emphasize students' agency in sharing their stories and their ability to shape the study–rather than the more passive connotations with "being a participant" or "student."

experience of choosing to write about a traumatic experience for a personal essay assignment in their composition classes. Personal essay prompts represented in this study include:

1) Write about a personal experience that gives you insider knowledge on a current issue.

2) Why did you decide to come to college?

3) What is the hardest thing you've ever done? (the prompt chosen by a narrator from three options)

These essay prompts do not explicitly ask students to write about trauma. While the last prompt might lend itself more to inviting traumatic events, it was one of the options for students to choose from. The first two prompts above are ones from my own classes that serve as a kind of invention for students' future research papers. Most students do not write about traumatic experiences. For example, for the first prompt, one of my students wrote about her experience as a twin and later researched whether or not twins should be separated when they first start school. For the second prompt, one of my students wrote about what it was like being the first in her family to go to college and then went on to research first-generation student barriers. Most students respond to these prompts without touching on traumatic experiences at all.

However, other students *do* choose to write about a trauma, whether we ask for them or not (Valentino; Carello and Butler, "Potentially Perilous"). In fact, the narrators in this study, similar to many other students, leaned into these painful topics in one of their first forays into academia: the first essay in a first-semester composition class. Given the level of uncertainty about belonging in academia that many community college students especially struggle with in the first weeks of the semester as they navigate unknown territory (Amarillo College; Whitehouse, "Achieving the Dream Action Plan"), it seems counterintuitive that in this state of

anxiety they would choose to make themselves more vulnerable by sharing difficult memories with peers and being graded for them.

What I found in my interviews with these narrators was that they chose to write about trauma *because* of this unknown academic territory, not despite it. By writing about a trauma, narrators were able to participate in academia on their own terms and make meaningful connections with others. This chapter will look specifically at the themes that emerged around the narrators' decisions to write about their traumatic experience for an assignment. It will demonstrate that narrators viewed the assignment as an opportunity for them to share their stories with a real (and empathic) audience, write for real purposes, and more confidently participate in academia. Furthermore, this chapter will argue that giving students the agency to write about traumatic experiences, if they choose to, can help them build on meaningful rhetorical knowledge and help them establish more confident academic identities.

The Right Time: On Writer Identity, Rhetorical Invitation, and Real Audience

A first assignment focused on personal writing is an invitation to the student to position themselves as an authority, a contributor of knowledge (Mahala and Swilky; Yam). This is especially significant for first-semester college students, as their identity in composition is one of liminal state, neither beginner nor expert (Schaffer 91-92). As first-time college and composition students, they are navigating new and even seemingly exclusive territory, framed in coded systems and language (Amarillo College; Inoue). Yet they also enter this new space fortified by their own life experiences, and, for community college students who may return to college later in life, these experiences may be substantial: years in the workforce, developing a craft, or being in the military, to name a few. In order to build confidence as "beginner" academic writers, students' lived experiences should be explicitly valued in the classroom, as they are a way to

connect their lives and experiential knowledge to academic culture. Janet Lucas argues that some students write about a traumatic event because they view their most painful experiences as the kinds of "important matters…such as death and suffering" often associated with literature, current events, and news that they encountered in high school (371). Positioning students as agents who determine which lived experiences they share in the classroom, including traumatic experiences, can help them see writing as "a means of engaging with the possibilities for self-hood within [an academic] community" (Roozen 51).

Paradoxically, even though it is in the classroom and not in the "real world," the rhetorical situation of the first essay of first-semester composition may well be the *first* invitation for students to write out and share these personal experiences. This creates high stakes in which students may wish to use the opportunity to process – to commit to words – a significant or even painful memory. In contrast to high school writing, where students are more likely to focus on literary analysis and authorial expression, composition pedagogy instead centers writing as rhetorical: a "dialogue with the reader or an opportunity to make knowledge" (Robertson, et al.). The rhetorical situation of the personal essay, perhaps more so than other genres, is not bound by the "audience, rhetor, exigence, constraints, and text" located in the assignment itself; rather, these elements "simply bleed" into students' lives outside the classroom (Edbauer 7, 9). Because of this, a student who decides to write about trauma for a personal essay assignment may view the composition classroom itself as the kairotic space – at once critical and empathic – where they can frame their experience in way that gives it meaning both in the academic sense of the graded paper and in the context of their own life. Indeed, the field itself acknowledges the blurred lines between the classroom and the world through various recent position statements responding to shared traumas, systemic racism, and political violence ("Resolution on

Teaching"; Baker-Bell et al.; "CCCC Statement on Violence"). These position statements recognize that students may wish to have their sometimes-traumatic experiences "valued and respected" in a classroom environment and moreover that the composition classroom can be a space for students to "find empathy and healing" as well as "help [them] cultivate rhetorical awareness" ("Student Veterans"; "CCCC Statement on Recent Violent Crimes"; CCCC Statement on Violence"). Viewed as invitation, the first assignment of the first semester may be a kairotic opportunity for students to explore a significant or painful memory, and, because of the very real stakes, even motivate them toward rhetorical consciousness.

A key motivator toward this rhetorical consciousness is having, perhaps for the first time, a listening audience to react to the traumatic event. In taking up the invitation to write about personal experiences, rhetors in turn invite real readers "to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does" (Foss and Griffin 5). For experiences related to trauma, this requires a rhetor to not only be aware of the real audience, but also, according to Caswell and Cifor's ethic of care, to recognize the very real *affective responsibilities* they have to all of their audiences: real (instructor and classmates), imagined (others who need to hear their story), and themselves (24-25). In other words, working toward understanding means that rhetors have to navigate writing their experience in a way that empathically considers an audience of the other (who may be affected) as well as the self.

Methodology: Coding and Transcription

The narrators in this study shed light on why students decide to write about a traumatic experience. While many composition scholars have used reflections, interviews, and quotes to understand student motivations for disclosing traumas in their writing (Valentino; Lucas; Yam;

Hsu), this study investigates the student experience from a reflective viewpoint after the semester has ended and brings together students from multiple classes.

When I started recruiting narrators to participate in my study, I was surprised by the enthusiastic responses that I got from the narrators who reached out to me. Here are some of their responses:

> Jen[5]: Thank you so much for including me on this. I would be ecstatic to participate. I'll get the forms filled out and sent back ASAP.
>
> Gabriel: I would love to participate in your study! The premise sounds really interesting, and I would love a copy once you have it submitted.
>
> Jasmine: Hello, I would love to participate in your interviews. Thank you for keeping me in mind!
>
> Matthew: I only touched on the topic of my trauma growing up while writing our narrative essay, and I would be happy to share more. I'm honestly an open book when it comes to this stuff. None of it bothers me anymore. So, I would be open to answering any possible questions you might have, and I could give very detailed responses.

I share their responses related to participating in the study because their enthusiasm demonstrated to me that they saw the study itself as an opportunity to share their stories to help me "explore the student experience of writing about trauma"[6] in a composition class.

I was concerned that it would be difficult to find participants outside of my own students because of the personal nature of the study, but I felt this was a crucial perspective to have. I sent

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[5] All study participant names are pseudonyms.

[6] See Appendix for full recruiting email.

out a recruitment email to all NSCC students and asked my English department colleagues to share the IRB-approved recruitment email in their classes. Carina (my former student) contacted me after her current English professor forwarded my recruitment email to her class. Four students responded to my all-campus email expressing interest in the study, and two of those followed through with the interviews: Shay and Jack. Jack was enthusiastic about interviewing with me because he saw that I was an English instructor, and he said that his best experiences at NSCC were with English faculty, so I am grateful for my colleagues' kairotic impact on my study participants.

Next, I sent targeted emails to former students who I remembered had written about a traumatic experience in my classes, reaching back as far as spring 2019. I sent them the same recruitment email, as well as a personal note about why I thought of them for the study. I recruited six more narrators in this way: Jen, Alice, Gabriel, Jasmine, Jessie, and Nyah.

The final narrator, Matthew, was in my ENGL 1010 class at the time of the all-campus recruitment email and expressed his interest in participating. I had not expected my current students to be interested, especially since that first essay was still so fresh at Week 10 in the semester. I responded that because of ethical reasons, I could not interview current students. However, I suggested that he reach out to me after the semester if he was still interested. He did, and he became my tenth and final narrator.

After I completed the interviews, I compiled all transcripts into one document to code them. I use Keith Grant-Davie's definition of coding, which he asserts can "include all that a researcher does to the data" and emphasizes "that division and classification are interpretive acts" (273). Using my research questions below, I created a coding system to identify patterns in the narrators' experiences (Saldana):

- Why do students choose to write about traumatic experiences for composition assignments?
- What is the writing experience like for students who write about traumatic events?
- What do students need from classmates and faculty to support them?

Based on these research questions, my first pre-set codes included "opportunity," "invitation," "process," and "safety." However, as I continued working through the transcripts, other patterns emerged in my narrators' interviews. For example, I noticed that several of the narrators framed the "opportunity" of writing about their trauma as "my story" and tied it to their sense of identity in the classroom. I decided to use *opportunity*, *writing process,* and *response* as categories instead and explore the emergent codes that related to these. Acknowledging the recursive and subjective nature of coding, I pored over the transcripts to find narrator responses related to my preset categories and searched for specific and related terms, such as "my story" (Saldana).

I then color-coded the 244 pages of transcripts by category: blue for codes related to *opportunity*, orange for codes related to *process*, and pink for codes related to *response*. In this way, I was able to compare and contrast the narrators' experiences within these categories. This method helped me discover other categories (purple for when narrators talked about the traumatic experience, green for when they referred to college in general). I then established several codes that related to my categories. For example, codes such as "my story," "writing confidence," and "help others" emerged under the category of *opportunity,* which helped me consider my first research question, "Why do students write about traumatic experiences for composition assignments?" Based on the narrator interviews, this chapter will analyze the

themes related to the assignment as a kairotic opportunity that I culled from this coding process. Later chapters will focus on process and response.

Like my interview methodology, my coding is shaped by feminist and oral history methodology. From feminist methodology, my interpretation of the study narrators' quotes is tempered through a lens of critical self-awareness (Kirsch, "Methodological"). In coding the transcripts, choosing the quotes that I will include, and interpreting them, I have attempted to interrogate my own biases like this in a number of ways based on the principles that Gesa Kirsch lays out in her discussion of methodological pluralism: "The researcher's *relation* to the subject…, the *purpose* of the researcher's questions…, and the researcher's *agenda*" ("Methodological" 256, emphasis in original). Taking these into account, I have tried to be aware throughout my process of my biases, especially those related to my own writing assignments, teaching methods, and student outcomes related to trauma writing.

For one example, as I began compiling narrator quotes and interpreting them for this chapter, I realized that the code "grade" had not come up under the category of *opportunity*. It made me wonder if I had overlooked this in my coding. Had I imposed my own bias as a teacher-researcher–perhaps hoping for students to see writing an essay as serving more of a purpose than getting a grade – and missed something that pushed back against my category *opportunity*?

To explore this, I used the Find tool to locate "grade" in the compilation document. The term occurred 20 times, and only one of those was recorded in my blue category related to *opportunity*. Eight instances were part of my interview questions. For instance: "Were you hesitant at all sharing [this essay] with your classmates or for a grade?" Three instances of the term showed up in color-coded green sections in which narrators mentioned something about college or coming to college in general. Two instances appeared in the orange category related to

process. Three instances were in the purple category related to trauma, where one narrator discussed the bullying she endured in elementary school that affected her grades. Two more instances were in the pink category when two narrators discussed getting their grades back, and the final instance of grade ("military grade") was not in the academic sense of the word at all. While I will explore the one mention of grade under the *opportunity* umbrella in this chapter, I will further investigate the student experience of assessment on trauma narratives in Chapter 4.

In addition, I have tried to "open up the research agenda" to my study narrators as much as possible by having open ended questions to invite their stories, by sharing my interpretations with narrators to invite their feedback, and by actively seeking out narrators who I did not have as students (Kirsch, "Methodological" 257). This last intention posed a challenge specific to this study since I was asking narrators about traumatic experiences, which is easier to do when one has built some rapport (as I had with my own former students). While I have only two of such narrators who were not my own students, I think their perspectives under two other instructors help to temper what could have otherwise felt like an exercise in confirming my own beliefs rather than more openly exploring critical perspectives. Like other composition researchers, I was aware throughout my interpretive process of the ways that my own experiences and study design influence the results, so it was especially important to me to seek out feedback from the narrators (Grant-Davie 274; Borland). Additionally, I was mindful about centering narrator voices in the following section to give them a platform for their experiences (Kirsch, "Methodological" 264).

My use of oral history methodology intersects in many key ways with the feminist concerns, such as a heightened awareness of interviewer versus interviewee (faculty vs. student) power imbalances, acknowledgment of the intersubjectivity produced from interviews, and

attentiveness to including the research participant in interpretation (Portelli; Gluck; Borland). However, because oral history scholarship is borne out of trauma narratives from WWII's Holocaust, I was especially mindful of how quotes taken from transcripts might represent my narrators, who are sharing their traumatic experiences with me, in the most authentic and respectful way (Portelli). For these reasons, I have included some filler speech (such as "like" and "I mean") in order to render the narrators' voices and tones as closely as possible, but I have taken the liberty to delete repeated words or excessive filler that are often used in conversations but do not translate effectively to written transcription without distracting the reader or unfairly representing the narrator.

Narrator Voices

In this section, I analyze narrator quotes to explore why the narrators were motivated to write about traumatic experiences. The themes that emerged from codes related to the category *opportunity* include: "my story," "real audience," "to help others," "to understand," and "writing confidence." I found they were motivated to write about a traumatic experience because they 1) recognized a rhetorical situation which provided the exigence to (finally, in some cases) share their trauma, 2) could speak from an authoritative position for real, epistemic purposes, and 3) felt more confident in their ability to write about their trauma than other topics.

Recognition of rhetorical situation

One of the most significant themes from my study was how narrators connected their motivations directly to the *rhetorical situation* of their assignment prompts. Their responses reveal keen awareness of the audience, purpose, and context that they took into consideration when choosing to write about a traumatic experience. In fact, their responses demonstrate that writing about their trauma allowed them to explore and expand on their rhetorical knowledge in

personally meaningful ways. Narrators saw their audience (the instructor and often peers) as empathic listeners who could acknowledge their experience within this academic context. They articulated real purposes that they hoped their writing would serve. Moreover, they viewed the constraints of the assignments itself as motivating.

Gabriel recognized the assignment as the *first* rhetorical situation where he had the opportunity to share his experience about being mistreated in high school because of an invisible disability:

> All of these [personal essay] topics are things that I'm not allowed to talk about. I'm not allowed to go up at work and to somebody and be like, "Hey, do you want to hear about this traumatic thing in high school that I went through?" But if I'm to actually legitimately try to put those emotions, that experience, into an art form then I feel more like I'm actually able to express myself, but in a socially-acceptable way.

Gabriel's response demonstrates his awareness of different audiences in different contexts and the rhetorical choices he is making in each situation: sharing his trauma in a controlled academic setting where other people are sharing meaningful experiences versus not sharing in work or other situations. Gabriel explains, "I thought that…trying to tap into the energy that happened in that experience was a good way to like, impress my professors, but also improve my writing….I kind of wanted to work through those emotions in a literary environment where I could express myself and what happened, but also be judged in a critical way about it."

Like Gabriel, other narrators expressed their desire to not just get the story down but write it effectively–thereby moving from writers to *rhetors*. Matthew discussed his motivations for writing about a trauma by contrasting the differences between the rhetorical situation of the assignment versus his experience journaling: "Whenever I write in my journal, I have no, like, I

don't have some picture of a person that's listening….I can say things the way that I want them if I imagine someone's going to read them." His response speaks to the rhetorical choices that he would make given the two different contexts. Whereas writing in a journal for some of the narrators was a helpful way to express themselves, writing for a class, with its attendant multiple drafts, feedback from the instructor and peers, and strategies for creating structure, was viewed as a welcome opportunity to learn the craft of writing. They expressed the different opportunity that the constraints of the assignment afforded them that journal writing did not. Shay said the narrative assignment required "thought and structure," unlike the "freewriting" that she did in her journals. Similarly, Jessie said, "People sometimes need a direction," which journaling doesn't always offer.

Other narrators also commented on the constraints of the assignment as a motivating factor. Nyah welcomed the deadlines of the assignment that motivated her to write about her grief, which was something she had been meaning to do for some time: "Having that accountability like, it's due next week, made me sit down and have to really be like, okay, this is how I feel. It made me do it versus me just freely doing it on my own. Because I would have never done it." The rhetorical situation of the assignment, especially its time limitations and concrete accountability was the motivating factor in finally starting.

For some of the narrators, the assignment presented an opportunity to simply connect with their audience. Jack characterized being able to share his traumatic combat experience in an assignment with peers as an "opportunity to gain" an audience who will listen and "make [students] come out of their shell." For others, it was more about connection with the instructor. As Matthew noted, "It allowed us to connect a little more on a human level rather than, you know, you just strictly being my teacher. I think [the narrative assignment] allowed for that type

of connection." Shay similarly looked for a connection with her instructor. She said that sharing her essay with just the instructor served a similar purpose as Matthew: "It felt like [the essay] had another purpose. I knew at the end of the day, that this was just an assignment to be graded…but I knew that somebody was going to read [it] and it would at least put it into perspective. Because you always feel so alone in that situation." However, she notes that if her class was going to do peer review, she would never have chosen to write about her experience in a mental health facility. She says, "I don't know that that would have been very helpful for me because it's weird having to confront it with your peers." This distinction between teachers as audience and peers as audience highlights the need for instructors to be as transparent as possible when first assigning an essay about the audiences who will potentially read it.

The above responses show that narrators were motivated to write about traumas because of real audiences, and more specifically, they reveal an understanding about the stakes involved with such sharing. This kind of rhetorical knowledge – the awareness of readers, the development from writer to rhetor, and the recognition of a rhetorical situation that provides exigence for a text – is significant to FYC goals. Choosing to write about these traumatic stories, perhaps *because* of what was at stake, helped narrators recognize the personal essay assignment (the first essay of their first semester) as a rhetorical situation that created a space for their trauma. Furthermore, these narrators foster an ethic of care in various ways that demonstrate affective responsibilities: care for others by using their lived experience "to help" or "to connect" and care for themselves by honoring their own limitations (Caswell and Cifor 28; Noddings; Imad, "Our Brains, Emotions" 37).

Being an authority

Beyond the rhetorical situation, another theme to emerge was that writing about their traumas positioned narrators (perhaps for the first time) as an authority within academia. They were motivated to write by epistemic purposes: the narrators viewed themselves as knowledge-makers who were seeking to *know*, and therefore transgress, their trauma and contribute that knowledge to others to help them do the same. Trauma can be very isolating, so it was interesting to see that narrators viewed their assignment as a way to push back against being alone with their experience and speak from a position of authority. This is especially significant in the first weeks of a first-semester community college writing class where students are in a liminal space between being experts in some ways, such as being successful high school writers or having substantive life experiences, but they are at the same time novice academic writers. In this liminal space, students reach for ways to apply their prior knowledge in order to participate in unfamiliar academic territory on their own terms, like writing about the kinds of "important matters…such as death and suffering" often associated with literature, current events, and news that they encountered in high school (Lucas 371). The narrators in this study demonstrate that having the ability to share their story was validation that their experiences also mattered.

Pushing back against the "unknowable" nature of trauma and its impact on memory (van Der Kolk), narrators hoped that reflecting about their trauma via their writing would be a way to *know* it. Shay characterized her choice to write about her traumatic experience with her depression as a reflection opportunity: "I just feel like any opportunity you have to face who you are and reflect on how far you've come is a valuable experience." She went on to say that the prompt gave her something that felt personally meaningful to explore: "Part of the issue that I

have with English classes, is it never feels like I'm writing with a purpose, you know….The prompt [option] itself like 'what was the hardest thing that I've ever faced?' You know, I think that's more like a real question, where you get to seriously look at it."

Writing about trauma seemed to be a way to take control of their narrative, even integrating it into their identity. Jen, Matthew, and Jasmine, who all wrote about experiencing domestic violence and abuse as children, commented on their choice to write about these experiences, respectively: "I just felt it was such an important part of my existence and I wanted to express it"; "This is the epitome of what I have that happened to me"; "I don't like when people get to a certain place and forget how they got there."

Several narrators noted the dual purposes that the assignment served for them. On one hand, they wanted to express their trauma in order to process it themselves, giving it a sense of order. On the other hand, they hoped that by writing about their trauma, they might be able to help someone else feel not so alone. Gabriel said, "There were just a lot, a lot of emotions, and this was a way for me to express that, get that out, but to do it in a way that might affect other people positively as well." Alice, who wrote about nearly dying during childbirth after a difficult pregnancy, also wanted to process her story for herself and to help others:

> Alice: I had to work through it. And, God, someone else is out there that probably would have some of the same issues, and it's not really talked about. So that's kind of why I wrote about it.
>
> Heidi: To connect with someone else?
>
> Alice: Yeah, pretty much just tell the people that go through it, 'hey, you're not alone.'

By sharing their knowledge, they hope to help others transgress their own traumas. According to Jasmine, she chose to write about domestic abuse because, "I want people to understand

something. If I'm writing, it's for a reason." These real purposes for writing about their traumas – giving order to their experience, allowing outside constraints to contribute to its shaping, sharing it with others in order to communicate or connect – speak to an epistemic motivation. As Lucas notes, instructors should view students as "meaning makers" and help them enter into empathic conversations that "listens the [writer] into existence" (374). The narrators decided to write about these stories for an assignment, many for the first time, because they wanted to both engage in a process toward *knowing* their own trauma and contribute that knowledge to their anticipated readers. By doing so, they write to *belong*–in the classroom and in academia. This is important because establishing a sense of belongingness in the early weeks of the first semester is crucial to academic retention and success (Cohen).

Writing confidence

The last theme that emerged related to student motivations for writing about trauma was that it simply gave them more confidence engaging in academic writing for the first time. Some scholars have asserted that students who write about trauma may choose to do so for a sympathy grade (Hood; Miller 98). However, for the narrators of this study, their reasons for writing about a trauma seemed to have less to do with their choice of the traumatic experience itself and more to do with what they felt most confident about writing.

Paradoxically, choosing to write about a traumatic experience seemed to *lower* the writing anxiety that some of the narrators came in with. Nyah decided to write about her mother's death in part because she was confident that she could meet the length requirements: "I was scared to give it to [my instructor], but at the same time, I was like, this is what I can write, this is what interests me, this is what I want to tell. This is what I can bring without getting writer's block because I get that from time to time." Gabriel felt that writing from "energy and

emotion" related to his trauma was "a lot easier" than other kinds of writing because "you just need to get it out."

Similarly, other narrators characterized writing about a trauma as less effort than other topics simply because it was already on their mind, a significant memory. As their first foray into academic writing, since all of these personal essays were their first essay of the semester, they felt confident that writing about a trauma was a way to help them avoid running out of things to say. Explaining why she chose to write about growing up in an abusive and neglectful household, Jasmine says, "I mean it wasn't hard [to write] just because the first thing that pops up in my head to begin with is my siblings and the things that we've gone through." As Jessie says, the night she overdosed "was a part of my story, so it was easy to write." When I asked Alice about why she had chosen to write about her traumatic experience related to miscarriage and severe postpartum depression after the birth of the twin who survived, she responded, "It was, honestly, the most current thing in my memory. Like, it was clear." All of these narrators felt they had a lot to say about their traumatic experiences and were thus confident they could meet the writing assignment requirements.

In a first-semester composition class in a community college, where the majority of students come in with profound writing anxiety because of negative prior writing experiences (Lunsford "Writing Is Informed" 54), it is telling that writing about a trauma is a way for some students to motivate themselves to write. The narrators seemed to view the personal essay assignment as an entry-point into the rhetorical situation of the community college composition classroom. The assignment provided an exigency (a situation where narrators could express an urgent matter that was already on their mind), an audience (instructor and classmates) who they

viewed as readers who could motivate them or help them tell their story, and constraints on their story (deadlines, structure, standards) that gave it academic value.

Reflection

Processing a trauma is not a goal in composition. However, if a student *chooses* to write about a trauma, this can be a means to help them meet FYC goals related to rhetorical knowledge and academic writerly identity. In fact, as the narrators above demonstrate, choosing to write about a trauma might be a significant motivating factor in making progress toward these goals and more confidently engaging in academia in general.

Perhaps most significantly, narrators discussed their decision to share their trauma because they wanted to connect with a real audience. They felt their story could help other students transgress their own trauma and also let them know they are not alone. But more in line with the goals of composition, the narrators noted an early awareness of the stakes involved with sharing their stories in peer groups, demonstrating the rhetorical knowledge that can emerge from this writing experience. Because narrators were motivated to tell their stories, many of them expressed their desire to also write their story as effectively as possible. They were open to feedback and responses to their essay drafts. These speak to competencies related to the writing process, such as the endurance to write and revise multiple drafts and integrate feedback (Council et al., *Framework* 5,8).

Writing about their trauma served as a bridge moving from narrators' meaningful personal experiences, where they are the authority, to more academic conversations, where they might feel less confident. Several of the narrators also went on to research topics related to their trauma narrative, giving them opportunities to not only locate their experiences in larger conversations but also critically reflect on them. Forming connections with peers and their

instructor early in the semester can give students a stronger sense of belonging in an academic environment, a key predictor of persistence (Davis et al.). The narrators frequently cited "having a lot to say" about their trauma as the reason they chose to write about it. Many characterized it as being "on their mind" and at least one narrator specifically said that they wanted to avoid writer's block. Having this confidence in what they wanted to say motivated them to write, even when they felt less confidence about their writing skills. In addition to themes related to rhetorical knowledge, I also uncovered themes related to identity. Matters of identity–how students saw themselves as writers, themselves within the institution, and themselves full-stop–revealed another motivation for why narrators viewed the personal essay assignment as an *opportunity* to share a trauma. Within any rhetorical situation, the rhetor enacts not only their purpose but also their voice, their writerly identity (Scott 48-49).

Despite the experiences of these narrators, which suggest that writing about a trauma can help students reach academic goals, this does not mean that instructors should assign trauma narratives. Trauma writing introduces more potential risk to manage, such as retraumatization and even vicarious trauma. The narrators in this study are self-selecting; they wanted to write about their traumas, and since the experience for them was overall a positive one, they were also enthusiastic to participate in the study. Several of them also expressed their mindfulness of potential readers, demonstrating that they were sensitive to how their story might affect readers. Even though some of these narrators were my own former students and expressed that their narrative essay was the one they were most proud of, I am more aware now of how I might have inadvertently encouraged students to push the boundaries with their trauma or made them think exploring their own emotional pain necessarily improved their writing. For example, since the 2019 class sections, I have updated my narrative assignment from asking students to write about

their experience related to a current issue, which I found more likely to lead to disclosures related to racist encounters, mental health crises, and other personal and shared traumas, to asking students to write about why they decided to come to college, an assignment more in the vein of a literacy narrative. Both narrative essay assignment topics in my class had the primary purpose of moving students from their lived experience to a research question based on that experience. The college narrative question was especially meant to explore research conversations around college that would be meaningful to first semester college students and move them away from inviting painful experiences related to sociopolitical issues.

Yet even the seemingly innocuous question about coming to college led students toward traumatic memories. Jen was motivated to pursue her social work degree as a result of her father's physical abuse, and she was eager to share her experiences, especially to illustrate the legal problems she witnessed, with classmates. Similarly, Matthew wants to be a childhood psychologist, and wrote about how his childhood experiences with abuse led to his interest in helping other child victims. This means that any time instructors ask students about their experiences, as we often do in composition whether or not we assign personal essays, they must be prepared for students to share or write about a trauma. If the walls between the composition classroom and the real world are indeed porous, as the field acknowledges ("CCC Statement on Recent Violent Crimes"; "CCC Statement on Violence"; "Student Veterans"), then it is not merely a matter of avoiding the personal essay assignment but finding ways to support students as they bring their own rich and wide experiences into the curriculum. Instructors should never assume that it is the "right time" for students to write about a trauma in their writing, especially for structured, shared assignments. However, they should consider how an assignment might intentionally or unintentionally invite trauma writing and respond with care (see Chapter 4).

It is admittedly difficult to strike a good balance between valuing students' lived experiences in college writing while also attending to academic rigor. However, it is important to emphasize that the narrators in this study wished to write about their trauma as a way to engage with academia on their own terms. While a couple of the narrators characterized writing their essays as "like therapy" and another said the experience helped her begin to finally grieve her mother's death, most narrators noted that these experiences were ones that they had worked on in therapy and embraced an opportunity to explore them in an academic framework. Jen acknowledged this even before she wrote her essay. As she reflected in her topic proposal: "I don't plan to get graphic, as I understand this class is not my therapy session, but I think I would enjoy bringing these taboo, but unfortunately common, issues up for awareness." In other words, most narrators did not characterize their class writing as an opportunity for healing, but rather as an opportunity to engage in an academic conversation through their own stories. Writing about trauma, if students choose to, can have distinct academic and personal value. As the narrators in this study demonstrate, writing about trauma in first-semester composition allowed them to defy the artificial boundaries between academia and their own personal lives–the outside world–thereby making their trauma experience in *both* places more meaningful.

Conclusion

This chapter sheds light on the thought behind student decisions to write about a trauma for an essay in composition. The students in this study viewed the first essay in their first semester of college as the right time to write about their trauma. Furthermore, their motivations for writing about a trauma align with critical first-year composition objectives. They recognized their first essay assignment as a rhetorical situation that gave them the opportunity -- perhaps for the first time -- to write about their trauma for a real audience and specific purpose. Writing

about trauma helped them position themselves as an authority in academic conversations early in the semester. Finally, the narrators felt they had a lot to say about the experiences they chose, which helped them move toward a more confident writing identity.

Moving to the next step of the writing journey, Chapter 3 explores what the writing process was like for the narrators after they committed to their topics, including how the narrators' classroom environments, peers, and other audiences impacted their essays.

CHAPTER 3: PROCESS AS RESILIENCE

"Everyone [in peer review] was very kind, but you automatically think that, like, nobody wants to hear about this [traumatic experience]. You know, this is an English Comp class. I'm sure they want to be doing other things, but everyone kind of walked in with the same mindset of like, 'Well, this is genuinely what happened to me, and if you would like to hear about it, I'd love to share, but if not, that's alright too.' It was almost a culture of just being okay with what people put in front of you." –Gabriel

In spring 2021, I assigned a personal essay to my composition class that invited them to discuss why they had come to college. The assignment was borne out of a pilot class that I did the previous semester, in which I collaborated with College Success and Reading instructors to create overlapping assignments between our classes. I told students at the beginning of the semester that they might think about how they could use this personal essay as a starting point for the future research paper. For example, I had one student who wrote about her motivations for coming to college that revolved around being the first in her family to attend college. She went on to research the kinds of barriers that first-generation students face.

I walked students through some invention exercises to come up with ideas for that first essay. At the end of the class, Matthew stayed after class to ask if it was okay if he wrote about being abused as a child. He said that was the reason he was here, to be a child psychologist so he could help other kids like him. I asked him if he felt comfortable sharing that with peers (for peer review) and with me (for grading). He said that was what he wanted to write about and that he would not get too specific about the violent incidents. I told him it was fine, but after he left, I

turned the assignment over and over in my head, uneasy about the kind of vulnerability this assignment was inviting.

As we worked on this essay over the next few weeks, Matthew was eager for feedback. He showed me his intro paragraph and thesis, and then the following class asked for feedback on how he had applied my suggestions. He submitted his complete draft to the tutoring service at NSCC, following up with me on a couple of questions the tutor raised. By the time we got to peer review, I had already seen his motivation to seek out feedback and refine his essay.

As I usually do for first essays in first-semester classes, I emphasized that peer review was a way for them to read each other's work as readers. Here is the peer review exercise, based in part, on Sharon Yam's article, "The Deep Story":

Reader-Response Peer Review

Purpose: to test your writing with a live audience, to build community by learning from each other's stories, to ask questions in small groups.

*1. What do you find most **interesting** about the topic or the writing and why? (point to one part of the draft you think is strong and say why)*

*2. How did reading this draft **affect** you? (Do you understand something that you didn't before? Does it validate your own experience in some way?)*

*3. Look back at the Rubric. What is one **suggestion** you have for the writer? (especially consider Content and Organization categories[7])*

Talk about your answers to the group. Writers, ask your groupmates any questions you have about your draft.

[7] NSCC's English department-designated rubric includes the following categories: Content, Organization, Editing, and Documentation (only for research essays).

Matthew had two other people in his group. As I floated around the computer lab answering questions and listening in, I noticed that Matthew's group was so engaged in their discussion, they didn't even look up as I passed by. After the time for peer review ended, I gave students time to work on their drafts on their computers. After several minutes of writing/revising time, Matthew raised his hand and called me over. He said that one of the students in his group, Gena, who disclosed that she could relate to his essay from her own experiences with childhood abuse, suggested that he include a brief narrative of one of the abusive events. I was reminded of V. Jo Hsu's description of her student, Evan, receiving similar feedback from his peers: they wanted him to "ground" his reflection on the mask he and others in the LGBTQ community wear in specific personal events (152-153). Like Hsu, I did not want Matthew to feel pressured to disclose anything. I told him that it was not necessary and that his essay already had enough support without going deeper into the abuse. He responded that he had already written it and that he thought it made his essay better; he also pointed out that no one else would read that part except me.

What most struck me about our exchange was that Gena's feedback in particular validated his experience in a way; it gave him permission to write about this taboo topic, to share it with others. He had shared with me that therapy had helped him process this period of his life so that it did not bother him to share it. However, he expressed that he did not want his essay to be "too dark" for readers, so he approached his rhetorical choices through that lens of caution. The peer review motivated him to name the abuse, thereby allowing more space to show how far he has come from it – a process of resilience for himself – but also representative of those readers, like Gena, who had survived similar trauma. All of this took place between Week 1 and

Week 4 of the semester, inside a computer lab in the Kisber building, and – as I would learn more from Matthew in our interview – all the other places where the classroom spills out.

Weeks later, in our interview, I asked Matthew to tell me about the peer review exchange with Gena and Zack (his other peer reviewer):

> Matthew: She wanted to know, like, some of the memories that I had because she felt very connected to it. She felt like she had a very similar upbringing and she just liked the way that I wrote things, and she wanted to know what is one of the memories that you wouldn't mind sharing, because I feel like that would make it, I guess, hit harder and kind of like pull at the heartstrings more to really sell your dream of being a psychologist. And she felt like she could relate to it as well.
>
> Heidi: Did that surprise you? Because that was one of your major concerns, right, that you didn't want to make other people uncomfortable, and here she is saying, can you give me more?
>
> Matthew: My wife and I, we actually when I was writing this, I had her read my rough draft, and I was like, I was debating on whether or not I should put some sort of memory in there. And she said, probably not because I'll probably get the reaction that I don't want [pity]. Because I mean, it's dark, you know, and it's just people being empathetic and they want to connect with you, and they feel your emotions, so at first, I just chose not to include that at all, and it was very surprising that she asked me to include that and then Zack, he agreed, so that's what I did.

This is just one example of the stakes and the complex choices that revealed themselves as the narrators negotiated their processes of writing about their trauma.

In this chapter, I identify themes that emerged related to the narrators' experience of the process of writing about their traumatic experience within their classroom environments, acknowledging that the classroom location can be both a physical and symbolic place. Patterns in these themes suggest that, for some students who choose to share, trauma writing in a supportive classroom environment can foster a rhetorical process of resilience for writers and readers of trauma stories. According to Elizabeth A. Flynn, Patricia Soritin, and Ann Brady, in their introduction to their book, *Feminist Rhetorical Resilience*, resilience is a "complex rhetorical process" that is also relational – meaning that, as opposed to the singular hero story, it is based on an ecology of relationships (1, 6). In the context of the FYC classroom, rhetorical resilience can be understood as a means to transgress individual trauma by sharing it with others—in narratives shaped by "agency, change, and hope" (Flynn et al. 1). The process of drafting and revising then becomes a rhetorical resilience that incrementally offers narrators a way to imbue their trauma with meaning for themselves and their audience. It also creates tension with a real audience as narrators make rhetorical choices that continuously negotiate the balance between connecting with readers and protecting them. Focusing on process, this chapter shows how writers learn to dwell, value their embodied knowledge, create new knowledge, and care for their audience along the way. Looking at the narrators' experiences through the lens of space, both the physical (the classroom) and the metaphorical (boundaries, dwelling, invitation), this chapter explores the relationship between the process of writing about trauma and writing to belong.

On Dwelling: Rhetorical Resilience as Knowing, Caring, and Belonging

Chapter 2 established that first-semester composition may be the right time (an invitation) to write about a trauma, but it is also useful to consider why students might perceive the composition classroom the right *place* as well. Here, Nedra Reynold's concept of dwelling is

particularly illuminating in a number of ways that relate to the process of trauma writing in the classroom space(s). In this section, I will demonstrate how dwelling in words can become an emotional and embodied way of knowing. I will explore dwelling's connection to an ethic of care, especially as it relates to writers' welcoming their readers into their texts. Lastly, I will consider the role that academic belonging plays in trauma writing and how vulnerability in writing can contribute to connection, even validation. All of this can contribute to students' assertion of resilience in trauma writing.

Because lived experience is a form of knowledge, writing about a traumatic experience is a way to both *know* the trauma and assert this knowledge in an academic context. During the window of time in which students are in the process of writing about their trauma for a personal essay (generally within the first four weeks of their college career), instructors have the opportunity to affirm the value of these stories as a valid way of knowing. In describing engaged pedagogy, bell hooks argues that professors have the responsibility to help students connect what they are learning to their overall life experiences and in this way "provide them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply" (22). One way of knowing relates to the embodied and affective aspect of writing; to generate new knowledge, writers might dwell, embodied and emotional, in their words (Reynolds 11; Bazerman and Tinberg 74). However, instead of *dwelling on* their trauma, with its attendant negative connotations of unproductive or immutable thought, trauma writing requires *dwelling in* that experience. Writing that is dwelling "invites us to revisit the connections between habits and places, between memories and places, between our bodies and the material world" (Reynolds 141). Dwelling allows writers to mindfully re-construct a trauma, "revisiting it" within a new context.

Instructors then should not underestimate students' intuition that writing about (dwelling in) their trauma – even reimagining how they frame it within their lives – in an academic context may be helpful to them because of the classroom's potential "emphasis on well-being" (hooks 15). For writers of trauma, this is especially relevant given the disembodied effects of trauma responses. This is why it is important to focus on both bodily experiences (thought, emotion, presence, movement) and dwelling (which requires stamina—like the writing process). Common approaches to trauma therapy include cultivating awareness of the body through yoga and other mindfulness practices. In *The Body Keeps the Score*, trauma expert Bessel Van Der Kolk writes, "We [trauma psychologists] have discovered that helping victims of trauma find the words to describe what happened to them is profoundly meaningful, but it is usually not enough….For real change to take place, the *body* needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present" (21, emphasis my own). This is not to say that composition is a place for therapy (it's not), but because it is one place that students may *recognize* as a thin place where the personal touches the academic, and its potential for using their experience to generate new knowledge that leads to connection with others – a place where knowledge is closer to love (Jagger). This becomes a process of resilience that at once transgresses their trauma and asserts embodied experience as a way of knowing that is cogent to the composition classroom.

However, the composition classroom is not traditionally thought of as a place that encourages positive emotional experiences. In her study on the affective experiences of student writers, Amy Williams found that students spoke positively about self-sponsored and creative writing but frequently diminished their potential for academic writing because their embodied and emotional responses, such as stress, frustration, pressure, and disengagement discouraged them from the effort. Despite this common understanding of the separation of serious academic

writing and emotion-embracing creative writing, some scholars argue that these two versions of writing should not be divorced at all: personal writing "as play" and exploration are forms of knowledge essential to critical inquiry and engaging with issues in "their own voices"' (Micciche 182; Carlo 26). Playful writing strategies during the process, such as visual mind maps, freewriting, poetry as invention can offer students low-stakes ways of engagement (Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*; Bizarro and Baker). In fact, leaning into both the serious and the playful aspects of writing should be especially important to educators given that neuroscience shows that "positively perceived emotion is associated with learning," and student writers often associate their trauma writing processes with positive emotions such as hope, resilience, and an eagerness to help others (Scalise and Feld 30; Williams; Lucas; Hsu). In other words, the process of writing about trauma has the potential to kairotically challenge and shape the ways of knowing that are accessible to a first-semester composition class; it becomes an embodied means for students to rhetorically negotiate the knowledge that they bring with them.

Mapping these personal experiences into larger cultural narratives requires a reflective relationality between writers and readers (Hsu). In this way, the drafting process in the first few weeks can become a process of resilience and growth, a "site where different narratives meet, struggle, and possibly align," and perhaps more importantly, a site where students "are heard" (Hsu; Flynn et al.). Asserting this resilience effectively means continually shaping texts for a real audience through the lens of an ethic of care and recognizing the intersubjectivity of these rhetorical choices. It means asking as writers, "How do [I] make [my] text habitable?" (Reynolds 166). The bodies writers encounter in this location beyond the self, or even beyond the student-teacher transaction, motivates an ethic of care -- a responsibility to themselves and to the others who are exposed to their story (Caswell and Cifor). An ethic of care lens is also useful in

imagining the responsibilities that the writer has to their readers. Trauma writing means making choices about how to protect, encourage, or enlighten readers in this space – how to welcome them to *dwell* there (Reynolds). Because of the very real ethical implications with writing and reading about trauma, this intersubjectivity, the way that imagined readers impact the shape of a text, requires radical empathy and rhetorical listening since students need to be cognizant of boundary-awareness conduct (Royster; Ratcliffe). As my study narrators demonstrate, writing about their trauma, perhaps more than other topics, impelled them toward an ethic of care.

Finally, by shaping their knowledge and experience mindfully for audiences, trauma writers in FYC seek and cultivate a sense of belonging. Discussing the geographies of exclusion, Reynolds notes, "First-year students, especially those who are first-generation college students, often feel a sense of alienation or displacement on a college campus, at least before they have dwelt within its spaces long enough to begin to feel at home" (158). For students to feel a sense of belonging, especially within that critical first semester, they need to know that other students experienced similar discomfort at first, that this feeling of not belonging will get better in time, and that they are valued (Cohen). As hooks reminds us, students share in the responsibility of an engaged classroom. By asserting their resilience in writing about trauma, students can move from an ethic of care to an ethic of connection (Flynn et al.) to increase academic belongingness. Students may sense that vulnerability can produce connection: "In order for connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be seen" (Brown).

Several of the narrators articulated the ways that the classroom space (often seen as exclusionary to new students) began to merge with their home spaces – as they shared work with and sought critique from significant others, siblings, and friends. This is significant to belongingness because community college students, first-generation students, and students who

come from poverty may face barriers to college precisely because of its historically exclusionary practices; as a result, some students may face belongingness uncertainty *both* within the institution and in their home life if family members view academia with contempt (Davis et al.). Ruby Payne, author of *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, writes, "In order to move from poverty to middle class...an individual must give up relationships for achievement" (1). While belongingness research often focuses on ways to help students feel connected to the college, students' potential for healing those divides seems less explored. As their interviews show, these narrators empowered themselves to not only be heard and valued in academic spaces, but to also welcome others in, through sharing stories of resilience.

Narrator Voices

Once the narrators committed to writing about a traumatic experience, they worked through the writing process to the final submission. Below, I analyze themes related to their process and their experience. Some codes that emerged in this chapter related to process were "catharsis," "critical distance," "rhetorical choice," "peer review," and "environment." These codes allowed me to analyze the narrators' experience of writing about their trauma within the classroom space. In this case, "space" extends to not only the physical place of the classroom, which narrators comment on, but also the space where their writing bleeds over into other contexts–into other classes, their homes, and their thought processes.

Ways of Knowing

Process Is a Way to Process

When I asked how the experience made them feel in general, one theme that emerged during my analysis of narrators' writing process was that putting the experience to paper allowed them to reflect on the experience in a way that was emotionally helpful (Hsu; Lucas; Williams).

Alice said the essay allowed her to "write down what the feelings actually were" in a way that "kind of helped me piece together everything." Similarly, Carina said, "It felt good to…get it off my chest. . . . feel like I've been holding it in my head. . . . Writing that was kind of like a release pretty much." Some of the narrators described their experience writing about a trauma in unexpectedly positive terms. When I asked Jen about what the writing process felt like, she said, "I was excited. I don't know, just something this semester, I was just really excited about my writing. I just really liked that it was pouring out of me. I liked that I just felt really expressive."

I asked Jen to tell me more about her process, and she commented on how much she revised her work:

> That was the edited version so there was a lot more. I definitely will thank my support class for this too, because one of my first days in writing support, we learned about like the Flowers Paradigm[8], and I thought that was just a super neat framework to kind of figure out how to, like, organize your writing and like super that were doing like messy charts and stuff like that, like bubble charts. And I just threw out a topic and just kind of started branching from there, and I was like well, I want to talk about my trauma.

She continued by explaining her thought process for the essay structure:

> And then I wanted to break it up into different parts, where you know I talked about like the early, like the really scary early stuff, and then I wanted to talk about just kind of phasing into my adulthood, and how that affected me. And then I wanted to get to a point where I was at present like I wanted it to be almost like a timeline. And I had to cut out a

[8] The Flowers Paradigm, conceptualized by Linda Flowers, reimagines parts of the writing process as characters: Mad Scientist for invention work, Architect for organization and structure, Carpenter for developing and drafting, and a Judge for revising and editing through a critical lens.

> lot more, I definitely talked to a couple people, and you know, I did peer review. I just like, I love it. I think it's a really vulnerable piece that I'll probably look back on and have critiques about, but I'm still really proud of it.

Jen's description of her revision process reflects the iterative process of making meaning through her own analysis and through her awareness of audience.

Gabriel told me that he had wanted to write about his experience for years: "To be honest, when I started writing it, I felt terrible, like just awful. But it was cathartic; it was a good awful because it actually helped me re-analyze the situation. . . . I could actually see myself in that situation for what it was instead of like the guilt. . . . It was a way for me to think critically about the situation." Shay also commented on the reflective aspects of her process, distinguishing her experience writing about her trauma from when she talks about it. She explains:

> Writing it back out was interesting because it was revisiting like the worst parts of it…When you have to sit and put thought into the things that you're saying when you're physically writing it down, it's almost like you feel it again….But it was a very almost nostalgic**,** reminiscent kind of way. Like, I didn't feel like I had just gotten the [mental illness] diagnosis, again, but it was reflective of what I was feeling.

This reflection from a critical distance seemed to allow the narrators to know their trauma from a different context.

When I asked Shay if she had any advice for students considering writing about a traumatic experience, she responded:

> I'll just say that it's not as bad writing about it, as it seems to anybody who is like thinking about writing about their issues….At least for me, I just feel like any opportunity you

> have to face yourself and reflect on how far you've come is a valuable experience, because there will either be lessons learned or appreciation to see your growth. And just recognizing that like I'm never going to be the same that I was in high school and there are good things that I wasn't in high school that I'm never going to be again, and there are bad things in high school that I'm glad I'll never be again. And having that reflective moment kind of lets you get to hold on to some of the good stuff and recognize that you've grown from the bad stuff.

Her response aligns with the understanding that students expect their education to be holistic and contribute to both growth and well-being (hooks).

Locating Stories in Research Conversations

In addition, some of the narrators in my study chose to continue writing about trauma for later assignments through research projects; they indicated that their research was motivated by their personal connections with the topic. For example, Jessie wrote about her experience with drug overdose and went on to research different withdrawal treatments. She even interviewed one of the doctors who had treated her. Jen wrote about her experiences with childhood abuse and poverty in her narrative, and then researched how poverty impacts college students. Nyah wrote her narrative about her mother's sudden death and decided to research the grieving process. She says she was able to locate her own experience with grief in a bigger research conversation:

> Actually, when I was reading it and doing the research, it was almost like 'Oh, this is how I feel, like this is it – kind of like I was relating it to myself, to what I was learning. So, it was like I was comprehending some of the issues and stuff that people face, and it's like,

> *'Oh,* people go through the same thing I do,' which I knew, but it was reassuring to feel the way that I did reading what I did.

Her realization speaks to both a sense of belonging and a way of knowing her grief (Reynolds; Cohen).

In these cases, writing narratives about their trauma was to think about their own story led them to locate their experience in larger research conversations. This connection from narrative to research allows students to not only see how their personal experiences can be channeled into an ethical "writing that makes something good happen" (Lunsford, "Writing Is Performative" 44), but it also demonstrates how the ideas and opinions that they come across in sources or in their lives might be informed by personal experiences, thereby lessening the gap between the personal and political in composition (Cain 43; Yam).

While catharsis itself is not a goal of first-year composition, metacognition is an ideal habit of mind that can help writing students be successful (Council et al., *Framework* 5). These narrators demonstrate that the process of writing about their trauma led them to thinking about it differently, even critically. In Alice's case, she was able to name her emotions and give order to her experience in a way that was helpful. Carina found that putting her trauma on paper mitigated the ever-presence of the memories in her mind. Gabriel's writing experience led him to the realization that he could think about his trauma differently–in a way that would relieve him of blaming himself. In other words, choosing to write about their trauma and following through with drafting and revision led to new knowledge – coming to *know* the emotions, events, and thought patterns associated with the trauma they wrote about, even reconstructing that knowledge via critical distance and research. They found that writing their trauma, and

reclaiming their own narrative through that act, "invited them to tie *thinking with feelings"* and to braid together cognition and well-being (Elbow, "Foreword" *viii*; hooks 15).

Ethics of Caring

Rhetorical Choices for Protection, Hope

In addition to these discoveries during the writing and researching processes, narrators also mentioned the kinds of intuitive rhetorical choices they made when discussing their processes with me. Some of the narrators who knew that peer review was on the horizon, for example, talked about how that real audience impelled them to think carefully about what they wanted to share or not share with classmates. Matthew expressed that he was concerned about peers reading it: "Not that I'm embarrassed or ashamed, it was just more like…not wanting it to be too dark." He chose to share one example of the physical abuse he experienced because it didn't need the context that others might have: "That was just one [example] where I could condense it. I could be matter-of-fact, and I could try and work it in a way where I'm not seeking pity and just say it exactly as it happened." Matthew's description here demonstrates the kind of spaces that these writers were carving out for their audiences, spaces that included inviting "portals" into that world, while also producing very intentional "boundaries" to protect readers (Worsham 38).

Similarly, Jen also talked about making specific rhetorical choices to avoid pity with her audience, and she takes this a step further in her desire to help her audience sustain hope:

> I wanted to break it up into different parts, where you know, I talked about the really scary early stuff, and then I wanted to talk about just kind of phasing into my adulthood, and how that affected me. And then I wanted to get to a point where I was at present. I wanted it to be like a…almost like a timeline. Because I didn't want to make it a sob

story. I didn't want it to be like, "Oh, all this terrible stuff happened." I wanted to be like, this is my goal. I wanted to show how that [experience] aligned to where I was going.

Jen's thought process around how she wanted to structure her story demonstrates the resilient narrative arc that she wanted to achieve for her audience. This chronological structure that ends with how the experience related to her future goals, "where I was going," assigns meaning to the trauma, which she does for the benefit of the audience.

Nyah also commented on how she wanted to inspire her audience. Just as she had felt validated in her research on grief (see above), she advised writers to "don't be afraid to write about how you feel or what you've been through because you never know if the person reading it might need that….Maybe that's all the guidance you need, you know, maybe just one little word could be the key to changing your life." Alice had a similar need to take care of the reader: "There for a while I struggled with it, thinking it was my fault. And that's a big portion why I wrote about it, as I want people to realize it's not your fault. There's some things that are out of your control."

Intersubjectivity between Writer and Reader

While Jen, Mathew, Nyah, and Alice approached their writing with an ethic of care by making mindful choices about how to shape their stories for a vulnerable audience, Jack decided to create "some distance" between himself and his readers by writing his first draft in third person. He explains his thought process for doing so: "I really didn't know for sure how far I could take it." He also acknowledged that even when he switched to first person after his instructor's recommendation, he still considered how details from his combat experience might affect peers. He said, "I didn't want to go into deep detail [because] psychological pain exists, and you don't want to do that to students." These descriptions point to the intersubjectivity of the writer and their imagined peer audience (Ong). In the process of writing their essays, narrators

took care in making rhetorical choices about what to show – and, perhaps more importantly, what *not* to show–in order to communicate their purpose effectively and in a way that would not potentially harm their actual peer audience (Caswell and Cifor). Writing about their trauma allowed them to intuitively inhabit an ethic of care with their potential readers (Reynolds; Ratcliffe).

Peer Review

Peer review allowed narrators the opportunity to share their story and make it stronger with a live audience. Narrators commented on the ways in which they negotiated their story with their peers to connect with them and also protect them. They also offer advice for future peer reviewers of trauma writing that demonstrates that most narrators generally invited constructive criticism, sought validation for things they had endured, and aimed to avoid pity. As they explain, this intersubjectivity, no longer imagined response but real feedback, was highly influential in their revision process (Hsu; Yam).

When I asked Jen what advice she would give peer reviewers who came across a painful narrative, she responded:

> Definitely don't be afraid of giving real criticism. I think we like to sugarcoat everything a lot and we don't look at things in a realistic logical way a lot. We're just like, oh, that's a good story. I also want critiques about my paragraphs and just the way everything's set up, you know, different stuff like that. It's not always looking for [whether] it was a good story or not. You know, how it's set up or the way people want to move things around, I don't know, just real criticism and don't be afraid of hurting people's feelings.

Alice similarly wanted responses that would improve her essay: "If you sit here and say, 'hey do you think this is a good idea?' Just give your honest feedback. Put yourself in their shoes for a

moment and think about how they would feel and base your questions off of that. The *biggest thing is to be empathetic* and understand these things happen, but don't feel bad for the person just because it happened" (emphasis added). Alice's advice to prioritize empathy and then move to critique was echoed by several of the narrators. This demonstrates students' contribution to general well-being in the classroom, seeing one another first as whole people separate from their texts (hooks 7, 15).

Similarly, Gabriel notes, "I kind of knew what the feedback would be like, what it pertained. I was just more interested in I guess the mechanics of everything, like wanting to be better, wanting to be able to improve my writing through this." Beyond the feedback that Gabriel expected, he emphasized the importance of validation, recommending that reviewers *first* look through a lens of empathy:

> Think about it as if a friend was in the classroom with you and sharing these things. If your friend had shared something that you hadn't learned about, you wouldn't immediately be like, "Okay, so the hook is a little off, and we can fix the grammar here." You would first recognize, like, their humanity and say, "Well, I'm sorry you went through that." I think I remember all of the peer review sessions, people were like, "Dang, that sucks," and like, me doing the same thing for other people. It was about acknowledging the humanity of the situation, and then, once that was over, it was then time to move on to the grammar and syntax, which was a good thing.

Again, like Alice, Gabriel recognized that reviewers have the same key responsibilities to the writer: lead with empathy and then help them improve their text.

When I asked Matthew if anything surprised him about his writing process, he responded, "Well, the first was just Gena [in peer review] asking me to include something that really

surprised me. The second was that I did, and I was able to do it in a way where it wasn't like I was asking for pity."

Matthew echoes a concern with peer review that came up from several narrators: "I would feel confident saying for a lot of people that have been through trauma is like we just don't want pity, that's the very last thing that we want is pity."

Heidi: Is acknowledgement different from pity?

Matthew: What do you mean?

Heidi: I'm just wondering if there is a way to acknowledge that this is a terrible thing that happened and then moving to the work of offering feedback?

Matthew: Yeah, I mean, you can even say, "Wow that was brutal." I think you even said something similar when I asked you to read the rough draft. You were just like, "That was, that was hard to read." And I didn't mind that at all because I mean I already knew it probably would be. But yeah, acknowledgement is totally okay. I mean, it happened. That's something that I have had to acknowledge too. Yeah, yeah, I don't think that's bad at all. Like Gabriel, Matthew described the importance of first acknowledging the human experience before moving to the text.

Jasmine gave more cautious advice than other narrators. She said that peer reviewers should "not let [learning about the traumatic experience] affect how they think of somebody. But a lot of people when they hear me talk about this, they look at me differently, and they perceive me as really strong, and they don't know how to react to me." She emphasized the vulnerability of the writer:

> And it's like, I'm showing you who I am. ...Don't take their story as a joke, but don't take it and run with it because it doesn't mean that's who they are. Right, I mean it is a lot to take on because you're going to feel a lot of things. You're going to read some crazy

> things and you're going to feel a lot of things, but it's just, it's just a boundary to you as the other person to not get too attached to it or to let that control how you think [about that person].

By mentioning a "boundary," Jasmine reminds readers that some disclosure is not an invitation to define the person by the trauma. Her explanation about what she doesn't want from peer review seems to parallel other narrators rejecting expressions of pity. As for advice, she says, "And if somebody [in peer review] was going through something similar to me I'd probably tell them that they're doing great, like, just put something positive out there."

However, she disagrees with other narrators when it comes to constructive criticism: "I wouldn't say much about their story just because you don't know how they're feeling about it. And some people are a bit hesitant about it, and you don't want to push them to do something that they regret, right? …. Then just give them positive feedback again…. I'd probably leave writing suggestions out…or at least tell them some resources that could help." Her advice demonstrates a more nuanced sensitivity to trauma writing and speaks to the importance of not requiring similar disclosure but also helping students navigate these delicate boundaries when they come to them (Yam; Ratcliffe).

For other narrators, peer review was a way to be inspired. In Carina's case, she was hesitant about sharing her draft, but relaxed when she started to hear from other students. According to Carina, "I always thought the other classmates shared some of the problems to kind of, you know, make me open about mine."

> Heidi: And that made you feel better?
>
> Carina: Yeah, more open to know it's okay because everybody can relate to the stress and anxiety.

Heidi: Do you remember any of their responses to your paper?

Carina: Some of them I don't really remember, but I think they were just you know, big clap, pretty much. I don't remember [what they said].

Jessie also felt peer review was validating of her experiences. She says she was:

> Probably struggling to read [my peers' papers] because all I'm in my head about my own and what so-and-so is reading about [in mine]. But I clearly got good feedback and they were glad [I was okay]. I think they were probably both glad that I was in a good place. That just goes to show you that the whole thing about what I was concerned about maybe was really just turned inward. Because they were both able, even though I don't know if either of them have any drug use or drug experience or parents with drug experience (or that wasn't shared), they were able to extend…just the support of, "Wow that's great to see you're doing great," you know or "Wow, that was a lot."

Jessie went on to reflect on her experience with peer review, saying that the feedback she received from her peers made her feel "less ashamed and glad I decided to go back to school.

Nyah had a similar experience of feeling hesitant and then validated. She had a classmate in her peer review group who was also grieving her mother's death. Her experience even helped her gain more confidence in her writing:

> I was a little hesitant about [peer review] because I kind of didn't want people to see me vulnerable because I'm one of those people that likes to put a shield and be strong sometimes, and I think that's my downfall so that's the reason why I was nervous to like actually share anything about it because I'm afraid of crying and someone seeing me cry…. I realized like you know, maybe I'm helping her deal with her issues so then it became more like, I felt good about sharing my story. So, even though it was scary at first

> you felt at the end of it that you were able to make that connection and help someone else.

This validation gained from peer review aligns with other scholars' work on the relational process of resilience – that negotiating the text with peers can help writers reflect on their growth and that their story has value (Hsu; Yam; Flynn et al). Nyah attributes the confidence that she gained in writing to the process of sharing and getting feedback on her work, giving her an opportunity to cultivate belonging as a student (making her feel more comfortable in other classes) and as a writer (confirming that she was not defined by past "writer's block") (Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*; Cohen).

Space and Belonging

Class Environment

While discussing their thought process as they were writing, several narrators also commented on the class environment as a place where they felt comfortable sharing their trauma. Jack said, "[The class] was a very nurturing environment, it was a safe environment." Jessie said her class provided a "safe space [since] there were lots of times that we got into groups." I asked her to elaborate on what made her feel safe:

> Heidi: I'm just curious – if you were telling a different instructor, here's how to make your students feel safe, it just makes me wonder what would you say?
>
> Jessie: Intimate settings, so not large. You couldn't do this with a group of 50, okay? Too many. So, you know, you've got a class of 25, okay? Break these into small groups, four tops, to get to where you could get to know each other. I think it's a lot easier. You know, it's like, if you get in a group, you can all have a voice, you can kind of talk about it and then give the answer.

Only Jack and Jessie specifically used the word "safe" to describe their experience. However, other narrators described their environment in ways that I coded as "safety" as well. For example, some students discussed flexibility, small groups, and their instructor's presence as making them feel open to writing their traumas. Jen contrasted her NSCC classroom environment to a composition class at a different institution a few years ago where she had also attempted a personal essay about abuse and poverty. She blamed the class environment for her failed attempt; she was unable to finish the essay and eventually dropped the class:

> I don't think I learned well in that environment. The class was very big…My specific English teacher just didn't seem like she could pay attention to us individually and it just felt, I don't know, I felt out of place there…. I remember being in the empty library with almost the exact same topic [as the essay she wrote in my class] and just sitting there staring at my computer for hours and restarting and restarting.

She credits her NSCC class, citing both the relational (flexibility and support of instructors) and the physical (size of the class space), as an environment that motivated her to complete the essay:

> I think it was the smaller classroom. I also think that the way you teach was really relaxed and understanding life [happens]. I appreciated that your approach immediately was like these are the rules that you were taught, and you don't actually have to follow them. So, I just really appreciated that perspective, and I also got that from my support classes…. I think that's really important to like, especially people coming into college for the first time, to know that those rules we were taught in high school are so completely strict, and we don't have to play by them all the time. And also, like letting people have more of a free rein with the topics they talk about. I think we get forced into a box really hard where it's like we have to talk about this or that.

Jen's discussion demonstrates her perception of the classroom environment as having an impact on her ability to complete her essay. I find her comment about her other professors a good reminder that our composition classes are not experienced by students in a vacuum, but rather as connected to and impacted by their other classes. Her comments that contrast her college class to high school highlight her perception that academic writing is divorced from emotion and that it felt freeing, even motivating, for her to embrace that emotion.

Conversely, Shay, who revealed that she would have chosen a different topic if she had been required to share her work with classmates, only felt a sense of connection with one other student in her class:

> And so, for whatever reason, there were really only like two people in the class who participated regularly answering questions and responding to the professor. The professor, she would try, you know, to get people involved, but after 30 seconds of silence one of us would end up piping up and saying the answer… so I guess that's the only other person that I really like connected with.

Shay credited the lack of connection to other students in part due to the pandemic: having to wear masks and social distance. She said, "It was also just weird because it was like the first in-person class after Covid, so you know everyone was wearing masks and everyone was staying far apart from each other and stuff like that, so it was not like collaborative in any sense." She even contrasted the face-to-face class with her Zoom class, noting that her Zoom classes, because of breakout rooms, allowed for more small group interaction that led her to form several friendships.

Beyond flexibility and peer interactions, the other theme that emerged in line with "safety" was the way Jen and other narrators talked about the influence of their instructors.

According to Gabriel, “There was a lot of fixed times where you or Jacqui [class writer mentor] were checking in with us intentionally about something, so that part of [the class] was good, in my opinion.” In their article about the nonfiction essay workshop, Erika Anderson and Brian Gresko emphasize the importance of safety while also acknowledging that some students may not recognize how safe they feel or may not wish to express it: “the best thing you can do as a facilitator is to keep checking in to see whether everyone feels safe.”

To elaborate on her characterization of the classroom as flexible, Jen noted, “I think I probably have some undiagnosed ADHD or something, but deadlines are really hard. And I think they’re probably hard for a lot of people, and I think when you have a teacher who’s willing to listen to you and communicate ...I think that’s something a lot of people need is just flexibility in school.” Jessie says that her composition and writing support instructors were the first people she felt most connected with. “My teachers were the [first] people that I met that I felt very comfortable with. I still think of Ms. Mendoza to this day. So she was that important piece for me.” For Carina, it was her Reading Support instructor who made her feel less nervous about returning to college after a failed attempt in 2015:

> Heidi: At what point did you feel comfortable [in your first semester of college]? Carina: I think like second to third week in my Reading class. I really forgot her name. She was really sweet. I feel like it took me back when I was in middle school, I didn't really speak English. I had an English teacher, she had mostly foreign students and she took her time to break down everything word by word explaining everything. And I feel like my [Reading] Professor was doing the same thing for me.

The discussion of their instructors’ flexibility and support speaks to a larger need to form an identity and belongingness carved out through a rhetoric of resilience that both opens portals and

draws boundaries (Worsham 38). Their description of supportive and flexible teachers aligns with Tayles's description of a buffering role model who can connect with students by being open to understanding student fears and by normalizing stress associated with returning to college, with writing, with personal responsibilities. As Tayles says of her own interactions with students, "Honest and explicit discussions about stress, flexible coping strategies, and resilience attempt to normalize the levels of distress and threat faced by all writers; simultaneously, I am attempting to show strategies that my students may have never considered but that they might use to stay regulated and resilient in the face of writing adversities" (305). Tayles' application of the buffering role model to the community college instructor allows for a universal design that addresses many incoming students' needs as adult returning students, first generation students, or students who are trying to mitigate effects of trauma. Connecting with classmates and various instructors (not just their composition instructor) played a significant role in helping narrators feel safe enough to want to write about a traumatic event. This finding from the study aligns with studies on student sense of belonging in academia and how that perception ("saying is believing") can shape their progress during the vital first interactions with the college (Cohen; Walton and Cohen).

Beyond the classroom

Matthew told me that he revised after a tutor session, after peer review, and after our conference. He also sought out other feedback. He tells me, "I had both of them [wife and sister] read it and offer any advice that they wanted to give, and I have another friend that wanted to read it, too, so I just sent it to him...too." He then shared the feedback that he got from those sources beyond the classroom:

> With my wife, she's a very big grammar Nazi so she went through and like corrected all my grammar issues if I had any. My sister, she, you know, lived with me during this time [of childhood abuse], when all these things were happening. So she just was like, she knows the stories and she was there, so I don't think she offered any [suggestions] for that part, but it was more of just like she just started talking with me about the stories and asking if there was anything else I wanted to include or asking if you know, there was maybe a different memory I wanted to talk about because this one was a little dark. And then, my friend Kenny, he just said he liked it, to be honest, he didn't say anything else.

Carina mentioned that while she didn't share her essay with her mother, the process of writing it helped her open a deeper dialogue with her mother about how she felt abandoned while her mother worked in the U.S. to establish citizenship before bringing her over from Haiti. She said, "After I wrote it, I had to kind of reflect on our life and talk to her and let her know some of the things I experienced. And we talked about it and cried about it, and you know, promised each other that we will always be here for each other." She credited her essay with giving her more confidence to talk with her mother about her experiences.

Jen also sought out feedback from her sister, who had experienced the same family abuse:

> I even had my sister who grew up with me in this stuff, and she read it herself, and she was like, "I really like it," but she gave me pointers about how to not necessarily make it [fades out]. I just went to a point where it was really messy. I just tried to clean it up more and more, and to have people read it and talk to me about it, and I would cut whole chunks out of it, and I would just make sure I spent like a couple of hours every once in a

while, to just kind of go at it. I loved sharing my story, and I let my boyfriend and I let my sister read it.

Each of the narrators expressed concerns about whether or not they belonged in college because they were older than many of the other students and had been out of school for a number of years. Sharing their writing outside the classroom allowed narrators to make stronger connections between academic and personal, getting validating support from family (which is connected to retention), opening channels to discuss shared traumatic memory, and even deepening connections (Gabriel told me that he shared his story with his partner for the first time).

Conclusion

The narrators' discussion of their trauma writing process reflects an active resilience, whereby they are expressing their experience to both know it and to contribute to the knowledge of others. Not all student writers of trauma will have the same experience; however, this study shows that for those students who have a positive experience writing about painful events, it is because this undertaking, early in the semester, empowers them to connect composition strategies to their own lives, use their knowledge to rhetorically care for others, and assert their belonging within the academy. These revelations show the relationship, rather than simply the contrasts, between writing-as-healing pedagogies and trauma-informed, clinical pedagogies. By focusing on the above positive emotions (confidence, caring, belonging) involved with writing about trauma, instructors can help establish a place in which students feel safe, yes, but also, as some narrators noted, even excited. These are circumstances that psychologically support learning for all students (Scalise and Feld).

Throughout the process of writing their essays, all of the narrators talked about sharing their work both in the classroom and with friends, family, and even a therapist. The next chapter, Ch. 4: Response as (Ethic of) Care, will look at narrators' discussions around trauma writing assessment and feedback.

CHAPTER 4: RESPONSE AS (ETHIC OF) CARE

"I was really nervous [to submit] because I was scared. I was like, I wonder if she's gonna be like, 'Oh, this is not right, throw it out, do something else,' and so I was scared to give it to you, but at the same time, I was like this is what I can write, this is what interests me, this is what I want to tell."—Nyah

When I first started teaching composition, a common first assignment within the department was a eulogy. The assignment offered students an opportunity to engage with a real writing genre, consider primary and secondary audiences, and write with a specific purpose. In my first couple of semesters, I noticed that my students seemed very responsive to the assignment and often told me that it allowed them to say things that they had been wanting to say, for example, about a lost loved one – usually a grandparent. The assignment also seemed relatively easy to grade. It was short, followed a genre pattern (I used examples from real eulogies), and focused on topic sentences and parts of an essay. Some students shared them with friends and family, or even delivered them.

However, one semester, I had a student who wanted to write about her fiancé who died suddenly only a year or two before. I told her that would be fine as long as she was okay sharing it in peer review and for a grade. On peer review day, she read her eulogy aloud to her peer group, got to the end, and fainted. It seemed like the whole class froze and gasped at the same time. As she revived, I helped her outside with another student, who rushed to buy her water from the vending machine, and we waited for security to come and check her out. She apologized, saying that reading the eulogy aloud took her back to that moment.

I now realize that, because of the nature of the assignment, I was doing what Carello and Butler refer to as directly engaging trauma ("Potentially Perilous" 159). I not only felt deeply responsible for my student's retraumatization, but I also felt that it was impossible to grade her essay in any critical way. If "Death Gets a B" (Miller), then fainting gets an A.

I never assigned the eulogy again, but as I've mentioned in previous chapters, even though I tried to avoid directly engaging trauma, I continued to receive and grade essays that contained painful memories. As my study participants have shown, students can view any prompt related to their own experience as an opportunity – a kairotic rhetorical situation – in which to write about a traumatic experience (see Chapter 2). Moreover, the narrators confirmed that they in general had a positive experience writing about their trauma because it helped them locate their experiences in academia and connect with others in the process (see Chapter 3).

In this chapter, I explore narrator themes related to instructor response and grades. Because most of the narrators are my own former students, I will also reflect on my own pedagogy. As Day notes, responding to trauma writing in a way that will not retraumatize and that will not compromise an honest grade in part requires a clinical understanding of trauma and how it manifests in the classroom. She also finds in her interviews with composition instructors that as much as we recognize that we are *not* therapists, that is not adequate enough to give us a way forward in responding to student trauma when we face it (95). The narrators from my study show that one way forward is through an ethic of care lens and the attendant responsibilities that come with it. In writing assessment, responding in due measure means being attentive to our care responsibilities when it comes to 1) mitigating retraumatization, 2) prioritizing both student well-being *and* progress toward outcomes, 3) attending to our relational interactions with students, and 4) taking care of ourselves in the process.

Ethics of Care: Responding in Due Measure

The idea of allowing students to write about personal traumas in composition has been met with criticism from some compositionists because of grading implications as the conversation around student trauma has evolved over the years. In their 1993 *College English* debate, Cheryl Alton and Kathleen Pfeiffer respond to Carol Deletiner's "Crossing Lines" article about inviting student trauma writing, especially through journals. While Alton shows the potential legal consequences and physical danger of grading trauma writing (such as her student who wrote about murdering a person and serving time for it), Pfeiffer invokes the expressive vs. academic debate, deploring that students can't grow as writers if they are "taught only to look inward and cry" (667-668, 671). Day points out that all three scholars cite the "teachers are not therapists" maxim to support their arguments; she finds that her instructor study participants (2019) still use the saying as a touchstone to differentiate what they do from therapy but find it insufficient for describing the responsibility they feel toward their students' trauma (86-87). Other scholars cite the ethical implications (especially for retraumatization), potential grade manipulation, and compassion fatigue related grading trauma writing (Swartzlander et al; Hood).

Trauma Writing Assessment and Ethic of Care

Since I have established in previous chapters that students will write about traumatic experiences whether or not instructors ask for them and since it is not always possible to use alternative grading practices, instructors should be ready to respond to trauma in the context of any kind of grading. As John MacDevitt, both a college counselor and composition professor, reminds us, "When students share a trauma in a writing assignment, there is a task to be addressed: becoming a better writer. The disclosure is made as a part of that project." And unlike therapy, "the students are not the topic: their writing is" (145). His advice is to respond with

empathy: “If the composition instructor is perceived by the student as decent, empathic, and caring, the instructor need not agonize about exactly what to say: she can just say what is on her mind, as tactfully as possible” (139). In other words, care in assessment does not take place in a vacuum but is informed by students’ perception of their instructor’s care in general.

Although MacDevitt does not explicitly mention ethics of care, its themes are implicit throughout his article. For example, he notes that in actively committing ourselves to our students’ success, instructors bear ethical responsibility for caring for both their wellness and for their academic progress. Ethics of care as applied to disciplines other than the health field in part comes from Carol Gilligan, who, in her book, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, argues for a greater valuing of feminine rhetorics in ethics that come from women’s socialization as caregivers, namely the emotional and relational dimensions of ethics. She characterizes ethics of care as a place that offers us a wider perspective: “where an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for one another” (5). Feminist educator Nel Noddings, in her seminal book on care as a “feminine ethics,” argues that there are two criteria for care: “the existence of or potential for present relation, and the dynamic potential for growth in relation, including the potential for increased reciprocity and, perhaps, *mutuality*” (102). She goes on to identify four categories where care is most perceived by students: *modeling, practice, dialog, and confirmation*. All these categories are associated with care because they emphasize the ways in which teachers can form intentional relationships with all students – not just the ones they may “naturally” care for (Noddings 13).

This is especially germane to community colleges, which have greater populations of students who are first-generation, coming from poverty, and non-traditional (and thus have a greater likelihood of being veterans, parents, and caretakers). In this context, it is crucial that

students form relationships with their instructors and advisors as early as possible in the first semester (Walton and Cohen). In first-semester composition, we might apply Noddings' principles by considering how we *model* our own writing processes, provide opportunities for *practicing* writing strategies, *dialog* with our students through conferences and personalized feedback, and *confirm* their competence (and experiences) by interrogating academic and institutional codes. In fact, these principles are enmeshed throughout the touchstones of our field (Adler-Kassner et al., *Naming What We Know* 27-28, 39-44, 59-67; "Student Veterans in the College Composition Classroom"; *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*; "This Ain't Another Statement," "WPA Outcomes").

Viewing assessment through an ethic of care lens provides a way to attend to both the academic growth and personal well-being of the student. Here, I apply archivists Caswell and Cifor's definition of ethic of care to balance power in the archives to instructors receiving trauma writing. They call for care ethics built around "relationality, interdependence, embodiment, and responsibility to others," aligning with Hsu's own marriage of reflection and relationality. While ethic of care can be a universal design practice, it is especially germane for instructors receiving student essays about experienced trauma since the ethics of the rhetorical situation "are the culmination of the confrontation between *kairos* [what is timely] and *logos* [what is reasonable]" (Sipiora 41). In this case, the kairotic factor includes the timeliness related to students' perceived readiness to share trauma and timeliness of the first semester of college, as well as the timely cultural context of institutional initiatives and standards. Given this imperative to act, instructors can apply ethics of care principles to trauma writing response assessment and pedagogy in useful ways, as I will discuss below.

Relationality – Buffering Role Model(ing)

One way to create a more mindful care space is by viewing the instructor as a kind of role model of resilience. Melissa Tayles applies physician Nadine Burke Harris's term of buffering role model – first conceived as a loving, supportive adult who can help buffer a K-12 student from the effects of trauma – to the community college writing instructor. By offering this term, which also draws from relationality, she proposes that it is a more academically appropriate alternative to the "instructor as therapist" frame. She writes that an instructor who is a buffering role model "promotes and displays resilience and regulation throughout course instruction, classroom spaces, and interactions with students" (303). In my composition classes, my students essentially had two buffering role models who were consistent presences in the class.

As the instructor, I aimed to fulfill this role by promoting the class community and getting to know my students (Hsu). The writer mentor[9], who did not grade student work, was nevertheless able to support on a regular weekly basis students' writing efforts by leading the class through invention workshops, meeting with them one-on-one, and being in communication with them via email. As a writer and poet herself, she also, like me, *modeled* her writing process and how she approached writing challenges (Noddings). Her role allowed for an additional "buffering" layer of care when it came to assessment because students could talk with her about their concerns or fears when it came to writing. Tayles offers buffering role model as "an

[9] Writer Mentors from Southern Word, a Nashville non-profit organization that specializes in bringing local poets into classrooms to mentor students in first-semester composition courses, was a grant-funded initiative at NSCC. Writer mentors attended class once a week to lead a creative writing exercise, work with students in small groups, or mentor students to perform in a college-wide Writer Slam. My class writer mentor, Jacquelyn Swift, and I co-authored an article for *TETYC* reflecting on the ways in which her presence created an additional buffering role model during the pandemic: "Poetry in a Pandemic: Using a Writer Mentor to Build Confidence and Connection in ENGL 1010." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College,* 2022, https://publicationsncte.org/content/journals/tetyc/49/4

alternative to healer" for trauma-informed writing pedagogy, defining a buffering role model as "a loving, supportive, and stable adult who serves as an essential ingredient in minimizing trauma responses and adverse consequences of traumatic experiences and chronic stress" (Tayles 303). For students in my first-semester classes, the writer mentor served as an additional buffering role model, one who had writing expertise but who did not grade work.

Interdependence—Dialogue, Rhetorical Exchange between Writer/Reader

Responding to student writing is a crucial opportunity to build an interdependent rhetorical exchange between writer and teacher, emphasizing the presence of a human reader who can engage with the student's work (Sommers 148). The student's work has the potential to shape the teacher's response, and the teacher's response (and even imagined response) has the potential to shape the student's work. Teachers can continue to build this rapport with response strategies that prioritize transparency and by designing assignments that allow students to respond authentically as well (Winkelmes et al.). In these ways, the interchange between writer and reader (teacher and student) can be mutually beneficial. As Noddings notes, ethic of care requires mutuality, investment by both the one-caring and the care-for (102). If that capacity to respond is present, caring doesn't only help the cared-for, but the practice of care "enriches the carer's life" (Noddings 15).

One-on-one conferences have been established as a way to further dialogue with the student (Harris). In her seminal study evaluating teachers' comments, Sommers critiques the distance between student and instructor in offering these comments: "As a means for helping students, they [comments on papers] are, in fact, disembodied remarks–one absent writer responding to another absent writer" (155). However, a conference can become a way to check

in with the student, offer constructive feedback, and actively – and rhetorically – listen (Ratcliffe; Lucas).

Embodiment

Caring for students' well-being means caring for their growth beyond our class, especially in their academic journey. Yancey et al. found that in order for students to be able to transfer writing skills from one context to another, students must be exposed to common terminology that applies to different writing contexts and able to compare and contrast texts in different contexts (42-43). Moving from a personal essay to a research paper in a semester, all the while seeing how their peers' research was informed by their personal experiences is a way to show students how to transfer their interests into academic products, and also to understand that their experiences contribute to (academically valued) emotional epistemologies (Jagger). This means that they learn to value their embodied experiences in meaningful ways, both within academia and within their lives outside of college.

Teachers' responses are also embodied with their own emotional experiences. Beyond being emotionally moved by reading about a student's personal story, teachers may also experience emotions related to their values, lived experiences, or professional identity; these emotions—which contribute to meaning-making--can impact their responses (N. Caswell, "Emotionally Exhausting," 149-150). Caswell's study tracking one teacher's emotions as she navigated through student papers found a wide range of emotional responses, with the two most cited emotions being "Joy and Anger" (N. Caswell, "Emotionally Exhausting" 152). Similarly, as Kathleen Hynes found in her exploratory study of how teachers experienced and navigated emotional labor while responding to their students' personal writing, many writing teachers described their experience as "frustrating and exhausting but also energizing and meaningful"

(192). Taking on emotional labor, such as responding to trauma writing, guiding students away from inappropriate personal topics, and discussing a painful disclosure, sometimes generated positive emotions for the teachers. They described experiencing pride, sense of purpose, and even joy: "I find it exhilarating...to hold space for and hear my students' emotions" (Hynes 230).

Looking at teachers' emotions in response has some implications for personal writing practices. One, teachers can use their emotional response to a personal disclosure to reinforce the presence of a real reader to the student (rhetorical knowledge). Two, by reflecting on their emotional responses throughout the response process, teachers might care for themselves (and, in turn, their students) by mindfully (re)designing assignments, rubrics, and learning activities that increase their own positive emotions (N. Caswell, "Emotionally Exhausting" 159; Cavanagh). Joy is especially noteworthy in the context of teacher response because of its capacity to help us sustain our practices. As Noddings notes, "Joy helps to maintain us in our caring, and thus, adds to our ethical ideal" (14).

Kairos and the Community College English Instructor

However, it is important to recognize the limitations to this kind of engaged response that prioritizes relationality, emotional rhetoric, and humanized response when it comes to grading trauma essays, especially in the context of the community college. In this space, teachers also experience "affective tensions" between what they "feel they should do...and what they are expected to do" (N. Caswell, "Affective Tensions" 69). Responding in due measure is in part dependent on the place – the institution and the entities that surveil it. While alternative grading strategies, such as un-grading, have been championed by many compositionists keen to avoid the anxiety and judgment often associated with grades, this is not always a viable solution for instructors – even if they see these methods as an ideal solution (Tchudi). Factors such as

institutional oversight, WPA leadership, and faculty status all figure into these decisions. For example, at my community college, composition (ENGL 1010 and 1020) instructors work within several constraints:

- All instructors carry a 5-5 course load, with a "maximum" of 25 students (this can become 26 or 27 in some cases). Therefore, composition faculty regularly have 125 students in a semester, the majority of whom are co-enrolled in learning support classes, which means that they test below (often well below) college-level writing.
- At the department level, ENGL 1010 classes are required to have 60% of the final grade come from essays, 3-5 essays totaling 12-15 pages of formal writing, a required rubric, and a research paper.
- At the institutional level and state (Tennessee Board of Regents) level, ENGL 1010 classes are required to report "proficiency" on several criteria for the research paper. These criteria include thesis statement, structure, grammar, academic voice, and citations, among others.

This is not unlike other similar institutions that also work within these constraints. In the May 2022 issue of *TETYC*, the TYCA (Two-Year College English Association) Workload Issues Committee reported, "Faculty at two-year colleges teach far more students each semester than any professional organization recommends (for example, CCCC 'Principles' and MLA 'ADE Guidelines') and far more than nearly all faculty at four-year institutions. It is not uncommon for faculty to teach beyond a standard 5-5 course load with class caps for each section at 25 to 30" (295). And composition faculty in particular "teach the broadest range of students in higher education" (295). In addition to the course load, they report that English faculty at community colleges are also more surveilled than other higher ed institutions, further adding to the

workload: state-mandated reforms (such as TBR's move to co-requisite learning support models[10]), accountability funding, and limited institutional resources for compensating administrative work (TYCA 296-297). Recognizing that these working conditions undermine instructors' ability to both serve their students and attend to their own well-being, the TYCA Workload Committee advocates for several systemic changes, including 4-4 composition loads, capping composition enrollments to 20, and "reduc[ing] unnecessary program mandates," such as essay and page requirements (297-298).

Their findings highlight the context, including external pressures, that contribute to composition instructors' essay grading constraints and processes. Added to this is that community colleges generally have a much higher percentage of students testing below college-level writing, increased issues around academic belonging, and more history of trauma (Anders et al; Hausmann et al.). Teaching 125 students in their first semester who represent a wide range of skill levels and backgrounds translates to a substantial amount of time responding and grading essays.

Grades and Care

Finally, in this kairotic context, where institutional purposes meet faculty time strains, it is difficult to tease apart assessment from grades. The field itself seems to have a conflicted view toward grades – even the CCC's "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement" only refers to "grades" once, and even then, as a quick example of a type of assessment. At the institutional level for community colleges, the grading debate is not even a part of the conversation, as these terms are often conflated and used to surveil and evaluate programs, grant funding, and even

[10] Co-Requisite Remediation at TBR Community Colleges, TBR, December 2019, https://www.tbr.edu/sites/default/files/media/2019/12/Co-Requisite%20Remediation%20at%20TBR%20Community%20Colleges.pdf

faculty merit (TYCA). For example, at NSCC, grade distributions are one of the required documents for faculty going up for promotion and tenure. As a member of some of these committees, I have witnessed faculty leaders call into question an instructor's viability in part because of grades: once for being too low – a higher percentage failing compared to similar classes – and another for being too high – too many A's (must be "too easy" of a course then). Our grant funding for writer mentors was dependent on grades; this was one of the expectations by upper administrators, that the success of the program should be more heavily defined by how many students received grades C or higher than metrics such as improved confidence, belonging, and perceived growth (as measured by a pre and post survey).

Scholars have explored students' attitudes toward grades as a hindrance to learning, as anxiety inducing, and as inequitable (Tchudi xv; Ketter and Hunter; Inoue 25-76). Alternative grading can address many of these issues. In Tchudi's introductory chapter of their book, he affirmed that "The NCTE Committee on Alternatives to Grading Student Writing finds that both teacher experience and educational research argue powerfully for the abolition of letter grades on individual student papers. *We prefer and promote alternatives to grading student writing*" (xvii). However, as established, this view does not necessarily carry over into the classroom because of limitations in community college faculty autonomy despite individual teaching philosophies.

Still, the act of grading does not have to be an antithesis to care. While grades certainly have a fraught history, they can also track growth and open up dialogue when accompanied by meaningful scaffolding, conversation, and a buffering role model. Based on my study, I find that it is not impossible to grade within our institutional/departmental constraints *and* through an ethics of care framework. While it is not easy to grade inside a more traditional system, instructors can still enact an ethics of care imperative that supports their students' well-being.

When grading is accompanied by meaningful scaffolding, conversation, and a buffering role model, it can be understood as care.

Narrator Voices

As I noted in Chapter 2, the word "grade" occurred 20 times in narrator transcripts, but that alone did not describe how narrators felt about assessment of their trauma writing. In this section, I explore the student experience of receiving instructor feedback, reacting to grades, and moving through revision. I first coded the narrator transcripts using codes such as "grades," "conference," and "feedback." Next, I explored the themes that emerged from those codes, such as narrators wanting validation, feeling support from their writing mentor, and seeking meaning– and connected these with indicators of care, whether present or lacking. Finally, I organized this section by mapping out how the narrators' responses reveal the potential for instructors to respond in due measure by enacting an ethic of care practice, using the categories relationality, interdependence, embodiment, responsibility to others (Caswell and Cifor; Hsu; Noddings).

Relationality

A common theme that showed up in several interviews was that narrators commented on the importance of connecting with their instructor and with other potential buffering role models through campus and community resources. Often, instructors are the first point of contact for students because, unlike their advisors, they see them on a regular basis. One way that instructors (or writer mentors) can act as buffering role models is by destigmatizing the use of campus resources. For example, Matthew says, "I mean, you know, you offered the counseling services, which I thought was very, very nice and thoughtful. I've already been through therapy, a lot of it, so it didn't really apply to me, but I appreciated you offering it. Because that's a very nice thing."

Shay regretted that she didn't know about resources when she first started, emphasizing that it would have been nice to know "somebody" was there if needed. She advises instructors to communicate school and outside resources:

> Well, I definitely wish somebody would have told me, even if you guys have it listed somewhere, that the school had resources. Even though I wouldn't necessarily need them, it's kind of nice to know that there's the safety net of somebody you can go to. . . . And I always, always, always, always, always recommend to anybody to give out the national suicide hotline as often as possible, because you don't ever know.

Even more, she recommended including resources with feedback on essays about trauma: "That can be such a tool. . . . Like, 'oh it's just in this email or it's just on the bottom of this page that's printed out for my essay.' So [it should be] accessible." Melissa Tayles notes that buffering role models can model resilience by promoting supportive community and safety cues in the classroom; if students feel safe talking about resources, they are more likely to use them (298).

Conferences with the instructor came up with some students, and this aligns with Noddings' perceptions of care such as dialogue. When I asked about feedback she wanted or feedback she found helpful, Nyah responded, "I actually enjoyed your feedback when we had that [conference] and, I believe, you cried."

> Heidi: I did. I teared up a few times during that. I didn't know if you could tell that on Zoom.
>
> Nyah: Yeah, I enjoyed that one. It was kind of like I think writing and talking is probably my best medicine. It makes me be like . . . "Okay, I can live another day, I can do this . . . I don't have to be sad, angry or anything." Like I feel like writing really did help me a lot.

Nyah shows that her grade and my comments on their paper are also contextualized in the larger classroom, in which there were several opportunities to build relationality through in-class check-ins, peer groups, and conferences (Hsu; Lucas).

In their article on trauma-informed syllabus policies, Carello and Thompson ask instructors to reflect on to what extent "are grades relational?" (215). To center relationality–and care–systematic grading can be buffered by opportunities for "reflection and conversation" that fosters "empowerment, voice, and choice around grading as part of the process of learning" (Carello and Thompson 216). As several narrators note, having the opportunity to write what they wanted to write about (confirmation) and having an instructor and other people-resources who checked in on their wellbeing (dialogue) translated into perceived care (Noddings).

Interdependence

Some of the narrators commented on viewing the instructor as a listener and expressed the potential for interdependence based on this interchange of writing and (instructor) response to writing. Having agency to take advantage of this kairotic interdependence by writing something that felt authentic–mutually meaningful to writer and reader–seemed like a primary factor in perception of care (Noddings; Hsu).

As Jack notes, "If there's nobody there to listen to you, well, you know that's hurtful right there to begin with. Yeah, that's lonely." Because Jack was stopped from writing about his war trauma in one class, and allowed to write about it in another class, I asked him about his advice to professors. He discussed how he felt about his first composition instructor not allowing him to write about the war and involving the Access Center in the decision, presumably to help Jack and connect him to support:

Jack: I felt I was getting bullied to be honest.

Heidi: So it didn't feel protective to you?

> Jack: No, I felt like I was being bullied. Okay, because I'm not a doofus. I'm not gonna say something that's going to horrify somebody, okay.

Jack's characterization of his experience of what he could/should write about in his composition class shows how wrought a conversation around trauma writing can be between a student, instructor, and student support services even when everyone's goal may be to avoid retraumatization. Dori Laub discusses two key ways that retraumatization can manifest: 1) the act of telling/writing about a trauma if the result is "re-living" it rather than relief and 2) the act of telling/writing about trauma "without being truly heard or truly listened to" (67-68, emphasis in original). That means that well-meaning instructors may discourage students from writing about trauma to protect them but, at the same time, this might be received by the student as rejection – "the absence of an empathetic listener," leaving them with a narrative that "cannot be witnessed" (Laub 68). This shows the tightrope that instructors must walk when responding with due measure.

Gabriel associated agency with being able to write authentically. I asked Gabriel for the advice he would give instructors commenting on trauma writing, and he responded:

> I think a lot of it doesn't even come down to like what is said in the process. I think, from the very beginning with you and [the writer mentor] there was an assumed authenticity from it. I gave you something that I wrote, and you assumed that that was the most authentic thing I could have produced…and that was what I wanted to share 100%. What I got from the critiques right from the get-go..., there was an assumption that like, this is who I was, these are the emotions I wanted to portray.

For Gabriel, responding in due measure includes both a critical response to his essay (he sought additional feedback from both me and the writer mentor before submitting it for a grade) and an

authentic, human response to affirm his experience. Compositionists such as Peter Elbow have long established reader response feedback as an effective form of motivating revision, and Gabriel's positive experience with assessment shows that reader response in grading is also meaningful (Elbow, *Writing with Power* 240-252; Tchudi).

Gabriel went on to trace the impact of the class:

> The [following] semester, I submitted an entire poetry portfolio that had to do with like the politics of race, and like how I viewed it. My honors project this semester is submitting an English and creative writing portfolio for when I transfer [to Yale]. . . . Really, [the Comp class] really helped…spark something in me that thankfully has not dwindled in two years [the time between our class and when I interviewed him].

His experience brings to the forefront his agency in choosing to write about something that felt authentic to him, and how that "sparked" a deeper love of writing. He knew he had something to say.

Similarly, Shay spoke to the authenticity of the assessment. When I asked about the grade and feedback she got on her essay, Shay said that writing her essay about her severe depression served both the purpose of getting a good grade and not feeling alone in that experience. In other words, she felt like she had a stake in it. She said, "At the very least, it would have the purpose of getting this grade hopefully – and I'm not that great of a writer either. It was something that I knew, I don't know why I knew, but I knew that somebody was going to read it...Because you always feel so alone in that situation."

Students who choose to write about traumatic experiences, even in the context of a graded assignment, are showing us the very human ways in which they want to use writing, and they depend on their instructors to offer feedback that will help them tell their story. The

narrators' discussions around their expectations of instructors and their own motivations highlight the reciprocity inherent with writing about something personal. They need their instructors to respond in due measure by grading their work and by bearing witness to their story. At the same time, instructors depend on students to be intrinsically motivated and to share in the responsibility of their own learning. Interdependence between instructor and student in this context reflects Noddings' reminder that enacting an ethics of caring is only possible when there is potential for reciprocity and growth for both parties (102).

Embodiment

Similar to the narrators' experiences with peer review, several of them mentioned that when it comes to instructor feedback, it was helpful to first acknowledge the trauma in written feedback and then move to writing concerns. This is in line with advice from trauma-informed and feminist pedagogues such as hooks, MacDevitt, Valentino, and Berman, who recommend addressing the (human) writer before attending to the writing. Gabriel notes:

> Yeah, I remember y'all [instructor and writer mentor] were really supportive obviously um you said it was terrible what happened. But I think the more important thing that stuck with me is that y'all were saying very clearly like this is an experience and this sort of experience and emotion really helps you write and helps you write in a very just strong manner.

While it has been established that powerful feelings can produce powerful writing for student writers, the ethical and legal implications in ushering students toward this are less clear (Gale 30-34). However, students such as Gabriel are not writing about a traumatic experience because it is expected but, again, what he chose to write about (as noted in Ch. 2). As such, rather than silencing similar efforts–which can be retraumatizing–instructors can offer

confirmation (Noddings) that this kind of experience is worthy of academic writing since emotion can be a source of meaning making (Portelli 69; Jagger).

This validation seemed to be the way forward in helping Gabriel focus on his growth as a writer:

> And once that light switch turned on, I was like okay, 'Well, this is, this is something good I'm doing, I need to continue doing it.' A good mixture of literary criticism and then, at the same time, I think you and [writer mentor] saw me as an individual and not just like an essay if that makes sense. Like you, you were talking to me about my experiences and saying, like, okay well, implicitly you're saying like these experiences are really valid because we were sharing with them, and you were talking me through them, but also at the same time, it was a good critique all the way.

Gabriel's characterization of these two aspects to feedback–validation and critique–distills ways that instructors can show care both by making both the writer and the writing feel seen.

When I asked Shay about how she responded to her instructor's feedback and grade, she also mentioned getting some validation of her experience along with the critique:

> I got graded like normal, so you know, where she circles the commas, and like grammatical errors and stuff like that. And I can't remember exactly what she said, but I think she did say something along the lines of like, "Hey, I hope you're okay" kind of thing. I think it was interesting for her because I don't think she knew what to say about it because it's such a dark topic. So for me, even though I've grown to accept it, you wouldn't necessarily get that from [my essay] so I'm totally okay now… I don't know if she really knew what to say about it, so it was nice.

However, while Shay appreciated this comment, it seems to fall short of fully validating her experience in the way she wanted. She goes on to note, "I don't know what her intentions were, but it was almost like an obligatory like, I almost felt like I was trauma dumping on her where [she's] like, 'I don't know what to say to this, like, great that you told me all this, but what do you want me to do with this information situation?' I think that, you know, her being alone with it, like it's interesting because when you're just telling somebody, there's a conversation involved. When you're writing about it and giving it to somebody to read, they're alone with the information, they're alone with the document that you just spilled your crap onto. I think she felt like she needed to say something about it, but she didn't know what to say so, she was just like, 'well I hope you're okay.'" Shay's response reveals that validating student traumatic experiences is more than one comment on an essay; she seems to want more engagement from her instructor on the experience. Her emphasis of the reader being "alone" with the text (she says it twice) contrasts with the desire for connection that so many of the narrators said was a motivator for them to write about trauma (see Ch. 2). In assessment, this speaks to a lack of interdependence and confirmation as care indicators, where both instructor and student are unsure how to move forward without more dialogue (Noddings; Cifor and Caswell). The instructor wanted to help but wasn't sure what more to say; Shay wanted more engagement, so she didn't feel like she was just "trauma-dumping." Unlike Gabriel, who characterizes his critique as "literary criticism," Shay associates her critique with grammar ("commas…grammatical errors, stuff like that").

Both narrators reveal an opportunity for instructors to encourage writing growth by validating students' emotional meaning-making efforts. Validation can help students feel personally valued as humans who are contributors of (emotional) knowledge and also academically valued as writers who want to improve their texts, both of which are relevant to

their lives beyond first-semester composition (Jagger; Hsu). For example, Gabriel goes so far as to say that not being able to write about what he wanted (confirmation) would have felt like a rejection. He says, "I don't know how things would have been different if, like, I decided to not write about these emotional topics, or like be rejected [by the instructor] saying, 'all right, like slow down there, buddy.'" First, instructors show care by acknowledging and empathizing with difficult human experiences (Noddings; Hsu). Second, instructors show care by valuing those experiences as academic–that is, offering constructive criticism and yes, grades, to further their growth as writers (MacDevitt).

Responsibility to others

Grades

Analyzing the narrators' responses to instructor feedback has helped me recognize the limitations on myself and other faculty in developing relationality-oriented feedback. The narrators in this study are self-selecting, so most of them received As on their personal essay and in the class. For example, Jessie, distinguishing between the assessment of her work and potential judgment of her experience, which aligns with MacDevitt's assertion about students wanting writing feedback rather than therapy and threshold concept 4.1 "Text is an object outside of oneself" (Bazerman and Tinberg 61-62). But she still wanted a good grade. She says, "I think, as long as I got a good grade, I was good. I don't think there was, I mean, it's not the experience that you were creating, you know ...I don't look at it like, 'oh she's grading me, judging my experience.' Okay, I don't feel like that at all." It bears noting that Jessie seemed highly motivated to get feedback on her paper, seeking out feedback from the writer mentor, her writing support instructor, as well as additional feedback from me (in office hours).

So what happens when students don't get the grade on trauma writing that they want? Since getting a good grade has been centered in scholarship that questions the ethics of allowing student trauma writing (Hood; Miller; Alton and Pfeiffer), I want to explore responses from two narrators who did not receive an A on their essay.

When I asked Carina about getting her final graded essay back and how it made her feel, she said, "Yes, you…I think you liked it. I think I got a pretty good grade, since it was like several days late. Yeah, it was a really good feedback and things like that." Carina, like many students, may see grades as inevitable, but trauma-informed writing pedagogy does offer a way for instructors to assess writing that both works within community college constraints and engages a care ethic. In our interview, I also asked her if writing and getting graded on her personal essay affected her confidence as a writer. She responded: "No, no. It does make me feel like…that's something I need to start doing [writing more] because I love writing, so maybe it will pay me too, you know, maybe I should start back writing." I find this statement so impactful because it shows that she recognizes the value that her writing holds for other people–and that was not diminished by the grade she received. For Carina, this experience seems closer to authentic assessment in which the process of writing and attendant support was more meaningful than a grade.

Other narrators noted that the grade seemed beside the point. The need to write about their trauma–no matter the outcome–superseded all other reasons to write. I asked Nyah, who I mentioned expressed some disappointment with her grade at the end of the semester (Chapter 1), to talk about her experience with grading. She said, "I was really nervous [to get my grade], because I was scared. I was like, I wonder if she's gonna be like, 'Oh, this is not right, throw it

out, do something else,' and so I was scared to give it to you, but at the same time, I was like this is what I can write, this is what interests me, this is what I want to tell."

Nyah's response shows her fear of being rejected, even imagining an instructor might completely "throw it out" if it was not "right." This aligns with student attitudes toward writing that Ketter and Hunter uncovered (115). While Nyah was afraid of that kind of response, her choice to write about a trauma departs from how some compositionists have framed this. According to Leah Carrah Hood, students may be more inclined to hyperbolize–or even lie–about personal experiences in hopes for a higher grade. However, as Nyah demonstrates, some students come to composition wanting to write–and their own reasons for writing are deeply relevant to their lives (Hsu). And those reasons seem to supersede grades. I asked her about how her grades and feedback affected her confidence as a writer. She responded:

> I don't know, I wasn't very confident coming in to English because I was like I always felt like I suck at writing, and I guess really writing about that [my grief], made me be like, "Oh, I can do this," and then even when I go into my other classes, I find myself improving from that English course. It's just like, wow, where did this come from, you know what I mean? It just gave me that stepping stone, and I needed to tell myself that I can do anything if I try. I got my confidence in English. . . . I feel like that's my tribute to my mother.

Her response highlights the idea that students come to composition not for therapy but with the expectation that they will grow as writers (MacDevitt). While grades seem to be a partial extrinsic motivator, the more powerful intrinsic motivator for the narrators came from wanting to write something personally meaningful and gain confidence.

Revision

Before narrators submitted their work for a grade, they had various scaffolding supports in place. All NSCC composition classes, in line with WPA Outcomes, include practicing the writing process as one of the four course outcomes (Council, "WPA"). For example, in my own classes, students received completion credit for submitting a first draft, engaging in a one-on-one conference with me, and participating in peer review. That means that before submitting, students received feedback from me and their peers. Some students also sought feedback from the class writer mentor and tutors at the writing center. Scaffolding and low-stakes assignments that help students refine their work and gain confidence supports trauma-informed pedagogy and ethics of care by allowing students to practice before getting a higher-stakes grade (Carello, "Examples"; Noddings; Lang and Rudenga).

For example, Alice regularly requested to work with our class writer mentor, so I asked her about that experience. According to Alice, "It was really helpful because she gave me good ideas. But she had more of an expert opinion about it [than my peers]. So she threw out better ideas when everybody else was like I don't know."

Jack also found it helpful to work through a process of revision with feedback. He expands on this by noting that the instructor, in commenting on drafts, needs to be trauma-informed. He offers some advice for instructors:

> It had value [to write about war trauma], very much so, and especially if you [the instructor] can get it ahead of time [before submitting for a grade]. Then you can get up ahead of it on how to deal with it before, you know, it balloons into something else. And I think that's based on if people were ever diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder because I think that's something that can be done ahead of time. I think that the students should each design their paper on what they're going to speak about. Then, they should

> bring it to you first. You do a brief overview. And like I said, you really need to find out if PTSD is involved. And so you got to be prepared if you're walking into that.

Jack's advice here aligns with Day, Carello and Butler, Tayles, Imad and other trauma-informed pedagogues who advocate for greater understanding of how past traumas can manifest in the classroom. This makes it all the more important to see feedback as a kairotic opportunity to promote relationality–a key component of supporting trauma resilience (Imad, "Our Brains, Emotions" 40-41).

When feedback is paired with revision, it offers another trauma-informed strategy: flexibility (Imad, "Our Brains, Emotions" 41-42; Carello, "TITL Annotated"). Jack goes on to advise assignment constraints and multiple revision opportunities to mitigate the possibility of harmful disclosures. He says:

> Because if that's the case [that you're dealing with PTSD], then they probably should talk about something where you should build a template to where you limit what they speak about so the whole full blown thing doesn't just come vomiting out in class….You would have to do, several drafts and you have to walk really walk it over very well. And you'd have to get prepared for it, and I think writing several drafts would prepare you and you've got to read each one over at least once if not twice to help prepare to bring down the shock value level of it. All of a sudden, they're speaking and they can't talk anymore, because it's too overwhelming right. Or they break down in tears, no, you don't want those things to happen necessarily I don't think.

His comments emphasize the need for instructors to be aware of how trauma can impact the learning process (Imad, "Our Brains, Emotions" 39).

However, as I have established, I also acknowledge that while revision is a crucial part of first-year writing components, the amount of revision opportunities is restricted for instructors who have large credit and enrollment workloads (TYCA). In addition to the drafts that offered built-in revision, I had a syllabus policy that stated students had the option of revising either Essay 1 or Essay 2 for a higher grade. My policy aligns with Carello's "TITL Annotated Syllabus" and Carello and Butler's imperative to center growth and care (flexibility) in my policies while not forfeiting my own wellbeing by allowing students to revise later graded work (216). Most students do not take me up on this unless I individually encourage them, but having this policy in my syllabus allows me to express care by reducing anxiety and prioritizing growth.

Conclusion

In general, the narrators speak to ways of caring: offering one-on-one conferences (dialogue), normalizing support services (modeling), providing revision opportunities (practice), and validating life experiences as worthy academic endeavors (confirmation) (Noddings; Hsu; Caswell and Cifor). Their insights into the feedback process offer composition instructors many ways forward for handling sensitive content with care and responsibility, even within traditional grading structures. Responding in due measure means coupling grades with empathic feedback, caring conversations, and low-stakes scaffolding. It also means a continuous cycle of mindful self-reflection on how we can make grading more relational through an ethic of care.

In my final chapter, I review the trauma-informed and narrator-informed pedagogical recommendations to offer practical suggestions for meeting students at the rhetorical invitation of an assignment, supporting them during the writing process, and responding to their trauma writing with mindful care.

CHAPTER 5: TRAUMA-INFORMED AND STUDENT-INFORMED CARE PEDAGOGY

"Sometimes a smile can fix anything, so a small conversation about a lesson I don't understand can take me a long ways. It can be about the lesson or then asking if I'm doing ok." –Jasmine

In the previous chapters, I analyzed the interviews from ten narrators who had written about a traumatic experience in a past first-semester composition course. Their responses to my questions shed light on the student experience of writing about trauma. I organized their quotes according to a chronological sequence to highlight the kairotic nature of their experiences at key points of the process: first, when they decided to write about their topic (Ch. 2: Opportunity), second, when they worked through the drafting process (Ch. 3: Process), and third, when they received feedback and grades from their instructor (Ch. 4: Response). Analyzing their quotes alongside composition pedagogy and trauma-informed pedagogy, I explored why students choose to write about trauma, what the experience is like for them, and what they need during that process. What separates my study from other trauma-informed writing pedagogy scholarship is that it centers student voices, highlighting the ways in which student experiences align and depart from established pedagogy. Their contributions to this study, along with theory, guide the pedagogical recommendations in this final chapter.

One of the reasons I pursued this study to better understand the student experience of writing about trauma is because I have been continually struck by the *positive* emotions that often accompany these experiences. Students who stay after class because they can't wait to show me what they wrote. Students who thank me at the end of the semester for finally being able to write something they have long intended to write. Students who tell me about a special conversation they were able to have with a loved one because they shared their essay with them.

Students who decide they want to pursue *more* writing because of the way peers valued their work. Students who are surprised to see themselves as writers. And the narrators from this study who expressed excitement (sometimes in exclamation points) about sharing their experiences. While not all students have a positive experience writing about trauma, what I think we can learn from these ten narrators is that the first-semester composition classroom is ripe with possibility for supporting student wellness by mindfully cultivating joy.

This idea has been underexplored in trauma-informed pedagogy. Trauma-informed pedagogues promote safety, community, equity, meaning, and growth (Carello and Butler, "Practicing What We Teach"; Imad, "Our Brains"). In her interview study of writing faculty, Day found that incorporating more clinical knowledge of trauma would help faculty feel more confident in integrating these core principles into their courses. However, Noddings dedicates an entire chapter to the role of joy in ethics of care relationships, noting that joy "is the special affect that arises out of the receptivity of caring, and it represents a major reward for the one-caring" (132). Moreover, this joy affect "encourages growth in the ethical ideal" (Noddings 132).

What this study of narrators, former students, adds to the discussion of trauma-informed writing pedagogy is that the student experience of writing about trauma shows the potential for joy as a result of enacting an ethic of care—instructors enacting ethics of care for students and students enacting ethics of care for their peers. And this aligns with positive emotions and habits of mind that composition scholars already champion (Council et al., *Framework* 4-5). In the previous chapters, I organized narrator quotes in loosely chronological sequence at key points in the process of one essay, and through each of these chapters runs a vein of resilience that at times transcends to joy. As an aspirational state for both instructors and students, I have found that joy

is a useful centerpoint that pulls together these various spokes of themes that emerged from analyzing the interviews:

1. Joy requires vulnerability and is related to what we find meaningful (Brown; King and Defoy). In Chapter 2 (Opportunity), narrators discuss choosing to write about a trauma because they wanted to be heard by real audiences and breathe meaning into a painful experience.
2. Joy promotes connection with others and builds resilience (Frederickson 1370-1372). In Chapter 3 (Process), narrators discuss the process of caring for their audience through their rhetorical choices and feeling motivated to share their work outside the classroom, often for the first time.
3. Joy boosts wellness by helping us place painful experiences in "the broader context" of our lives, which lessens their negative impact (Frederickson 1370). In Chapter 4 (Response), narrators reflect on applying validating feedback to revisions and discovering other like stories in their research.

I am not suggesting that instructors should encourage students to write about trauma because it leads to joy. This is not guaranteed, and instructors still need to apply much caution in situations where they mentor trauma writers. Instead, I suggest that the narrators' experiences that produced positive affect such as joy–even while writing about deeply painful experiences–is something that compositionists can build on to support the wellness of *all* students. Instead of advocating writing-as-healing, the imperative to support wellness--understanding that positive emotions buffer the impact of trauma on well-being and thus learning--offers a way forward for instructors wanting to bring a trauma-informed lens to their teaching.

In this final chapter, I summarize the key pedagogical practices that can support not only students who choose to write about trauma but also serve as universal design for supporting student well-being by mindfully promoting joy. In line with my chapter organization, I outline practical writing pedagogy applications at significant and deeply kairotic moments across the few weeks of one essay assignment. I have also included an abbreviated form of these recommendations in the form of a chart at the end of this chapter to serve as a resource for instructors. These trauma-informed and student-informed strategies can help buffer ourselves and our students against trauma and help us make more space for joy in our classrooms.

Opportunity: The Assignment

Trauma-informed pedagogy starts before the semester, with assignment design and anticipating that some students, regardless of the prompt, may view an assignment as an opportunity to write about their trauma. It is important to note that even when instructors make efforts to avoid personal writing, students may still disclose trauma in an assignment. The following recommendations, though not comprehensive, can help instructors prepare to respond to trauma writing or disclosures when an essay is *first* assigned. These include giving students agency, being transparent, prioritizing well-being, and building in critical scaffolding.

Give students agency in topic choice.

Instructors should consider giving agency to students in choosing personal topics for at least one essay and set these parameters as early as possible. This approach is a common FYC practice, and my study narrators reinforce the importance of having this agency (Chapter 2; Yam; Foss and Griffin; Eodice et al.). As my study narrators show, having agency to write about personal experiences where students are the authority on what happened can be motivating, especially if they come into FYC with anxiety about writing. This self-determination is vital to a

trauma-informed approach that "obliges us to…assume [students] know what helps them feel secure" (Carello and Butler, "Practicing What We Teach" 273). While some students may be eager to write about a traumatic experience, others may feel safer in an academic space by having the choice to *avoid* personal writing or to observe trauma from a critical distance (Goggin and Goggin). All of the narrators in this study were motivated, even excited, to have the opportunity to lay out their traumatic experience in writing for an academic audience, in part because the assignment aligned with a personal (as well as academic) goal (Chapter 2). For some of the narrators, this first assignment felt like the *first opportunity* to write about this experience– to give it structure and meaning and share it with real readers.

Make assignments transparent.

Although for many of the narrators, the idea of sharing their trauma with their peers motivated them to write about deeply personal experiences, others said that if they had to share their essay with peers, they would have chosen another topic (Chapter 3). To help students make informed choices about what they choose to share in their writing, instructors should be transparent about not only the assignment requirements, alignment to outcomes, and grading criteria, but also how much and how often students will share their drafts when first assigning the essay. Instructors might also invite discussion on the purposes of sharing writing with real readers and what students can expect from instructor conferences and student peer reviews. Transparency means that students understand the expectations of the assignment and can therefore be in a better position to choose what to write about. Transparency is also associated with trust and openness; it creates a learning environment where students know what to expect and can feel safer (Winkelmes et. al).

Prioritize well-being.

It is important to address human needs before student needs, such as learning outcomes. When students disclose a trauma or decide to write about it for an assignment, it may be because they are seeking connection with their instructor and peers, especially given how isolating trauma can be (Van der Kolk). This is one of the reasons trauma-informed pedagogues advocate for more understanding or how symptoms of trauma may manifest in a classroom (Imad "Our Brains, Emotions" 39; Carello and Butler, "Potentially Perilous"; Day). According to Brene Brown, being vulnerable by sharing personal experience is the quickest route to connection. When students propose writing about trauma, instructors might ask illicitive questions to help students decide if they are emotionally ready to write about a trauma, but, if at all possible, they should avoid a response that explicitly prohibits the student from writing about it. As we saw in the narrator study, this kind of absolute can feel like being silenced. The instructor should first acknowledge the trauma so that students do not feel dismissed, and possibly even retraumatized (Laub). Scripts that use reflective rather directive language (Valentino 12), like those below, can help instructors first acknowledge a painful experience (human need) before attending to the assignment (student need):

- "This seems like a very painful memory. Are you sure you feel comfortable writing about this for the next several weeks? Do you feel comfortable sharing it with peers?" **Why**: It is important to acknowledge the disclosure and make sure the student is aware of the work involved with the assignment, so they are agents in their own decision (Laub; Day; Lucas).
- "Thank you for trusting me with this. It sounds very difficult. Is there anything I can do to help you? Would you like for me to refer you to our resource manager [or other related

professional]?" **Why**: Instructors should empower students to advocate for themselves and know their own needs rather than assuming what they need (Day; Valentino 11).

- "This sounds traumatic, and I'm sorry this happened to you. I am concerned this does not align with the particular objectives of this assignment. Could we talk about this and other ideas you have?" **Why**: For cases where the proposed topic is not appropriate for an assignment's objectives, first acknowledge the trauma before reflecting on concerns. When in doubt, provide space for dialogue since people who disclose trauma may be looking for connection and to feel seen. It is critical to not make the student feel that their experiences "are not good enough" for academic writing (Lucas 11).

Instructors can also consider policies and activities that incorporate trauma-informed care for students. In their study, Carello and Butler found that the practices students felt were most valuable to their well-being were a self-care plan, deadline flexibility, and nonjudgmental feedback on early drafts ("Practicing"). Instructors can model self-care by talking about their own practices and encourage self-care by brainstorming as a class some strategies for self-care.

Build in scaffolding and critical framing opportunities.

Build scaffolding into essay assignments to promote safety and confidence and communicate to students how low-stakes activities (such as due dates for the outline, draft, peer review, and conferences) support their success in the assignment. Some of the study narrators also found it helpful to see their personal experiences reflected in larger critical conversations (Chapter 4). Critical framing, that is, locating narratives in research, can be a way to examine a trauma from a greater distance. One way to build critical framing into scaffolding is by having students write first about a personal experience related to a critical issue, research the issue, and then synthesize their experience with the larger research conversation. This can lead to different

ways of knowing, which aligns with composition pedagogy, and it can also support well-being by helping students discover that they are not alone in their experience (Yam; Hsu; Van der Kolk). Nyah found it helpful to recognize her own grief through her research. It allowed her to see her experience as one worthy of academia and also allowed her to incrementally build from personal writing to more critical, analytical writing–with a topic that was deeply meaningful. This kind of assignment design can help students see how they can transfer the skill of using personal experiences to explore research questions, a skill that promotes lifelong learning.

A Process for Processing

Once students have committed to writing about a traumatic experience, the instructor can support resilience and other positive emotions by emphasizing rhetorical awareness that students already have, promoting authentic listening, creating predictable routines, and modeling resilience.

Recognize rhetorical awareness in personal writing.

The study narrators demonstrated that writing about trauma -- when one is ready to–can motivate more meaningful understanding of rhetorical situations (Chapter 3). Because of the relatively high stakes involved with trauma writing, both in its potential impact on the writer and readers, narrators intuited that their rhetorical choices had consequences (Chapter 3). This is significant because the trauma writing that each of the narrators discusses is their *first* essay of the semester–and their first essay in college (except for two narrators who withdrew from first attempts at composition) (Chapter 2). Although narrators mentioned that writing about their trauma was a way to understand or give it some meaning, the bigger driving force seemed to be wanting to help *others* through their own experience. The narrators also showed an awareness of their rhetorical choices that seemed to reflect an ethics of care (Chapter 3). In light of this,

helping students recognize the rhetorical awareness that they already bring with them can address perennial first-semester issues around writing confidence and academic belonging (Tayles; Cohen). Instructors can do this by giving students space during the drafting and revision process to reflect on how their rhetorical choices were shaped by imagined readers (Ong).

Promote authentic and rhetorical listening.

Personal writing and specifically trauma writing are deeply connected to identity. By helping students learn strategies for authentic and rhetorical listening, instructors can signal safety and belonging. Trauma writing can invoke identities that have historically marginalized people, including race, sexual and gender identity, poverty, and mental illness. It is therefore imperative to help students prepare to listen and respond to these stories. For example, many composition textbooks already contain personal essays with sensitive or traumatic topics by established authors and figures. Discussing these through an ethics of care lens (acknowledging the human experience first before critical aspects of writing) and readings on rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe) might foreground their peer review. To help students anticipate encountering painful experiences in peer review, instructors can ask students to tell one another their paper topics before reading and emphasize that writers can say, "I'm not ready to share that" if asked for more details. They can also create reader-response peer review questions to help students react as readers rather than judges (Yam; Hsu). These are some questions that I have used:

- Point to a place you found interesting or surprising and why?
- Point to a place you are curious to learn more about.
- What is one thing you can relate to and why?
- Writer, ask readers one question about your essay.

These questions can promote discussions that promote valuing the experience first. Then, it is up to the writer to solicit feedback on something specific. After peer review, I have writers reflect on their peer discussions about what they will change or add. I give them time in class to apply revisions so I can check in with students and answer questions that come up. Peer review like this is another reason why normalizing resources throughout the semester is so important, as students sometimes feel more comfortable learning about resources from peers.

Create predictable class rituals and routines.

Building in predictable class rituals mitigates stress and enhances feelings of community. During the fall 2020 semester when NSCC and many other institutions went completely virtual, I was concerned about how I could build rapport with my students and make them (and me) feel more at ease on Zoom, which was fairly new to all of us. Starting every class with an attendance icebreaker such as, "If your mood today were the weather, what would the forecast be?" or "Describe your writing process as terrain," helped to introduce some levity and build connection. Students could just put their response in the chat, or they could elaborate on their responses or not. This exercise often produced some laughter (especially when I invited students to send me icebreaker ideas) and encouraged students to see they were not alone, as some would respond, "Me too!" Introducing moments of levity, such as a gentle wisecrack or relevant funny story, can also make students feel safe and help them engage (Reiger). Building in this routine time for play and connection produced positive emotions (sometimes joy!) that have been shown to prime people for learning (Frederickson).

The next part of our predictable routine was an Overview slide, which was broken into three parts to orient us in the semester:

"Where we have been" listed assignments that they should have turned in and noted what we had covered in the last class or two.

"Where we are" listed the activities for that class day.

"Where we are going" projected the deadlines and assignments for the next week or so. I found that the slide helped ease my anxiety and set the tone for the class–that everything we were doing was intentional, a part of the larger goals of the semester. I noticed that during this overview time, students began to feel more comfortable asking questions about the assignments and deadlines we were going over. It gave us space to celebrate progress and address anxieties. I continued this practice when we returned to in-person classes because the predictable routine helped ground us. Creating a predictable classroom routine is in line with Carello's trauma-informed strategies for promoting safety and mitigating stress ("Examples"). Other predicable classroom routine strategies that promote positive emotion and wellness could be starting class with a mindfulness breathing exercise (Wenger 151-153; Inoue), a reflection on a meaningful poem (Imad), a discussion on a quote about growth mindset (Dweck), or a gratitude practice (Brown).

Model resilience.

Some of the narrators in this study took their first-semester composition class during the pandemic when NSCC was still completely virtual, in Fall 2020 (Gabriel) and Spring 2021 (Nyah and Alice). I point this out because this added another layer of resilience and made me more aware how I could help students by discussing my own challenges and strategies for navigating them. I shared my own stress about writing over the weekend while parenting my toddler, that I often had to do my work in the couple of hours in the morning before work and the couple of hours at naptime. I shared my time management strategy that I often used: the

Pomodoro timer method. During a two-hour period, I set a timer for 25 minutes to completely focus, then take a five-minute break, and then I set the timer again for 25 minutes for another deep focus session. By expressing my positionality to my students–how I accepted the reality of the situation and used a strategy to address it–I hoped to show students that all writers have these kinds of issues; they were resilient because of the strategies in their toolbox (Cedillo and Bratta). We also connected these kinds of discussions to habits of mind related to success in composition, such as responsibility, persistence, and creativity (Council et al., *Framework* 4-5).

Modeling resilience in this way also allowed space to demystify the writing process. Composition instructors can model resilience and vulnerability by letting students see behind the curtain–the challenges associated with finding time to write, dealing with writer's block, and getting constructive criticism. For example, I show students five drafts of the first page of an article I published so that they can see where I struggled to figure out my main point (a placeholder where I had just banged out random letters) or struggled to get the wording right (multiple crossed-out places).

Building in active rest into the semester can also reinforce to students that taking breaks supports resilience. In my first-semester composition classes, my writer mentor spends a class period walking students through creative writing exercises. While her activities can be tied to composition objectives (learning invention strategies, building confidence in sharing writing with others), the class is also meant to give students a break and allow them to experience "writing as play" (Micciche).

Responding: In Due Measure

Ethic of care offers a way to frame crucial conversations with students and ourselves. We can cultivate positive emotion by building in opportunities for one-on-one conversations,

connecting students to peers and campus figures, centering humanized grading practices, and taking care of ourselves.

Create space for deeper conversations.

Many of the narrators commented on the role instructor conferences had (Chapter 4). Conferences, one-on-one time with students to talk about their writing, are a way to show care. If it is possible within the parameters of the department or institution, instructors might consider scheduling a conference with students within the first few weeks of the semester. The writing conference has historically been championed for supporting composition students (Harris; Lerner), but it can especially benefit writers of trauma (Lucas; Hsu). First, the early conference can help to build rapport and connection with the instructor. Research shows that first-semester students need to form early connections to professors or advisors early in their tenure to start to feel a sense of belonging (Cohen; Yeager and Walton; Amarillo College). Second, the early conference can help instructors check in with students to see how their writing or course in general is going and connect them to necessary resources. Faculty are often the first point of contact for students going to college for the first time (Amarillo College). They can help students reflect on what they are comfortable sharing or not before peer review or grading.

Connect students to other buffering role models.

An instructor serves as a buffering presence when they signal to students that they show they care about students' success and well-being (check in with students and offer support) and when they model resilience (show how they overcome challenges) (Tayles; Cedillo and Bratta). Several of the narrators commented on the impact of their instructor and also the significant role that other proximal figures–who I characterize as buffering role models–played (Chapter 4). While it is not always possible to co-teach with a writer mentor in a first-semester class, it is very

possible to invite other potential buffering figures into the classroom and encourage students to interact with them. Instructors might think of their classroom in the context of an ecological and supportive web (Edbauer) where they can intentionally connect students to other supportive people across campus or in the community, especially in first-semester classes when everything might feel new and overwhelming. Instructors can invite more buffering role models into their students' lives by 1) introducing them and 2) setting up the potential for future interactions. Some of the ways I have integrated potential buffering role models or seen them integrated by other faculty include:

- Inviting a librarian to come to class to talk with students about research and encourage them to come visit her or him in the library with research questions.
- Inviting a guest speaker from the community to talk with students about the writing or research they are doing and allowing students to ask questions and contact them after the class.
- Incorporating an experiential learning assignment that helps students connect to members of the community.
- Promoting involvement in writing events that align with individual student interests (such as poetry slams) or clubs that align with experiences (one of the narrators suggested a self-care club led by a counselor).
- Incorporating an assignment in which students are required to visit a writing tutor sometime during the semester and reflect on their experience.
- Regularly encouraging students to connect with their other instructors and their advisor too by visiting them during office hours or reaching out.

When students feel like they are a part of a community of supportive people, this has a buffering impact on trauma (Imad, "Our Brains, Emotions" 40, 44).

Center humanized grading practices.

All the narrators advised instructors to first comment on the trauma (human) and then on the work (academic) (Chapter 4). Their recommendation aligns with trauma-informed compositionists who champion expressive writing (MacDevitt; Valentino). Rather than lowering expectations, Imad argues that teaching through a trauma-informed lens helps instructors instead "challenge students academically to reach their full potential" ("Our Brains, Emotions" 39). Humanized grading practices for trauma writing center the well-being of students by first acknowledging trauma resilience and leading with empathy. For example, when grading an essay, instructors might lead with comments such as:

- This sounds very difficult, and I'm sorry this happened to you.
- This was difficult to read, and I hope you're okay.
- This sounds very painful. The college has some resources that might help you, such as our counseling services. You can contact them directly at this number or let me know if you'd like me to refer you.

After acknowledging the trauma experience, narrators wanted instructors to comment on their writing and offer constructive criticism. This seemed to be an important part of feeling that their experience was valued as academic (Chapter 4). Having a template for feedback that makes room for an empathic response may also be helpful. For example, one of instructors Hynes interviewed used this structure for feedback: "I like to start with, 'This is how what you're / writing affected me.' […] 'Here's things that were / really strong, and then here's two or three / things that were hard for me as a reader'" (206). However, much of the work of humanized

grading practices involves transparency in the grading criteria *before* students even submit their work. Instructors should provide students with clear rubrics, example graded essays, and several opportunities for feedback and revision to mitigate grade dissatisfaction.

While many institutions, and especially community colleges, are constrained in their grading practices (see Chapter 4), it is worth advocating for alternative grading practices when possible, and especially for personal writing. Yet even when traditional grading methods are required, it is still feasible to grade through a trauma-informed lens by centering the student before their work. Instructors should be transparent about the grading expectations for the institution or department, and how grades may be used for administrative purposes. Students may also appreciate having insight into the grading process–how long it takes, what kind of feedback they can expect, how to follow up with a grade question, and how they can reflect on their rubric to improve for next time.

Prioritize self-care and self-reflection.

As much as we may try to support our students, it is important to remember that instructors are not superhuman. Instructors can experience vicarious trauma from reading about painful experiences. They might agonize over giving a grade. They might feel like they said or wrote the wrong thing in response to a student disclosure. To buffer the effect of such experiences, instructors would benefit from practicing regular self-care, self-reflection, and yes, joy. As narrator Jasmine stated, “Sometimes a smile can fix anything, so a small conversation about a lesson I don’t understand can take me a long way. It can be about the lesson and then asking if I’m doing ok.”

In the writing classroom, self-care is drawing personal boundaries and communicating with students about those boundaries. This could mean establishing clear expectations for

response time. It could mean having a conversation with students about an instructor's personal philosophy around not accepting trauma writing. It could mean referring students who need help to relevant services instead of attempting to wear all the hats of a counselor, advisor, and tutor. It means being protective of time outside of work to rest and attend to relationships and seek out opportunities for wonder–all the things that make us more resilient (Imad, "Transcending Adversity"; McGonigal; Keltner).

In addition, just as instructors encourage students to have a growth mindset–to learn from setbacks (or perceived failure) as a way to focus on continual improvement–instructors can benefit from critical, compassionate, and systematic self-reflection. Critical reflection allows instructors some distance in viewing their interaction or essay responses and consider how they might be more trauma-informed in the future. Compassionate reflection acknowledges that instructors can and will make mistakes and also be realistic about the potential impact of the mistake rather than either diminishing it or hyperbolizing it–and acting accordingly by, for example, acknowledging an oversight to the class or clarifying a comment to a student (Neff and Pommier). Systematic reflection offers a consistent structure for continually evaluating how close we are to our ideal teaching practices, and–just as we ask our students to do–revise as necessary (Larivee).

Finally, joy is contagious; it is possible for instructors to create the circumstances that lead to mutual joy. Cultivating authentic joy does not mean putting on a happy face when you are feeling anything but. Rather, instructors might think of joy as a mindset that, just like for students, is a centerpoint for finding meaning, connecting with others, and placing experiences into (human) context. Strategies for cultivating joy might look like assigning writing that instructors find meaningful or satisfying to grade, allowing students to see our passion and

humor, nurturing relationships with colleagues, making space for gratitude–a practice that requires looking outside of ourselves (Cavanagh; Imad, "Our Brains, Emotions" 43-44; Brown). When combined with other practices of care, joy can support instructor wellness too.

The Role of Joy

As frequent first responders to student crises, instructors are often put in precarious situations that tax our mental and emotional wellness. Unlike healthcare first responders, we are not formally trained in strategies that help us protect our mental health. I am not suggesting that joy is a panacea for the high burnout rates among composition teachers, especially those who are contingent. I am not suggesting that instructors embrace performative happiness that ignores reality–a practice that has been associated with toxic positivity (Cherry). Neither is joy a cure-all for students and faculty alike who are suffering from trauma.

Rather, I offer mutual joy as a worthwhile addition to more established trauma-informed pedagogy, one that has the potential to inspire students and ourselves (Cavanagh). And instructors need help, at the institutional level, to do this. Institutions must recognize the need for their instructors to be well *so that* they can support student wellness. As a start, institutions can support faculty in these efforts by promoting work-life balance, training on responding to trauma, and recognition that academic labor is often emotional labor (Imad, "Transcending Adversity"; Field; Hynes 192).

Chart: Trauma-Informed and Student-Informed Writing Pedagogy

The following chart is adapted from Janice Carello's chart, "Examples of Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning in College Classrooms." This chart includes Carello's trauma-informed principles and her definitions, informed by Fallot and Harris 2009 and SAMHSA guidance. I have replaced her general examples of trauma-informed teaching with a column of

applications specific to FYC classes. These examples reflect the pedagogical strategies that I have outlined in this chapter, reorganized here to align with their trauma-informed principle. Most importantly, these pedagogical applications also reflect the substantial insights from my study narrators, revealing the ways that students perceive care (Chapter 2-4). I also propose the addition of “Joy” as a trauma-informed principle that supports student wellness.

Table 1: Trauma-Informed and Student Informed Writing Pedagogy[11]

Trauma-Informed Principle	Definition	Student-Informed Applications to Writing Pedagogy
Safety	"Creating an environment that respects and accepts all individuals and helps them feel safe enough to take risks and learn from mistakes." (Carello)	Process and revision opportunities; share your own drafting process; demystify writing by having students share their own experiences with writing; smaller classes and group work when possible; incorporate low-stakes contributions to discussion; scaffold writing assignments
Trustworthiness & Transparency	"Making expectations clear, ensuring consistency in practice, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and minimizing disappointment." (Carello)	Be transparent about inst./dept. grading constraints as well as grading criteria; be honest about boundaries; create predictable class rituals; offer at least one opportunity to revise for higher grade; clear syllabus policies; transparent assignment design; model self-reflection
Support & Connection	"Connecting with appropriate peer and professional resources to support academic, personal, and professional success." (Carello)	Share resources; be a buffering role model and connect students to other buffering role models; connect students to people beyond classroom; advocate on behalf of students where necessary.
Collaboration & Mutuality	"Acting as allies rather than as adversaries and creating opportunities to share power and make decisions." (Carello)	Some agency in topics; conferences early in the term; check-in opportunities, such as a midterm survey; reflection opportunities; advocate for flexibility in grading or other policies that give space for mutuality
Empowerment, Voice, & Choice	"Building in opportunities to make choices, be heard, build skills, and develop confidence and competence." (Carello)	Recognize prior rhetorical knowledge; give authentic assessments that help students connect their experiences to larger research and critical conversations; encourage students to share their writing outside of the classroom
Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion	"Striving to be aware of and responsive to issues of privilege and power and respecting one another's diverse experiences, perspectives, and identities." (Carello)	Practice and teach rhetorical and empathic listening; recognize affective epistemologies; value student culture and diversity by valuing their stories; offer opportunities for students to discuss their experiences with peers
Resilience, Growth, & Change	"Recognizing strengths and resilience and providing feedback to help each other grow and change." (Carello)	Model resilience; acknowledge trauma before moving to writing concerns; respond to writing as a coach rather than as a judge; emphasize revision as a strategy for growth; demystify growth (sometimes it feels uncomfortable); create learning experiences that are relevant and meaningful; promote lifelong learning and transferability
Joy	Cultivating positive emotions such as joy supports wellness and motivates learning	Incorporate strategic levity; model and invite meditation or grounding exercises; model and invite gratitude practices; allow students to see your excitement or passion; create assignments that you enjoy evaluating; build active rest into the course schedule; seek out colleagues to connect with

[11] Based on Janice Carello's chart "Examples of Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning in College Classrooms," January 2022, https://traumainformedteachingblog.files.wordpress.com/2023/02/examples-of-titl-in-college-classrooms-1.2022-color.pdf (Also informed by Fallot and Harris, 2009 and SAMHSA, 2014).

Conclusion

I acknowledge that the narrators are self-selecting and seemed excited to participate in the study because they found it valuable to write about their trauma, and all but two narrators were my own formers students. What about those students who may have regretted writing about trauma? How might the interviews change if a researcher who was not their former teacher had interviewed them? I also intended my study narrators to respond to my interpretations of their quotes and read at least my final chapter. As far as I know, only two read my final chapter: Alice responded with a brief email saying that she loved the final chapter, and another narrator responded to the survey I provided, which again was mostly positive. I would have liked to do a follow-up interview with all the narrators to get more critical responses and continue collaborating with them. However, almost two years have passed since the initial interviews. I'm at a different institution, and the narrators have either graduated or have transferred to universities. The window of opportunity has passed.

Yet, I also have to acknowledge that this study was full of kairotic surprises. I felt lucky to connect with ten narrators who were willing to talk with me about their experiences so candidly. The logistics for these interviews also fell into place at the right time. After my committee members expressed concern about how the interviews might impact the narrators' mental health, I wasn't sure how I was going to be able to do the study in an ethical and caring way. However, shortly after reaching out to the NSCC Resource Manager, April Robinson, for her suggestions, I had an unexpected answer: April, who had expertise in trauma-informed learning environments, volunteered to help me. Doing all our interviews in 2022 on Zoom -- a kairotic development due to the pandemic -- I was able to schedule an optional Zoom session with April for all the narrators after they met with me. What could have been a logistical

nightmare became a supportive collaboration with a colleague who positively impacted my research as well as my teaching.

I am indebted to my narrators' significant contributions to better understanding trauma-informed teaching through a student lens. Their interviews highlight the possibility of the first essay in first-semester composition as the right time and right place for some students to write about trauma -- and their hope that their instructor and peers will respond to that offering in due measure. When we help students make composition relevant to their lives, connect them with others, and respond to their stories with care, we create the potential for joy. Joy that is not cure-all but a means to support student wellness while also sustaining ourselves. As trauma-informed writing pedagogy continues to evolve, it is my hope that more student voices will be invited into the conversation, especially in looking at writing administration and how we can continue to create more trauma-informed policies to support instructors in these efforts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

While the interviews are semi-structured, I will use the following questions as possible prompts:

- Tell me about your experience as a student in your first semester of college.
    - Why did you decide to come to college?
    - How comfortable did you feel on your campus? Who did you get to know in the first semester?
    - Were you aware of campus supports, like free counseling and campus cupboard?
    - What was your experience like in your composition class? What did you write?
- Tell me about your experience writing about a traumatic experience for an essay.
    - What experience did you write about?
    - What made you decide to write about it?
    - What was it like to write about the experience? Can you tell me about your writing process and what it felt like?
    - Did you share your essay with classmates? How did they respond?
    - What kind of feedback did you get from your instructor? How did the feedback make you feel?
    - Did you share your paper with anyone outside of class?
    - Had you written about this experience before?
    - Did anything about the process of writing about the traumatic experience surprise you?
- How did writing about your trauma impact your identity as a student?
    - Did writing about this trauma affect your confidence as a writer?

- How did participating in peer review affect your confidence as a reader? As a writer?
- Is there anything you would change about the writing experience?
- If you could give advice to peers who serve as readers for a traumatic narrative, what advice would you give them?
- Did writing about this trauma make you feel differently about sharing that traumatic experience?
- What suggestions would you give to instructors who may receive a paper about a traumatic experience?
- Do you feel there were any resources on campus that helped you? What other resources do you wish were available to students?

APPENDIX B: Narrator Recruitment Email

IRB Approval #22-2071 7vi on 12/20/2021

Subject line(s) for email recruitment:

RE: Writing about Trauma: recruitment survey

Body of the script/email:

Dear student,

Heidi Blaisdell, Associate Professor of English, is recruiting students to participate in a study on writing about trauma in ENGL 1010 (Composition I). She is conducting interviews to explore the student experience of writing about trauma for her dissertation to complete her PhD.

Study Description & Purpose – For this study, 8-10 NSCC students will be interviewed about their experience writing about a trauma for ENGL 1010. The main audience for this research will be English faculty at Middle Tennessee State University and at Nashville State Community College. To protect participants' identity, student names will be changed. This research will be used to help faculty support future students who write about trauma. The interviews will be audio and video recorded to capture the participant responses. The recordings will be destroyed once the responses have been transcribed.

IRB Details:

- *Protocol Title:* The Opportune Process(ing): Kairotic Trauma-Informed Writing Pedagogy for the Two-Year College
- *Primary Investigator:* Heidi Blaisdell
- *PI Department & College:* English, MTSU and Nashville State Community College

- *Faculty Advisor* **(if PI is a student)**: Dr. Erica Cirillo-McCarthy
- **Protocol ID:** 22-2071 7vi **Approval Date:** 12/20/2021 **Expiration Date:** 12/31/2024

Target Participant Pool – former ENGL 1010 students who wrote about trauma for a graded essay

Risks & Discomforts – Participants may experience discomfort talking about a traumatic experience. Every effort will be made to make participants feel as safe as possible. Participants can decide when they need a break or if they need to exit the study.

Benefits – There are no direct benefits to you. However, all participants will receive a document with a list of campus, community, and other mental health resources. Their participation in this study gives them a platform to share their stories and contribute to a pedagogical conversation which directly affects them and other students. Through their participation, they help other students like them.

Additional Information – According to SAMSHA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), "Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being." If you wrote about a traumatic experience for an ENGL 1010 (Composition I) essay, you are a candidate for this research. Participants will be invited to complete two interviews (no more than one hour each) to discuss their experience writing about trauma in an ENGL 1010 class. If you are interested in participating in this study or in learning more about it, please reply to this email with your name and contact information. Thank you!

Compensation – There is no compensation.

Contact Information – Heidi Blaisdell heidi.blaisdell@nscc.edu, 740-547-8000. .

Please enter the survey by clicking the link in the bottom of the email. You will be given a chance to read the entire informed consent to assist you make a final determination.

Yours Sincerely,

Heidi Blaisdell