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A Hermeneutic Composition Pedagogy: The Student as Self, Citizen, and Writer in Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur

Gregory Haley

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**A Hermeneutic Composition Pedagogy:
The Student as Self, Citizen, and Writer in
Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur**

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved wife, Tricia Haley, and to my mother, Catherine Haley Duncan. Your support, love, and faith in me have fueled this journey, and I will be forever grateful. This is also dedicated to the many friends who cheered me on in the process and to my Brushwood family, who always provide the much needed energy to carry me through each year. Thank you all.

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Finally, a very special thanks to my late professor and mentor Dr. Hector Torres. I miss our basketball games and Friday afternoon beers, my friend.

**A HERMENEUTIC COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY:
THE STUDENT AS SELF, CITIZEN, AND WRITER IN
DEWEY, ARENDT, AND RICOUER**

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is primarily concerned with describing a hermeneutic theory of composition pedagogy for the purpose of developing socially engaged, self-reflective, and critically conscious citizens of a democracy. This work examines the intersection of higher education and civic responsibility that has been the foundational motive of academics since the first schools were opened by Isocrates and Plato. The question now, as it has been since the days of Plato, is how to educate new citizens to become informed, engaged critics of their environments for the purpose of maintaining a healthy self governance and preserving the democratic ideals of equality, justice, and freedom.

The foundational theorists for this work are John Dewey, Hannah Arendt, and Paul Ricoeur. Their hermeneutic understanding of human learning development and motivation towards action are crucial for understanding how to help students become self-reflective, socially engaged members of a free society. While each of these theorists and their views on educational pedagogies have been studied in depth, there has not been a study that examines the common heuristic of these three philosophers and the implications of a combined theory of hermeneutics for composition pedagogy.

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"To teach students to read, to comprehend, and to contemplate what has been read; to instill a desire to educate themselves further and use that education to improve the lives of those around them is the ultimate goal and humble task of those who call themselves teacher." -- Curtis Haley, Texas educator, principle, and activist.

Chapter 1: Critical Democracy

Introduction

This dissertation intends to present a hermeneutic pedagogy of composition for first-year writing students using the philosophies of John Dewey, Hannah Arendt, and Paul Ricoeur to guide its development. The goal of this study is to demonstrate how effective, progressive writing programs that embrace students' multicultural and multisocial experiences in the development of critically conscious, democratically engaged discourse can help students achieve success both in the modern academy and in their communities beyond the academy as well. The key difference between the idea of a "hermeneutic" pedagogy and the traditional rhetorical approach is one of perspective. Where traditional rhetorical approaches focus on structure, content, and delivery of information to students, a hermeneutic approach is more concerned with the experiences, opinions, and comprehension on the part of the students themselves. This is not to argue that rhetoric has no place in composition pedagogy; on the contrary, rhetoric is the primary mechanism by which teachers convey new information. Nevertheless, rhetoric is only half of the process of educating students. How those students comprehend and engage in the classroom based on that rhetoric is the hermeneutic counterpart to rhetoric, and this dissertation intends to focus primarily on that half of the equation.

The overall goal of a hermeneutic pedagogy is to help students develop the understanding and critical thinking skills necessary for functional democratic engagement in their immediate communities and in society as a whole while still gaining the writing skills composition programs are intended to develop. That's the exigence for a hermeneutic pedagogy of composition, grounded firmly in current Rhetoric and Composition theory and building on the work of other scholars in the field focused on issues of civic literacy, community engagement, and writing across communities. Learning to see knowledge making as a discursive, renewable, and engaged process rather than a deliverable commodity is the key to improving student success in the composition classroom, across the academy, and in their lives beyond the academy too.

The motivation for this work comes from an experience I had in the fall of 2010, while teaching a class at the University of New Mexico on *The Rhetoric of Fear*. I was discussing the changes to American democracy and personal freedoms wrought by the political reaction to the September 11 attacks. Shortly after the attacks, as part of the federal government's proposed new anti-terrorism policies, the Bush Administration attempted to initiate a program called TIPS, which would have effectively deputized millions of civilians – delivery truck drivers, utility and cable-TV company employees, postal employees, mass-transit employees, etc. – to report “suspicious activity” in and around homes they visited in the course of their work. Considering how much Americans value personal privacy and being concerned for the safety of the men and women in these jobs, the postal workers and other government employees logically rejected this idea and, as a group, managed to keep it from becoming law. At the time, it was one of the few instances of effective public organization and public political impact against what

many saw as the erosion of our civil liberties. When I asked my students if any of them remembered the public criticism of the *Patriot Act* when it was passed, one student raised her hand and said, “Professor, I was only nine.”

That sudden moment of realization that the class before me had no real understanding of a world before September 11, 2001, forever changed my perception of writing students in the 21st Century. For students today, in their experiences and understanding of their world, the style of zero-sum, partisan, political rhetoric and ideology politics of the first part of this century is the way our democracy has always been. It’s all they know. Thus, when we as educators talk about helping our students understand and engage in critical, reasoned discourse in their writing, we are starting with an expectation of understanding that the majority of our audience simply doesn't have. We talk about returning to a time of reasoned political discourse while our students can only imagine it as something new that must be created and shaped for their own future needs, and those are two very different things.

This dilemma of miscommunication and misunderstanding between teachers and their students has been examined by scholars for generations. I.A. Richards, for example, discusses the “proper meaning superstition” and “interanimation” of language in his canonical text *The Meaning of Meaning*, and Jurgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action examines the “lifeworld” of the individual vs. the external viewpoint of the “system” (Richards; Habermas). From a purely hermeneutic perspective, however, Kenneth Burke’s examination of *terministic screens* are most applicable for understanding the how individual student phenomenologies affect their comprehension of classroom discussions (Burke). Terministic screens are the mechanisms by which we

filter out information that our cultural and personal experiences don't allow us to comprehend. The "terministic" descriptor introduced by Burke, however, has always seemed to me too rhetorically focused, since it suggests these screens can't be eliminated or altered. They can be. I would venture to argue that as composition educators, that's precisely what our job actually is. A more accurate descriptor for these screens perhaps is the word "cultural," since they are basically conditioned results formed by previous cultural experiences.

These *cultural screens* are present in every person regardless of education or background. They represent perhaps the greatest impediment to educational success, and they heavily restrict teachers' abilities to connect effectively with their students. What's worse, the nature of cultural screens makes them extremely difficult to overcome. Thus, our educational systems in the academy and elsewhere have either been ignorant of or ignored this important concept and sought to bridge the cultural divide between teachers and students by placing the burden primarily upon the students to participate in and accept the cultural expectations of the establishment. But this raises an important question that a hermeneutic pedagogy of composition hopes to address: If engaging cultural screens is too challenging for the institution, how are we to expect our students to achieve the feat?

The evidence is apparent that too many of our students fail at this task regardless of their potential or their innate intelligence and thus never complete their education. A recent study by the Educational Trust Foundation shows that only 54% of students who enroll in American colleges complete their coursework; and while the reasons for this vary, it is a dismally low rate (Marklein). For teachers of composition, as well as the

academy as a whole, this low success rate represents a gross disservice to our students, our ideals of economic and social equality, and our democracy.

George Kuh and other scholars at Indiana University have been attempting to address this disconnect between students and the academy through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This wide-ranging project attempts to measure student engagement in educationally purposeful activities that are more likely factors in long-term student success than traditional measurements of university resources, reputation, student grades, etc. What Kuh and his colleagues have discovered through this ambitious effort supports many of the arguments developed in this dissertation and particularly the potential benefits outlined herein regarding a hermeneutic pedagogical system, where hermeneutic pedagogy is defined as one focusing on student learning processes, comprehension, motivations, and critical consciousness.

Though this dissertation is particularly focused on the composition classroom while the NSSE measures broader effects across all disciplines, the findings of Kuh, et al. support one of the primary propositions of a hermeneutic pedagogy that social engagement in the classroom “is positively related to academic outcomes as represented by first-year student grades and by persistence between the first and second year of college” (Kuh 555). Furthermore, exposure to the kinds of purposeful engagement practices such as classroom discussion, learning communities, self-reflection, interpretive reading, service-learning courses, and other forms of discourse skill development discussed in this dissertation has a “compensatory effect on first year grades” for all students with effects that “are even greater for lower ability students and students of color” (Kuh 555).

Pedagogies designed to teach critical consciousness and composition to new students based on hermeneutic underpinnings are supported by NSSE research that concludes that outcomes should be focused on the backgrounds and needs of the students rather than supporting or defending systems that are convenient for the institution. The composition classroom, as a foundational course in virtually all American universities, offers an ideal opportunity to implement these kinds of student engagement activities through a hermeneutic pedagogy of writing.

Hermeneutics, is after all, named for the Greek God Hermes, the god of writers and communication. It's value, however, runs deeper than simple mythology. Plato referenced hermeneutic understanding as a contrast to *sophia* and the practice of *philosophia*. Where *sophia* is knowledge of the basic truth about an utterance or idea (wisdom), hermeneutics is the revelation of knowledge and the process of interpretation necessary for knowledge development.

As a general philosophy, hermeneutics has largely been relegated to teleological studies among theologians due to its focus on interpretation and its application for interpreting scripture. St. Augustine, for example, adopted hermeneutics for the Catholic Church in his argument that the "inner word" of God that one feels has more validity than the "outer word" of the bible that one interprets. In a more traditional philosophical sense, hermeneutic thought was partially advanced during the renaissance by Peter Ramus and Rene Descartes for the development of systems of inquiry from individual perspectives. However, the greatest development of hermeneutic philosophy occurred during the Enlightenment with John Locke's theory of the *tabula rasa* and Immanuel Kant's *a priori* epistemology. The field of hermeneutic theory as it is explored today began in the late

18th and early 19th centuries when philosophers began trying to understand the mechanisms that existed between our *a priori* knowledge and our understanding of the world around us. These explorations would have the strongest support in Germany, of which Kant was a native, and were developed by Schleiermacher, Hegel, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer over the next two centuries. In fact, it can be argued that all modern hermeneutical theory is fundamentally German with further refinement by French philosophers Paul Ricoeur and Jaques Derrida in the mid-20th century, and, more recently, with new critical thought by theorists like John Dewey (American pragmatism), Hannah Arendt, and Jurgen Habermas.

What all of these theorists are focused on, from John Locke forward to Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur, is understanding how the world is revealed to and comprehended by the human mind. Unlike *epistemic rhetoric* as it was defined by Robert L. Scott that is focused on the end relationship between rhetoric and knowledge, hermeneutics is more concerned with the actual process of acquisition of knowledge and how one interprets and understands it than it is with the final result of that process (Scott). This is important for teachers of writing to understand, because ultimately, that is what writing does. It actively unfolds and reveals the world to an audience through its author's eyes and is itself an interpretive act that uses the signs, symbols, and language constructed for the purpose of interpreting the world around us. Writing is the conduit of meaning-making, and as teachers of writing, we should have a better understanding of how meaning-making occurs through the process of interpretation if we expect to instill the skills of critical thinking in our students and help them find success across the academic environment.

The Modern Academy and the Composition Classroom

As educators, we are tasked with communicating and transferring knowledge and critical thinking skills to our students, and as all rhetoricians know, understanding the motivations and expectations of our audience is key to achieving those goals. The problem, however, in today's world of constant technological development and change, is that our audience is increasingly pluralistic and adaptive, and those two factors are accelerating at an extraordinary rate. The tools we use as teachers of writing are often the tools we learned with, and a century ago the tools of teachers were the exact same tools used by students – books and pens. Today, the tools we know and use as teachers for accessing, processing, and disseminating knowledge are constantly being altered and advanced in ways that give our students a completely different set of tools for those same purposes every few years.

For example, when I started my graduate work in 2005 and taught my first core writing class, YouTube didn't exist, but by 2009 it had become a ubiquitous form of media dissemination. When I completed my Masters degree and started work on my Ph.D. in 2007, there were no smartphones, but as I complete my dissertation in 2013, virtually all of my students carry cell phones capable of accessing the Internet and transmitting text, voice, and video communication instantly. In just eight semesters, the methods my students used to gather and process new information and knowledge changed dramatically, and that rate of change is not slowing down.

How are we expected to educate and train effective writing teachers in specific, research-based pedagogical systems when the processes and tools of knowledge-making that those pedagogies depend on become obsolete in the time between starting a graduate

program and completing it? As academics and teachers alike, we have avoided considering the possibility that we simply can no longer use old paradigms to educate an educator who will likely be less effective at the end of her graduate program than new writing students require. The course of pedagogical development over the past 30 years has tried to accommodate these increasingly diverse, technologically advanced, commercially-focused college students through increasingly adaptive pedagogies that try to encompass as much of our audiences' backgrounds, identities, and needs as possible.

These multimodal pedagogies take advantage of new media systems in developing student writing and are often effective at capturing new ways in which students conceptualize writing through the adoption of new media systems including video, wikis, texts, websites, and other forms of digital media (Ball, Hawasher, Horner, Katz, C. Selfe). While these are useful composition pedagogies for students in the digital age, they are still universally constructed systems that rely on the understanding and adoption of forms and parameters controlled almost exclusively by the teachers and administrators who are communicating to a rapidly evolving, technologically savvy audience with different experiences and expectations of the world than we have ever imagined.

Thomas Kent was among the first to challenge the idea of universal pedagogies of composition in *Paralogic Hermeneutics* by arguing that any such system, "presupposes that discourse production can be reduced to a process that represents, duplicates, or models" existing structures (Kent 299). Heavily influenced by the work of Donald Davidson and Mikhail Bakhtin, Kent presents two issues working against the idea of a universal pedagogy in his critique. The first issue is that for students of the modern age,

there are no existing structures of discourse production that effectively navigate modern media systems whose models are usually focused on narrowly defined target audiences with similar points of view. Any discussion of an ideal discourse system automatically limits such a system in the establishment of its parameters. While such systems may have value for focused communities, there is no “system” capable of full transcultural discourse.

The second issue we are facing in this increasingly disparate cultural environment is that existing pedagogical structures, in American university environments, are built mostly on a foundation of white Protestant, Eurocentric philosophies developed in large part to prepare middle-class workers to support an industrial infrastructure. Paolo Freire frames this pedagogical approach in terms of banking, wherein teachers serve as depositors into students who are vessels of receiving institutionalized knowledge as well as expected cultural outcomes (Freire). Regardless that higher education has been successful for the past century at training workers, engineers, scientists, and business leaders in support of an industrial society does not mitigate the need for those support groups to also be engaged in the self-governance envisioned by our society’s framers. On the contrary, the need for critical consciousness may be even greater for these specialized groups to overcome dominant but ineffective paradigms in education, economic, and cultural consciousness that limit the development of a more egalitarian society.

We can see that the trend for the past few decades, and moving forward into the 21st century, is that all writing programs, regardless of pedagogical focus, are faced with an increasingly culturally divergent student population with drastically different perceptions of educational value, discourse, economics, science, politics, and even

narrative frames. Our students don't just see different opportunities for themselves or have differing expectations about the role higher education should play in their lives, though they have those as well, rather, our students today perceive the entire world through highly individualized, differing lenses of reality – lenses they are now shaping for themselves through an increasingly divergent, and increasingly profligate, culture of instant media.

As teachers of writing, the cognition gap that exists between our own understanding of the world around us and our students' understanding of that same world has never been greater. Even for relatively young graduate students teaching core writing classes for the first time, their students who are more than five years different in age increasingly have different concepts of educational purpose, knowledge, and values than their teachers, and this creates a significant challenge for new teaching assistants, as well as established teachers of composition, in connecting to and communicating with these students. This cognition gap forms a kind of *perceptual classroom dissonance* between teachers and students that is growing faster with the increasingly rapid rate of technological development and the rise of global markets. Furthermore, this dissonance is exacerbated by the university community's own semantic incongruities regarding "critical thought" and "public discourse" that are occurring as a result of what Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, and Carducci call the "conservative modernization" of higher education:

Conceptually, conservative modernization signifies a hegemonic bloc of social forces that collude to effect conservative changes in education. Effectively, this hegemonic bloc forms a movement to sustain the

dominant power structure and exacerbate social inequalities, under the guise of rhetoric that espouses “freedom” and purports the values of meritocracy. Temporarily, conservative modernization represents a contemporary condition of education wherein conservative agendas rule and progressive agendas are illegitimate (Gildersleeve 88).

This critique of the academy’s shift toward commercial and corporate interests and the dangers it presents to democratic rule has been echoed by scholars from across the disciplines including distinguished professors and educational theorists such as Michael Apple, Gloria Ladsen-Billings, Philip Altbach, and Nancy Cantor among others. This devaluing of public interests in favor of private interests is manifested in a modern ideological agenda that views “anything that is public as ‘bad’ and anything that is private as ‘good.’ And anyone that works in these public institutions must be seen as inefficient and in need of the sobering facts of competition so they work longer and harder” (Apple 15).

This devaluation of the public sector and the perceptual dissonance that has developed between educators and their students regarding the purpose and value of higher education has, according to Linda Adler-Kassner, placed pressure on Rhetoric and Composition programs to produce liberal arts-like skills such as writing, communication, and critical thinking focused primarily on career readiness, with the ultimate purpose of writing education being economic competition for employment (*Companies*). This undermines the very nature of liberal education and the value of developing critically conscious citizens of a democracy. As Adler-Kassner argues, “conceptualizing writing courses only as service, erases the content of our discipline” (*Ethic of Service* 1).

Jeanne Marie Rose, Bruce Horner, Lynn Bloom and other composition scholars have also begun addressing the commoditization of writing programs toward production oriented, career-focused students motivated by “capitalist constructions of time” (Rose 45). As commercial models of production have increasingly encroached upon public interests like government and education, profit-oriented managed systems like cost-efficiency, streamlined manufacturing, and customer service are pushing teachers of writing to provide course instruction that offers maximum return on investment with minimal expenditures of time and effort. “As this market logic infuses pedagogical relationships and shapes classroom community, writing pedagogy’s commitment to process, revision, and collaboration becomes particularly vulnerable” (Rose 46).

While recognizing the dangers this change in academic purpose represents to educational goals is both necessary and valiant, expecting the academy to reverse course or return to some imagined ideal of liberal education is highly improbable considering the nature of entrenched interests and the potential for increased commercialization of education in the near future. As composition scholars have worked to address these changes in the culture of the academy over the past thirty years, the evolution of pedagogical changes moved from Current-Traditional Rhetoric when a growing concern about perceived failures in literacy skills among students developed into the social turn (Berlin; Bizell; Faigley) that connected student literacy directly to issues of democracy (Bizell).

This further developed into pedagogies of composition that embraced political action as a mechanism for learning about writing, and composition practices as a mechanism for instigating political change (Crisco; Lazare; Trimbur). From this turn

grew a rich culture of composition pedagogy that embraced community literacy as a public act of writing and taking social action (Flowers; Harris; Long; Porter). Migrating the practice of composition from the classroom to the community through the promotion of social action, however, involved an examination of the power structures present within the academy and the development of pedagogies to overcome issues such as ‘banking models’ (Freire), ‘inventing the university’ (Bartholomae), intimidating dialogic discourses of the academy (Elbow), and entrenched racist power structures (Ellsworth).

This transformative period of writing pedagogy emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as the Writing Across Curriculum (WAC) initiative that sought to bridge the academic discourses necessary for student success with these new models of student-centered, social activist composition systems (Bazerman et al.; McLeod; Russell). Modeled on British cross curricular programs of the 1970s, WAC programs flourished in the 1990s, and today more than three-fourths of American universities either have some form of WAC initiative in place or plan to start them (Thaiss). While WAC has been effective for promoting the value of writing development across the disciplines, there are drawbacks to it as well. WAC tends to privilege academic discourse over unique socio-linguistic identities (Russell) and focuses more on achieving cross discipline expectations of product than developing critically conscious citizens capable of examining their world (Kells, Villeneuve). A more recent initiative started at the University of New Mexico that extends WAC programs from the curriculum to the broader communities, however, shows promise for addressing these problems (Kells).

All of these transformations over the past 30 years have been informed and supported by scholars connecting the social turn and student-centered pedagogies to

hermeneutic principles (Grondin, Kent, Crusius, Mailloux). Bringing hermeneutic theories into student-centered pedagogies helped the field better understand student motivations to write, the role of narrative in cultural and socio-linguistic development, and the connections between interpretation and composition practices (Phelps, Brauer). What work has been done connecting hermeneutics to composition, however, has mostly demonstrated the viability of hermeneutics for composition studies but otherwise fail to articulate a practical implementation (Brauer). That is the gap in the literature that this dissertation hopes to fill, providing both a theoretical underpinning of a hermeneutic pedagogy as well as a pragmatic application of rhetoric, what I term *applied rhetorics*, focused on the process of acquisition rather than the end product of that process.

A hermeneutic pedagogy such as the one introduced here is not the proverbial ‘magic bullet’ of composition studies, nor is it meant promote a sea-change in composition practices within the academy. Rather, its purpose is merely to present an idea, a new way of thinking about our existing composition practices informed by hermeneutic theory and focused on improving student outcomes both as writers within the modern academy and as critically conscious citizens of a changing democracy.

Globalization and New Composition Pedagogies

There is a common meme that increased access to global communication and globalization in general is homogenizing cultures around the globe. The argument suggests that as people from disparate cultural experiences gain access to increasingly common media systems and instant knowledge databases, their views, understanding, and expectations of the world will become more similar than separate. Indeed, Paul Collier, an economist at Oxford, has shown evidence of this homogenization in the growth of

consumerism and the global commoditization of natural resources (Collier). Robert Phillipson introduced us to the idea of Linguistic Imperialism in the early 90s, and we can certainly track the expansion and impact of English language on existing cultures collectively (Phillipson). While a holistic view of cultural change and homogenization is certainly valid, we are reminded in Manuel Castell's work that this globalization and connectivity is simultaneously creating an ever-shifting personal/cultural landscape (Castells). Additionally, in the field of linguistic studies, Bruce Horner, John Trimbur, and others have extensively examined the effects of language homogenization and academic expectations of culture and academy on the native Englishes and native languages of students that often leads to class and cultural hierarchies (Horner, Lu, Royster, Trimbur). The end result is not a more cohesive, homogenized cultural collective of students; rather, the end result is an increasingly divergent set of cultural screens among our students that makes a common pedagogical approach to knowledge-making decreasingly likely to succeed.

So then, where do we begin?

If the answers to the questions at hand keep leading us to the same ineffective conclusions, then it is always best to return to the questions we have traditionally asked ourselves as educators:

1. How do we more effectively apply limited resources to overcome and/or bridge gaps in student learning and cultural differences in pursuit of common pedagogical goals?

2. What are the common denominators in student educational experiences that we can draw upon to overcome these cultural differences in our approach to normative, socially-based writing schemes?

For the graduate students and professors at the University of New Mexico who have found success in the Writing Across Communities program, the most effective answer to these questions has been to ask different questions:

1. How do we take advantage of (rather than overcome) gaps in student learning and cultural differences to achieve common outcomes in critical thinking about philosophies of social justice, equality, and civic responsibility?
2. What are the unique differences (rather than common denominators) in student educational experiences that we can draw upon to enhance and validate (rather than overcome) student phenomenologies in our approach to transcultural (rather than normative) modalities of student discourse and writing?

If we begin to view the differences in our student experiences as the best possible tool for the development of critical thinking about our democracy and issues of social justice and civic responsibility while simultaneously validating those differences as fundamentally equal, then a concomitant intersection of cultural acceptance and values validation occurs and becomes an inspirational driver of social justice and educational equality rather than a set of obstacles to overcome.

The exigence for UNM's Writing Across the Communities program is driven in part by the excellent research and work of Juan Guerra on *transcultural repositioning* (Guerra) and the idea that members of any given community, whether teacher, student, or other, are capable of intuitively moving back and forth among social classes, cultural forms and expectations, and even languages and dialects when the members of that community accept their own authority and capacity for self-regulating such movement. One change to existing educational structure supported by this work and discussed herein is how the role of teacher in this flexible space necessarily becomes that of facilitator and guide rather than that of authority or defender of Freire's "banking-model" of education.

In Donald Davidson's 'Three Varieties of Knowledge,' he develops the metaphor of triangulation into the idea of a three-way conceptual interdependence between knowledge of oneself, knowledge of others, and knowledge of the world that in essence forms a common, 'objective' world from an interdependent set of concepts, no one of which is possible in the absence of the others (Davidson). If we accept this notion of triangulation as a method set of pragmatism, then we cannot expect an increasingly pluralistic student population to come together in support of either narrow academic goals or overarching world community goals of peace, prosperity, justice, and economic equality without an understanding of the hermeneutic processes that take place in the development of critically conscious democratic citizens.

Imaginative experience has the power, through individual action, to shape our world as we live and understand it since we are affected both by a past that is not of our own making and by the perceived future that our individual phenomenological experiences suggest will happen. Therefore, it takes direct personal initiative to make

new history and actively affect our perceived realities while constantly redefining ourselves in the process, and that is what a hermeneutic pedagogy of composition is designed to provide.

It is our task as composition teachers to embrace these individual phenomenological experiences among our students and help them, in turn, develop a new idea of democratic social engagement that is reliant upon them defining themselves and their roles in their communities based both on personal phenomenologies and a desire to understand the “otherness” of those with whom they interact. The outcomes we measure among these students becomes less about their ability to craft normative, argumentative essays to fit a specific academic structure, and more about their ability to understand and effectively communicate how their unique cultural experiences interact with, and are informed by, the experiences of others.

The key to this understanding can be found in Paul Ricoeur’s work in hermeneutics and phenomenology, and specifically his arguments against Hegelian absolutism in favor of a phenomenology of the mind. Ricoeur argues in *The Symbolism of Evil* that the subject does not know itself implicitly but only as a product of the mind interpreting signs placed in the memory and in the imagination by tradition, stories, literature, cultural experiences, etc. (*The Symbolism of Evil*). If this is the case, then the concept of individuality is always an interpreted entity in constant need of new stimulus for the purpose of further defining, or even consciously altering, that identity. This concept supports both Hannah Arendt’s arguments for tradition and remembrances as guiding principles in educational philosophy (*Between Past and Future*) and John Dewey’s calls for an active learning system (*Democracy and Education*).

One of our greatest hurdles to achieving this self-reflective space in these challenging times, is that the relationship between students, the American public at large, and the academy is strained. A number of factors account for this, including political and financial ones, but there is an increasing feeling among students and the broader community that American universities are no longer living up to their promise as institutions that develop critically conscious, innovative thinkers who drive our national economic and social agenda. In addition, the academic freedoms offered to researchers and scientists by the academy are increasingly under attack by politicians and college administrations while the financial stagnation of the American middle class since the late 1970s has moved the institution increasingly out of reach for many.

This is exacerbated by ongoing pressure from the business community to produce only technically skilled workers while undermining the Academy's role in producing liberally educated thinkers for the good of society. Recent attempts in Texas, for example, to reconfigure the University system in a way that treats all students as "customers," and sets professor benefits and pay in relation to how much "profit" they generate for the university system would have effectively eliminated the academy's role as a place for liberal education and the pursuit of new knowledge (Dean).

At the same time, as Brian Huot identifies in *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment*, writing teachers are expected to follow their departments' pedagogical systems and produce assessment-ready student-generated results tied to outcomes that are institution – rather than student – focused for the purpose of "maintain[ing] an efficient and accountable educational bureaucracy" (Huot 1). Both constituencies have different needs that individual teachers struggle to meet. Students don't care about the assessment

problems of a department or institution that must constantly fight for scarce funding and needs those assessments to satisfy administrators and politicians. Many students are, logically, self-concerned by nature; focused on passing tests, completing assignments, and satisfying the expectations of individual teachers in hopes of getting good grades and advancing through the system. But, as we've discussed, students struggle to overcome their own cultural screens and attempt to embrace a linguistic style that privileges academic and cultural expectations of "proper" language at the expense of their own in hopes of achieving these goals. When some students fail at these tasks, which are too often placed entirely upon them with little help or understanding from the institution, they are left behind and sometimes forced out of the system altogether, and the statistics clearly support this (Marklein).

Institutions, as well as the professors and graduate students tasked with teaching writing, universally desire and work to help as many students as possible find success in the academy, but they are ultimately held accountable not by those students, but by the governing bodies of various sorts that dictate pedagogy, budgets, staff sizes, resources, and schedules. Virtually all existing measurements of institutional success are instruments designed either by those institutions, or by the governing bodies of those institutions, or both. The dirty secret of our current educational system, as Bob Broad describes in *What We Really Value*, is that since these instruments are designed by groups with different cultural screens and expectations than the students have themselves, they rarely measure anything of value to the actual students in the academy (Broad). They only measure items of value to the people designing the assessments.

This dissertation attempts to address this dichotomy by taking a hard look at how we understand both our students and the role the academy plays in their lives by helping them engage in functional democratic communities in which they will live and work. But rather than generate yet another pedagogical “system” for writing programs to either adopt or ignore, this work builds on existing structures already in place for many programs and explains how students writing across communities, as described by Michelle Hall Kells and supported by the work of Juan Guerra, Victor Villeneuve, and many others, learn to embrace the discursive processes necessary for what Stanley Fish calls “Critical Self-Consciousness” (*Critical Self-Consciousness, Or Can We Know What We're Doing?*).

This dissertation also explores both the historical precedent as well as the future necessity that writing programs become the place where new university students learn to engage in modern democracy as described nearly a century ago by John Dewey in *Education and Democracy*: “Democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (*Democracy and Education*).

It is in this intersection of education and democracy that the academy is most relevant to society outside the ivory towers. The academy, after all, was born primarily to protect and preserve the democracy of Greece by educating young men to be good citizens of the state and to teach them how the proper applications of reason and rhetoric are best suited for this purpose. When the new American democratic republic was founded, the framers reaffirmed this intersection as a primary role of higher education. Benjamin Rush, one of the founding fathers and signers of the Declaration of

Independence saw higher education as the best possible vehicle for preserving the ideals of the new American Democratic Republic. In “Thoughts Upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic,” Rush argued that it would be a mistake to train new citizens in such a way that they would simply reinforce existing institutions. Rather, Rush envisioned democracy as a progressive, constantly modifiable institution in which students are “taught that there can be no durable liberty in a republic and that government, like all other sciences, is of a progressive nature” (Rush 58). He also envisioned a hermeneutic, student-centered approach to education in which curricula would establish a direct link between higher education and the practical needs of their everyday lives. Under this philosophy, students would become “Republican Machines,” that would be grounded in democratic principles and, at the same time, be capable of modifying the instruments of society necessary for progress toward greater freedom. Likewise, Thomas Jefferson, who founded the first public university in the United States, saw higher education as the best vehicle,

to form the statesmen, legislators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend; [and] to expound the principles and structure of government, the laws which regulate the intercourse of nations, those formed municipally for our own government, and a sound spirit of legislation, which, banishing all arbitrary and unnecessary restraint on individual action, shall leave us free to do whatever does not violate the equal rights of another (Jefferson 129).

Clearly, there is an intersection of education and civic responsibility that has been the foundational motive of academics since the first schools were opened by Isocrates and Plato. The question now, as it has been since the days of Plato, is how to educate citizens of a Democratic society to become informed, engaged critics of their environments for the purpose of maintaining a healthy self governance. From the earliest schools through the dark ages, this task was accomplished through the study of rhetoric as the primary discipline of higher education. Following the Enlightenment, universities began subdividing their studies between physical sciences and philosophy, but students were still expected to study the classics in Greek and Latin and develop their skills in rhetoric.

Not until after the Morrill Land Grant acts of 1862 and 1890 did higher education begin to turn away from focusing on classical rhetoric and the development of citizen leaders and begin focusing more directly on the development of citizens capable of supporting the rising industrial revolution. Our new public colleges and universities began focusing almost exclusively on the development of skilled professionals while reducing the importance of engaged citizenship, rhetoric, and critical thinking based in Aristotelian logic.

Hannah Arendt, John Dewey, Howard Zinn, and other liberal education scholars of the past century, have pointed out this loss of society-oriented education in favor of worker specialization:

Education, as distinguished from learning, must have a predictable end...

The professional training in universities or technical schools, though it always has something to do with education, is nevertheless in itself a kind

of specialization. It no longer aims to introduce the young person to the world as a whole, but rather to a particular, limited segment of it (*Between Past and Future* 196).

Thus, it becomes clear that critical consciousness among citizens and civic engagement share a mutually codependent relationship. It can be effectively argued that from Antiquity to modern society, education has and should play a pivotal role in the development of an engaged citizenry. Further, it can be established historically through the rise of public higher education and the associated development of composition pedagogies that American public higher-education systems have struggled to accomplish this task.

The Hermeneutic Approach

One of the goals of this dissertation is to bring a broader understanding of hermeneutics to writing instructors and other educators because of its potential as an educational process. But that is a relatively minor goal in respect to the purpose of this work overall, and that is to present a method of teaching composition grounded in the hermeneutic theories of Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur, and focused on the development of socially engaged, self-reflective, critically conscious citizens of a democracy. These three theorists, in particular, are useful for this purpose because they all were concerned with the hermeneutic development of the self, and the preservation of democracy through active discourse.

Hermeneutics, or the philosophy of interpretation as it might be described in simple terms, is an area of study that focuses on how a message or idea is interpreted by the audience rather than the rhetorical focus on how it is delivered. Though Ricoeur is the

only one of these three who actively placed himself within the hermeneutic tradition, all three were concerned with the nature of human understanding and phenomenologies of the world. Dewey's pragmatism, for example, has often been compared directly to philosophical hermeneutics in its embrace of the hermeneutic circle, in its recognition of aesthetic experience, and in its rejection of a separation between theory and practice (Bernstein, Jeannot, Vessey). Arendt's tradition in hermeneutics can be traced directly to her work, her studies, and her relationships with Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger. She has been frequently categorized as a phenomenologist, (Novak, Vasterling) and her work examining Totalitarianism and the banality of evil is uniquely hermeneutic in its exploration of human motivation and judgment.

For this dissertation, the important factors of how hermeneutics function in the development of critically engaged students will explore three fundamental elements of a hermeneutic approach to composition pedagogies. First, hermeneutics helps us see how education itself, not just writing, is a recursive process. Students have as much to teach us as we do them. For example, the rapid escalation of technology is almost always adopted by our students first, and their immediate access to knowledge today is unrivaled in the history of the world, and this is only the beginning. Our students have a capacity for coping in and comprehending the world in a way that we as their teachers are clearly struggling to understand, and our students are often the most knowledgeable sources on new technologies. Yet, in the face of this reality, we have a tendency as educators to revert almost reflexively back to our outdated, hierarchical, knowledge-ownership models of unidirectional pedagogies. Our students have as much to teach us as educators as we have to teach them, and an effective hermeneutic approach involves a constant

learning process on the part of the educator as much as the student. Real, lasting, and renewable education is recursive in nature, not linear.

Second, the role of a good educator is closer to that of peer than that of a superior. Though Hannah Arendt adeptly demonstrates why maintaining and emphasizing authority in primary and secondary educational settings is necessary, in academic writing classrooms we are engaging new adults, many of whom have no intuitive understanding of their own authority or responsibilities in their various communities. We are dealing with a population accustomed to the role of teacher as authority, even though in a university setting, these students have entered voluntarily as citizens of full and equal rights to their teachers and school administrators.

Our democracy grants voting rights to every citizen over the age of 18. That means each student in our classrooms, from the standpoint of our democratic values, is fully equal to each teacher, and we must begin to acknowledge and respect them as such. What we have are knowledge, skills, and experiences that our new adult students lack and have come to the academy in search of, yet we are too willing to adopt an authoritarian role freely offered by a student body already acculturated to such a role in a setting where that very proposition becomes an impediment to learning. Donaldo Macedo's work, in conjunction with Freire, highlights the struggles students in this situation face when they are confronted with an academic community that assumes authority where little actually exists and that fragments knowledge, denies contextual understanding, and undermines student ability to make connections between what the school is offering and their actual lived worlds (Freire and Macedo). This is also a crucial development for linguistic validation of student languages in comparison to the adopted language of the academy.

Helping students recognize how the language of the academy functions as standard without undermining or discrediting the value and validity of their own personal and shared languages is a step in equalizing the classification pressures of language differences as examined by George Lakoff, Bruce Horner, and others. A hermeneutic approach to working with these new adults, focuses on developing educators as facilitators rather than owners of knowledge. It creates a space where students can practice, explore, inquire, and engage in discussions with their peers about their knowledge and skills along with a critically engaged teacher who actively directs that space.

Third, and crucial to the value of hermeneutics as an educational philosophy, is its role in generating inspiration among student learners. When we imagine our students engaging enthusiastically in a democratic community as effective writers establishing their own authority and voice, the level to which we will be successful is entirely contingent upon our understanding of what motivates and inspires that audience. That cannot be achieved in an authoritarian setting where knowledge and understanding are controlled by the teacher and presented as treasured secrets of the academy for which the students should be grateful. Rather, teachers have a responsibility to their students to learn about and understand the world as they perceive it too, and that will continue to evolve faster with each successive semester of the new century.

While a hermeneutic approach to education offers a renewed, exciting, and different understanding of our roles and responsibilities as teachers helping composition students emerge in their new identities, as a philosophy, hermeneutics is generally poorly understood by even our most advanced educational thinkers, and most researchers and

administrators shy away from the concept due to its dense nature and the difficulty of applying an otherwise abstract concept to real-world pedagogies. The challenges of offering this somewhat opaque theory as a possible solution to an underlying weakness in our educational system are immense, primarily due to the intractability of existing structures to change of any kind, especially a change based on a concept that few people understand anyway.

What is most important for readers to embrace, however, is that a comprehensive understanding of hermeneutic philosophy is not required in any way to understand the relatively simple role it plays in addressing the cultural screens, cognition gaps, and classroom dissonance currently at play between students and teachers in the academy. New teaching strategies and existing pedagogies that embrace simple hermeneutic concepts offer a way forward for the academy that is both renewably innovative, and in my experiences developing and teaching these methods in the composition classroom, highly effective. The real advantage of this concept in the modern academy is that it takes nothing away from the work we are all already doing in teaching discourse methods and argumentation, but rather enhances it in a way that motivates us to re-imagine our roles as educators, both as educators in the classroom, and as educators of educators.

Though it requires the relatively difficult process of altering our expectations of knowledge-making systems as well as what we assess in student outcomes, it allows us to embrace and expand fundamental principles about higher education that include social justice, personal and civic responsibility, and critical discourse systems that the academy must embrace going forward if it is to remain relevant for our society and our democracy.

Incorporating a hermeneutic pedagogy in the composition classroom also carries with it the danger that such a theory might be seen as yet another post-structuralist pedagogy that is impossible to actually implement, or a modified process system that overvalues individual students' native practices, experiences, and beliefs at the expense of institutional standards and critical self-examination. While some Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) have, to varying degrees, adopted postmodern practices that focus on student experiences and narratives while downplaying the value of formal structure, mechanics, and institutional perspectives, we do our students no service by ignoring or working against established institutional biases and expectations in their development as writers.

Those biases and expectations still exist outside the confines of the writing classroom, and helping students validate their individual experiences at the expense of preparing them for academic standards in higher-level classes is not a practical solution either. We may pride ourselves on acknowledging and promoting agency without imposing our ideologies, but a failure to prepare students for understanding, engaging, and either embracing or challenging our existing ideologies is a failure of education as well. That's why the strategies I propose in a hermeneutic pedagogy are designed to achieve both student agency and the discourse skills necessary for success in the academy.

A hermeneutic pedagogy helps students learn to examine and interpret the world by interacting with it on topics of direct interest to their immediate and future social well-being; topics that we as prior generations with our own unique cultural screens cannot begin to understand or predict, and we shouldn't be trying. Thus, engaging cultural

differences in a stable, discourse-centered setting that encourages student involvement and social engagement will better prepare students for success in an increasing global society on their terms rather than ours, and we can construct a framework of learning that is both highly stable and effective as well as evolutionarily mutable to meet the needs of each new generation of students. The following chapters will provide both a hermeneutic basis in the theories of Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur for a new consideration of composition pedagogy as well as a practical outline and essential elements necessary for such a pedagogy. I will examine the student phenomenologies as learner, citizen, and writer, and then use the key findings from those studies to argue for a hermeneutic method of teaching composition to first-year writing students in the academy.

Chapter 2: John Dewey – Hermeneutics and the Student as the Learning Self

This chapter will explore John Dewey's educational philosophies and particularly the manner in which individuals discover a sense of themselves and understand their roles as members of society. Beginning with the acquisition of the mind and continuing with the role education plays in that acquisition, this chapter introduces arguments related to critical consciousness and the ability to reflect upon one's own, as well as the other's, motivations and beliefs. It examines the role society plays in this process and how engagement in the social sphere affects its development as well as what it means for democracy as a whole. Self-reflection and the capacity for critical self-examination are key elements in Dewey's hermeneutics, and how our understanding of the self affects civic engagement, the shaping of a shared culture, and the development of democratic institutions that arise from that will also be explored.

Chapter 3: Hannah Arendt – Hermeneutics and the Student as the Political Self

This chapter brings Hannah Arendt into the conversation and examines human motivations for political engagement and the roles of narrative and tradition in shaping our political selves. It will examine the cultural construct of freedom as a democratic value and discuss its role in guiding civic action. I will also present Arendt's arguments about education and its role in the development of critically conscious citizens capable of civic engagement. This includes an exploration of the distinctions between human labor, work, and action and how Arendt's concept of the *vita activa* functions in the preservation of democracy. I will then link Arendt's hermeneutic arguments to the student in the classroom and suggest how the public sphere of the composition classroom can capture her ideas and use them effectively in the development of critically conscious citizens.

Chapter 4: Paul Ricoeur – Hermeneutics and the Student as the Narrative Self

This chapter will bring into the conversation Paul Ricoeur's work on narrative and identity creation and explore how these created identities can develop into self-reflective, critically aware citizens capable of expressing their voices through writing. I will make the connection between the phenomenological experiences of the physical world and the development of the self as both *idem* and *ipse* identities. I will also examine in detail the connections between narrative, identity construction, and action that help form the basis of a hermeneutic pedagogy. These connections are affected by our concept of time and the influence of our culture, which I will explore as well. Finally, the process of interpretation in the act of narrative formation and reflexivity in identity development

will help connect Ricoeur's theories to the process of action by individuals in support of critical discourse and active democratic engagement.

Chapter 5: A Hermeneutic Pedagogy of Writing Instruction

This chapter synthesizes the arguments of Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur and argues for a functional, applied pedagogy of hermeneutic composition. It provides a brief history of composition pedagogy and briefly discusses the few composition scholars who have introduced hermeneutic theory to the field during that time. It discusses the value of critical interpretation of the narrative structure in the development of personal identity and argues for a peer-oriented teacher-student relationship in hermeneutically focused classrooms. It also presents the four essential elements of a hermeneutic composition pedagogy along with specific strategies for their implementation, including examples of my own classroom practices.

Chapter 2: John Dewey

Hermeneutics and the Student as the Learning Self

This chapter introduces John Dewey's philosophy of education that examines how people acquire both a sense of the self as an individual and a sense of the self as part of society. I will examine how Dewey's *pragmatism* connects the *acquisition of the mind* to motivation for civic action, a concept that links Dewey directly to Hannah Arendt and grounds his work firmly in hermeneutic philosophy. But where Arendt focuses on the "why" of the political animal that is human nature, Dewey provides us with the "how" of the political animal that exists in society. Through this process, I will explain how Dewey's contributions to philosophy extend beyond his arguments about liberal education to connect this vital social function to the health and advancement of democracy itself. I will also examine how critical thinking, as a concept, is uniquely hermeneutic and thus "unteachable," yet can still be learned by composition students focusing on the processes of learning rather than the products of learning. This will support key arguments of my dissertation by demonstrating how and why the development of critical thought, engaged citizenship, and consensus-focused discourse are best accomplished through direct social engagement in a peer-oriented educational setting. My units of analysis for this chapter are *Democracy and Education*, *Leibniz's New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, and *The Later Works of John Dewey*.

John Dewey's contributions to educational philosophy and pedagogy in the 20th Century are unparalleled, and he has been studied, praised, and even condemned by scholars, politicians, and religious leaders for more than a century. At his 90th birthday celebration in New York in 1949, Dewey received telegrams and messages from

President Truman, Prime Minister Attlee of Britain, and Pandit Nehru, the first prime minister of an independent India, as well as from hundreds of American universities and educational scholars around the world (Hardin). His work and ideas have been studied extensively, and his direct impact on modern education is perhaps unsurpassed by virtually any other philosopher in history save Plato. It is certainly a credible argument to make that John Dewey is the most influential philosopher of Western education in American history.

Today, however, traditional liberal education as it was envisioned and championed by Dewey is under attack. From the No Child Left Behind federal mandate that emphasizes testing over critical discourse to the charter school movement where corporations are taking educational responsibility away from local communities, the role of public education as a training ground for civic engagement is in danger. As Nancy Welch highlights in her work *The Living Room*, our students today are faced with a public sphere that is increasingly privatized, which constrains public visibility and public voice. As scholars faced with the first generations of students trained to pass state-mandated and uniform tests rather than educated in the liberal tradition to meet local and regional community needs, our work to instill Dewey's philosophies of critical thought, engaged citizenship, and respect for research and scientific inquiry is all the more challenging and desperately needed.

That's why re-engaging Dewey in this dissertation is important for establishing two things. First, while the clarion call among composition scholars like Lillian Birdwell-Bowles, Keith Gilyard, Lester Faigley, and Kathleen Yancey in the past twenty years has been for a re-focusing of writing toward civic engagement and democracy as Dewey

originally argued, much of that work has focused on the exigence and the product of that endeavor. But Dewey also provides a hermeneutic understanding about the necessary motivations of the students to engage in discourse in the first place, and that's a crucial element in the ongoing development of civic literacy in writing program. In support of this movement, scholars like Victor Villenueva, Michelle Hall Kells, Juan Guerra, and Jacqueline Jones Royster have identified and clarified cross-boundary discourse barriers, and all have worked to validate individual and minority voices in our discourse communities in support of increased engagement in composition classrooms and greater pluralization of alternative voices in the public sphere. This dissertation expands their scholarship by including the role Dewey's hermeneutic philosophy plays in the *acquisition of the mind*, something that will help writing teachers understand the process their students use to imagine and create those alternative voices in the first place.

Second, while Dewey has been aggressively engaged over the past 30 years by composition scholars like Linda Flowers, Richard Young, David Russell, Patricia Bizzell, Stephen Fishman, and a host of others, their research is most often focused on Dewey's pragmatism and its relevance to the "social turn" in composition pedagogy. Beyond Dewey's calls for educational reform in support of democratic engagement, what he offers for understanding how individuals perceive concepts like freedom, justice, equality, and liberty can best be understood through his hermeneutic philosophy of *self-reflection* and the development of critical thought. Critical thinking, according to Dewey's argument, is only possible when critical examination of one's own beliefs, biases, and arguments occurs through active engagement with them. Dewey provides an

understanding of the motivation to action, established through critical thought, that is vital in a successful hermeneutic classroom.

Acquisition of the Mind

“Uncertainty,” according to Dewey, “is primarily a practical matter” (*The Later Works of John Dewey, Vol. 7* 178). This is how Dewey introduces his essay on “The Supremacy of Method” in which he lays out the fundamental argument that drives his overall philosophy of education, that theory and practice should be congruous rather than dichotomous. Dewey was critical of the philosophical tradition in which theory was primarily reserved for “mental gymnastics” that sought to identify absolute truths in realms of the pure being, what he described as “philosophy’s search for the immutable,” and was dissociated from the practical needs of everyday human beings. This separation grew, according to Dewey, from the uncertainty of life common in ancient, primal cultures that sought knowledge of the ultimate reality in which, similar to Arendt’s argument, mankind could achieve a kind of immortality separate from the natural cycles of life and death. This separation of theory and practice hampered human development, and Dewey was concerned primarily with bridging these practices for the purpose of advancing human development and solving real-world problems through his philosophy of pragmatism:

The actual process of knowing, namely operations of controlled observation, inference, reasoning, and testing, the only process with intellectual import, is dismissed as irrelevant to the theory of knowing.

The methods of knowing practiced in daily life and science are excluded from consideration in the philosophical theory of knowing. Hence the

construction of the latter become more and more elaborately artificial because there is no definite check upon them. It would be easy to quote from epistemological writers statements to the effect that these processes (which supply the only empirically verifiable facts of knowing) are merely inductive in character, or even that they are of purely psychological significance. It would be difficult to find a more complete inversion of the facts than in the latter statement, since presentation constitutes in fact the psychological affair. A confusion of logic with psychology has bred hybrid epistemology, with the amazing result that the technique of effective inquiry is rendered irrelevant to the theory of knowing (Dewey, *On Experience, Nature, and Freedom* 56).

Rather than knowledge itself, it is the process of knowing things that develops our intellect, and that process is driven by inquiry. Dewey believed the process of inquiry developed in humans as a response to the life and death consequences of uncertainty about the natural world. There is no doubt that inquisition is a natural habit of humans, according to Dewey, for inquiries “enter into every area of life and into every aspect of every area. In everyday living, men examine; they turn things over intellectually; they infer and judge as ‘naturally’ as they reap and sow, produce and exchange commodities” (*Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* 102). We inquire in an attempt to mitigate doubt and increase the effectiveness of our actions. Dewey called this *explorative action*, an attempt to analyze circumstances and improve chances that the outcome will be positive. This also gives action a mental or intellectual quality (*The Later Works of John Dewey, Vol. 7* 178). Thus, intelligence is born from action mitigated by doubt, and it is directed by the

examination of conditions to reduce this doubt and increase the likelihood that outcomes of actions will match expectations.

Education and the Acquisition of the Mind

How we acquire the mind through this process of inquiry, or how we acquire that concept of the self and an awareness of the world in which the self thinks, learns, and acts is what concerned Dewey relative to the role education plays in the development of free-thinking and free-acting citizens: “With the growth of civilization...mere physical growing up, mere mastery of the bare necessities of subsistence will not suffice to reproduce the life of the group. Deliberate effort and the taking of thoughtful pains are required. Beings that are born not only unaware of, but quite indifferent to, the aims and habits of the social group have to be rendered cognizant of them and actively interested. Education and education alone, spans that gap” (*Democracy and Education* 7).

If the mind is something that is acquired through inquiry by all human beings, then the process of inquiry by all people shares certain characteristics, and those characteristics can be understood through our conscious practice of experimentation, which is a clear province of education. For Dewey, to “inquire” is to be aware of the physical world and the problems it presents both physically and philosophically, and to inquire experimentally, deliberately, and methodically is to conduct science. Hegel’s influence on Dewey is apparent in his position that intellectual inquiry, the process of thought and reflection, is the primary system of developing a sense of both the “self” and the “other,” a concept he shares with Ricoeur. This acquisition of “otherness” and the connection between the self and the other as either same or separate cultural entities occurs primarily through observation, another element of scientific inquiry. The point is

that Dewey saw philosophical development and the process of scientific inquiry as two sides of the same coin whose purpose is to solve problems. His criticism of philosophical tradition was its failure to focus on real-world problems.

Our formation of common groups; our organization into towns, cities, and nations; our very society itself is constructed in part as a result of our ongoing desire to reduce uncertainty in our lives relative to basic survival and economic and social development. Despite the reality that this organization creates the potential for new problems to develop such as crime, sanitation needs, and increased use of natural resources, it also provides better access to technological advancements, medical care, social support, education, and overall better living conditions than a completely rural population possesses. It also supports the Deweyan notion that problem-solving is a replicative, cyclical, and progressive practice when the members of that society are critically engaged in the process through experimentation, and the best space for that to be taught to, and understood by, new citizens of that society occurs in community-oriented educational systems.

Additionally, if the mind is something that is acquired through inquiry that can be defined as experimentation and observation in an attempt to reduce uncertainty, then the education students receive will naturally be restricted by the conditions and experiences that result from the cultural interactions in the societies from which they are drawn and into which they are placed that have been formed, as argued above, for the purpose of reducing these uncertainties. Society, therefore, is both the all-encompassing concept that includes all of these subgroups, as well as the individual experiences among these societal subgroups from which students are drawn. As Dewey describes it, “a modern

society is many societies more or less loosely connected” (*Democracy and Education* 20). It is simultaneously an extrinsic concept and an intrinsic experience, and the degree to which these two things reflect one another is the epitome of educational purpose in the acquisition of the mind.

Like many other elements of Dewey’s philosophy, education is recursive: “There are no senders and receivers of information according to Dewey, it is always a two way street” (Biesta 3). This recursion idea in education has been controversial for decades. The traditional education model in which lecturers presented information and judged student performance based on the ability of those students to regurgitate with accuracy the information they have received, what Paolo Friere has termed, “The Banking Model” of education, is ineffective for a variety of reasons, including multi-cultural integration into common classrooms and rapid technological advancements.

As we can observe in classrooms today, for example, the rapid escalation of technology is almost always first adopted by our students who have a growing capacity for coping in and comprehending a new world their teachers are clearly still struggling to understand. In the face of this reality, we have a tendency as educators to rely on our outdated, hierarchical, knowledge-ownership models of unidirectional pedagogies, while resisting the idea that students in our classrooms bring educational value of their own to the process by the sheer nature of their advanced engagement with technology. Any argument that students have nothing to teach their instructors and/or political decision makers is reductive at best, and clearly fails the principle of Cartesian doubt. Students may or may not have as much to teach educators in the modern classroom as educators have to teach them, but an effective hermeneutic approach of recursive, engaged

education involves a constant learning process on the part of the educator as well as the student. Indeed, it may be the only process in which real education actually occurs.

This learning community in which the students, as well as the teacher, engage in inquiry and critical examination of information and ideas is a cooperative activity that is regulated by the social contract assumptions and interpersonal relationships in place. Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch summarizes this idea by incorporating Thomas Kent, Stanley Fish, and Joseph Petruglia, among others into her claim that there are “two main principles that post-process theory can offer pedagogy: the rejection of mastery and the engagement in dialogue rather than monologue with students” (Breuch 118). This is not to argue for a lack of structure in the composition classroom, or what Keith Gilyard calls “a classroom full of perceived instability” (Gilyard 379). On the contrary, the teacher’s role is to provide the structure and lead the conversation. What’s important is that it be a conversation among peers rather than a lecture delivered by a Master to his students.

The acquisition of the mind, or the capacity for critical thought to reflect upon one’s own, as well as the other’s, motivations and beliefs, is not innate, it is acquired through social interaction and transactional experience, which is supported by Dewey’s subjectivism and the argument that reality acts and therefore is. People, as students both in the formal classroom and the informal classroom of society, evolve through their interactions with one another associated with the process of inquiry by “securing direction and development in the immature through their participation in the life of the group to which they belong” (*Democracy and Education* 64).

The mind, in Dewey’s approach, is not regarded as an original being that comes into existence from the mere fact of life. A person completely devoid of societal

influence, if such a person could exist, would possess no concept of freedom, for example, because there would be no situation in his or her life that suggests its necessity. Thus, transactional experience is the process by which people engage in activity with one another that requires mental reflection. Social interaction, whether between students or between students and their instructor, is vital for humans to experience liberation and operate at their full capacity to develop social intelligence and promote the progress of society toward the resolution of problems through inquiry: “Individuals can find the security and protection that are prerequisites for freedom only in association with others” (*Freedom and Culture* 166).

Dewey’s main focus in his massive portfolio of writing was education, and virtually all criticism and analysis of his work relate to his influence over the last century on that institution. But it is important to understand that while Dewey was an educator himself who was deeply concerned with educational theory and pedagogy, what motivated him throughout his work was something deeper and more profound – the idea and protection of democracy and the individual freedom it serves in an increasingly complex society.

Living and working from the late 19th century through the mid 20th century, he witnessed firsthand the rise of an industrialized society and the increasing influence of the merchant class on American political institutions, and he was aware of the pressures on educational systems to abandon traditional liberal education in favor of basic skills training to support those institutions. He witnessed the rise of the railroad, telephone, automobile, highway transportation, and television and lived through two world wars in which totalitarianism and fascism rose, seized power through violence, and were

ultimately defeated. Dewey had the vision to understand how much influence, both positive and negative, an increasingly connected society had on individual freedoms, and he saw education as the primary defender of human freedom and spent his life working to ensure that institution would remain the fundamental system for building democratic citizenship in America and around the world.

Acquisition of the Mind and Democracy

Dewey maintained that democracy is much more than a political system; it is also a personal way of life, a mode of associated living, and a moral ideal. If a community of people seeks to secure individual freedoms in an increasingly large and complex society that in turn, recursively, supports and defends those freedoms, then acquisition of the mind must involve an acquisition of common values and meanings through open discourse and reflective thought constructed by our experiences and supported by our educational system: “The conduct of individuals together, in and with an environment, must be adjusted and coordinated... If a community of endeavor is to be established, individuals must know how objects are to function in social action” (Gouinlock 88). This is not to say, however, that values and meanings themselves are common, nor that they should be taught as static concept. On the contrary, the potential for static values and meanings to serve as tools for totalitarian emergence is well documented throughout history. What Dewey is arguing in his theory of mind acquisition is that individuals within a group or society must know how values and meanings function relative to social engagement and interaction because “shareable meanings are derivative of social action” (Gouinlock 88). The experience of social action, in other words, is the grounding

mechanism for establishing common awareness and agreement on common ideas within and between social groups.

This is why hermeneutic awareness of cultural screens and student expectations are important for teachers in a writing classroom so that an exploration of these values and meanings towards an acquisition of mind can be achieved with any level of effectiveness. Value propositions, meaning-making, and inquiry are all uniquely hermeneutic processes that require social interaction to develop and mature, and only through engaged discourse in an environment established for its purpose to train citizens to conduct such discourse in self-reflective ways can democracy flourish. Acquisition of the mind is a social exercise, and the common principles of a free society can only be acquired in a common social environment where the tools for critical inquiry and communication are developed for the purpose of achieving consensus among those engaged. It is critical to note, however, that consensus is not the same thing as concession.

Confusing consensus with concession is a fallacious malapropism often presented by Objectivists and others who deride the concept of a social entity separate from individual identity. Despite some conservative arguments that public education undermines individualism, an effective educational pedagogy for teaching engaged, critical discourse is reliant more upon individual differences and disagreement than it is on ubiquity of ideas or values. Disagreement and debate are vital to the long-term strength of an effective democracy, but only so long as all sides can at least agree that the purpose of debate is to achieve consensus based on research and logic rather than to “win” an argument or defeat of the “other.” Indeed, an individual can only enjoy one’s

“freedom” and individuality when there is a diverse group among which one can associate freely and draw comparisons between the self and the other without fear of reprisal or rejection from the group. “Liberty is the secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich, manifold association with others: the power to be an individualized self making a distinctive contribution and enjoying in its own way the fruits of association” (*The Public and Its Problems* 154).

Counter to the false dichotomy of the pro-individualist, anti-socialist meme that dominates both political and educational philosophy in modern America. An individual enjoys a diversity of values and a quality of individual experiences only because of the diversity of ideas and population present in the various groups and social engagements available in a pluralistic society. While it is accurate that tendencies toward confirmation bias and group identification exist in part due to our underlying drive to reduce uncertainty, it is not true that these tendencies naturally threaten individual personality, expression, or creativity. Our understanding of hermeneutics and phenomenology described previously demonstrate this point effectively. The loss of individual expression and dissent occur, instead, when authoritarianism promotes the false ideology that “the other” is a threat to personal freedom specifically because the other is different than the self and that conformity of ideas and positions are in some way stabilizing when they are instead undermining. Social groups and society in general provides an opportunity for those engaged to develop new ideas and attitudes in response to those presented, sometimes in agreement and sometimes in disagreement, but always as a response.

When the opportunity for civic discourse is present, and when those trained in effective discourse are engaged in building consensus toward action, then individuals can

come to consider themselves *part* of the society with a valued voice, and consequently comes to consider the other as *part* of the same group, associated in a joint enterprise with a common goal. “This is not an ideal of conformity. It is an ideal of democratic equality; and it manifests itself in the individual not only in his recognition of the interests of others as having the same status as his own, but also in his willing and habitual regard for these interests” (Gouinlock 114). Through this process of engagement with the other, an individual mind is acquired that recognizes equality as valuable and necessary for all voices to be heard and for one’s own voice to carry equal weight as another’s even when those voices disagree. Equal to me does not mean “the same as me.”

The solution to disagreement in a society of equal, disparate individuals is building consensus toward action without abdicating individualism, and this is one of the principle values of democracy. Consensus is not concession of ideas or values. Since we know action is mitigated by doubt, and our goal is to reduce uncertainty for the purpose of successful action, then we come to understand that consensus is merely a social contract for action. But for that contract to have the maximum benefit with the best possible outcomes for the group as a whole, then cooperation as well as an understanding by all the individuals of the group is necessary for the action to achieve success. That requires communication among the group and between individuals so each will know the responsibilities of the others as well as understand how to keep the others informed about one’s own progress and purpose in the plan. Therefore, “consensus demands communication,” and effective communication and discourse require critical, reflective minds that can best be acquired in an educational setting that supports hermeneutic

perspectives and practices argument and consensus building in peer-oriented environments (*Democracy and Education* 8).

Self-Reflection and Critical Thought

“He who offers a penny for your thoughts does not expect to drive any great bargain” (*How We Think* 2). Though this sentiment might be applied as a jibe to any number of modern American politicians or media personalities, Dewey was merely presenting the proposition that thought, in one definition, consists of all the random sensibilities, daydreams, recollections, choices, and other disconnected scraps that float through our minds every day. In this sense, every conscious human thinks. This is not to say, however, that every person thinks reflectively or critically. On the contrary, what we find in our modern discourse, both social and political, as well as in our test-driven educational focus, is an unfortunate dearth of self reflection or critical thinking. The evidence for this is not merely anecdotal either.

A four year research study of undergraduate students in the United States, conducted from 2005 to 2009 by New York University sociologist Richard Arum, found that 45 percent of students showed no significant improvement in their critical thinking, reasoning, or writing skills in their first two years of college, and after four years that number improved but was still an unacceptable 36 percent (Arum). Ostensibly, writing programs and the academy exist to develop scientifically trained, research oriented critically thinking members of society. “In a rapidly changing economy and society, there is widespread agreement that these individual capacities are the foundation for effective democratic citizenship and economic productivity” (Arum 2). While there has been some criticism about Arum’s methods and definitions of critical thinking, it is the only research

study that has taken a broad view of this topic using a consistent and measurable standard, and the research shows well over a third of university students are failing to develop effective critical thinking skills.

The reasons for the decline in critical thinking skills among graduating university students are numerous, and no single alteration of student expectations or behaviors is going to resolve this significant, multi-faceted problem. For example, labor economists Philip Babcock and Mindy Marks examined how much time students spend in class and studying every week compared to students of prior generations and found, using individual surveys dating back more than 80 years, that undergraduate college students until the early 1960s spent an average of 40 hours per week studying or attending class. Over the past 50 years, that number has declined precipitously to just 13 hours today (Arum). If we examine just this element and make attempts to correct it in hopes of improving student critical thinking skills, we would be ignoring the many reasons why this decline has occurred that we may be unable to affect from an academy-focused perspective.

Beginning in the early 1960s, for example, the number of minorities and children from traditionally middle class and lower class families began attending college for the first time. The multi-cultural clash of expectations and hermeneutic understanding of the world on the part of the students met an entrenched academic standard and pedagogy for which many students were simply unprepared, and the academy was unwilling or unable to meet their changing pedagogical needs. In addition, the number of these students who could only afford school if they also worked part time or full time increased dramatically.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of full time undergraduates aged 16 to 24 working fewer than 20 hours per week declined to 15 percent nationwide in 2007, the last year for which data is available (Perna). Compare that to the 60 percent of students in 1961 who didn't work at all and a picture begins to form about why students spend so much less time studying and doing class work today than they did then (Stern). But even this is only a beginning. Students in 1960 had much different pedagogical needs than students of today since modern students with full-time instant access to the world's largest database of information have no motivation to memorize knowledge, and productivity overall has increased significantly through technological development.

We cannot expect students to alter their cultural norms to accommodate the demands of the academy without helping them develop the tools necessary to do so. This is no great revelation for the academy or our society as a whole. The collective hand-wringing on the part of our political institutions, citizenship, and the academy itself over the lack of critical thinking skills among college students has led to a rash of rhetoric-oriented pedagogical theories all looking for the silver bullet solution to this problem with varying degrees of success. The first real step in resolving this issue, however, is to understand where the problem actually lies, and it's not necessarily with the students. In fact, as James R. Flynn has effectively demonstrated from his research into Intelligence Quotient development, students today are in many ways much smarter than students were in the first half of the last century (Flynn).

Nevertheless, the focus of the academy is almost always on how to bring students closer to academic expectations rather than examining ways the academy must also

change to help bridge that gap. A hermeneutic approach to student critical consciousness and discourse skill development requires student-centered thinking and cultural awareness on the part of the academy that is essential to understanding the gap between student capacity for objective critical thought and the actual practice of critical thought. But what exactly *is* critical thought?

Edward Glaser wrote the seminal paper on critical thinking in 1941 and co-developed the most utilized test of critical thinking skills still in practice today. His research determined that the ability to think critically involves three elements (Glaser):

1. An attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences;
2. Knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning;
3. Some skill in applying those methods.

Glaser clearly separates the intrinsic attitude of a person from the banked knowledge of methods as well as from the extrinsic skills of application. Glaser argued that some people have these things in more or less greater capacity than others, which may or may not be accurate, but the implications of that assumption means the academy and educators too often dismiss Glaser's crucial first element as unteachable since it relies upon the abstract notions of capacity and personal attitude. Thus we tend to focus too heavily on the latter two elements in the classroom and not enough on the hermeneutics of student disposition, which can indeed be learned. Thomas Kent incorporates this same argument in *Paralogic Rhetoric* about teaching writing, the ostensible vehicle for expression of

critical thought, because it is ultimately a “situated, interpretive, and indeterminate act” (Breuch 99).

It is clear that Glaser owes a great deal to the thinking on this subject by Dewey, who is widely regarded as the “father” of the modern critical thinking tradition. Dewey’s definition of *reflective thinking* is “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (*How We Think* 6). By defining reflective thought as an active process, Dewey is once again rejecting notions of a passive phenomenological experience and arguing that only purposeful conscious engagement provides for educational opportunities on the part of the learner. Reflecting on a belief or idea “in light of the grounds that support it” is an affirmation of reason as the basis of belief and “the further conclusions to which it tends” an admonition to consider the implications and consequences of those beliefs.

This idea of self-reflection can be seen in Dewey’s foundation of naturalism as well as Locke’s influence in his argument that if “upon thought hang all deliberate activities...then it is the greatest concernment that care be taken of its conduct” (*How We Think* 19). Unfortunately, most scholars combine Dewey’s notion of “reflective thinking” with today’s notion of “critical thinking” and use the latter term to the exclusion of the former arguing they are essentially the same thing. But while they may contain the same elements, it is a mistake to assume they are interchangeable notions or that the ability to think reflectively about oneself automatically translates into the ability to think critically about the external world or apply critical thought as a skill, and vice versa.

Cultural screens, confirmation biases, and other hermeneutic elements make the process of critical self-reflection much different than objective critical inquiry of the external world even if the two processes use similar skills. However, the necessity of first achieving the capacity for self-reflection and an attitude of careful consideration of all assumptions and beliefs is vital for objective observation of the world, and the academy is an ideal setting, even an anticipated setting, in which such self-reflection is possible. Without the encouragement and expectation to practice reflective personal inquiry regarding beliefs and assumptions then critical thought of the external world will always be clouded by unexamined personal biases.

Real, objective, critical inquiry that serves to reduce uncertainty and increase the probability of successful action first requires self realization to develop true ethical deliberation skills. Our tendency to overemphasize critical *skill* development in our pedagogies rather than ensure the necessary attitude of being disposed to critical thought in general results in a culture of political argument derived from unexamined ideals and divorced from objectivity or principled deliberation.

Skill obtained apart from thinking is not connected with any sense of the purposes for which it is to be used. It consequently leaves a man at the mercy of his routine habits and of the authoritative control of others who know what they are about and who are not especially scrupulous as to their means of achievement. And information severed from thoughtful action is dead, a mind-crushing load. Since it simulates knowledge and thereby develops the poison of conceit, it is a most powerful obstacle to

further growth in the grace of intelligence (*Democracy and Education* 116).

Both Dewey and Arendt were concerned with understanding the nature of critical thought itself and developing the argument for why it is so vital to defending democratic principles of freedom, justice, and equality. Both recognized the importance that social experience plays in establishing those principles and in learning the discourse skills for engaging in the necessary public debate that keeps democracy alive and flourishing. “Any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it. Only when it becomes cast in a mold and runs in a routine way does it lose its educative power” (*Democracy and Education* 9). Dewey argued that self-reflection is not innate, but that the ability to reflect inwardly and think outwardly has a social origin. This is the social conception of Dewey’s subjectivity that Arendt further develops.

Dewey believed individuals only evolve through social interaction and reasoned self-reflection based on and structured by those interactions, “securing direction and development in the immature through their participation in the life of the group to which they belong” (*Democracy and Education* 64). The cooperation of development is one of society’s greatest benefits. The mitigation of uncertainty obtained through social interaction and the critical engagement that society naturally breeds liberates individuals to achieve their full potential through the support of the group, which recursively, breeds better minds and increases social intelligence for the group going forward. This is Dewey’s theory of subjectivity. The one problem with this theory lies in the realization

that some educated social groups advance at different rates than other educated groups, and some social groups don't advance at all or even regress.

While Arendt embraced Dewey's idea of social intelligence in general, she recognized the importance of the human condition (*i.e.* politics) in its effect on social intelligence development. Since Arendt saw plurality in the public sphere as a condition of validity for action to take place, she argued that social intelligence is a product as much of the action of others upon the self as it is upon the self's ability to engage in self-reflection and critical thought. "The main reason for this," argues Gert Biesta, is that Arendt holds that subjectivity "is only possible in the situation in which others can be subjects as well" (Biesta). By incorporating the possible actions of others in the development of social intelligence, Arendt opens Dewey's theory of subjectivity to the possibility that groups can move in an infinite number of directions since the human response to particular action is unpredictable and the potential outcomes of individual actions are innumerable. Thus, positive progress on social problems associated with freedom, justice, and equality is only a potential outcome of action.

This is why Dewey and Arendt both supported social public education and its vital role in the development of engaged individual citizens of a democracy with shared, common principles. In a society where social groups promote the individuality of their members and value critical inquiry rather than impose conformity of thought, individuality increases and authoritarianism retreats. Public education exists to provide the tools, experiences, and challenges necessary for self-reflection to occur, which in turn develops a self-identity unique within the social group, but that also exists as part of the social group.

As a naturalist, Dewey campaigned for an educational pedagogy that challenges personal biases and beliefs and stresses scientific inquiry for the purpose of promoting self-reflection and critical inquiry, or “thought.” As he put it, “the sole direct path to enduring improvement in the methods of instruction and learning consists in centering upon the conditions which exact, promote, and test thinking. Thinking is the method of intelligent learning, of learning that employs and rewards the mind” (*Democracy and Education* 116). Thus, scientific inquiry grounded in Cartesian doubt breeds self-reflection and challenges our assumptions not only about the physical world, but also about social order, class, and individual human potential divorced from ideologies that promote inequality:

“By disclosing unity in a common humanity, scientific analysis gave evidence of and support for the ethical conception that all men should share in the ends and values of society, and more important, that each must share in the creation and control of the processes that achieve these ends, and finally, that in such participation each individual best realizes his own potentialities... for this idea to be consciously shared, a wide distribution of intelligence is also required... the task of building such intelligence is the work of education” (Baker 122).

But understanding the “work of education” in promoting common principles of a society and the necessity of self reflection for the purpose of advancing society and solving problems provides us only with the theory of education and the development of social intelligence. The process of how we actually achieve this self reflection and teach it to others is the challenge of developing a critical hermeneutic pedagogy, and that’s where

Paul Ricoeur's work offers significant value to the academy. Both Arendt and Dewey provide the theory and exigence for critical engagement by all members of a society, and both are equally aware that our society's education system is the best place for this critical engagement to be developed. Educators, reformers, politicians, and citizens of all stripes have introduced and argued for educational programs and policies they believe will improve outcomes in knowledge and critical thinking, but how they choose to assess those improvements and what they value as outcomes are often different and sometimes conflicting. While they all believe in the value of their positions, those positions too often lack consensus and are often ideologically driven.

Where the academy has fallen woefully short has been in understanding the best method for meeting the goals set forth by Dewey and Arendt. If we can build consensus not about specific outcomes or pedagogies, but rather around a principle that regards critical thought and the practice of objective critical inquiry as valuable and rewarding, then perhaps the development of self reflection and the resulting improvements in social progress are possible.

This is particularly challenging today, though, in light of our changing cultural demographics, changing student needs, and changing technologies. Trying to build a universal pedagogy around outcomes by focusing on rhetorical theories will always be limited by the cultural screens in place throughout the academy in different cultural regions. Instead, approaching self-reflection from the standpoint of common cultural principles and individual student experiences, a hermeneutic approach, may provide the flexibility necessary for success in developing the critical consciousness skills and social engagement necessary for democracy as a philosophy to flourish.

Dewey wrote about education because he cared about individual freedom first and foremost. In his 1939 work, *Freedom and Culture*, he immediately draws upon Thomas Jefferson's words from a letter to John Adams in defining his thesis: "The advance of liberalism encourages a hope that the human mind will some day get back to the freedom it enjoyed two thousand years ago. This country, which has given to the world the example of physical liberty, owes to it that of moral emancipation also, for as yet it is but nominal with us" (*Freedom and Culture* 6). In other words, we must also free the mind if the body is to remain free forever.

Critical Thinking and Civic Engagement

Dewey's own civic engagement and social activism in his support of women's right to vote, as well as his work in support of the labor movement and the organization of the American Civil Liberties Union are testament to his practice of what he believed was a vital role of engaged citizens of a democracy. Like Hannah Arendt, Dewey believed the concept of good citizenship was associated too closely with the idea of obedience to authority and saw the dangers of this connection promulgated in an educational system that emphasized obedience and ritualized learning. Enlightened citizens of a democracy are highly unlikely to be produced by such a system. As Dewey argues, a healthy democracy consists of citizens capable of skepticism, willing to experiment with new ideas, desiring of evidence, and disposed to discussion and inquiry rather than bias and idealization.

As with Hannah Arendt, Dewey's philosophies are heavily influenced by the work of Immanuel Kant, and Dewey's dissertation, *The Psychology of Kant*, is testament to that influence. Though Dewey could not be called a "Kantian" by any stretch and

would later come to embrace a Hegelian, pragmatic, and naturalist philosophy, Kant's categorical imperative nevertheless provides Dewey with the fundamental philosophical concept upon which he would build a lifetime of work, that is our moral systems should be anchored in concrete principles guided by inquiry, self-reflection, and pragmatic societal functionalism rather than "traditional" hypothetical systems based on purely subjective considerations. Dewey viewed freedom as a construct of culture, ultimately unique to each individual within a culture but possible only in a society where authority exists to preserve individual freedoms from the tyranny of the many over the few.

While Kant's rational autonomy is the foundational theory behind much of Dewey's and Arendt's work, its exclusive focus on rational, individual perspective limits its functionality in a pluralistic, increasingly social world, particularly in the age of the Internet. Dewey and Arendt both recognized that all perspectives, while uniquely individual and shaped by private cultural norms, are ultimately only relevant in a social world in which an active exchange of ideas between the individual and the environment, government, and social spheres that affect that individual is possible. Hegel's influence is much more apparent in this development of Deweyan thought. Indeed, while rational autonomy is vital for an individual's concept of freedom to form, there are increasingly important societal and political issues (e.g. healthcare, workplace safety, environmental protection, nuclear war, etc.) that must be addressed through subjective models of democratic discourse and critical thinking for a stable polis to exist at all in the 21st century. It may seem a trivial point to separate individual perspective as free from the influence of society vs. individual perspective influenced and reliant upon the influence of society, but it's vital to consider this separation in the development of a free and

engaged democratic polis. It's the subtle but vital difference between the development of a politics of ideology that leads only to conflict, and the development of a politics of principles that leads to consensus.

The shaping of culture and the development of critically engaged citizens of a democracy were simultaneous processes for Dewey. The two existential spaces are connected in the same way people are connected to nature. One does not preclude or derive from the other, but rather they work simultaneously together in a constant evolutionary process of development, destruction, and recreation. Dewey was a naturalist, and he continually orbited around the central philosophy that "subject and object, self and world, cannot be specified independently of each other" (Kestenbaum 1).

There is an important evolution of thought in this naturalism that helped Dewey develop his educational philosophy that has become so important for understanding the life of the mind. Certainly in his early research about Kant we can see a rejection of the socially detached self, but also in his opposition to the sensationalist psychology of John Locke that argued for a passive sensational experience upon a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) of the mind in which reality, and the substance of reality, merely exists secondarily to the phenomena we experience, and our phenomenological understanding of reality masks its true nature. Dewey was more interested in Leibniz's argument that "substance is activity; that its process is measured by its end, its idea" (Baker 10).

The problem with Locke's view of *tabula rasa*, as Dewey saw it, was that it failed to account for the commonality of ideas and the development of common values among individuals raised with differing phenomenological experiences. If we are merely passive

experiencers of the physical world who are impressed upon by our individual engagement with that world, then we can

“know nothing of existence as it is in itself, but only of its phenomena.

Mind, matter, objects, are all substances, all equally substances, and all

have their unknown essences and their phenomenal appearance. Such a

distinction between the known and the unknown can rest, it is evident,

only upon a separation between reality and phenomena similar to that

which Locke makes between substance and qualities. In knowing the

latter, we know nothing of the former” (*Leibniz's New Essays Concerning*

the Human Understanding: A Critical Exposition 181 - 182).

Yet humans do possess qualities and values that transcend culture and independent experiences, and society is built upon and functions in large part due to the acceptance and enforcement of these commonalities. The development of a culture, therefore, is shaped by the experiences of the people in that culture, which also shapes the experiences of the people. Culture, like freedom, is dialogic in nature. But this dialogic presented a dilemma for the naturalist Dewey who was distrustful of theological implications associated with rejecting Locke’s *tabula rasa* theory.

Dewey sought to solve this dilemma first by embracing the Hegelian notion of human psychology as part of a larger shared “consciousness” that also finds its way into the theories of Émile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud. Dewey argues in *Psychology*, for example, that our psychological values are the science “of the reproduction of some universal content or existence, whether of knowledge or of action, in the form of individual unsharable consciousness” (*Psychology* 6). But this was transitional for Dewey

and did not fully express his naturalistic beliefs that actions and engagement with nature are part of man's inherent and necessary process of learning. A truly shared consciousness, though opposite in concept but similar in ideal to *tabula rasa*, presupposes a level of conformity in thought among individuals that runs counter to principled, self-reflective enlightenment. If we share a consciousness, then original thought would require an effort to overcome commonalities through conflict with the shared ideal rather than being a natural part of human development. This is where Leibniz helps Dewey connect his naturalism to the principles of enlightenment through self reflection and action.

Leibniz argued it is an active participation with the world, rather than a passive phenomenological experience of it, that shapes our shared consciousness. Humans are both unique in that we each experience the world in our own hermeneutic ways, but also consistent in that our experiences and actions bring us to similar conclusions about the desires for freedom, justice, and equality. We may not all define the substance of these goals in the same way or see them as achievable through the same processes, but the goals are nevertheless consistent and universal despite our individual phenomenologies. For Locke, reality essentially exists outside of our phenomenologies and secondarily to them, and therefore has "no revelation of itself." For Leibniz, and for Dewey however, reality exists only because it does act: "Reality acts, and therefore is. Its being is conditioned upon its activity. It is not first there, and secondarily acts; but its "being there" is its activity. Since its very substance is activity, it is impossible that it should not manifest its true nature" (*Leibniz's New Essays Concerning the Human Understanding: A Critical Exposition* 181 - 182).

This is a significant adjustment to Plato's position on the "unknowable truth" about the universe, the renaissance discovery of Cartesian doubt, and the enlightenment concept of *tabula rasa*. Plato argued that reason is a necessary skill of the thinking man because we can never know the absolute truth of anything, but we can approach it through logical analysis and a close examination of the truth using reason. Descartes took this unknowable truth a step further and examined the possibility that all reality is suspect except for his ability to simply ask the question about it, which is proof of his own existence but nothing else. Locke's concept of a purely phenomenological reality leaves the possibility of nature *absqua* knowledge in which all we can know about reality is what we understand and experience.

What Dewey draws from Leibniz is an argument that man and nature are interconnected in a way that it is impossible for man *not* to know the truth of nature because its very being is the whole truth. How we interact and engage with nature and culture is reliant, therefore, on how well we understand it and one another so that we might continue to progress toward a common and realized society of freedom, justice, reason, and peace.

This inter-connectedness between man and nature, and between man and culture, means an actively engaged citizen of a democracy will have the most influence on the reality of that democracy, and vice versa. If our goal is freedom, but freedom is subject to the ideals and principles of those engaged in the process, then an actively engaged citizenship is vital if we want those ideals and principles to reflect our own phenomenologies, both individually and as a culture, and protect it from those whose "second nature" of power acquisition and defense of that power impinge upon it. Over

the course of his long career, Dewey developed an idealistic psychology approach that was most concerned with the question of how to achieve engaged citizenship, for it is not something that can be compelled without falling victim to the same totalitarianism it is intended to prevent. Thus, rather than a rhetoric-based strategy of education and acculturation, a hermeneutic-based strategy makes the most sense because it is directed by each individual based on his or her experiences and personal education of the world.

The best solution for the development of consistent political institutions that align themselves with the principles of individual freedom in a complex, interconnected society lies in finding common cultural engagements where learning and development are consistent across groups and where those groups are most likely to open their minds to the possibility of learning, and that clearly lies in our system of education:

The idealistic psychology which Dewey first approved...postulates an active, continuous, and organic development, thought of as self-realization. In [this view] the individual was seen as active, as motivated by feeling and desire, and as striving to reproduce the universal consciousness. To reach this state of near union of the self with the wisdom and spiritual ideals of the absolute is a long, tedious journey. The same feelings that motivate the individual also may lead him astray unless, presumably, they are carefully disciplined by others until such time as his own intellect and will arise to control his desires. And before the individual is able to understand the institutions of men which embody the ideals of the absolute, he must acquire the tools of learning and the

information with which intellect and will, when finally developed in early adulthood, can contrive to form into spiritual wisdom (Baker 23).

Thus, education is the mechanism that provides the necessary equipment and training for citizens to become fully functioning members of a society dedicated to the preservation of individual liberty through democratic institutions whose power is limited by law. The limits and controls in place on those institutions exist to prevent the second nature of humans from over-riding the primary responsibility of that institution to preserve liberty while improving the lives of the constituent members of society. It's a delicate balancing act that politicians of all stripes battle over in every American election. The degree to which these political forces either fail or achieve success lies in their capacity to influence voting citizens to support their positions. The best defense against what Isaac Asimov argued is a "cult of ignorance" in our country that assumes one's ignorance is equal in value (democratically speaking) to another's knowledge is an active and engaged educational system that trains all students in the art of discourse and reflective thought and develops their minds for the rigors of an often turbulent and ever evolving democratic process.

Before we delve into the necessary elements of an effective democratic education, it is first necessary to set aside a common argument that media plays an equally viable, and possibly an even greater role in the education of American citizens and thus reduces the importance of focusing our national efforts exclusively on education. While it is possible that our increasing media proliferation has a greater impact on knowledge and education than do our schools, it can also be argued with equal legitimacy that the media, with its profit-driven model, is a reflection of the demand and desires of its audience,

whose relative education level and ability to think critically affects the content delivered. It reflects the same dialogic, interconnected relationship between man and culture that Dewey identified and developed in his idealistic psychology.

Dewey himself specifically addressed the role mass media plays in the education of citizens and knew that it would continue to grow and expand beyond even his capacity for imagination. In the now famous debate between Dewey and Walter Lippman in the 1920s, both men argued that the press had a responsibility to the preservation of our democracy. Lippman argued that an increasingly complex society precluded the average citizen from fully understanding the issues of the day and required an engaged, watchdog press whose responsibility is to analyze the decisions being made by legislatures and explain them to the public with recommendations for action. Dewey, however, believed in active engagement by members of a democracy in all matters great and small. He was concerned with the potential for a corporate media system, ruled as it is by pecuniary interests over broader principles, to undermine the individual liberties of a free society.

Dewey recognized the potential for communications systems to bring together communities of interest outside the confines of geographic location and argued that “both government and the press shared the responsibility to figure out how to engage the entire public in the decisions that would affect them all in the end. In other words, all members of a given democracy have responsibilities” (Champlin 138). It is the responsibility of citizens to be informed about issues that affect their communities, and it is the responsibility of teachers to develop the tools necessary among their students to act democratically to support, sustain, or change the laws and institutions that affect those issues as they are delivered to them through this increasingly complex media.

The role of our educational system, then, has never been more vital to the preservation of an educated and engaged democratic populace than it is today in the age of the Internet and instant, real-time communication. It is ironic that as mechanisms for the delivery of media content have increased exponentially in the past two decades that citizens in America are decreasingly likely to be exposed to multiple points of view. The Farleigh-Dickenson research about Fox News and the Kaiser Family Foundation research about media consumption clearly demonstrate that a public facing increasing access to multiple viewpoints will naturally tend to filter out those views that conflict with their own internal biases. This modern reality of confirmation bias in media outlets appears to support Dewey's position over Lippman's in the need for a polis educated as broadly as possible about multiple subjects and basic facts rather than a media interpreting and recommending positions for a citizenry unprepared for the complexity of governance. As this research indicates, we cannot count on the media for educating our citizens, but must insist upon an active educational system free from the pressures of pecuniary corporate interests that focus almost exclusively on investment returns rather than educating actively engaged citizens with critical thinking skills and democratic ideals.

As we've discussed, Dewey was primarily concerned with maintaining individual freedom in a socially complex society considering the political institutions necessary for such a society to flourish. The ever-present conflict between economic, political, and social justice issues requires a liberally educated, critically engaged citizenship capable of engaging in serious discourse about common problems and adjusting laws and policies to improve or correct the issues that naturally occur in the evolution of every society. Dewey relied, perhaps too much, on the idea that all people of a democracy, at a base

level, desire freedom and justice for themselves and their communities. Regardless of the mechanisms and policies promoted by conflicting interests to achieve these goals, Dewey believed the commonality of those goals could help direct and preserve our fundamental freedoms so long as the people of that society have the tools and freedom to question authority and the ability to engage in critical discourse and compromise. That's why he focused his work so extensively on the theory and application of education where these tools are best developed. In the 1949 *Saturday Review of Literature*, William Kirkpatrick wrote: "Pestalozzi had prepared the ground. Froebel and Herbart had helped. Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, ...and others had carried America along the Pestalozzi road. But one thing was lacking. No one of these men, nor all combined, had given an adequate theory for a thorough-going democratic, science-respecting education. This Professor Dewey has done" (Kirkpatrick 12).

Chapter 3: Hannah Arendt

Hermeneutics and the Student as the Political Self

In this chapter, I will use Arendt's concepts of historicism, human motivation, the *vita activa*, and the role of narrative in the development of self identity, and particularly the development of political self-identity. I will examine the cultural construct of "freedom" as a fundamentally hermeneutic space and identify the conjunction of hermeneutics and personal motivation for engaging in civic action necessary to defend and extend freedom in a democratic society. Through this process, I intend to explicate how Arendt's analysis of the natural political self can be used to develop a pedagogy of composition that connects writing students to their communities. This will support key arguments of my dissertation by demonstrating how and why our political selves develop in relation to our communities and how harnessing those unique perspectives in the composition classroom presents new opportunities for engaged democratic citizenship among our students. My units of analysis for this chapter are *Between Past and Future*, *The Human Condition*, and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Understanding Arendt's role and unique contribution to the idea of a hermeneutic classroom involves first establishing her credibility as an observer of democracy and the dangers of Totalitarianism taking control of that society through its political systems. I will also establish the importance of returning the academy to its proper role as defender of democracy in the manner envisioned first by Plato and recaptured by modern scholars. Examining the history of the political self is first step in developing a pedagogy of engaged civic discourse by establishing how the political self developed in antiquity as a

pursuit of permanence against the temporality of nature, as well as the motive of political actors in pursuit of remembrance. I'll present the importance of action as the defining characteristic of engaged citizenship and carry that idea into the modern era. In the modern era of the political self, I'll examine the role of narrative in establishing political norms and discuss how the loss of transcendent truth affected the political institutions and the political motivations of mankind. I'll then cover how the search for new transcendent virtues led to the rise of totalitarianism and how and why a hermeneutic pedagogy can best prepare modern students to recognize and defending freedom and egalitarian democracy. Finally, in conditioning the student as the political self, I'll discuss the modern notions of equality and freedom as they are codified in our constitution and what that means for the political self. I'll also look at the role the academy played traditionally in the development of engaged citizen rhetors and argue for its return to the role along the lines of Nancy Welch, Steve Parks, Ira Shor, Genevieve Critel, Paul Loeb, and others. Most importantly, I'll present the unique contribution that Hannah Arendt makes to the movement toward citizen rhetors in the composition classroom.

Hannah Arendt as Rhetor Philosopher

Perhaps no philosopher of the 20th century is better positioned to critique the intersection of the political and the personal than Hannah Arendt. Arendt studied philosophy with Martin Heidegger at the University of Marburg in the late 1930s, but as a Jew was not allowed to Habilitate (Graduate). She supported refugee Jews in France until 1941 when she and her husband were forced to flee Nazi Germany to the United States. Later she reported on the Nuremburg trials and wrote a book about them in which she coined the phrase, "the banality of evil," a concept that serves as her treatise on the

potential for evil to emerge in democracies. Having witnessed the rise of a totalitarian state through popular vote, Arendt was particularly concerned with the role democracy plays in the evolution of freedom such that it could result in the creation of a fascist state. She had a uniquely qualified voice on the subject. Indeed, it may easily be argued that few people in the last century have as much credibility on the subject of democracy and the need for a critically engaged citizenship as does Hannah Arendt. Her work with Heidegger prepared her for the hermeneutic, or interpretive, observation of how Germany's democracy turned into totalitarian rule, and Arendt worked the remainder of her life presenting ideas and solutions to prevent it from reoccurring. In this way, her work complements Dewey's arguments of the need for engaged, critical citizens.

However, unlike Dewey, Arendt's primary discussions of education argue against incorporating community politics in the education of children, and she encouraged a strict authority/student division between teachers and their classrooms in primary and secondary education. While these arguments are valid and should bear further discussion for students prior to college, university students are almost all adults of voting age who are completely equal to their teachers when it comes to our only direct form of political change, voting. These students' ability to examine their society and government critically is vital for an effective democracy that resists totalitarian rule. The academy, in its primary role since its inception by Plato, exists to develop critically thinking, logically reasoning citizens who engage in the process of self-rule. Though universities and colleges have taken on the role as well of developing skilled workers who support an industrialized society, the protection of our democracy first and foremost must never be abrogated by the academy, and it is time for the academy to reestablish its cultural

authority in this role. That process begins by connecting our newest voting members of the citizenry to their political responsibilities and helping them understand how their political selves relate to the political world.

This argument is certainly not new in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Beginning in the 1990's, scholars like Sharon Crowley, William Keith, Michael Leff, Steven Mailloux, and others identified the shift away from civic rhetoric in English departments throughout the 20th Century and argued for a return to the study of rhetorical practice and civic engagement. Certainly in the last few years the emphasis on community engagement in Rhetoric and Composition programs has been promoted by Lorraine Higgins, Elenore Long, and Linda Flower among others. This move toward civic literacies and action in composition programs has broadened to encompass Writing Across Communities programs like the one at the University of New Mexico as well as gender and racial rhetorics of activism. While everyone seems to recognize the loss of a civic oriented rhetorical education as well as argue in favor of new pedagogies of engagement, few have examined *why* such civic engagement focused composition pedagogies should be an important function of Writing Programs beyond the culturally constructed desired outcomes. Fewer still address the basic human motivation toward freedom, and the necessary action in its defense, that Hannah Arendt offers through the analysis of the political self.

Historicism in the Development of the Political Self

Hannah Arendt built much of her philosophy on the notion that history plays a dominant role in the development of Western culture and by extension the development of the *political self*. She divides Western history into two components, ancient and

modern. Arendt tracks modern history from the beginnings of the scientific revolution and the Renaissance, though it didn't become ubiquitous in the lives of humans until the rise of industrialization. Much of her philosophy and criticism in both *The Human Condition* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is tied to the effects of this modern history on the human consciousness and contemporary public self. However, the role of Ancient history and its inventions are what motivate Arendt's construction of the nature of human existence itself, and that is important in a number of ways, including the motive of history, the role of narrative in cultural consciousness (which is further extended by Paul Ricoeur), and the concept of the political self.

For Arendt, Ancient Western history deals with the Greek invention of Democracy and the concurrent invention of the citizen legislator responsible for the function of government and answerable to the polis. However, the development of these political inventions would never have happened without the dichotomy that exists between man and nature. What is important to understand from Arendt's view of Ancient history is the role historicism, and the narrative form we use to express it, plays in the development of our political selves as beings simultaneously capable of self-reflection and self-deception in our pursuit of permanence, our pursuit of immortality separate from the limitations of our natural processes.

For the Greeks, nature existed outside the realms of gods and men, and thus was immortal. Since the Greeks did not mythologize the creation of the world by their gods, those parts of the world that came "into being by themselves without assistance from men and gods" (*Between Past and Future* 42) are ever-present, and thus immortal in their "nature." Since mankind is part of nature, the nature of mankind is immortal. As Arendt

highlights, “Aristotle explicitly assures us that man, insofar as he is a natural being and belongs to the species of mankind, possesses immortality” (*Between Past and Future* 42) but the consciousness and memories of individual men do not. Those things are the hallmark of mortality because they are capable of disappearing from the world to be forgotten forever, and it is that part of human nature that defines the concepts of human existence and legacy.

Even mountains change. That is the argument by Rilke against the Greek notion of permanence in nature, and thus Arendt concludes that even if concepts like imperishability or immortality actually exist, they would be homeless. There are no permanent structures, and even those artifacts such as the Greek ruins and Egyptian pyramids that have lasted a few thousand years on a billion year old planet are there only because they draw their relative permanence from the natural materials from which they are constructed. No one can name the men whose hands laid the stones. Their thoughts and ideals and memories are forgotten forever, and eventually even those ruins and monuments will collapse into dust. Stories, however, approach permanence because they are rejuvenated continuously in the hearts and minds of new generations of humans, each of whom are impermanent by themselves. Only humans possess the capacity to communicate, teach, and remember the names and acts of those who came before them to generate a kind of immortality, a kind of permanence that exists nowhere else, not even in nature. For Arendt, this is the true motive of history, and it is this particular idea that ties Hannah Arendt to hermeneutic philosophy, particularly in her understanding and expression of the role of narrative in the establishment of the political self and the promulgation of cultural norms across cultural spheres.

It is this dimension of Arendt's philosophy, that the motive of history is to secure immortality and remembrance in support of cultural norms and development, that we begin to think in political terms. For Arendt, the political mind is not one concerned with the acquisition of political office or financial gain, rather, the political mind is intricately tied to the nature of human consciousness. We are political beings because we are beings concerned with propagating ideas and supporting our personal beliefs in the ongoing pursuit of permanence, whether that be ideological or biological. Beyond the pursuit of legislation and prosperity as vehicles for driving permanence for our society, as individuals we also pass down family traditions and raise our children in our own cultures and belief systems in a subconscious desire to extend ourselves into the future beyond the limitations of our temporary physical lives. The primary vehicle for this translation of history, tradition, and culture is narrative, a concept important in its totality to Arendt's philosophy that will be explicated more thoroughly in Ricoeur.

Both Ned Curthoys in "Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Narrative," and Julia Kristeva in *Hannah Arendt, Life is a Narrative*, bridge Arendt's ideas of the political self and the role of narrative in the construction of the "conceptual personae," (Curthoys 350) or as I have framed it, the political self. Narrative is a crucial element in the propagation of cultural norms, and therefore is not necessarily anchored in objective facts or documentation. Arendt was concerned with objectivity primarily as a necessary element of a genuine historical account, but she recognized as well the contributions of Werner Heisenberg, whom she quotes in *The Human Condition*, regarding the natural tendency of humans to alter objective fact simply from the process of observation itself. In the observation of history and the development of the political self, the effect of altering our

observations to reflect cultural expectations are what Kenneth Burke calls *terministic screens* and Arabella Lyon describes as “suspicion within interpretation” (*Intentions* 85). Psychologists call this behavior the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE), which is the human tendency to ascribe dispositional effects for the behaviors of others rather than situational ones. I call these alterations *cultural screens* because they’re culturally anchored rather than species anchored. In other words, we tend to apply our own biases and cultural judgments on the behavior of others rather than view them objectively.

For the observation of history, Arendt described the problem of a true objectivity, what Ranke defined as the “extinction of the self,” in terms of the human tendency toward smoothing (*Between Past and Future* 49), since even attempts at such true historical objectivity are undermined at their outset by the selection and editing of the material used in the research of that event or personality. The narrative we tell about Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, is filled with cultural norms about civil rights, human dignity, courage, and leadership because those elements defined the man, and were defined by the man in his actions. He was the youngest man to receive a Nobel Peace Prize, and he continued his work toward peace and equality in spite of often violent opposition until the day he was assassinated.

Few narrative accounts of M.L.K., however, recount his “weakness for women” (Abernathy), or his “numerous extramarital affairs” (Garrow), or the reported FBI surveillance tape of Dr. King from the Willard Hotel on the day before his assassination with 14 hours of recorded partying and sex. Indeed, our history is replete with examples of heroic figures and great achievements that fail to also account for the very “humanness” of the individuals involved. Thus, Arendt argues that historical narrative is

about the essence of the historical tale, a “sensuous objectivity which has the subjective as one of its elements” (Hansen 19). History is not about objective fact, it’s merely the process by which we carry forward valued cultural ideas and expectations based on people and events as we choose to see them, not as they actually were.

Arendt uses the story of Ulysses (the Latinized form of Odysseus) listening to the tale of his own life at the court of the king of the Phaeacians as the paradigm for understanding the dual nature of historical narrative. As actor, audience, and sufferer of the story, Ulysses is in a unique position of both remembering the objective historical reality as well as being moved to weeping by the subjectivity of the reports of the messengers. This catharsis, the “reconciliation with history,” (*Between Past and Future* 45) as Arendt describes it, is the ultimate purpose of historical narrative. For Arendt, Ulysses lacks the usual motives of curiosity and lust for information that drives all historical inquiry, since he has already lived them; rather, Ulysses is moved by his repositioning within the timeline of history, by the recognition of his own immortality in the words and deeds of the Ricoeurian *other*.

When confronted with the greatness of his actions, Ulysses comes to recognize that immortality is a collection of historical moments as perceived by the historians in reference to themselves and their cultural ideals rather than by himself who knew the truth of the humanness of those moments. This is an important hermeneutic concept for Arendt’s political self, that the solutions we seek to the problems of mankind, whether through “objective” science, or “subjective” history will always be undermined by the questions we ask, questions limited by the subjective humanness of the questioners. Arendt presents us with a criticism of objectivity as an idea confused by an assumption

that there could exist independent answers that lie outside the human limitations of the questioners.

This is why narrative plays such a crucial role for the political self. Narrative is a structure that is pervasive across all human histories and thus serves as a bridge between cultures that is anchored in each cultural sphere by the expectations of both the speaker and the audience as it is perceived from within those spheres, regardless of which person is the historian and which the audience in a given point in time. This can lead both to mutual understanding, if those anchors are similar in concept, or to mutual misunderstanding if those anchors are displaced by unique cultural historicism. That's where Donald Davidson's triangulation theory becomes so important in hermeneutic pedagogies of higher education in constructing discourse between cultural spheres.

This aspect of historicism is what fuels the political self, and it foregrounds Arendt's criticism of *modernity* as a poor foundation for concepts such as human equality, civil rights, and moral transcendence necessary for the preservation of a productive, egalitarian society. If we can't rely on true objectivity because it doesn't exist, then we are left with subjective views of history and the world that must always be questioned, and thus we are always questioning our own sense of permanence, the thing that defines our sense of human existence.

For Arendt, modernity and its anchor in the Cartesian doubts about the reality of human experience marked the end of transcendent "truths" that served as the scaffolding of human rights and moral ideals. Western traditions, prior to modernity, held that moral standards existed outside the limitations of the human mind, standards against which we could compare and evaluate our subjective choices. These standards helped us define

“right” versus “wrong,” and “good” versus “evil” through the use of Aristotelian logic to clarify whether our beliefs and behaviors were appropriate and in line with the standards our narrative historicism provided. Without this transcendent anchor for human morals and actions, we lose the foundations of our moral behaviors and beliefs, and this loss serves as a fertile field for the rise of Totalitarianism and entrenched radicalism at the expense of equality and justice.

Totalitarian ideology is appealing precisely because it provides a sense of permanence and authority “in a world where nobody is reliable and nothing can be relied upon” (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 478). The value of this argument in the development of engaged citizens among modern generations is the recognition by Arendt that these dangers are not external, as we tend to assume, but rather internal. It was not that the reality of the world rejected human notions of morality and equality, rather, it was the political self removed from transcendent moral virtue that rejected the reality of the world as a common space in which we all must live, integrate, and cooperate. If we can no longer trust our senses and our traditions as harbingers of unquestionable virtue, then we are left only with our individual contributions to the world in which to find personal salvation. In other words, “if we are incapable of knowing the world given to us, we can at least know what we ourselves have made” (Hansen 22). The result is a rejection of historicism as the framework upon which modern common experiences, regardless of our cultural spheres and screens, can ground our basic concepts of accepted moral authority.

This “crisis of authority,” as Arendt sees it, means “we can no longer fall back upon authentic and undisputable experiences common to all” (*Between Past and Future*

91) in pursuit of an egalitarian modern world. This is valuable to our work in rhetoric and composition because it demonstrates there are no “common” experiences, only similar ones. A healthy critical mind is not created by seeking the commonalities among a group and examining them. Healthy critical examination comes from examining the *differences* in our similar experiences and how and why those differences exist, and that’s where hermeneutics can contribute so effectively to new composition pedagogies.

Modernity denotes progress, and progressivism is a threat to status quo cultural institutions. The criticism of civil progress is often couched in the threat that progress poses to established ideologies and traditions. For example, the rhetorical “beachhead” established for the defense of marriage against gay marriage supporters over the past decade has been less about the relative morality of love between consenting homosexual adults and more about its assumed existential threat to the institution of marriage itself. Hannah Arendt recognized that it is exactly efforts by modern societies to reestablish absolute authority and unquestioning certainty that led to Totalitarian regimes and religious radicalism in the 20th Century: “Totalitarianism became this century’s curse only because it so terrifyingly took care of its problems” (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 430) by creating the false politics of a new transcendent moral authority.

Sharon Crowley explores the resurgence of Totalitarianism in America over the past 30 years in *The Rhetoric of Fundamentalism*. She identifies the political disconnect between liberal democracy that is the foundation of our constitution and based on reason and factual evidence, and Christian apocalyptists, who rely on revelation, faith, and biblical interpretation to ground their political claims. According to Crowley, Fundamentalists “judge the world against some otherworld of the supernatural and find it

wanting – this life is but a falling off from, a dim reflection of, or arduous preparation for, a better one” (Crowley 134). If our work in the academy is about preparing new students for the rigors of academic thought and the practice of critical examination, then helping them see among themselves this same struggle between progress and tradition, between pragmatism and ideology, will help them become better stewards of their democracy and help defend against the ever-present threat of Totalitarianism.

Hannah Arendt, for her part, is neither critical of the loss of transcendent value nor supportive of a specific new structure upon which to establish our sense of human existence; rather, she is primarily concerned with the political implications such a change suggests for the evolution of human thought and the preservation of a fair and equal society. Rather than seek moral grounds for human rights in some mythological grand authority or in some version of natural law, Arendt’s solution, and one that is central to the development of critically engaged citizens in the modern Academy, is the understanding and acceptance of a new “transcultural” common experience, what Juan Guerra terms “transcultural repositioning,” in which grounds for human dignity, equality, and civil rights can be established. This is the exigence for a contemporary political self in which human rights are grounded not in political or religious authority, but in the value and dignity of human experience itself, regardless of how unique that experience may be. By embracing the hermeneutic experience of life then, we embrace the unique, individual experiences of it and ground those experiences in equality and validity. The acceptance of the Ricoeurian “other” as valid and equal is the best vehicle for undermining Totalitarian conformity and preserving democracy, and it is the cornerstone of a hermeneutic pedagogy in the composition classroom.

Modernity and the Political Self in Democracy

Establishing a framework for identifying the contemporary political minds of students in the academy involves understanding the world from their unique and often limited exposure to it. However, as we've already established, that understanding is naturally restricted by our own cultural screens and experiences. It's one thing to consume the popular media of our student audience, for example, in an attempt to understand their influences; it's another to build a pedagogy of hermeneutic composition based on that reductivist practice. Instead, our understanding of our students, our "others," in the classroom can be accomplished by examining the varied world experiences of these students and the implications that those unique experiences engender among them, and that is best accomplished as a meta-conversation amongst and between the teacher and the students. The practice of that examination is part of the the pedagogy of a hermeneutic classroom through critical interpretation.

Thus, rather than searching for cultural commonalities around which to construct a composition pedagogy, which will always be flawed, a pedagogy of composition and critical examination can be anchored instead in the individually unique experiences of our students themselves – varied, interpreted, conflicting, and disputable as they may be. This ultimately unique hermeneutic understanding of the world is the ironic commonality of all humanity, and that commonality is the foundation of our social order. Embracing our varied cultural screens in pursuit of common political action is possible only when we understand and accept the idea of unique, sometimes conflicting, but always fully valid perspectives of shared human experiences as David Donaldson so eloquently defines in the *principle of charity*.

It is not a new argument that focusing on commonalities in a writing classroom can undermine individual experiences and render invalid unique perspectives. Kurt Spellmeyer is highly critical of “shared communities” in composition pedagogy, likening them to the shared conventions of a prison because they shared communities necessarily subjugate the individual experience to the group. (Spellmeyer 83). Greg Myers criticizes the community metaphor of composition pedagogy as a system that rewards conformity at the expense of dissent and difference, and Frank Walters began encouraging writing teachers in the mid-90s to examine the extent to which they “reinforce the strategies of a social order that coerces agreement” (Walters 823). What Arendt offers us through her concepts of narrative, objective history, and hermeneutic motivations are vehicles for examining the individual in both contrast to and consensus with the group as a whole, and this is more representative of the real world our students will always occupy. Pedagogies that either embrace individualism in resistance to social order or focus on common denominators at the expense of unique perspectives both fail to address reality. The dichotomy of individuation versus communal pedagogies is a binary tension that hermeneutic classroom specifically seeks to understand.

The Dangers of Totalitarianism in a Democracy

When she began work on the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt was concerned not with preserving or conserving the historiography of totalitarian rule, but rather with destroying the capacity for its reoccurrence. This poses a dilemma for a narrator who simultaneously seeks to present a relatively objective history of the process for the best understanding of it while also seeking to undermine and criticize that same process for future generations. “Thus my first problem was how to write historically about something

– totalitarianism – which I did not want to conserve but on the contrary felt engaged to destroy” (*A Reply to Voegelin* 79). This engaged rhetorical practice places Hannah Arendt in the dual position of philosopher and rhetorical scholar. Arendt also believed in the agency of her own rhetorical project, and thus she crosses the line from purely objective scholar into the realm of Applied Rhetorics because she was ultimately concerned with the process of objective understanding as a mechanism for influencing an audience toward a particular position.

Arendt accomplished this challenging task by humanizing the actors within the Totalitarian culture and highlighting the human decisions made under the most difficult of political circumstances. While the process of historical narrative in its traditional form requires an adherence to the chronology of events from precedent to succession that grants it the appearance of inevitability, Arendt was most concerned with breaking this pattern by stressing the overlapping human experiences surrounding them, including alternative orientations and unique viewpoints as well as potentialities for alternate outcomes. This process of “fragmentary historiography” (Benhabib 121) creates opportunities to reposition our historical understanding of the process, helps us re-imagine the varied human experiences and multiple viewpoints within the history itself, creates empathy for the failed hopes and efforts of the dead that historical necessity has ignored, and alters our judgment of the “inevitability” of history. In essence, it helps us engage history in a new and more active way outside of the accepted cultural norms of the official historical narrative, and this is the praxis of hermeneutic pedagogies in support of our social concepts of freedom.

However, the problems in this new process of repositioning one's viewpoint toward an understanding of the "other" in any given historical recreation are twofold. First, any form of relativism that such a process implies can lead away from the similar moral elements of an experience from multiple viewpoints and toward a conclusion that there is no shared concept of "right" or "wrong" and that all our moral justifications are mere smoke screens for our individual biases, perspectives, and desires. Second, the adoption of a plural view of history is only possible insofar as the historian is capable of imagining the viewpoints of the other with limited resistance from the cultural screens inherent in each of us. Arendt addresses both of these issues, with varying degrees of success, in her adoption of two key positions regarding human engagement and moral development of the political self: The *vita activa* and *natality*.

Freedom and the Vita Activa

The nature of human existence is political, and the purpose of the political self is freedom. This is the conclusion we can draw from Arendt's exploration of the *vita activa* and her adoption of Aristotle's dictum "man is by nature political, that is, social," as well as Kantian concepts of freedom and free will, subject as they are to the categorical imperative. Like John Dewey, Arendt was concerned with the contributions of labor and work to the social animal. For Arendt, specifically, the *vita activa* consists of three elements: Labor, work, and action. Labor is the personal and private activity one engages in for the sustenance and reproduction of one's physical life, and Arendt draws heavily on Marx's ideas regarding labor in her definition. She argues that labor is the force in our *vita activa* that keeps us linked to the natural world, for "the blessing or the joy of labor is the human way to experience the sheer bliss of being alive which we share with all living

creatures, and it is even the only way men, too, can remain and swing contentedly in nature's prescribed cycle" (*The Human Condition* 106). Work, by contrast, corresponds to our community engagement and need for social sustenance and reproduction. It is what we make with our hands or produce in value for the sake of ourselves within and compared to our respective communities. Arendt connects work to *homo faber*, or "man the creator." In the role of *homo faber*, man constructs a bridge between labor, which was traditionally private in nature, and the public realm. This bridging aspect of work occurs through the inherent destruction of nature necessary to achieve work's products, thus moving humans into a unique position relative to other animals outside the confines of nature and into the realm of the *polis*, and it exists for the sake of the public alone. "Since his productivity was seen in the image of a Creator-God, so that where God creates *ex nihilo*, man creates out of given substance, human productivity was by definition bound to result in a Promethean revolt because it could erect a man-made world only after destroying part of God-created nature" (*The Human Condition* 139). But only in this man-made world are humans capable of engaging in the third aspect of the *vita activa*, *action*.

Action is defined by Arendt in relation to Labor and Work. All three, says Arendt, are "conditioned by the fact that men live together, but it is only action that cannot be imagined outside the society of men" (*The Human Condition* 22). Any behavior, such as labor, that is limited to self-sustenance is not action, for all animals in nature are engaged in their own ways in this endeavor, and thus Arendt calls this behavior *animal laborans*. Even a man who toils in a field and provides for his own shelter and sustenance, if he does so alone, is not fully human, for while he labors, he lacks the elements of work or

action in his life. As well, *homo faber* may serve as a bridge between labor and action, but itself is focused on fabrication and preoccupied solely with means and end. It is in this utilitarian nature of work that *homo faber* fails to compare with action, because it has “an innate incapacity to understand the distinction between utility and meaningfulness” (*The Human Condition* 154). Nevertheless, both labor and work are necessary elements in the life of humans for action to emerge because only when our physical needs are met such that they do not preoccupy our constant thoughts and when our work creates the structures and goods upon which a community is built are we free to undertake new beginnings (*natality*) and distinguish ourselves from others in the public world through action and speech.

Abraham Maslow expanded extensively on this concept in his 1954 book *Motivation and Personality* in which he argues for a “hierarchy of needs” that must be met in order for self-actualization to occur. If labor and work are effective for meeting those base needs, in Arendt’s interpretation, then self-actualization is generative to creation. For Arendt, this space of self-actualization occurs in the *natality*, the creation, of new ideas and/or the development of creative solutions to common problems through action in public spaces. The composition classroom is an excellent public space for new college students to learn and practice the mechanisms of effective action. In contrast to her contemporary peer, Heidegger, who linked private contemplation (*Sophia*) to action, Arendt argues that action and plurality are intricately linked because action always occurs in conjunction with other people. “Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act. Action and speech need the surrounding presence of others no less than fabrication needs the

surrounding presence of nature for its materials, and of a world in which to place the finished product” (*The Human Condition* 188). Action outside of the public sphere is merely introspection, no matter how many tools or how much destruction of nature is involved. Action, therefore, as the principal means of defining and expressing the political self corresponds to the condition of plurality, which in turn is *THE* condition, the of all political life. Bridging the concept of valid individual experiences to the common political realm is the point and purpose of rhetorical practice in the composition classroom.

For Arendt, like Aristotle, action and speech are “coequal” and necessary companions under the broader definition of “action” as it relates to the *vita activa*. Without action, there can be no new discoveries or changes that benefit the public or the individuals who make up the public. Without speech, there can be no “remembrance” or means of persuasion that is necessary for action to take hold. Our words and our deeds together serve as defining principles of the political self in determining what makes each of us unique within the confines of the public sphere in which we engage. Mary Dietz points out that Arendt did not apply a Latinized form for this third aspect of human nature as she did for labor (*animal laborans*) or work (*homo faber*) “perhaps because Arendt means for it to capture an aspect of human life that is essentially collective” (Dietz 235). The idea that we all live in a world in which we share common goals and traits, yet each of us within that common world is inherently unique, is described by Arendt as “the paradoxical *plurality* of unique human beings” (*The Human Condition* 176).

This role of action and its relationship to plurality is intricately connected to the process of developing a hermeneutically engaged citizenship primarily because of its

impact on our ideas about freedom and how we define and communicate those ideas.

However, before we can discuss these ideas about freedom, it is first necessary to examine the political self to better understand how individuals move intellectually from labor, work, and introspection into the realm of action. A strong understanding of this evolution toward action will help us better understand how to communicate and deliver the necessary tools to composition students for this action to occur.

All people are defined in two ways, first in “what” they are, and second in “who” they are. Our understanding of the key differences between these ideas can best be understood through this lens of plurality. If plurality is the essential condition for the public realm to exist, then plurality is also explicitly reliant upon the political self actively operating within that realm. To create a public space is merely half the battle. Without active engagement within it, the creation of public space simply becomes *publica absque causa* (public without purpose).

For Arendt, this public space is the sphere in which individuals are simultaneously united and identified as unique human beings. But plurality cannot fully and objectively define “what” a person is, e.g. the characteristics, talents, faults, etc. of a person, because those things can be hidden or misrepresented by either the person or the public and because our human limitations and situational biases prevent us from completely and objectively analyzing the defined “what.” Nevertheless, that same incomplete and vague definition, while still subject to the vagaries of ontology as Arendt expresses in her criticism, can be argued is still the necessary condition for acceptance into the public sphere as an equal.

If we are to accept the Enlightenment concept that all humans are born equal to all other humans relative to the natural world in which our unique human capacity for meaning-making is grounded, then the idea of “what” a person is will have both the unique qualities of each person as well as the universal qualities that ties us all together. As Linda Adler-Kassner argues in *The Activist WPA*, “the power of personally grounded stories for individuals... when seen as a collective body, testify and give witness to a larger one” (Adler-Kassner 4). In other words, “what” a person is has the same “paradox of plurality” that Arendt describes in *The Human Condition*.

For plurality to exist, we must accept the *other* within that public space as having valid and relevant positions compared to ourselves, and we can only accomplish that if we accept the humanness of the other as equal to our own, regardless of the differences in race, gender, identity, or handicap that may exist. Put another way, if we reject any other person or group as less than equal to ourselves or possessing fewer “rights,” then we are also engendering the proposition that others may possess greater rights than our own, and that is antithetical to the Enlightenment ideals of equality and justice. Thus, plurality is limited in its capacity to define equality by any measure other than a fully socialized and realized ubiquity if plurality itself has any meaning at all. True plurality therefore, can only exist in a fully socialized and equal public space.

While plurality may be constrained in its definition of “what” a person is, it is ideally suited for defining “who” a person is, because our purposeful engagement through actions and speech within the public realm reveal who we are, and that can neither be hidden nor purposefully exposed by the *other* within that space. This does not mean that a person is not human if he or she fails to engage in public speech or democratic actions

that we observe in others. This is because public space itself can't be limited to considerations of social political action. Public space is anywhere that humans engage one another in various communities, whether in the home, at school, at work, or among friends and acquaintances, as well as public political speech.

Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca expand on this idea in *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Perelman argues that no universal audience is absolute, but rather that all audiences are made up of individual people with different perspectives dependent on the situation and the relative values of the orator. Wherever two or more humans engage in any type of communication there exists the individuation of the political self. This individuation is an inevitable consequence of living "among men," as Arendt describes it, because the necessity and process of communication required for life among others means that we automatically disclose ourselves in the process. Seyla Benhabib provides us with the differentiation that Arendt brings to modern philosophy in this idea that the political self is constructed wholly through action. Contrary to traditional philosophical ideas that the self can be constructed either in comparison to others (e.g. the Kantian "I") or as an introspective thinker separate from them, Arendt's definition of the political self is reliant upon one's position within the human community, for not even introspection is possible without a position from which to differentiate or define the self within the world or without interacting in the realm of men.

If we can imagine a human born into the world who never has the opportunity to interact with another human (ignoring for the moment ideas of survival in the early stages of life), then that human would never possess the capacity for language, comparison, or

philosophical introspection, and thus the concept of the Kantian “I” would not be possible. Therefore, it is from our interactions with others that we learn to define ourselves, and those interactions necessarily breed concepts of individuation and community – i.e. the public realm. Thus, according to Perelman and the *new rhetoric*, all exploration of differences within this public realm must proceed from a “communion,” or point of agreement between the orator and the audience, or between the teacher and the students, that they are equal in order for contentious matters to be addressed with any hope of achieving consensus. This is a vital consideration for addressing the lack of political consensus in 21st Century, post-9/11 political rhetoric in which key influencers of the public realm seek to undermine points of agreement on issues ranging from progressive taxation to the value of social support programs by attempting to undermine the validity of the other.

If all experiences are unique, then finding communal values among individuals in a given audience is necessarily predeterminate for action to work. Conversely, action, and its supporting component speech, is an integral part of defining “who” a person is within a given community, though it is not always clear that the definition is understood by the person speaking or acting. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, is a man defined uniquely by his extraordinary actions and speeches, but those actions and speeches have no impact on the public space unless common values exist among the audiences he addresses. Regardless, the “who” a person is perceived as by the audience, particularly in retrospect, is rarely predictive because the speaker cannot know for certain if the communion exists until the action of the community manifests as a result. As Parekh argues, “the self that is disclosed in speech and action is often a mystery even to the

agent” (Parekh 31). This is because the phenomenologies of both the speaker and the audience are unique and filled with cultural screens. Often, in trying to disclose “who” a person is based on his or her speech or actions, we resort to describing part of “what” that person is to help connect our ideas to existing cultural biases and concepts as a short-form of communication.

When describing the ideas presented in a speech from a speaker, we inevitably position that speaker within acceptable, known spheres to the audience – e.g. credentials, position, gender, political party, class status, race, etc. Aristotle defined this process as the *Ethos* necessary in a speaker for persuasion and rhetoric to find success. Speech and action in and of themselves are ambiguous without these cultural anchors from which we draw our opinions on the content. This is based, in part, on the inherent difficulty of articulating the distinctiveness of one person from another without intersubjective agreement between the speaker and the audience regarding the meaning and judgment of the speech and action. For *Ethos* to apply, therefore, the audience must also possess a hermeneutic *Confidence* in the “what” of the speaker as valid relative to the topic at hand. This requisite intersubjective agreement is the core requirement for political influence and power to exist in the public space, and public space is necessary for the political to exist at all. As Hansen argues, “political thinking is itself a political act: it can only proceed dialogically” (Hansen 3). Neither rhetorical *Ethos* nor hermeneutic *Confidence* can exist without one another, just as plurality and society cannot exist without politics. Human existence is about more than survival and work, it is about action that occurs in our public spaces and how we interact and engage with the others through what Patricia

Bizzell defines as “social processes” in those spaces. As humans, we think politically not out of choice, but out of necessity.

Aristotle dismissed epideictic rhetoric as the weakest of three genres of rhetoric, but Perelman promotes epideictic rhetoric and the communal values it relies upon as central to all arguments for action to occur. From a hermeneutic perspective, Perelman is right, but his explication of this new rhetorical hierarchy fails to consider the dangers that such rhetoric poses for critical democracy. Nazi Germany was excellent at using epideictic rhetoric for establishing common values among German citizens that, in broader analysis, were ultimately destructive to democratic ideals of equality, justice, and freedom. Arendt’s unique contribution to the study of public life and the nature of human interaction, therefore, is motivated by her direct experience and observations of the rise of a Totalitarian state in Germany and is bounded by the nature of the political human in modernity and the ways in which humans interact with one another in public spaces. She avoids judgment or directives in her philosophies, even of those people who supported the Nazi party in Germany. Her goal was neither deconstruction of the political world nor a rationalization of pro forma ideals; rather, she was interested in exploring, as objectively as possible, the history of mankind and its influence on the hermeneutics of individual action within political spheres regardless of moral or ethical decree, yet her “objective” study of this space also relied upon modern communal values constructed as a result of the sins of the Totalitarian Nazi state.

Humans are political animals driven by individual desires shaped by our history but not controlled by it. We are both creatures of our past and progenitors of our future, but our actions exist only in the now, or as Arendt describes it, “Between Past and

Future,” between what has shaped us and what we are going to shape. It is clear from our history that humans are both capable of shaping a society that benefits the greatest numbers of people within it as well as shaping one that is destructive to all but a few. Thus, Arendt’s goal was to understand rather than proscribe human action and interaction in an effort to explicate the notion of freedom and improve our collective consciousness regarding the roles action and politics play – “for action and politics, among all the capabilities and potentialities of human life, are the only things of which we could not even conceive without at least assuming that freedom exists...and freedom...is actually the reason that men live together in political organization at all. Without it, political life would be meaningless. The *raison d’être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action” (*Between Past and Future* 146).

This is critical for composition teacher to understand because our role not only within the academy, but also within the broader democratic society the academy exists to protect, is to educate new citizens about their responsibilities in a democratic society, about the dangers of unexamined ideologies and traditions, and about the necessity and process of action in the public sphere to protect basic freedoms. However, the concept of “freedom” itself is an ontological one, and uniquely hermeneutic. That’s why an examination of that rhetorical space is also necessary for understanding the motivations of composition students.

Freedom never exists in a vacuum, but can only exist in relation to others within the public sphere, thus freedom is dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense. Our notions of freedom, conflicting as they sometimes may be, are always framed in response to the notions of freedom as expressed by others and in anticipation of arguments that will be

framed against our own expressions in the future. There are also the dialogic notions of freedom “to,” and freedom “from,” which are sometimes diametrically opposed. In other words, there is no unified ideal or proposition of freedom that can be either demanded or imposed without simultaneously infringing upon the notions of freedom as they are understood by others, and that is the exigence of politics as well as the necessity of action within the public sphere. “Men are free – as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom – as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same” (*Between Past and Future* 153). We are free, in other words, only as much as we define freedom for ourselves and act to gain, maintain, and defend it.

This necessity of action for freedom to exist is the foundational argument for a hermeneutic pedagogy within higher education that bridges the desires for freedom by new citizens in our classrooms with the necessity of an active and engaged citizenship in a functional Democracy. It’s also a simple argument to make to new writing students in the academy: “If you desire freedom in your life, it is necessary for you to act. Without constant and persistent action, there is no freedom for yourself or your family.” As we have discussed, wherever social spheres exist, there exists the individuation of the political character, and though “political” thinking is often intimidating when the idea is broached with new students, it is important for our audience to understand that thinking politically involves neither academic intelligence nor moral ideology; rather, it is the fundamental, naturally social process by which we secure our individual places in our overlapping spheres of influence through our relationship to the “others,” in Ricoeur’s definition, and more importantly, to our concept of the self. Most importantly, how we understand ourselves is the engine that drives our political motivations. Therefore, it’s

one thing to tell students they should be involved and even to tell them why, but unless we understand what motivates our students to action from their perspectives, we will never generate true engagement on their part.

This is Arendt's recursive proposition of the self, that is, how we identify ourselves as individuals depends on how we choose to interact and engage with other individuals and groups that make up our Habermasian spheres, and our identities are inextricably tied to our personal experiences and views regarding our capabilities, opportunities, and limitations within those spheres. Our concepts of freedom exist in a binary tension between the individual concept of the self and the concept of what defines the social good in support of the self. Supporting the social good at the expense of individual free will necessarily places constraints on the purely pluralistic individual who wishes to live among others in a stable society of laws, morals, and ethics. One can never be ultimately free to act without considering the consequences of those actions both upon the self and upon the social world one inhabits. One cannot have freedom without a public sphere in which to exercise it, and one cannot have a public sphere without laws and limits upon individual action, thus infringing upon that freedom.

Those who act out of pure selfishness with no regards to the social sphere act outside the bounds of that sphere, and thus act alone. As Arendt points out, acting alone occurs only in the realm of the *animal laborans* and does not meet the minimum definitions of what can be said to be fully human. In addition, acting alone without consideration of that action on one's social spheres is not "action" in the political sense, but rather is an act of abrogation of society itself. Since freedom can only be defined relative to our actions and capabilities within the public sphere, acting alone without

regard to that sphere can never be defined as freedom. Freedom, therefore, is a boundless concept without a universal definition even though, and perhaps because, it is the purpose of the political self. It is only in our natural political minds that freedom has meaning, and only within our individual, hermeneutic minds that it has definition. This may appear antithetical to the public notion of freedom, but it is ultimately appropriate since we both imagine our plurality and engage in common society only through our individual ideals and actions, and the motivating elements of all political thinking lay in our many varied, intensely hermeneutic concepts of freedom.

Within the public realm, freedom exists only so far as it can be experienced by those engaging in that realm through action, yet freedom itself “does not express anything. It just is, in itself” (McGowan 151). It is a conceived and perceived concept that exists only in our political minds, with as many variations of concept and perception as there are minds engaged in the process. Humans overcome this fractured, hermeneutic concept of freedom by developing political institutions to codify and enforce systems designed to preserve and protect “freedom” for those who are acting members of those institutions. Since freedom itself cannot express anything, it is left to these institutions to define public concepts of freedom as they are perceived by its acting members and use political action to ensure the security of those concepts in the public realm. The reality of freedom, then, depends entirely upon institutions enforcing limited ideals of a concept that cannot exist without those ideals being promoted through action. This lies at the heart of Arendt’s claim that freedom only exists where men live together in political organization, for “not one man, but men, inhabit the earth” (*The Human Condition* 234).

The academy is an ideal example of a political institution responsible for the preservation of freedom through the education of engaged citizens.

There is, of course, a danger inherent in the proposition that freedom only exists where many individuals gather, define, and act upon a concept that is so uniquely hermeneutic, and that danger is evident in virtually all modern political institutions. For wherever people gather to define and enforce their concepts of freedom, there exists the probability that such enforcement will subjugate other people and infringe upon their own distinct ideas of freedom, and that infringement comes into existence when the inherent properties of power that emerge naturally from political institutions are applied in ways that undermine ideals of equality, justice, and freedom that the institution is meant to preserve.

Arendt is careful, however, to differentiate power from strength and violence. Power is potentially existent wherever people gather together and agree on ideas or actions for their community, and its realization corresponds to the condition of plurality and the people who agree and support the propositions of the institution from which it derives. But true power, like freedom, is a boundless concept that exists only in the minds of men and is wholly reliant upon the continued actions of those who accept its potentiality through an aggregation of approval or indifference. The boundlessness of power lies in its ability, like freedom, to be divided without decreasing its effectiveness.

However, wherever people seek to abuse power through strength or violence as a means of decreasing the effectiveness or freedom of other institutions, then power inevitably dissipates. "Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to

veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities” (*The Human Condition* 200). Tyranny, on the other hand, is often defined by the violence toward and oppression of the subjects who are prevented from acting and speaking together in the establishment of new political institutions. Tyranny relies on violence and oppression masquerading as power, but inevitably destroys itself because only the weak rely on such machinations to achieve control, and that control is always illusionary. Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. both realized this truth and were able to create true power from the actions of “powerless” people banding together in new non-violent institutions for the purpose of creating a new reality.

Power only exists where there is freedom to act, and power is circulated and accepted by a culture through the formation of political institutions. Moreover, freedom is the only condition under which power can be maintained. It is not power itself that “corrupts” as Pericles claims, rather it is the “will-to-power” and anti-political concepts of greed and control that is corrupting as Nietzsche so artfully describes. However, unlike Nietzsche who saw will-to-power as the main driving force in man, Arendt viewed the quest for permanence against the ongoing, never ending cycles of nature as the prime motivations of human consciousness, and that quest for permanence lies not in relatively fleeting ideas of power, wealth, or station, but in the remembrance of ideas and actions that are only possible in a realm where freedom is the ideal and the *vita activa* is the process from which it derives.

The Student as Political Self

The American notion of equality as inherent in all living persons from the moment of birth is a purely modern concept brought about as a codification of new ideologies embodied in the philosophies of the Enlightenment, which in turn developed in response to the chaotic ambiguities of a world seeking new values and discovering them only in the limited spaces. Without natural law as transcendent truth, new ideologies formed based on race, power, intrinsic ability, or in the case of Protestantism, moral rectitude, and dominated philosophic thought. Arendt refers to this development of ideology in place of transcendent truth as *Weltanschauung*.

The fact that such a basic concept like equality must be codified in the nation's constitution is an example of a political institution establishing an idea as sacrosanct in pursuit of egalitarianism and protection of human rights that only has power so long as the people support it because there is no "natural law" to defend it otherwise. "No answers handed down by tradition are available and valid any longer; the break in tradition is an accomplished fact...we are irrevocably modern" (*Between Past and Future* 15, 26). This is where Arendt presents one her most controversial assertions, an assertion that not only possesses enough evidence to be necessary for consideration, but which also offers us the exigence for redefining the role of the academy as the place for the development of the political self.

Arendt argues that modern society, on all its levels, having absorbed both the traditional political and private realms into the public, excludes the possibility of action for political purposes because it "expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to normalize its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding

achievement” (*The Human Condition* 40). This argument strikes at the heart of our semantic disagreements over the concept of “freedom,” because society expects from its members a conformity to social rules where behavior has replaced action as the primary means of relating to one another in the public sphere. The obstacle to action that expectations and societal pressures create have been explored by other writers like Spellmeyer, Myers, Walters, and R. Lane Kaufmann, but what Arendt offer us as composition teachers is more than observations and criticism of this obstacle; she offers us the underlying motivations to and from action that is engendered by our presence in society as both individuals and members.

Modern equality is uniquely different from ancient equality not because we have institutionalized the idea of equality as inherent in all living people, but because modern equality means conforming to social rules of acceptance of the other as the *same as me*, where ancient notions of equality required citizens to differentiate themselves from one another through action and speech, to be *distinct*, to distinguish oneself and demonstrate one’s individuality through unique ideas. “In the modern world, distinctions are the stuff of the private, where we are unique only to our friends and family, while in society we conform in order to appear equal and lacking in distinction” (Parekh 47).

This does not mean, however, that society built on the proposition that all people are inherently equal is incapable of recapturing distinctiveness and originality within its plurality; on the contrary, in the modern age of instant communications, worldwide media, and an increasingly decentralized notion of authority, we are observing the rise of individuality and political action by those who support democratic reforms around the world. What we are beginning to see at the beginning of the third millennium is a return

to political action that challenges enshrined political institutions that, in their attempts to secure their existence and stabilize the status quo have increasingly undermined political action by individuals or groups with differing philosophies that might challenge them. It's ironic how these institutions fail whenever their prominence or power is used to oppose or reject political action necessary to change their structures as the world changes around them, for "political institutions, no matter how well or how badly designed, depend for continued existence upon acting men" (*Between Past and Future* 153).

When the plurality is no longer served by the institutions designed to support and defend the governments of which they are part, then those institutions lose their power when the people stop supporting them, and those institutions inevitably are faced with three choices: To resort to violence, which we have already determined is antithetical to real power and doomed to eventual failure; to adopt fundamental reforms and change in leadership as a means toward salvation outside the status quo; or to dissolve altogether, which often leads to upheaval and instability until new institutions might be formed. When the founders of the United States codified our constitution, their aim was to create a system in which the second option is the natural default of political action in an attempt to ensure the long term survival of the nation through regularly scheduled elections as an institutionalized form of political action in support of constant, conservative change. Though this system has been tried and tested since its foundation through often contentious, sometimes violent discord, it has demonstrated a level of stability and general prosperity in modernity that no other political system or nation can claim. As Winston Churchill so famously proclaimed, "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried."

It is important to note, however, that Arendt's concept of political action neither engenders nor is concomitant to "social equality." As we have discussed, social equality is purely modern concept in which we accept others as *same as me* and thus equal and deserving of the same social, educational, jurisprudential, economic, and political attainment. In our fervent and noble efforts to extend the benefits of equality to the plurality as a whole, we often confuse the realm of the political with the realms of justice and security. Remember that the nature of human existence is political, and the purpose of the political self is freedom. This does not mean that "freedom" trumps political action, but rather that freedom does not exist without it. Neither can freedom be granted to others through political action, rather, freedom exists only where political action is taken by individuals or groups working in concert toward their own political ends.

Likewise, using politics as mechanism for delivering wealth to oneself or to others is doomed to undermine the very freedoms it hopes to establish. In the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, informed as it is by her analysis of Karl Marx, Arendt presents a politics of accumulation as the "fundamental dynamism" of capitalist economics in which totalitarian power uses political devices to secure property and wealth at the expense of the polity despite the rhetoric of those forces who claim capitalism is the only philosophy under which freedom can thrive. On the contrary, as Arendt so aptly argues, the acquisition of wealth as the sole focus of political action is anathema to freedom and through its devices will always undermine "the liberty and autonomy of man" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 143). Neither can politics be a mechanism for abolishing poverty or equalizing the distribution of wealth. While Arendt was deeply motivated by the American Revolution and the political structures developed by free-thinking men who

were heavily influenced by Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, she was equally critical of the French Revolution that focused more on serving the recurring economic needs of all its citizens at the expense of stabilized constitutional government.

In *On Revolution*, Arendt adopts the position of Edmund Burke who wrote of the French Revolution that the people of France “may have subverted Monarchy, but they have not recovered Freedom” (Clark 64). For Arendt, governing policies that are extrinsic to personal liberty in their pursuit of either property accumulation or wealth redistribution are based on “the aimless, senseless chaos of private interests” in which “property becomes a dynamic, new-property producing device” and creates a system where “wealth becomes a never-ending process of becoming wealthier” (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 142, 145). To be clear, it is not that capitalism or social welfare programs are unjust, though they possess those properties as well, nor are they the panacea for any of our nation’s needs or problems, it’s that they are meaningless relative to the pursuit of freedom through political action. These economic philosophies are merely philosophies with both positive and negative consequences, but they are not progenitors of freedom for anyone.

Many critics have noted the aesthetic nature of Arendt’s ideal of freedom, unbounded as it is from conditions of economics, society, culture, etc. For Arendt, each of us seeks a life distinguished from others and worthy of “remembrance” as a means of attaining a kind of historical permanence that exists nowhere else but in the minds of men. But an individual life can only be distinguished if it is unique, and uniqueness is shunned in a society built on a *same as me* philosophy of equality. Therefore, attaining

such distinction requires individual actors, in the political sense, to live and perform their political actions in a space of societal expectations of adherence to a norm while also challenging that norm in very public ways. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," is an excellent example of this dichotomy of norm and challenge. Political life in modern society, therefore, is reliant upon attention from an audience who connects with the actor personally or sees the actor as representative of the audience's interests, especially when those interests challenge the status quo.

Political actors compete with one another for attention in a bid to win acclaim and secure support for their positions, a skill that Arendt refers to as "virtuosity," a concept she borrows from Machiavelli's concept of *virtù*, or the "excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna* (*Between Past and Future* 153). Arendt was interested primarily in the virtuosity of performance itself rather than the end product that such a performance is intended to produce due to her strict adherence to the notion of political action that is separate from necessity, which belongs in the private realms of labor and work. "The accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in the end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it" (*Between Past and Future* 153). Any political action motivated by need or intended to produce specific results is inherently bounded by predicted outcomes and antecedent causes and thus falls in the realm of governing policy rather than being an act of freedom. Furthermore, a political act limited in idea or scope by cultural or societal expectations on the part of the actor is not an act of freedom, but is performed for the sake of the audience's expectations, which can never be original nor free.

Without the tangibility of physical boundaries, such an act is entirely reliant upon the presence of the other as audience who can see and acknowledge the free act, learn from it and critique it, and engage in a discourse of freedom necessary for the political self to exist. For an act of freedom to exist at all then “depends entirely upon human plurality, upon the constant presence of others who can see and hear and therefore testify to [its] existence,” and that is ultimately the necessary equation for permanence in an impermanent world (*The Human Condition* 94). Action in the form of freedom, as Arendt defines it, is what locates the agent in the political realm and separates the agent as a free thinker among those who occupy the space of appearance in which the act occurs.

As inhabitants of a material world with its political and social systems focused on the needs and security of a society, we are intractably engaged in the day to day functions of labor and work towards those ends, but political action in a space separate from those is our best potential response, perhaps our only possible response to the limitations of the physical world in pursuit of freedom of the mind and immortality of the spirit. Freedom cannot exist without action.

The Composition Classroom as Public Sphere

Bounded as we are as living beings in a complex world by circumstances of culture, society, material needs, and security, finding a space in which the political actor can engage in the kind of freedom that Arendt defines is particularly difficult, especially considering the modern confusion and blending of the mutually exclusive concepts of freedom, economics, and religion. But without the capacity for modern people to experience freedom in its pure form, an act that is completely spontaneous and a totally unexpected intervention into the causal world, then freedom as a concept ceases to exist

and all political action is relegated to oppression, subversion, submission, or in consequence. “Action, to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other. This is not to say that motives and aims are not important factors in every single act, but they are its determining factors, and action is free to the extent that it is able to transcend them...as such the free act is quite literally a miracle” (*Between Past and Future* 151, 169). What such an act produces is a space of appearance that is unbounded by the dictums and expectations of the world and thus brings into being a truly new idea distinguished from material goods or personal necessity. This capacity for producing new ideas or bringing into existence new forms of political thought is captured in Arendt’s concept of natality.

Most critics see Arendt’s concept of natality as a response to Heidegger’s argument that mortality drives human motivations. Heidegger positions all human action relative to “anticipatory being-towards-death” in which humans confronted with their imminent and guaranteed demise are propelled to action *in between* birth and death, and Arendt anchors much of her philosophy on the *in between*, and drew the title of her collection of essays from this idea. Other scholars note that Heidegger does not use the term “natality” in his work and Arendt did not begin to incorporate it into new essays or revised editions of her work until the 1950s. Nevertheless, the concept of natality as Arendt introduces it is rooted in her argument that birth, not death, “sends forth each person as unique” and “makes possible the action, and more particularly the political action, which Arendt regards as the privileged vehicle of authentic self-disclosure” (Gottsegen 26).

Originality then, is not a derivative characteristic of a person's existence among others in time and space, or as Heidegger argues in *Being and Time* as a realization of the self relative to one's encounters with the existent world; rather, Arendt argues that differentiation is inherent in every individual as a condition of birth, and each person has the capacity for original thought and new political action in the pure form of freedom regardless of whether each person achieves that potential over the course of his or her life. This bringing into the world of something wholly new and free of external demands is the nature of Arendt's natality. Where Arendt and Heidegger do agree is that human political action can only be revealed through appearance to an audience. In that view, who a person is in his or her singularity can never be known "except to the degree he [or she] attains concrete particularity" as a person among others through interaction with them (Gottsegen 27).

As we have discovered, however, interaction with the other is often bounded by cultural and societal expectations within a given sphere such that freedom is suppressed in favor of approval seeking and acclaim. This is compounded by an increasingly profligate media and communications industry designed to appeal to individual and group confirmation biases in which original thought, conflicting opinion, and political freedom are sacrificed to the convenience of multiple spaces delivering tailored rhetoric to decreasingly discerning audiences. But if we accept Arendt's notion that only in community can people achieve the manifestation of their individual potential, then it becomes necessary to construct a space in which multiple cultures and viewpoints, combined with a freedom from worldly necessities and otherwise constructed confirmation biased audiences, can gather to share ideas and engage in political action

and speech unfettered by the boundaries these restrictive elements imply. “If, then, we understand the political in the sense of the polis, its end or *raison d’être* would be to establish and keep in existence a space where freedom as virtuosity can appear,” and the space of the academic writing classroom is ideally suited for just this purpose (*Between Past and Future* 154). It is the academy, and perhaps in modern times only the academy, that provides an opportunity to establish for new citizens a space in which economic, cultural, and religious interests can defer to pure political action.

The academy is an educational institution that could, and should, lend itself to the creation of the type of public space that Arendt imagined as many current composition scholars argue. From Susan McLeod in the early 90s to Eli Goldblatt, Arabella Lyon, Sharon Crowley, Steve Parks, Adler-Kassner and others in the past decades have argued, the composition classroom is a natural extension of the community, and the development of Writing Across Curriculum/Community programs have been so successful because they are right. Since the writing classroom does not belong to the realm of necessity and is freely entered into by students from multiple communities and cultural backgrounds, it is ideally located in the nexus of engagement among these communities with the students themselves serving as representatives of them.

In *Crisis of the Republic*, Arendt very briefly discusses this space as an opportunity for political engagement of the form she promotes, since its concerns are open to discussion by all those involved, does not require a managerial form of government, and provides the space in which students can regularly meet and engage in open discourse. However, Arendt also argues that students and their professors are unequal in their capacity to conduct their common affairs and since professors and staff

possess a space of authority within the system, the potential for public space is limited in scope. This argument is certainly valid in a traditional curriculum focused on common denominators among students and one in which students are compared to one another relative to their adherence to the institutional forms and knowledge. However, in a hermeneutic classroom, the discourse model focuses on the individual experiences of the students and uses the meta-conversation to help those students develop the kinds of rhetorical tools necessary for effective public action. In support of this ideal, Arendt herself taught classes at The New School in New York, a uniquely student-driven academy designed to foster exactly the type of open public space Arendt proposed. Kenneth Bruffee's more recent work in collaborative learning models are good example of how the discourse model can be developed as well.

One of our greatest hurdles, however, to achieving a purely political space in the academy in which natality can flourish is that the relationship between students, the American public at large, and the academy is strained. A number of factors account for this, including political and financial ones, but there is an increasing feeling among students and the broader community that American universities are no longer living up to their promise as institutions that develop critically engaged, innovative thinkers who drive our national economic and social agenda. It becomes necessary then for us to begin the process of "Re-Validating" the academy as a key component in the defense of political action and freedom through the education of good Democratic citizens who are aware of their own cultural biases and possess the capacity for self-reflection and intellectual thought necessary to action.

By recovering Arendt and injecting her political theory into the field of rhetoric and composition we can build on the excellent work of rhetoric and composition scholars of the past 20 years who have argued for a return to civic literacy and engaged community action in composition pedagogies. From Anne Ruggles Gere's Chair address at the CCCC's in 1993 to Susan McLeod's work in strengthening WAC programs, the early development of community engaged writing and other efforts to extend writing from the composition classroom into the community were successful in part because they take advantage of key parts of Arendt's hermeneutic philosophy of the political self. The same can be said for Victor Villanueva's, Michelle Halls Kells', Juan Guerra's, and other's work to extend the writing classroom in multi-cultural directions and begin recognizing the value of minority voices in democratic values of equality and justice. What a hermeneutic classroom offers is not a revolution in teaching theory, it is rather an evolution of thought regarding student voices and the responsibilities of the academy to connect those voices to their democracy. What Arendt offers is all of these scholars is an underlying philosophy of the political self that both grounds and extends their work in student phenomenologies. It's a philosophy that will help writing teachers better understand not just how to connect student voices to their communities, but more importantly *why* students respond so encouragingly to the pedagogy. If the exponential growth of social media is any indication, then our students are hungry for the public space. A hermeneutic classroom can be that sphere and help them shape their voices for greatest effect within it.

More so today than even in the second half of the Twentieth-Century, the possibility of public space in which all voices have equal opportunity and truly new ideas

are welcome and discussed is increasingly unlikely to occur outside of a space designed to foster exactly that kind of freedom. If our goal is to develop new citizens capable of reasoned discourse in pursuit of common problems, then it is vital that we create the kinds of spaces and intellectual skills necessary for such a discourse to exist beyond the confines of a carefully controlled space. The modern writing classroom in American universities represents this opportunity of space, but only if writing teachers recognize their dual roles as classroom leaders and citizen peers whose function is to initiate, propagate, and guide classroom debate in which all student voices and ideas are granted equal validity. How this can be accomplished, as well as the research and theories that support this process, are detailed thoroughly in Chapter Five. But first it's important to further explicate the concept of the "other" as Ricoeur defines it as well as the role narrative plays in establishing our collective cultural consciousness.

Chapter 4: Paul Ricoeur

Hermeneutics and the Student as the Narrative Self

This Chapter brings into the conversation Paul Ricoeur's work on narrative and identity creation. This is an important element in the development of self-reflective, critically aware citizens capable of expressing their voices through writing. In this section, I will make the connection between the phenomenological experiences of the physical world and the concept of the self. I will also show how this process generates interpretative activity and an understanding of "being in the world" as both *idem* and *ipse* identities. This subjective process, as Ricoeur describes, is framed by his theory of mimesis, which I will explicate. I will also examine in detail the connections between narrative, identity construction, and action that help form the basis of a hermeneutic pedagogy. These connections are affected by our concept of time and the influence of our culture, which I will explore as well. Finally, the process of interpretation in the act of narrative formation and reflexivity in identity development will help connect Ricoeur's theories to the process of action by individuals in support of critical discourse and active democratic engagement. My units of analysis for this chapter are *Freedom and Nature*, *The Symbolism of Evil*, *From Text to Action*, and *Time and Narrative*.

If self-reflection is a critical element in the development of positive action for a society, as Dewey and Arendt argue, then a more thorough understanding of the process of identity development through an anthropology of the self can provide the foundation for a hermeneutic practice of education that promotes and enables self-reflection. In other words, if we can understand how human beings establish their individual identities and

interpret the world, then we can engage them in a process of interpretation that unfolds the world more thoroughly and generates critical thinking, defined as an “attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of [their] experiences.” We can help students understand how to interpret, understand, and engage more effectively with others in their communities through the simultaneous process of self-discovery and other-discovery that results from reflection of their own biases and phenomenologies. The idea is that the stimulus of discovery promotes further discovery, including self-discovery, and this is vital in the development of critically engaged citizens of a healthy democracy.

An important element in Ricoeur’s concept of discovery is his rejection of Cartesian dualism; Ricoeur argues in “Crisis of the Cogito” that the mind and body share an interrelated existence. Where Descartes saw the body as a thing and the mind as separate from that thing, Ricoeur argued that the body is an organism through which we live our intentional existence and our consciousness is a construct of all those experiences both physical and mental. We *are* our body, and consciousness is not just some trapped entity locked inside it: “Consciousness is not a closed place about which I might wonder how something enters it from the outside, because it is, now and always, outside of itself” (Ricoeur 119).

Consciousness, for Ricoeur, is the disposition to act, not merely an awareness of one’s existence. This disposition to act is defined by Ricoeur as “intentionality,” and it draws heavily on Edmund Husserl’s *thematic awareness* theory that argues for a unity of experience polarized between a conscious physical knowledge of something and the reflective internal meaning of that thing. The important point is the consciousness *of* and

the meaning *of* objects, ideas, concepts, etc. are always *of* that external presence in the world, even when internalized, and thus possess a certain unity derived from our reflective consciousness as beings who encounter phenomena in the world and must always interpret it relative only to our physical experiences of the world.

This concept provides one of the strongest intersections among Arendt's, Dewey's, and Ricoeur's theories. If, as argued in the previous chapters, there is no external physical world that is relevant to an individual beyond that person's comprehension of it, and the intentionality of consciousness generates a natural unity between the self and the world, then Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur frame an existential phenomenology that says a person has meaning only because the world has meaning, and vice versa. Thus, in our natural state of engagement with the outside, we are confronted with "an already meaningful world. It is not a world that lies vacant, available for an individual spontaneous construction and reconstruction of meaning. Consciousness applies to, or is applied to, what Husserl termed the "life-world" that is already meaningful. This relationship of meaning between consciousness and its life-world is a fundamental, irreducible structure of our being-in-the-world.

This "being-in-the-world" is a construct of Heidegger's *Dasein* in which he argued that human beings cannot be accounted as real except that they exist in a world amongst other things. Ricoeur references Heidegger in his famous "Model of the Text" essay as "rightly [saying]...that what we understand first in a discourse is not another person, but a project, that is, the outline of a new "being-in-the-world"" (*From Text to Action* 218). This also provides the intersection between Ricoeur's phenomenology and Arendt's being-in-the-world philosophy of the *vita activa*, demonstrating Heidegger's

clear influence on them both. But where Arendt was concerned with the fundamental activities *in* the world that define being human, Ricoeur was concerned with how existential phenomenology *of* that world is responsible for the hermeneutic development of self-identity and motivation.

As Ricoeur argued, a hermeneutic phenomenology of existence is one that is ruled by the signs, symbols, and texts, including language and its construct, that we use to apply meaning and convey information. Since all of these elements require interpretation, and since all interpretation is a product of the phenomenology of the self and experience, then self-reflection and identity will always be mitigated by the signs, symbols, texts, and language we use to identify the self: “There is no self-understanding that is not mediated by signs, symbols, and texts; in the final analysis, self-understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms” (*Oneself as Another* 15). In addition, Ricoeur argues in *The Symbolism of Evil* that the self does not know *of* itself implicitly but only as a product of the mind interpreting these signs and symbols placed in the memory and in the imagination by tradition, stories, literature, cultural experiences, etc. by others in the world. If this is the case, then the concept of individuality is always an interpreted entity in constant need of new stimulus for the purpose of further defining, or even consciously altering, that identity.

This concept supports both Hannah Arendt’s arguments for tradition and remembrances as guiding principles in educational philosophy as well as John Dewey’s calls for an active learning system. It is in Ricoeur’s ethics of subjectivity that a common heuristic can be found among these reformers for practically applying hermeneutic tasks in higher education classrooms. Dewey recognized the impact that conscious social

engagement has on the development of society, and Arendt developed this idea to suggest that social engagement generates an awareness of the other such that social development, both personal and as a society, is also subject to the effects others have on the self. Ricoeur advances this notion one step further. For Ricoeur, subjectivity includes the imagined other as self-same to one's own phenomenology in which we tend to project our self awareness onto the other by imagining our experiences as shared and thus complementary. Patricia Bizzell adopts this same argument in her development of discourse communities.

This is not to argue that phenomenological experiences are the same for each person, even when each person shares cultural, societal, and even historical commonalities. Nor does it undermine the notion that *equal to me* does not have to mean *same as me*. But it does argue that an experience that elicits common reactions among a group of people does so because that group shares at least some values in common, and those values are developed through individual phenomenological experiences mitigated by the signs, symbols, and discourse we use to understand them. This means there is, at some level at least, common reactions to similar experiences, and that generates a connection between individuals and/or among a group that can be utilized toward consensus building for the purpose of advancing social development. What it also means is the connections between *the self*, *the other*, and *the world* are genuine, even if we don't fully comprehend all the details of those connections.

This is Ricoeur's subjectivity and, nuanced as it is, provides a key element in the value of a hermeneutic philosophy of writing education. As Ricoeur argues, "by subjectivity I mean the subject function of an intentional consciousness, such that I

understand it as applying to me and to others; thanks to this mutual elaboration of knowledge of self and other, I arrive at true concepts of subjectivity, valid for man, my fellow” (*The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work* 10). This intentional consciousness has the power, through individual action within the group and in support of the group, to shape our world as we live and understand it. By embracing Ricoeur’s *inter*-subjectivity, we begin to develop a better understanding of both the self and of the role society plays in shaping the self, and vice versa. Thus, we become engaged citizens not out of a sense of responsibility or through indoctrination into the political realm by order of the academy, but instead by merely being *part* of a group and of society. The writing classroom is an ideal place for this group participation to flourish in support of critically thinking engaged citizens, especially if we as teachers remain conscious of the connections and differences among our students that hermeneutic principles imply.

Students can’t be anything else but engaged members whenever they connect, in whatever fashion, with another or group of others. This is a foundational theory of a hermeneutic pedagogy of education, and we succeed in helping our students understand their connections to one another and to their roles in the broader society and world communities when we help them understand how we are affected both by a past that is not of our own making and by the perceived future that our individual phenomenological experiences suggest.

The Role of Narrative in Effective Action

Our ongoing humanistic mission and progress toward universal goals of freedom, equality, and justice are always interpreted through and affected by this lens of subjectivity, but such progress is neither unidirectional nor inevitable. This means it takes

initiative to make history and affect our future reality while defining ourselves in the process. This definition of the self becomes our personal identity, and understanding its process will help us understand how best to provide our writing students with opportunities for its development.

Ricoeur reasoned that personal identity has two essential elements, an *idem*-identity and an *ipse*-identity. The *idem*-identity is the self as one understands oneself at any given time, a self with a constant spatiotemporal existence. This constant-ness is created by applying the signs, symbols, and language to ourselves in the process of identity building, an identity that is unique and constant through the fact of our being. The *ipse*-identity is also the self, but it is the one that changes over time. The personality and identity one has at 40 is unlikely the same as they were at 19. Thus the self, though possessing a static identity, is also mutable in its personality, knowledge, etc. “Ricoeur’s wager is to construct an alternative epistemological hypothesis...that will account for the self both in its sameness and in terms of its manifestations in time, its temporality.” In addition, “the self can be accounted for over time not only in terms of its identity but also in terms of its transformations” (Rasmussen 216). The *idem* identity is the self that helps establish permanence of being, the concept of the self as unique, and the concept of personal values, ethical positions, traditions, etc. The *ipse* identity is the self that gives humans the unique capacity to initiate meaning-making interpretations of ideas and experiences that have not been experienced before and apply them to the *idem* identity, which, by its nature, initiates interpretation of those experiences and applies them to our motivations for action. *Ipse* identity is also the self capacity to create brand new things,

what Arendt refers to as our natality, and impute them to the self. It frames our potential as human beings.

Without both sorts of identity there is no self, and because there are two kinds of identity that work together by both stabilizing and continuing to develop the self, then the self exists in two effective orders of causality, the physical now and the intentional future. This places Ricoeur and Arendt on the same footing in which Arendt argues for two different spaces, the private and the public, the family and the political. The private, family self is *idem* oriented. It inhabits ritual and tradition and security. As Dewey argues, we attempt to keep it free of uncertainty. The public, political self is *ipse* oriented. It's the space where motivation and desire generate initiative for progress and solutions to problems of self, the community, and society. But neither exists without the other, and understanding how the two identities of the self are intersubjective is developed through the process of narrative.

Ricoeur argues that the way humans resolve the conflict between the self as *idem*, and the self as *ipse*, between both the self as *self* and the self as *other*, is to construct an identity of self using the tools of narrative to relate a past, a present, and a future that includes agents of action in a plot in which the self is the main character affecting, and affected by, these agents and experiences across time. In essence, we construct a story about ourselves as we used to be and how our experiences came to make us who we are today, our *idem*. Our *ipse* identity is what grants us the ability to subjectively project ourselves into the future, and we do that by interpreting the narrative of the past self and consolidating that narrative with our perceptions and knowledge of the self at present into a new idea, a potential being who does not yet exist but could through intentional action.

It is this process of how we interpret the narrative past that is vital to understanding Ricoeur's value in the development of critically engaged political citizens. For Ricoeur, historical time is *human time* "to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (*Time and Narrative* 58). Ricoeur was concerned with the question of why reflection on a historical narrative must also include interpretation of the symbols and texts we use to understand it. In part, it's because all of our memories and histories can only be representations of those events in time as described by the narrator, even when the narrator is the self who experienced those events. Our own memories, no less our stories, histories, and traditions, exist only in a form of the symbols, images, language, etc. we use to imagine them. We are not actually seeing the full reality of that event in its time and place, but only our interpretation of it. Ricoeur calls this the "detour" of interpretation to highlight his belief that the operation of interpretation does not access the world directly but instead "shapes" the world through our subjective understanding of it: A person "constitutes it as the world that surrounds him by projecting onto it the aims for his action and his demands for meaning" (Ricoeur 89).

Ricoeur argued that the external world and the internal self are knowable only through this detour of interpretation (*Oneself as Another* 297). Ricoeur preferred this notion because the effort of interpreting the world is dependent entirely upon our pre-existing phenomenology and therefore is not the same thing as actually accessing the world as it is. We must "detour" through our experiences of the world to interpret it, and that will always be affected by that phenomenology. Ricoeur writes, "what is a situation that is not already interpreted, even if this be only in the categorizing of properties and

relations?... From what external position does one perceive the correspondence between the mental situation and the factual situation?" (*Reply to Dabney Townsend* 212). Our interpretation of the world, at any given moment, is reliant on this intersubjectivity as well as our individual hermeneutic notions of being-in-the-world. The world has meaning because we have meaning, but we draw our individual identities and meaning from our phenomenological experiences of the world. This is related to the famous "hermeneutic circle" problem in which interpretations of individual things are relevant only within the whole, and the whole is relevant only because of the individual things within it. Thus, our temporal self is always a subjective self. This idea is anchored in Aristotle's concept of *mimesis*, and Ricoeur argues in *Time and Narrative* that our narratives merely imitate, or mimic, the action of the past or present, and this mimesis is constructed upon three essential stages, which he calls *mimesis*₁, *mimesis*₂, and *mimesis*₃.

*Mimesis*₁ is the stage of understanding the sphere or reference in which the action takes place, what Ricoeur calls "pre-understanding of what human action is, of its semantics, its symbolism, its temporality." In doing so, Ricoeur credits Arendt with the framing of this pre-understanding of past action being grounded in narrative: "We speak of a life story, as though life were a story in search of a narrator. In the same way, Hannah Arendt, in her magnificent work *The Human Condition*, distinguished action, properly speaking, from labor and from work by means of the fact that action is what calls for narration, as though any action worthy of the title expects no other confirmation than fame and glory" (*Mimesis and Representation* 142). This referential past that we understand both in our internal narrative and our external engagements contains common elements, or anchors, of shared knowledge and experiences that are accepted intuitively

by the narrator and audience. These anchors include everything from an accepted physical sphere in which the action takes place (the basic laws of physics and the consistency of physical objects found on earth through time) to common historical assumptions and knowledge of the referents within the narrative. Common human activities like dining or shopping, for example, are ritualized and contain an “inchoate narrativity” that doesn’t require interpretation. Mimesis₁ engenders the intuitive narrative structures that are described by mimesis₂ like metaphor, motive, desire, conflict, cooperation, heroism, and misfortune. Ricoeur refers to these pre-understood narrative structures as “*emplotment*.”

Though narrative content, structure, and style may vary across cultures, the underlying existence of narrative itself across all cultures along with a consistency of themes (e.g. good vs. evil, triumph over adversity, heroism, comedy, tragedy, etc.) indicates its universality as a tool for bridging cultural divides. It can also be argued, as Ricoeur hints throughout his study of narrative and language, that the very structure of language itself has no meaning outside of narrative; it has no objective reality of its own but serves only to symbolize being and action. One piece of evidence for this is that every language in the world has verbs that signify action, giving even the most diametric cultural differences a shared narrative referent centered in action.

This pre-understanding of action is intuitive, but intuition is not the same as interpretation. That’s what Ricoeur signifies as the stage of mimesis₂. In this stage, every symbol used in representing the narrative gives birth to meaning through the process of understanding. Here we configure the sphere of overall action and the individual actions taking place into an understanding of their relationship to the self and the external world.

Where mimesis₁ provides a sphere of reference by relying on antecedent structures and patterns established through our experiences of the world, mimesis₂ allows us to internalize those referents and apply meaning to them and develop beliefs based on our relative cultural expectations. Thus, if our narrative language exists to represent temporal action, then narrative is also instrumental in the establishment of belief, values, ethics, etc., and can either reinforce or challenge cultural norms based on the narrative schema, an important point in the justification of a narrative component in a hermeneutic pedagogy of writing.

To understand how the self moves from the intuitive phenomenology of the varied parts of the life-world in mimesis₁ to a configured meaning relevant to the personal and the public in mimesis₂, Ricoeur draws on Richard Rorty's consideration of the "linguistic turn" in the philosophy of language, and also Louis O. Mink's act of narrative configuration that consists of "grasping together the details, or what we have called the incidents, of the story. From these diverse events it draws the unity of the temporal whole" (*Mimesis and Representation* 146). In this sense, the process of moving smoothly from the first mimetic conception of the narrative to the meaning-making function of the second mimetic stage necessarily involves accepting contexts and responses that are not entirely our own creation when we borrow meaning from the intention and rhetorical devices of a narrator who is not our self. Thus, the narrative emplotment necessary for meaning-making serves as a mediator between the other's point of view and our own. The interpretive process we engage in hermeneutically in mimesis₂ links the listener to the speaker through the active process of understanding, acknowledging, and accepting the narrative emplotment, and this linking between speaker and listener is the space

where social dimensions of the human subject are formed. “Such is the realm of mimesis₂ between the antecedence and the descendance of the text. At this level mimesis may be defined as the configuration of action” (*Mimesis and Representation* 147).

The third stage of mimesis₃ derives directly from this process of interpretation and involves “application” in the sense of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Influenced as it is by the social dualism of interpretation, mimesis₃ is the stage of understanding where the narrative moves from interpreted story to personal action. It is in this space following interpretation that self-reflection and evaluation generate the motivation to act. We have already determined that self-reflection is the critical element in the development of positive action for a society, and this stage of mimesis is the narrative as we imagine it moving forward, either in its own development or in ours as impacted by it. In other words, mimesis₃ “is the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader. Therefore it is the intersection of the world unfolded by fiction and the world wherein actual action unfolds” (*Mimesis and Representation* 148). Since narratives are made up not only of action, but also of characters, then our interpretation of these characters’ motives, desires, and sufferings becomes relevant to the self both because our hermeneutic concept of the self is projected onto the motivations of a narrative’s characters, and because our self is simultaneously being influenced and affected by those characters’ motivations and actions.

We evaluate the qualities of a character in a narrative based upon that character’s responses to, and actions in, his or her fictional environment, but that evaluation is always predicated upon the cultural biases and screens of the reader or hearer, which may not have been the same at the time of the narrative’s emplotment or the time of the

creator's development of it. The classic Roman story of Cimon and Pero is a good example. The lesson of Roman Charity praises the act of a daughter breastfeeding her imprisoned father to prevent his starvation and winning his release from jail through her selfless act. Well into the Renaissance, this story was a common inspirational lesson taught by the Catholic Church and was captured in numerous paintings of the great masters like Ruben and Caravaggio. Today, the same story in a composition classroom evokes initial reactions from students that are far from inspirational connections to charity. Once an interpreted frame is presented in cultural terms of that time, understanding might occur, but the initial repulsion by modern students is a relatively new development of Western Culture. How our culture evaluates the qualities of the characters Cimon and Pero has changed over time, along with the impact of our interpretation of that story on its perceived reality and that story's impact upon our own understanding of ourselves. Thus, time also plays a critical role in Ricoeur's theory of the self and narrative temporality.

Time and Narrative

Since we consider the self as existing in three time spaces – the past, the present, and the future – then the narrative self is inextricably bound to a structured timeline, and thus time determines all thinking and all self-reflection. But time in the narrative sense embodies two axes, one is the objective formulation of time as a chronological measurement of existence; the other is the subjective formulation of time where self-reflection generates a psychological self-image that consists of interpretations across time and brings them into the present. According to Ricoeur, “the task for thinking about time is to understand how the human being embraces both psychological and cosmological

dimensions of time” (Klemm 57). Narrative is the place where these two concepts of time intersect and can be incorporated into the identity in a unified way. Ricoeur dedicated three volumes of *Time and Narrative* to this process in which he argues that “time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal existence” (*Time and Narrative* 3).

This confluence of narrative and time on the understanding of the self means our identities are never based on accurate, objective reality, but rather consist of a composite of interpreted narratives, both from external stories and internal memories across time. “The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (*Oneself as Another* 147–48). Since our concept of the self and the values we embrace are the result of mimetic narratives of history that change over time, then our composite, interpreted idem-identities are never static.

As one might imagine, this constant mutability of identity creates dissonance between the self as interpreter and the self as actor. If, as Dewey asserts, action is mitigated by doubt and the desire to remove uncertainty to ensure the best outcomes; yet, as Ricoeur reveals, we are never completely “at one” with ourselves, then self-doubt becomes an irreducible fact of human nature and the only effective tool for reducing uncertainty in the world is constant, life-long, critical self-reflection. Thus, one’s identity is never an objective, static entity waiting to be uncovered, but rather must be constantly, actively created through the process of narrative. This constant process of identity development based on our *re*-actions to the actions of the other “is why identities are not

fixed structures or substances; instead they are mobile and, until the story is finished, the identity of each character or person is subject to revision” (Chiari 32). Our goal in a hermeneutic classroom is to give students both the awareness and tools necessary to actively and consciously revise their own identities.

The Role of Narrative in Establishing the Self and Self-reflection

As we’ve established, narrative is both the structure of self-identity and the constant change agent of that identity. Who we are, and who we will become, is always affected not only by the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, but also by the history and influence of an external world that is not of our own making. We become capable then of affecting our future selves and the future selves of those with whom we engage in our communities and society by initiating new interpretations of past actions to develop and sustain new realities. Building on Arendt’s concept of natality, Ricoeur argues that every action is both conscious and purposeful while also being the product of other actions, and new actions only take place in a context of meaningfulness as a response to past action and in anticipation that there will be future responses to it, reinforcing the relationship between time and narrative.

As a side note, we should consider that there is no concept of “present” action that occurs outside the self, because the process of mimesis means that only after an action has occurred can we react to it. This even holds true in the sense that action, particularly political action, is often undertaken as a response to *potential* action as proposed by others. Yet that proposal itself, whether as legislative policy or even philosophical ideal is action in itself, and our responses to that are anchored in our mimetic interpretation of its meaning and impact in the past and motivated by our desires to either ensure or prevent

its fulfillment in the future. Therefore, all action external of the present self takes place in the past, and since future action is only potential action, then real action in the present is only possible within the self.

Regardless, our responses to past actions are the product of the interpretation, synthesis, and judgment of those actions as rooted in current cultural biases and expectations. That means that all narratives of those actions possess moral and ethical dimensions that present themselves through the evaluations we place upon the characters of those narratives by how they act or what they endure relative to our own moral identities. Indeed, this moral connection to character behavior is the very exigence of narrative itself, since narrative exists in part to develop one's own identity and also in part to establish cultural norms across society.

Narratives are also the vehicle for understanding *the other* in respect to the other's impact on one's own identity and character. This generates a kind of primacy of the other relative to the self that undermines the fundamental arguments presented by objectivist ideology. It generates a validity of the other as necessarily equal to the self, possessing qualities that we find both positive and negative, allowing us to embrace, accept, or change our own characters based on our response to those characters and their actions. As Ricoeur argues in *Freedom and Nature*, objectivism actually lacks the capacity for identifying the objective self:

“Objectivity is not naturalism. The be sure, a psychology which pretends to treat the Cogito as a class of empirical facts which it calls mental facts or facts of consciousness and which it claims to be verifiable by methods of observation and induction used in natural sciences, a psychology which

degrades the central experiences of subjectivity, such as intentionality, attention, motivation, etc., to the level of a physics of the mind, is in effect incapable of shedding light on my bodily existence in any profound sense” (*Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* 15).

Ricoeur’s subjectivity is robust in its grounding of the self *as* other, and vice versa. This not only includes others in the community around us or who have come before us in history, but it also includes the self-as-other in the sense that we are mutable beings in constant development. The self we were a decade ago may not be the self we are today, but that other self is still an *other* whose past actions impact our current identities and to whose past actions we are responding. In terms of our ethical being, this narrative unification of the other and the self consists of an identity that exists to be responsive to and act in ways that generate responses from others. Thus, the self in action is not an autonomy preserving self, as Kant might argue, but is instead a social preserving self. It is motivated by the prospect that its responsiveness to others is capable of changing the future in a way that continues to preserve both the self and the social group, to the greatest benefit of all the group, since others are such an equal and irreducible part of the self. Dauenhauer summarizes Ricoeur’s analysis of personal identity development through narrative with four conclusions (*Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*):

1. Because my personal identity is a narrative identity, I can make sense of myself only in and through my involvement with others.

2. In my dealings with others, I do not simply enact a role or function that has been assigned to me. I can change myself through my own efforts and can reasonably encourage others to change as well.
3. Nonetheless, because I am an embodied existence and hence have inherited both biological and psychological constraints, I cannot change everything about myself. And because others are similarly constrained, I cannot sensibly call for comprehensive changes in them.
4. Though I can be evaluated in a number of ways, e.g., physical dexterity, verbal fluency, technical skill, the ethical evaluation in the light of my responsiveness to others, over time, is, on the whole, the most important evaluation.

Narrative is instrumental in the development of the personal identity, and personal identity shapes how we interpret and engage the world. Thus, the stories we tell about our external world as well as the narratives we create about ourselves are what shape action. If action is necessary for freedom to exist, as we've established throughout this work, then there is an inextricable link between the internal mind shaped by narrative and physical world freedom embodied in action.

Ricoeur examines the basic disproportion that characterizes the finite and the infinite dimensions of a human being in the difference between the mind's capacity for reason and meaning-making and the biological, incorporated self that inhabits the physical world. This disproportion is evident in everything we create that is not intended to meet the immediate or near term needs of our biological selves. Art, architecture, metaphor, music, speech and all other forms of meaning making and attempts to

influence an outward society are disproportionate to the personal biological need, and as a result, we are never wholly internalized beings separate from the external world. Since the external world has both meaning of its own and must be interpreted by each of us with our inherent cultural screens, then our interpretations are always potentially fallible. That means our actions based on those interpretations are always potentially fallible as well. Indeed, we are innately fallible. This is the crux of a hermeneutic education, the capacity to accept our own potential fallibility, and thus the need for self-reflection, social engagement, civic discourse, and consensus building.

The implication of this idea is that while our attempts to reduce uncertainty may be the motivation for action and the precursor of critical thinking as Dewey ascribes, the outcome of that action is not reliably predictable for actually reducing uncertainty or achieving desired outcomes like freedom, justice, and equality. This is exacerbated by the actions of some individuals who, for whatever reasons, seek to destroy and sow discord within a society. Indeed, the existence of people whose actions are “evil” or who have “bad will” toward the other is simply not accounted for in Dewey’s Subjectivism at all.

Ricoeur, however, sees these elements (bad, evil) as constructs of identity that also help create the possibility and motivation of elements like goodness, kindness, charity, etc. The elements of social progress we value most in our democracy exist in part because of the existence of elements like greed, evil, violence, etc., and we wouldn’t have one without the other. Thus, the quest for common values and unity through communication to bridge differences and promote consensus is only possible because of the nature of personal identity that includes notions of fallibility and recognizes “evil” doing by those whose actions are not in the best interest of the self-supporting society.

The very disproportion that makes us fallible and makes human evil possible is also what makes goodness, knowledge, and achievement possible. It is what distinguishes us from one another—each one of us has his or her unique spatiotemporal location—and at the same time makes it possible for us to communicate with each other, through the *logos* that intends to transcend such localized points of view.”

Precisely because we can observe, think, communicate, act, and observe again, the differences between individual values are never absolute. Even notions such as good and evil, or right and wrong, are mutable and susceptible to interpretation and perspective. That means there is always potential for communication and action to alter values or build consensus between seemingly diametric points of view, and that is the real value of discourse for building and preserving freedom in a democratic society.

Values change over time as action by individuals and groups challenge cultural assumptions. This means no one of us alone can be a self-actualized person. Though each of us has an individual identity, those identities are the construct of social engagement and demonstrate that we are intricately connected with the other: “Man is this plural and collective unity in which the unity of destination and the differences of destinies are to be understood through each other” (*Fallible Man* 138). If our individuality defines our hermeneutic understanding of freedom, and individuality only exists in complement to the other as equal, then only through social engagement where the other is treated as valid and equal is freedom even possible.

“For Ricoeur, freedom is not a transcendental presupposition. Rather, freedom is human capability that traverses the structures of a project motivated by needs and desires,

of movement that exerts effort on bodily resistance, and of voluntary consent to the limitations upon action. Therefore, human freedom is an embodied, *incarnate* freedom” (*The Poetic Imperative* 24). In other words, if the self is essentially embodied in the physical, then the self exists in part due to the material and social world that supports it, yet it nevertheless always retains a freedom of imagination and initiative to create new things, as Arendt argues about natality. What this ultimately means is that both the idea of freedom and the idea of the self are essentially the same thing. This is why self-reflection is so vital to the preservation of a democracy that embodies freedom itself. By setting the construct of freedom within the context of the self, Ricoeur was already establishing a philosophy of the basic structure of human capability grounded firmly in our narrative interpretations and strengthened, rather than weakened, by the reality of our constant mutability and our physical connection to nature. This distinctive understanding of subjective structures as relevant to our phenomenological experiences is one of the keys to a hermeneutic pedagogy that unfolds the process of interpretation for students so that process can both be better understood and actively engaged in support of our ideals of freedom, justice, and equality.

The Process of Interpretation and Reflexivity

If reflection is a form of interpretation, then understanding the process of interpretation when one encounters a narrative will be helpful in the development of a practical pedagogical system that allows students to recognize their *idem* and *ipse* identities and the influences of their experiences in the formation of those interpretations, which is vital for active self-reflection. Since all acts of interpretation are a dialectic between guessing and validating based on phenomenological experiences combined with

education and knowledge to produce a conclusion, it is important for students to recognize how that conclusion is filtered through their experiences and subjected to the flaws of cultural bias and confirmation bias.

As reflective and interpretive creatures influenced by phenomenology, we make educated guesses about the meaning of a narrative or action and then check that guess against the meaning of the whole. At the same time, we comprehend the meaning of the whole based on our understandings and interpretations of the parts. This is the hermeneutic circle in action. At the end of this process, we make conclusive assumptions built on our relative skills in logic and deduction, but there is never a definitive outcome or “truth” that can be derived from this process, only mitigated opinion. Since we can always derive more than one conclusion from an interpreted action, these differences in conclusions must therefore be negotiated in order to generate consensus among a plurality, particularly for political action. This process of negotiation is validated not by measuring it against a preset or empirically verified outcome, but by measuring interpretations against the logic and deductions of competing interpretations. Thus, validation and consensus are built not from concrete truth but through “a logic of uncertainty and qualitative probability” (*From Text to Action* 159).

Despite the differences in interpretations, it is possible to set the criteria for conclusions based in research, logic, and deduction. When more than one interpretation fulfills these criteria, it is also possible to compare the conclusions and make judgments about which interpretation is the most likely considering all possible factors and the quality of deductive reasoning. This falls in the realm democratic discourse and consensus. Indeed, for the purpose of developing critically engaged, discourse oriented

citizens of a healthy democracy, competing interpretations in a classroom setting are a goal to be achieved rather than avoided. Since any narrative, text, action, idea, etc. encompasses a limited field of possible interpretations, then the process of building consensus through validation is the *casus belli* of interpretive conflict. As Ricoeur argues, “It is always possible to argue against an interpretation, to confront interpretations, to arbitrate between them and to seek for an agreement, even if this agreement remains beyond our reach” (*From Text to Action* 160). Indeed, any contrast in opinion or interpretation that leads to cognitive conflict sets the stage for discovery, and discovery is the core motivation of a critical mind. What’s important to understand here is that Ricoeur argues throughout his reflections on discourse and action that individuals are the agents of their own construction or demise, both as self and as members of a social world since each person is simultaneously unique and representative of the whole. Regardless, the greatest capacity of any individual, so far as Ricoeur is concerned, is the ability to bring into being things in the world that must be interpreted.

One problem of a hermeneutic interpretation, as Ricoeur himself noted, is that it provides no means of evaluating its claims about the world: “In expressing itself, how can life objectify itself, and in objectifying itself, how does it bring to light meanings capable of being taken up and understood by another historical being, who overcomes his own historical situation?” (*The Conflict of Interpretations* 5). Ricoeur was concerned with finding a method for choosing between different interpretations that would have some level of objectivity and reason that could be communicated across cultural and social differences in an effort to bring consensus into the equation. If the detour of interpretation is restricted by individual phenomenology, then a method of overcoming

that restriction lies in Ricoeur's concept of *reflexivity*, meaning that an interpretation has value if it successfully reflects both the object being interpreted and the person making the interpretation. Reflexive activities such as speaking, willing, knowing, and evaluating are methods of "self-knowing" and also interpret the world by their very act of coming forth from the mind that is itself an interpreted entity.

The fact that human beings possess the capacity for these reflexive activities engenders the proposition that such reflexivity is possible when they are understood not as mere methods of communicating and interpreting of the world, but also as methods for interpreting and communicating the ever-evolving self that exists in that world. When that kind of reflexive interpretation is engaged, then it is possible to achieve that level of objectivity that Ricoeur is concerned with. Reflexivity combines both elements of the *idem* identity formed as a condition of one's past experiences, traditions, and culture, as well as the *ipse* identity capable of projecting ideas, actions, and promises into the future.

This dialectic of interpreting both self-identity and the otherness of the world, as represented in the hermeneutic circle, gives one the capacity to both narrate the self and be responsible for one's narration of the world in a way that comprehends and reaches across cultural divides because it is grounded in an understanding of the self, influenced as it is by both historic memory and potential action. Here we find the concrete connection between Ricoeur and Arendt regarding the impact of tradition and memory on the self as well as the potential for action reaching into the future. Ricoeur summarizes this connection: "In memory and promises, the problematic of self-recognition reaches two high-points simultaneously. The one is turned toward the past, the other toward the future. But they need to be considered together within the living present of self-

recognition, thanks to several features they have in common” (*The Course of Recognition* 109).

Ricoeur contributes significantly to this concept of the self as understood in relation to memory and promises, as well as the self as other in his work on attestation. In deference to brevity, focus, and a practical hermeneutic pedagogy, we will dispense with a complete and thorough analysis of attestation, which could take several volumes and is already well-covered by such scholars as Jean Greisch, Richard Cohen, Sebastian Kaufmann, Bernard Dauenhauer, and many others. In summary, attestation is Ricoeur’s term for the concept of the self-as-other in action, represented by the dialectic between interpretation and self-analysis discussed in reflexivity as well as the desire to “be-in-the-world.” Attestation is the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering based in the belief of the “I am” inherent in the Cartesian cogito as well as the confidence that one’s actions can affect the interpreted world at large. As Kaufmann summarizes, attestation is what “allows the self to appropriate its otherness: The otherness of its capacities, the otherness of its identity, the otherness of its body, of other people and of its conscience. In other words, the self gains the confidence of being a self through the confidence that the actions it performs and the words it says are its own actions and words; the confidence that the narratives it tells expresses its own identity; the confidence that the body is its own body; the confidence that the esteem of other mediates its own esteem and that the values it embraces are its own values” (Kaufmann i). Attestation and Reflexivity are two conditions of Ricoeur’s philosophy that contribute to the active self, both interpreted and projected into the world. But understanding these ideas is only half the battle. Reflexivity and attestation in practice is necessary for a pragmatic pedagogy

and the process of interpretive activity converted to action is the goal of such a system.

That is the topic of the next chapter, a pragmatic pedagogy of hermeneutics in the composition classroom that embraces and encompasses these theories of Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur.

Chapter 5: The Student as Citizen

A Hermeneutic Pedagogy of Writing Instruction

This Chapter combines the philosophical arguments of Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur and distills from them a functional, applied pedagogy of hermeneutic composition. To frame this pedagogical argument, I will provide a brief history of composition pedagogy of the past three decades and briefly discuss the few composition scholars who have introduced hermeneutic theory to the field during that time. I will also examine the important role that narrative plays in identity development. Then I will discuss the value of critical interpretation of the narrative structure in support of that development and argue for a peer-oriented teacher-student relationship in hermeneutically focused classrooms. With these important structures established, I will summarize the key arguments of Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur to better demonstrate the areas of overlap in their philosophies that provide for a synthesized application of hermeneutic education. Finally, I will present the four essential elements of a hermeneutic composition pedagogy along with specific strategies for their implementation, including examples of my own classroom practices. My units of analysis for this chapter are *A Teacher's Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, *Ways of Reading, Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, and *Alternate Readings: Student Hermeneutics and Academic Discourse*.

Hermeneutics in the Composition Classroom

Since at least the early 1980's, composition scholars and pedagogical practices in the academy have embraced what Patricia Bizzell, Lester Faigley, and James Berlin,

among many others, have defined as the “social turn” in composition pedagogy. The move away from the individualistic, structuralist, and cognitive pedagogies of the prior decades toward social epistemologies and multiculturalism was driven in part by a generalized concern over falling “literacy” skills among students. Bizzell clearly identifies the problem of literacy skills as equivalent to the “problem of democracy in contemporary America and the practical political task of fostering the rhetorical processes needed to negotiate differences within a divided and unequal citizenry” (Trimbur 108). The resulting theories and practices embraced composition as a mechanism for action in political, economic, historical, and cultural realms.

The social-epistemic movement defined and embraced by Bizzell and Berlin was supported, in part, by hermeneutic theorists in the 80s and 90s like Jean Grondin, Thomas Kent, Timothy Crusius, Stephen Mailloux, and Louise Weatherbee Phelps. Scholars like Grondin and Kent sought to recover hermeneutics from the realm of abstract theory and apply its interpretive understanding to the growing popularity of student-centered pedagogies that challenged dominant narratives and established discourses of the academy. Crusius linked Ricoeur’s hermeneutic philosophy directly to James Berlin’s work in social-epistemic rhetoric with a focus on interpretation, and his book *A Teacher’s Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* comes closest to accomplishing what this dissertation attempts to clarify. Specifically, Crusius embraces the “being in the world” frame of student composition as well as the Ricoeurian idea that “interpreting is not so much what human beings or some class of human beings do but rather what all human being are” (Crusius 5). Yet Crusius relies too heavily on Kenneth Burke’s constructive

deconstruction and fails to account for the elements of motivation toward freedom and action that Arendt and Dewey provide.

Crusius was not the only theorist of the 80s and 90s to bring hermeneutics into the conversation of composition pedagogy. Mailloux built on Stanley Fish's interpretive models to try and resolve the constructionist/deconstructionist tensions that emerged in the post-process debate by using hermeneutics to support students as interpreters of their own world. He embraces Rorty in a focus on historicism and cultural context for interpretive practices yet fails to fully empower the student as peer in the present or embrace how "being in the world" affects the interpretive process.

Phelps focuses more on the theoretical connections between Ricoeur and composition scholarship rather than pragmatic practice in the composition classroom. Indeed, most of the scholarship of the late 80s and early 90s in hermeneutics and composition lacked pedagogical directives. As David Brauer points out, "though these critics (Mailloux and Phelps) demonstrated the viability of hermeneutics for composition studies, they struggled to articulate its role in helping students negotiate written texts or deal with the exigencies of academic writing" (Brauer 73). Nevertheless, the work of these theorists connecting hermeneutics and composition theory helped pave the way for the social turn in composition classrooms that materialized in the 90s and 2000s, as well as the cultural studies and discourse practices of scholars like Villanueva, Guerra, Gilyard, Kells, and many others.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, theorists and scholars advanced the social turn through both "cognitivist" (Flower) and "expressivist" (Gradin) pedagogies that embraced inclusion rather than exclusion. In 2000, Robert Yagelski sought to combine

these two pedagogical trends into a unified theory that embraced both the discourse and cultural functions of cognitivism as well as the self-interest and agency of expressivism (Yagelski). What all of these scholars have brought into modern composition classrooms are the techniques and theories of a basic hermeneutic practice of connecting students to both themselves and the world, and teaching these students the value of their individual and collective voices relative to society at large. That makes embracing a hermeneutic pedagogy that much easier because the tools for its implementation already exist, even if the understanding of why these tools work has been largely ignored in graduate composition pedagogy classrooms. What is important is the connection these scholars, and many others, make between the interpretive act of writing and the promise of political, social, and cultural engagement by new citizens of the democracy.

Essentially, writing is a process of activating our ipse-identities; it is the action that connects students to their individual and collective life-worlds. Yagelski sums it up best when he argues that writing is a transformative power that is more likely to occur when it is conducted by individuals within a group setting, such as a composition classroom, because its “transformative power is more likely to be realized, and it ceases to be merely a matter of procedure, a tool for communication, an exercise in control, and a means for sorting and norming. Instead, writing becomes a way of being in the world. When we write, we enact a sense of ourselves as being in the world” (Yagelksi 7). Thus we come full circle to Dauenhauer, Heidegger, Arendt, and Ricoeur who saw this “being in the world” as a primary necessity of self-identity, and through writing and narrative we justify and legitimate ourselves as both individuals and members of a social world. When

we write, we act, and as we have already well established, action is the primary process of ensuring, defending, or creating ideas of freedom in a society.

Narrative and Interpretation in Identity Development

The narrative function of composition we use to tell our stories is much more than a simple structure for the teaching of writing. Narratives are acts of interpretation, both as writers interpreting our world and readers interpreting the same world through different hermeneutic lenses. The probability of those interpretations being different, and even conflicting, from one writer to the next or one reader to the next is not a weakness of that form, but rather a fundamental strength that engenders the overall goal of creating self-reflecting, critically thinking students. Jean-Francois Lyotard, a contemporary and follower of Ricoeur, provides us with a connection between narrative and critical thinking by way of interpretation. He argues that readers encounter narratives both intellectually and emotionally, and that it is our emotional reaction to a narrative that guides our individual interpretations. The emotional sensations we encounter in a narrative, on a scale ranging from extreme displeasure to extreme pleasure and everything in-between, informs the intellectual mind of its state of being.

This aesthetic interpretation is a reflection of the act (the narrative) and is, according to Lyotard, “the site of invention, where desire works free of the rule of truth” (Bourgeois 166). Here Lyotard foregrounds the social turn of composition pedagogy by placing the process of interpreting a text fully in the hands of the individual and linking reflection directly to interpretation, thus giving that individual the power to reject or

accept the underlying meta-narrative. Furthermore, Lyotard undermines objectivism, rationalism, and other notions of absolute “truth” by placing reflection (i.e. aesthetic interpretation) in the primary role of critical thought: “Reflection is the laboratory of all objectivities. In its heuristic aspect, reflection thus seems to be the nerve of critical thought as such” (Bourgeois 167).

One key point in the Lyotard argument is the role not only that writing plays in connecting students to narrative, but also the role of reading as well, something that modern composition pedagogy has largely ignored with the institutional focus on generative rather than interpretive composition skills. Considering the goal of a writing class is, after all, writing, the focus on pedagogies for production of text rather than consumption of text seems logical in a non-hermeneutic sense. However, what Lyotard substantiates and modern scholars like Ken Bruffee, Patricia Bizzell, James Berlin, and Stephen Mailloux have come to embrace, is the idea that composition is both a rhetorical and a hermeneutic act, and to privilege one of these acts (writing) at the expense of the other (interpretation) is to undermine the strength of the hermeneutic circle and interfere with the process of critical thinking development. Indeed, the social turn’s contributions to composition theory and pedagogy in developing discourse communities by interpreting and challenging dominant narratives paved the way for post-process pedagogical development seen in most composition classrooms today. This, in turn, has generated an opportunity for a hermeneutic pedagogy that contextualizes composition pedagogy both as a process of creation and a process of interpretation, what Stephen Mailloux describes as “the double nature of rhetoric” (Mailloux 38).

Most composition pedagogies assume that interpretive reading is a pro-forma practice primarily for engendering textual creation, and little has been done in the past three decades to invigorate the hermeneutic engagement of reading. David Joliffe, David Bartholomae, Linda Adler-Kassner, and Margarite Helmers are among the few scholars in recent years to approach this subject and challenge the dominant paradigm of textual genesis at the expense of textual interpretation in the general composition classroom. In Adler-Kassner's (with Heidi Estrem) 2007 article, "Reading Practices in the Writing Classroom," she aptly critiques the dearth of studies that focus on writing-instructor contextualization of reading expectations among their students: "at the same time as instructors ask for more explicit guidance with reading pedagogy, that pedagogy is rarely included in composition research, graduate composition courses, or first-year writing program development material" (Adler-Kassner). Yet despite this lack of research and pedagogical support, "critical reading" is clearly called for in the WPA Outcomes Statement for composition courses.

David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky have more recently engaged this issue in their classroom text, *Ways of Reading*, that attempts to engage composition students in an active relationship with the essays in the book through interpretive questions and processes that help students read both within the context of the essays and "against the grain" of the text to better understand framing, expectations, and cultural processes (Bartholomae 10). The essays, however, are challenging for even advanced readers, and though it offers a "strong reading" pedagogy that introduces hermeneutics to writing teachers and students alike, it does not accommodate actual student hermeneutic processes. Nevertheless, Bartholomae and Petrosky fully embrace the balance of

interpretive reading and reflective writing as supportive hermeneutic acts, and we are seeing more composition scholars look toward the benefits of hermeneutics as a method for dealing with “the radical situation of our modern world, one in which communication is rendered difficult by the multiplicity of discourses” (Brauer 72).

Teachers as Peers, Students as Equals

A crucial element in a successful environment of interpretation and learning is resistance to the privileging of teacher discourse and knowledge over that of students. In his canonical text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire challenged the “banking system” of education pedagogy by calling for a more equitable relationship between students and teachers. Freire recognized the value of identity-development and discourse construction skills that occur when teachers and students work together to question and challenge discourses and narratives through a political lens. When students and teachers work together to unfold the world and examine the influences of narrative and discourse on our identity development and cultural landscapes, then both become active participants in the creation of knowledge on an even footing.

This is particularly valuable in the sphere of a composition classroom, and it’s important to frame this discussion of a hermeneutic pedagogy in the term of “composition classroom” rather than “Freshman English” because of the inherent linguistic “otherness” that the latter engenders. In addition, the concept of “composition” extends well beyond the construct of putting words on paper. Composition is inclusive in framing multiple modes of creation, from argumentative essays to identity development and all other creative acts. The composition classroom is place where we compose not only texts and arguments, but ideas and identities. New students of composition may

enter the academy with varying levels of linguistic skills formed from a myriad of phenomenological experiences, but virtually all of them enter it as voting age adults. That means regardless of linguistic skill, experience, knowledge-level, or any other metric, these students are fundamentally equal to the teacher in a democratic society in the one, and perhaps only, area that really counts. The individual vote.

Composition teachers may enter this sphere with training, education, and knowledge that they hope to share and develop among their students, but in a democratic society, each individual's voice has real influence in the voting booth. As equals then, it is important that teachers refrain from viewing themselves as somehow privileged over their students. Rather, successful composition teachers in hermeneutically focused classrooms serve their students best when they work as peers in the process of discovery and identity development necessary for critical consciousness to emerge. Teachers must remember that *equal to me* does not have to mean *same as me*, and in an environment where all voices are valid and exploration is encouraged, student agency and notions of equality can flourish.

That being said, teachers should not view a hermeneutic classroom as an environment where their own interests, opinions, and influences should be avoided. On the contrary, teachers who bring their own passions into the composition classroom for examination and discussion with the students are more likely to generate learning environments where the students become passionate as well. Robert L. Fried describes the value of this approach in *The Passionate Teacher: A Practical Guide*:

To be a passionate teacher is to be someone in love with a field of knowledge, deeply stirred by issues and ideas that challenge our world,

drawn to the dilemmas and potentials of the young people who come into class each day – or captivated by all of these. A passionate teacher is a teacher who breaks out of the isolation of a classroom, who refuses to submit to apathy or cynicism... Only when teachers bring their passions about learning and about life into their daily work can they dispel the fog of passive compliance or active disinterest that surrounds so many students. I believe that we all have it within ourselves to be passionate teachers, and that nothing else will quite do the trick (Fried 1).

Composition teachers who bring to the classrooms their own areas of interest and research to share with their students while also encouraging those students to explore and explicate those passions, to challenge the narrative frames and discourses of them, and accept the validity of student criticism of those passions, generate a *zone of proximal development* where students feel empowered to challenge discourses in their own areas of their lives and cultures yet have coaching available as needed. It also generates passion in those students for their own interests and encourages them to bring those passions to the composition classroom and all other communities. In short, teachers should embrace their own interests and encourage students to do the same. This is a hermeneutic environment of education.

Dewey, Arendt, Ricoeur, and Composition Pedagogy

At this point it would be prudent to summarize the key points illustrated in the theoretical underpinnings of an applied rhetoric of the self, the citizen, and the writer based on the three theorists highlighted in this work. Their theories and ideas regarding

human motivation to act in pursuit of freedom and democratic discourse will be useful for understanding their pragmatic application in a hermeneutic pedagogy.

John Dewey

Dewey promoted the idea of civic literacy as a primary function of education with a focus on critical thinking skills through self-reflection and an understanding of the acquisition of the mind. Dewey argues that critical thinking is only possible through self-reflection and examination of one's own beliefs, biases, and arguments that occurs through active engagement with them. Contrary to the assumption that knowledge is the goal of education, Dewey believed that it is actually the process of acquiring knowledge that is most valuable in educational pedagogy. Inquiry, or explorative action as Dewey defines it, exists to help mitigate doubt and improve chances that action will be successful. Thus, educational pedagogies that help students develop the capacity for inquiry will be more successful than those focused on knowledge acquisition. For Dewey, to "inquire" is to be aware of the physical world and the problems it presents both physically and philosophically. This examination of the physical world is a process of thought and reflection that helps students develop both a critical sense of the self and reflective sense of others who inhabit the world.

Successful inquiry of the physical world is not something that is taught by a teacher, but rather is a process that both teachers and students engage in together where teachers serve as guides and peers in a journey of exploration. Social interaction, particularly, is necessary for successful critical skill development as students learn the discourse skills necessary for success in a democratic society. The experience of social action is the grounding mechanism for establishing common awareness and agreement on

common ideas within and between social groups through inquiry, acceptance of the other as equal, and recognition of opposing viewpoints as valid. Dewey believe that consensus construction, the primary mechanism for successful democratic action in a society, comes not from conceding arguments but from achieving agreement through discourse and debate. In other words, there is no “win” in democratic debates, there is only consensus. All other outcomes are failures.

Dewey argues that reflective thought is an active process that can be learned. A learning environment that promotes purposeful conscious engagement with the self and the other in a way that both challenges cultural norms and accepts the validity of those norms achieves the kind of active reflective sphere necessary for the development of critically engaged citizens. This learning environment should be one that explores cultural screens, confirmation biases, rhetorical fallacies, and other hermeneutic processes that stand in the way of critical self-reflection. Though critical self-reflection and objective critical inquiry are different things, they share many of the same processes, and without the encouragement and expectation to practice reflective personal inquiry regarding beliefs and assumptions, then critical thought of the external world will always be clouded by unexamined personal biases.

The abilities to both think reflectively and observe objectively have social origins. Dewey’s subjectivity calls for active social engagement for the development of critically aware citizens, and the composition classroom is an ideal environment for developing that skill. Dewey also argues that social engagement is possible, in part, due to commonalities that exist in all of us. There is an inter-connectedness between humans, between humans and nature, and between humans and culture that link us together

whether we are aware of it or not. Exploring these connections is as important as self-reflection for the development of critical discourse. Developing and maintaining individual freedom in a complex society comes not from rejection of other viewpoints, but from engagement, validation, and consensus building.

Hannah Arendt

Having experienced first-hand the dangers of an unchallenged democracy, Arendt set out to understand how otherwise well-meaning and intelligent people could become part of what she termed “the banality of evil.” Having studied with Heidegger at the University of Marburg, Arendt was well versed in hermeneutic philosophy and used her knowledge and experience to examine how and why human beings become politically engaged, critically thinking citizens of a democracy. Arendt was concerned not only with the reasons students should be taught critical thinking and democratic discourse, but also with what factors lead students to desire such an education. Where Dewey was concerned with how people engage in critical thinking, Arendt wanted to know why they would want to and how to connect them to that motivation. This is a very practical application of hermeneutic theory for composition teachers to consider.

For Arendt, people are motivated to critical thinking and action by the desire for relevance and permanence, as well as the desire to ensure the continuity of cultural traditions and expectations. That action is manifested politically through narrative, but narrative is susceptible to cultural screens. Arendt recognized that narrative history we use to enforce cultural norms is not the same thing as objective history. Instead, we use narrative to carry forward valued cultural ideas and expectations based on people and events as we choose to see them, not as they actually were. This prompted Arendt to

argue that solutions we seek to resolve our problems and political differences will always be affected by the subjective interpretations and cultural screens of the people asking the questions. Thus, two important elements of a hermeneutic education are interpretive readings of narratives that examine cultural biases inherent in the story and a careful examination of our own cultural screens through self-reflection and interpretation of the self.

Arendt argued that active and effective critical discourse is achieved not by seeking out similarities in relative positions, but by examining the differences in them to understand the underlying cultural biases that generate those conflicts. Arendt couched the struggle between healthy democratic governance and totalitarianism as the difference between progress and tradition. Without tradition to anchor our morals regarding the progress of civil rights for example, we must find new moral anchors in the value of human experience itself by recognizing the validity of each individual's phenomenological experiences with an outcome grounded in the goal of equality for all. Thus, composition classrooms should not seek out commonalities among an increasingly culturally diverse student population, because that practice is reductivist. Rather, an effective hermeneutic classroom is one in which the teacher seeks to understand and validate the unique, individual differences among those students and guide them toward an understanding of one another.

There are three elements to an active life, what Arendt calls the *vita activa*: Labor, work, and action. Labor is the effort of living, and belongs in the private realm. Work is a bridge between the private realm and the public realm and is the substance of which our communities are made. It is action in the sense that it is doing something, but it is not

action because it is focused on utility rather than meaningfulness. A fully realized person capable of representing his or her culture in the public realm, however, is a person who engages in meaningful action for the purpose of affecting his or her social world. This means action is a public act and takes place among others in a social sphere. Action, therefore, as the principal means of defining and expressing the political self corresponds exclusively to the condition of plurality, which is the essence of all political life. Bridging the concept of valid individual experiences to the common political realm through active engagement with others is the point and purpose of hermeneutic practice in the composition classroom.

The academy was created to help protect the process of democracy, and it is that foundation that we must embrace if our goal is to help students become critically conscious, self-reflective citizens of their world. This necessity of action for freedom to exist is the foundational argument for a hermeneutic pedagogy that bridges the desires for freedom by the new citizens in our classrooms with the necessity of an active and engaged citizenship in a functional democracy. However, action in the public sphere is hindered because our modern culture has removed the barrier between the public and the private world. Action, rather than highlighting our unique qualities, has instead been replaced by conformity to norms and expectations. Where in ancient society individuals were expected to differentiate themselves in public, modern culture has flipped those spheres such that individuals seek conformity in public and only differentiate themselves to family and friends in the private realm.

Arendt argues that differentiation is inherent in every individual as a condition of birth, and each person has the capacity for original thought and new political action in the

pure form of freedom regardless of whether each person achieves that potential over the course of his or her life. This bringing into the world of something wholly new and free of external demands is the nature of Arendt's natality. The academy is an educational institution that could, and should, lend itself to the creation of the type of public space that Arendt imagined as many current composition scholars argue. Thus, the composition classroom is a natural extension of the community, and since the writing classroom does not belong to the realm of necessity and is freely entered into by students from multiple communities and cultural backgrounds, it is ideally located in the nexus of engagement among these communities with the students themselves serving as representatives of them. The role of a composition teacher in a hermeneutic classroom is to help students see and understand those differences in one another, to embrace them as valid even if they disagree with them, and to use critical interpretation of narratives and self-reflection to engender consensus building.

Paul Ricoeur

Ricoeur was concerned with how identities are created through narrative and the role of self-reflection in their development. Like Dewey and Arendt, Ricoeur believed that consciousness is intrinsically connected to the physical world and vice versa. We are not free-floating consciences separate from our bodies, as Descartes argued. Rather, we are individual "beings-in-the-world" who have meaning because the world has meaning, and the world has meaning because humans are naturally meaning making creatures who exist in the world. It is the hermeneutic circle. Ricoeur uses this subjective theory to argue that all people exist equally as beings in the world, with each one of us making our meanings while simultaneously drawing meaning for ourselves from that which is created

by others in and about the world. In other words, to reduce the validity or equality of an *other* who exists in the world, for whatever reason racial, cultural, gender, sexual identity, etc., is to reduce our own relative value because our own meaning is drawn from the meanings of the world created by those others.

Ricoeur's subjectivity posits that all people interpret the world uniquely based on their previous experiences in it and use adopted signs, symbols, and discourse developed for that purpose. Yet since those signs, symbols, and discourse systems share commonalities among all people, then there are areas of commonality in the interpreted meaning and understanding of the world as well that can be applied toward consensus building. This subjective intentional consciousness has the power, through individual action within the group and in support of the group, to shape our world as we live and understand it. This intersubjectivity between the self, the world, and the other is the basis of action. Students can't be anything else but engaged whenever they connect, in whatever fashion, with another or group of others. The writing classroom is an ideal place for this group participation to flourish in support of critically thinking engaged citizens, especially if composition teachers remain conscious of the connections and differences among our students that hermeneutic principles imply.

Ricoeur also recognized the role that narratives play in the construction of our identities, and our identities are represented in our discourse and our cultural screens. He argued that identity consists of two parts, the stable *idem* identity and the mutable *ipse* identity. The *idem* identity is constructed of our traditions, phenomenological experiences, and cultural backgrounds. The *ipse* identity is the part of us that projects ourselves into a future and attempts to affect that future through action. Where these two

identities conflict is the space of self-reflection, and it takes critical examination of our narratives for progress and growth to occur, both within ourselves and in our communities. Thus a critical element of hermeneutic education is the practice of critical reading and narrative interpretation.

Because our world and our identities are interpreted creations based on our previous experiences, and because each of us possess cognitive dissonance and the capacity to incorrectly interpret the world, then all people are innately fallible. That's not to say all interpretations have some element of fallibility, though they might, but it does mean that acceptance of our own innate fallibility requires each of us to accept the other as fallible. Comparative analysis of interpretations and discourse centered on consensus creation are the tools of effective action in a democracy. This can only happen where people engage one another in a sphere of open communication. Thus social engagement is another necessary element in a hermeneutic education.

Finally, two elements crucial to developing the motivation of students to become actively engaged citizens are attestation and reflexivity. The confidence to project oneself into the world based on the idea that those actions have the potential to affect, change, and improve the world we live in is attestation. Reflexivity is the developed capacity to interpret the world in such a way that the interpretation reflects both the object being interpreted and the identity of the person doing the interpretation. The ability to recognize our own cultural screens and phenomenologies as lenses through which interpretation occurs improves the value of the interpretation and brings it closer to objectivity. When social engagement and discourse with equally valid other interpretations are added, then consensus becomes possible. This is the goal of a hermeneutic composition classroom.

Four Essential Elements of a Hermeneutic Pedagogy in Composition Classrooms

There is clear overlap in the work of Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur that guides an effective pedagogy of hermeneutic education and composition practices. Implementing a hermeneutic pedagogy in a composition classroom is as much about understanding how and why students are motivated to action as it is about actual classroom practice. When teachers of composition are trained to recognize and deconstruct cultural screens while also embracing those screens as valid representations of each student's "being-in-the-world," then a new cultural sphere is created where interpretation, self-reflection, action, and consensus can flourish.

Based on the work of the three principle theorists in this dissertation, a hermeneutic pedagogy that incorporates self-reflection, interpretive reading, social engagement, and discourse development can give students both the understanding and the skills necessary to become critically engaged citizens of their democracy. Fortunately for the academy, each of these skills and individual pedagogies exist in some form or practice in many composition classrooms already. What is important is for teachers of composition to recognize their specific values and bring them all together in the course of a single semester with the specific goal of developing socially engaged, critically conscious citizens of a democracy.

Pedagogies of Self-Reflection

The capacity to self-reflect and become interpreters of our own identities and the narratives we use to construct them is the first crucial skill to develop among students in a composition classroom. This is more challenging in practice than in theory because new students in today's modern academy often have little exposure to the practice. It is

particularly challenging for students to comprehend the reflexive and inclusive nature of discourse that argues for the validity of all perceptions and acceptance of the other as equal while simultaneously accepting the fallibility of all perceptions.

Fortunately, self-reflection and self-assessment have recently become more common in the modern composition classroom thanks in part to the work of Bell Hooks, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Linda Flowers, Robert Yagelski, and others. Of particular interest for practicum purposes is Yancey's book *Reflection in the Writing Classroom* published in 1998 and still extremely useful for developing class curricula around her notions of reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and reflection-in-presentation. However, as Jeff Sommers recently acknowledged, reflection for students in a composition classroom is challenging "because they are often asked to reflect in this manner as a one-time-only task" (Sommers 100). This is due to a number of factors, including the difficulty people have in describing their own cognitive processes, the desire by students to please the teacher instead of truly reflecting on their biases, and the limited experience teachers have in self-reflection of themselves. As a result, reflection practices in composition classrooms are too often relegated to a one-time effort on portfolio cover memos or as reflective essays designed to meet a rubric rather than understanding one's actual biases and cultural screens in an effort to connect with others in the classroom.

Another area of reflective practice in the composition classroom has centered around autobiographical writing. This practice has been examined and promoted by researchers like Peter Elbow, John Trimbur, Kurt Spellmeyer, and Bonnie Lenore Kyburz in recent years. The promise of this form lies in the opportunity for students to convert

their perceived notions and narratives about themselves into writing using the signs, symbols, and language that serve as filters between the self and the world. This process of writing forces students to codify their experiences and beliefs for an external audience, a healthy practice of reflection. As Kyburz argues, “the work of self reflection and conscientization [are] delicately and importantly symbiotic and...are intensely useful for students of first-year composition” (Kyburz 139).

The strength of this form lies in teaching it not as genre, but as rhetorical strategy that encourages students to think about their experiences, their cultural expectations, and the world that has shaped them. The weakness of this form relative to self-reflection is that while it may help students recognize the forces that have shaped them, it does little to challenge those forces. James Berlin identifies the autobiographical form as exclusively expressionistic such that it primarily serves to “authenticate and affirm the self” rather than challenge it (Berlin 147). Furthermore teachers of writing may be unwilling to critique self-reflective writing for fear of undermining their students’ voices or appearing to cast judgment on the quality of a student’s prior experiences.

Fortunately, from a purely hermeneutic perspective, there are two effective strategies for teaching critical self-reflection in a composition classroom that overcome these limitations while building an appropriate structure necessary for engaged critical examination. These strategies are learning to recognize the effects of cognitive dissonance on our value systems and understanding the role of confirmation bias in our identity development.

Cognitive Dissonance and Confirmation Bias

Perhaps the most important, yet rarely utilized, practice in the composition classroom is learning to recognize cognitive dissonance that exists in every one of us. The concept of cognitive dissonance was first introduced in Leo Festinger's 1956 book *When Prophecy Fails*, which examined why cult followers did not alter their beliefs when their prophecies failed to come true, and it was explicated more fully in his 1957 work *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. According to Festinger, a person experiences cognitive dissonance when he or she holds two psychologically conflicting cognitions (Festinger). In the mid-1990s, cognitive dissonance research evolved further in the work of Elliot Aronson, Robert-Vincent Joule, and Jean-Léon Beauvois to examine the dissonance one experiences when engaging in a behavior that is counter to what one considers appropriate within one's narrative identity. For example, an otherwise health-conscious person may occasionally engage in binge eating, or smoking, or heavy drinking. Another example may be someone whose personal identity is one of reason and non-violence yet sometimes acts irrationally or violently under stressful conditions. Cognitive dissonance is one of the few psychological phenomena that exist in every person from every culture. It is a fundamental human trait, and that is precisely what makes it a useful tool for a hermeneutic pedagogy. Indeed, these dissonant behaviors and cognitions are quite common, especially among college students whose narrative identities may still be in the nascent stage.

Without delving too deeply into the realm of social psychology, there is one element of cognitive dissonance research that is useful for our purposes in developing engaged, self-reflective, critically thinking citizens of a democracy, and that is the

tendency to seek consonance when one encounters dissonance. According to Festinger, cognitive dissonance stirs feelings of frustration, “disequilibrium,” anxiety, and even anger, and the reaction to these feelings is to reduce the dissonance by seeking to resolve the conflict: “Cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent condition which leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction just as hunger leads to activity oriented toward hunger reduction” (Festinger 3).

The methods we use to resolve dissonance involve changing the original cognition or acquiring more information and knowledge to help in our decision making, and once we begin moving toward consonance, we tend to ignore information that conflicts with our new belief systems, a process known as “confirmation bias,” coined by cognitive psychologist Peter Wason. However, there are a number of political issues for which many people hold simultaneously conflicting feelings and beliefs that may continue to go unresolved even when experiencing dissonance on that issue, including war, reproductive freedom, gun rights, freedom of expression, taxation, religion verses science, etc. These are all politically divisive issues that we first seek to resolve internally before we engage in debate about them externally, and how we resolve these types of issues within ourselves is often situational, yet still requires self-reflection and internal debate before a direction toward consonance begins.

Yet this psychological phenomenon of dissonance to consonance combined with confirmation bias also lies at the heart of political division and discourse dysfunction, since our natural tendency is to reject or ignore all opposing arguments to our newly achieved consonance. All of these issues of cognitive dissonance can help us understand how students respond, or fail to respond, to instruction in the classroom, and helping

students understand this phenomenon and overcome it through critical self-reflection and the acceptance of the human condition as innately flawed is a key step in the development of engaged critically thinking citizens that a hermeneutic pedagogy is designed to create.

Techniques for teaching cognitive dissonance involve presenting students with valid arguments and experiences from two sides of a contentious issue. The experience of war, for example, serves as an excellent example, though any topic of interest to the teacher could work. In my classrooms, I begin by providing students with a long list of adjectives on a sheet of paper. Then I provide them with a photograph of the flag raising at Iwo Jima during the second world war and tell them the story of that battle and the heroism of American soldiers involved, including the deaths of three of the six flag raisers on that island during the ensuing battle. I then ask students to write a list of adjectives that reflect their feelings on the story. They typically respond with words like strength, honor, heroism, valor, pride, etc. Those are all accurate feelings that reflect the students' relationship to the narrative. Then I provide the students with the famous photograph of Vietnam war survivor Kim Phuc, who as a nine year old child was severely burned by Napalm and is seen running naked down a road. I tell them the horrific tale of those children and villagers killed and burned during that battle and ask for a response. The words they associate with war in that instance include sadness, unnecessary, horrific, tragic, etc. I have them compare the two adjective sets side-by-side and help them see that within themselves exists this dissonant relationship with war. Both relationships are valid and entirely contradictory. There are any number of similar lessons over topics ranging from abortion to immigration to civil rights, and teachers who engage

students in substantive discussions on these issues for the purpose of identifying and validating the differences in student opinions rather than seek commonalities will help students recognize dissonance both within themselves and in others around them. The emphasis of the exercise should be on validating the other and recognizing one's own internal dissonance. This helps students begin to build an understanding of the other as equal while reflecting on their own internal values and narratives.

Recognizing confirmation bias and its role in the development of self-identity is another valuable hermeneutic pedagogical tool. For this practice, the work of Peter Wason who coined the term proves valuable. The Wason Rule-discovery test presents students with a set of numbers, for example 2-4-6. Then the teacher asks students to develop a hypothesis about the rule by presenting additional numbers in the sequence. Students usually offer up 8-10-12, or 22-24-26 as additional sets in the sequence, which the teacher responds as correct sets. Then the students write down their hypotheses of the rule, which are often incorrect. Seeing a set of even numbers ascending in order directs students to present another set of numbers in similar order, which are correct sets yet do not represent the actual rule. Students assume the rule is ascending even numbers when the actual rule is simply ascending numbers. Any set of 1-2-3, or 4-23-72 would be correct as well, yet once students assume they have a rule worked out based on their approved sets, they stop testing their hypotheses. Students rarely present 3-2-5 as a set, which would be incorrect, or even 6-22-85 which would also be correct. The students seek to be "right" rather than examine their hypothesis by attempting to prove their own rules wrong. This is due, in part, to Wason's argument that people do not want to face the

possibility that their beliefs are wrong, so they rarely examine their beliefs beyond information that confirms those beliefs.

In our political realm, the space where we expect students to engage as citizens for the preservation of democracy through critical thinking, the evidence of confirmation bias is readily apparent. Both conservatives and progressives are convinced that the available evidence supports their ideologies and values, yet both sides are often unwilling or unable to seek out evidence that contradicts their own beliefs. In 2006, Drew Weston of Emory University released a study of 30 men who underwent MRI scans prior to the 2004 presidential election between George Bush and John Kerry. In the study, Weston selected 15 men who identified as strong Republican and 15 who identified as strong Democrat. He then presented comments made by both candidates there were contradictory to other statement each man had made. In all cases, men who were both strong Republican and strong Democrat were highly critical of the other party's candidate but found reasons to let their own candidate off the hook. The MRI scans clearly showed that "none of the circuits involved in conscious reasoning were particularly engaged," but rather the circuits associated with emotional reward and those with resolving conflict were engaged instead (Weston). In essence, we are hard-wired to seek confirmation of our beliefs, and overcoming this hard wiring requires teachers to help students recognize confirmation bias in themselves such that they can accept it in others, and through this mutual recognition acknowledge both the challenges and opportunities for developing consensus through discourse and debate.

Recognizing and challenging cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias are just two effective tools for helping students begin the process of self-reflection that go beyond

the simple autobiography or reflective cover memo. These tools and active discussion and participation with them in a composition classroom as a foundational and semester-long exercise are critical for developing students who are capable of the kind of self-reflection necessary to develop critical consciousness. Helping students recognize these biases in themselves can also be explored further through classroom assignments that require them to first write autobiographical or position papers on any given subject of interest to the teacher, then require a follow-up analysis of the cognitive dissonance and confirmation biases present in the first paper, perhaps with a third assignment that effectively argues a counterpoint to their first paper. Grading students based on the relative strength of their opposing arguments or effective self-reflections can provide students with the exercise and practice in the kinds of critical consciousness promoted by Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur that we hope to instill in engaged citizens capable of critical discourse and consensus building.

Interpretive Reading

As Adler-Kassner and others have pointed out, the practice of engaged interpretive reading as a composition classroom practice has largely been relegated to the background in favor textual genesis. Yet helping students learn to read across-the-grain, as Bartholomae and Patrovsky envision, is a key element in composition skill development because it helps students recognize the biases, cultural screens, and metanarratives that exist in both reading assignments and other student papers. Reintegrating critical analysis in the composition classroom as a primary pedagogical tool will help students balance the generative and interpretive skills necessary for effective critical engagement.

When composition teachers encourage students to engage with a text both as audience and cultural detective, then the practice of interpretive reading can unfold. As Brauer points out, a student's relationship with a text is rooted in the "visceral experience with the language of the text as well as the various factors that determine his or her historical situatedness" (Brauer 74). In other words, a student reading an article about global warming or the American healthcare crisis, for example, will always be affected by that student's experiences and relationships with those issues in the present. If a middle-class student has a relative whose life was altered by cancer and the consequent medical bills associated with it, then his or her relationship to healthcare availability will be vastly different than a student with no experience, or even a student from a wealthy family with different economic realities.

Teachers of composition should seek to explore these situated differences as they relate to students in the classroom not through logical or propositional reason, but rather through participatory effect and understanding. How we perceive a text viscerally is rooted more in our emotional and cultural relationships to a topic than it is to our cognitive reasoning abilities. As Kells argues, "We need to be teaching students across contexts how to pay attention to texts – critically, reflectively, and ethically. Equally important, we need to be listening to our students concerning the consequences of texts on their lives and spheres of belonging" (*WAC: Reflections* 93). This is the hermeneutic approach that brings broader understanding to the text.

Too often, composition teachers focus on authorial intent or historical relevancy in a text. While these elements are valuable for understanding the exigence of a text, they are less valuable for the purpose of helping students generate an understanding of

themselves and the cultural screens and biased lenses through which they engage the text themselves. This is important in a hermeneutic classroom whose goal is critical thinking and active engagement in the world as it is today rather than the world as it is imagined from a purely literary perspective, or what Lakoff defined as “frames.” In addition, the question of meaning in any given text is never static, as we have explored fully in Ricouer, but is always affected by the reader’s phenomenological experiences and cultural screens. This is in turn affected by the teacher’s expectations, the students’ desire to please the teacher, and the cultural and social pressures in the group setting to conform to consensus rather than challenge agreed upon interpretations. This can be mitigated through discursive analysis assignments in which the students first attempt to identify and explicate the cultural biases inherent in the text on their own, then openly discussing their findings in a group setting where all analyses are granted validity. The teacher can then seek to identify both intersections and diversions of analyses and help the students work toward consensus through the act of comparative interpretation.

This can also be accomplished in the classroom by first collecting student analyses of a text through writing assignments and then producing a complete list of those analyses for class discussion. The process of discovery for the students then proceeds from a systematic comparison of these examples in open discussion with a goal of determining what is credible and what is not credible, and which analyses contain potential bias themselves. Ideally, there will be conflicting analyses that present the opportunity to examine cognitive conflicts where multiple interpretations share equally valid reasoning. This creates the opportunity for discovery and consensus building through discourse and debate. “The symbiotic relationship between text and

audience...evolves as preconceptions come into contact with other ideas. This contact is transformative, as neither audience nor text remains unchanged as a result of the hermeneutic encounter” (Brauer 75).

It is useful in interpretive reading to recall Arendt’s process of “fragmentary historiography” as Benhabib describes it. The goal is to look for opportunities in a text to reorient our historical understanding and cultural expectations that seek out alternative orientations and unique viewpoints as well as potentialities for alternate outcomes. When teachers give students the rhetorical authority to challenge the adherence to textual events as they are described and instead provide alternative outcomes, then students gain the skills necessary for critical interpretation. Additional work in this area was advanced through the observations and analysis of Paolo Freire who argued in favor of oppressed people to “read the word and the world” (Freire). Other scholars who have embraced the kind of critical reading and cultural analysis advanced by Freire argue that readers who become aware of how texts manipulate their cultural screens and expectations can become critical consumers and producers of text who challenge dominant meanings and realize that there is more than one way to read texts and their world.

Writing teachers who emphasize interpretive reading in the classroom and encourage a dialogic encounter with the text where students recognize their authority as critical observers to challenge the narratives and assumptions of the author create an environment that frees them from their assumptions while embracing the hermeneutic value of other voices and other perspectives. Because interpretation of a text and the authorial intent of the text are both bound to historical understanding and cultural expectations of the reader and author respectively, the epistemic process of interpretation

never ends. There is no “true” interpretation of a text since culture and historical understanding are both mutable entities. Thus, interpretations of a particular text will change over time. As Ricoeur writes, “if reading is possible, it is indeed because the text is not closed in on itself but opens out into other things. To read is, on any hypothesis, to conjoin a new discourse to the discourse of the text” (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* 158).

Interpretive reading as a primary function of the composition classroom instead of a background practice not only allows students to understand the assumptions and biases of the writer, but also allows them to recognize the cultural screens and biases in themselves that come into conflict with the text. Indeed, conflict with the text is the goal and should be encouraged and developed as part of the composition process. It teaches students critical interpretation skills for the world at large and for themselves. It paves the way for self-reflection and external critique and must be an integrated function of composition classrooms. As Adler-Kassner points out, “carefully considering what we ask students to read, how we ask them to read it, and why, is an essential aspect of writing program administration” (*Adler-Kassner* 35).

Social Engagement

The third aspect of a hermeneutic pedagogy for the composition classroom involves social engagement. Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur all three argue that active engagement with others in the group is the point and purpose of what it means to be a functional human being in society. This is an area of composition pedagogy that has received some attention in the work of Patricia Bizzell and discourse communities, Ken Bruffee’s collaborative learning models, and Charles Bazerman’s conversational model.

Unfortunately there is not much direct research on the effects of social engagement in the classroom and student identity development. Nevertheless, if Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur are correct in their arguments that all identities are socially constructed, then helping students engage with one another in discourse communities is helping them construct their identities. When that occurs in a hermeneutically focused composition classroom where self-reflection, critical interpretation, and acceptance of others as valid and equal voices are embraced, then we cannot help but construct critically thinking citizens of a community.

Any environment that provides opportunities for students to engage in critical discourse with other students is a sphere where identity development occurs. This is particularly useful in the modern multicultural environment of the composition classroom because it helps students recognize others as equal and valid even though the other is unique. This may be challenging for students with little experience in reasoned civic discourse, but a healthy environment guided by a teacher with a knowledge of how hermeneutics shapes identity development is an ideal space for this mutual recognition to occur. As Ricoeur argues,

Properly to understand myself in and through the capabilities and vulnerabilities that constitute me, I must unmask the many temptations I have to deny our mutuality. I must learn that even though you and I are irreducibly different from each other, as human beings we both have the same basic constitution. Our common constitution demands mutual recognition. Nonetheless, because our vulnerabilities are never eliminated, we must constantly struggle to achieve it. This is “a struggle against the

misrecognition of others at the same time that it is a struggle for recognition of oneself by others” (*The Course of Recognition* 258).

Viewing the composition classroom as an engaged community has been the thrust of post-structuralist theorists dating back more than three decades. Patricia Bizzell builds on the work of Richard Rorty, Stanley Fish, and Thomas Kuhn who all argue that knowledge is “socially or rhetorically constructed by the language using practices of discourse communities” (Bizzell 167). Though Bizzell was initially concerned with helping students construct an academic discourse for the purpose of participating in the academic community, she acknowledges that the process of discourse development for students is part of building a “democratic shared language” that helps students achieve critical consciousness. This idea of democratic shared language has clear connections to John Dewey’s notion of active communication within a community, or what he called a democratic shared partnership.

The transformative approach to composition pedagogy gave way in the 80s and 90s to a distributive approach in Writing Across Curriculum (WAC) programs that sought to bridge student-centered discourse with academic discourses across the disciplines. Built largely on the work of Robert Parker and Vera Goodkin in *The Consequences of Writing* who sought to bridge thinking and language grounded in Piaget and Vygotsky, WAC programs have been widely adopted across the academy in the past few decades because of their promise to help students connect their voices to the embedded academic discourse. However, the down-side to Writing Across Curriculum is that such programs by their nature tend to privilege academic discourse at the expense of cultural and linguistic identities, serving to indoctrinate students to a specific style of

language and writing rather than seek to validate their unique voices as equal members of a society. Criticisms like those of David Russell that WAC programs tend to “exclude others on the basis of their linguistic performance,” (Russell 62) as well as promote “the myth of transience,” (Russell 53) demonstrate the challenges faced by such a movement in the established structures of academic environments. While Writing Across Curriculum programs seek to give students greater voice in their curricula, they ultimately fail to accommodate the actual social engagement necessary to accept others as valid and equal, especially those with linguistic differences to established academic discourse, or to help students develop a critically engaged identity necessary for the support of a democratic culture. Kells argues, “historically WAC has not been called to interrogate the knowledge-making systems and discourses students seek to acquire. WAC replicates and reaffirms dominant discourses by socializing new writers into established systems without cultivating critical awareness of the ways that literacy practice remains embedded in ever-shifting sets of economic, political, social, cultural, and linguistic factors” (*WAC: Reflections* 93).

Fortunately, there have been two significant evolutions of this distributive approach in composition pedagogy in the past few years that show promise for what Juan Guerra terms a *reconstitutive* approach to the teaching of writing. The first is the evolution of Writing Across Curriculum into Writing Across Communities spearheaded by the graduate-run program at the University of New Mexico. This evolutionary effort still embraces the underlying socio-linguistic and identity-construction philosophies of Vygotsky’s social development theory that supports Dewey’s, Arendt’s, and Ricoeur’s notions of social interaction preceding development of critical consciousness. Critical

consciousness and cognition are, after all, the end products of socialization and active discourse.

Writing Across Communities encourages composition teachers to help students build identification and understanding of cultures of influence both within the academy and without while granting students the rhetorical authority to challenge the privileged discourses they are learning about. One of the strengths of this ethnolinguistically diverse model is its reliance on peer-oriented teaching and administrative efforts to recognize the value of the voices of students without reducing the value of their own and vice versa. Within the Writing Across Communities initiative, “communicative competence depends upon complex strategies of shuttling between ideas and audiences, a challenging, culturally-dependant process” (*WAC: Reflections* 96). Dewey also makes this argument clearly, “the great waste in the school come from [the student’s] inability to utilize the experiences he or she gets outside of the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he or she is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school” (*The School and Society* 89).

Strategic implementation of Writing Across Communities initiatives include examples like Adler-Kassner’s “Celebration of Student Writing” started at Eastern Michigan University and adopted by Appalachian State, Bellevue University, Texas A&M, The University of New Mexico, and a number of other schools. This event brings students together to write collectively, engage in open discourse about writing goals and processes, and present their voices to the community at large. The popularity of these programs among students is a testament to the motivational value of social engagement in the composition classroom for the development and socially-constructed identities.

In addition, UNM's Civil Rights Symposia connects community activists and civil rights leaders with students in the university in open forums of discussion and debate. Other programs like community writing centers supported by university students and staff, service-learning programs, student learning communities, and peer tutoring efforts, as well as events that bridge civic, academic, and professional communities in support of diverse viewpoints and multi-linguistic literary practices all serve the kind of social engagement practices necessary for a hermeneutic education.

This emergence of Writing Across Communities as a bridge between students and civic engagement is supported, in part, by the second recent development in composition pedagogy practices, the *Apocalyptic Turn*. Paul Lynch, in a sweeping essay published in May, 2012 identifies the apocalyptic turn in composition studies as one that foregrounds the kind of social engagement and critical discourse necessary to tackle the new realities of a changing world, from the effects of global warming to natural disasters and even terrorism. Indeed, a number of composition scholars in the past decade have sounded the alarm over the growing size and frequency of natural disasters, the wholesale destruction of the environment, loss of ecologically sustaining coral reefs, and other important developments in an increasingly interconnected world, and these scholars are urging the field of composition to begin reconsidering what composition actually means for our students and for their future. In addition to Lynch, established scholars such as Kurt Spellmeyer, Lynn Worsham, Marilyn Cooper, Patricia Bizzell, and a growing chorus of others are "urging composition to reckon with the world in which it lives" (Lynch 463).

There are certainly skeptics and critics of this apocalyptic turn who argue that the composition classroom is no place to try and save the world. None other than Stanley

Fish, one of the foundational theorists of social constructionism, argues in his book *Save the World on Your Own Time* that the university should focus primarily on academic development and avoid taking on the issues relevant to our social, political, and economic world:

I am not saying there is no connection at all between the successful practice of ethical, social, and political virtues and the courses of instruction listed in the college catalogue; it's always possible that something you come across or something a teacher says may strike a cord that sets you on a life path you may not otherwise have chosen. But these are contingent effects, and as contingent effects they cannot be designed and shouldn't be aimed at (Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time* 13).

A number of reviews and arguments against Fish's position have populated the journals, and Donald Lazare's review and rebuttal of Fish's book in *College English* is both detailed and vigorous. Yet even Lazare agrees reluctantly with Fish's argument that "respecting the voices of others is not even a good idea. You shouldn't respect the voices of others simply because they are others" (*Save the World on Your Own Time* 54). Lazare basis this abandonment of linguistic and multi-cultural validation on his experiences teaching mostly privileged white, mostly conservative, students who resist challenges to dominant narratives, and who overpower classroom discussions with belligerent, ill-informed opinions that drown out everyone else's voices (Lazare 531). Yet both of these critics are addressing the problems associated with social engagement in non-hermeneutic focused classrooms. In a setting that emphasizes self-reflection with an understanding of cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias, as well as interpretive reading skills focused

on recognizing and challenging dominant narratives, then the success of students regardless of their political identifications or beliefs is contingent on their abilities to unfold their identities, not impose their ideologies. In a hermeneutic classroom, there are no right answers and no arguments to “win,” there are only insightful questions, and student success is judged based on their efforts to form consensus through discourse and reason.

Patricia Bizzell takes up the argument of social engagement and social justice in the composition classroom in her 2009 *College English* article “Composition Studies Save the World!” In this short essay, Bizzell argues that composition studies may not have saved the world in the past few decades, but they have improved it. She points to the evolutions of composition pedagogy that first sought to eliminate the structuralist dictates of academic standards that punished linguistically diverse voices as “deficient” and instead sought to improve composition pedagogies “for teaching clear writing and cogent argument in ways that respected students’ intelligence” (Bizzell 176). She also identifies the past work of scholars in the field of composition who sought to bridge the academic discourse community – a predominantly white, male, heterosexual community – to the discourses of multi-cultural, feminist, gay, and “other” voices that experienced educational obstacles in the academy. While it may not have saved the world, it did open the doors of a previously exclusive community to an increasingly diverse society seeking the benefits of higher education. Further scholarship in composition and linguistic justice led to the adoption of ESL studies and research that improved access to higher education for an even broader range of students. Composition studies definitely improved the world for these audiences.

Rejecting the notion that new students of the academy can only find success by abdicating their unique socio-linguistic identities and becoming “brains-in-a-jar” for the composition classroom to “shape like a lump of clay,” (Bizzell 184) Bizzell succinctly summarizes the strength of social engagement: “we were not working with blank slates on which we could inscribe whatever discursive conventions we favored. We were working with people who brought their own rich discursive resources to the academy; who did not want to give up their own ways of thinking and using language in order to succeed in the academy; and who found, indeed, that they brought resources that could address academic problems in ways not available to traditional academic discourse” (Bizzell 178).

This clarifying argument brings us back to the apocalyptic turn and the arguments by Lynch, Spellmeyer, and others that composition should be conceived of “in the broadest possible sense” (Lynch 465) to begin addressing the real world needs of our students and their communities today and in their future that “pursues a way around the old choices (rhetoric versus reality, style versus substance, the cave versus the sun) that have restricted our work for so long. This more inclusive project seems particularly important for composition, a discipline of comprehension and speaking that finds itself confronting the incomprehensible and the unspeakable. How do we compose when the composition of the world in which we write is changing so rapidly?” (Lynch 465).

This apocalyptic turn in composition champions the hermeneutic processes of contemplation, connection, discourse, interpretation, and consensus construction that are also fully supported in the social engagement paradigm of Writing Across Communities. Speaking more broadly, the kind of social engagement practices discussed here also

support the broader objectives of the academy to develop critically engaged citizens of a democracy. Though some critics like Fish dismiss this effort as antithetical to the purposes of the composition classroom, it is clear that our world is changing in dramatic ways, and if we are to prepare these students to be critically engaged citizens of this dramatically changing world, we must adopt what Marilyn Cooper terms a “pedagogy of responsibility” in which students understand that “their rhetoric can contribute to the effort to construct a good common world” (Cooper 443). This can best be accomplished in a hermeneutically focused, socially engaged composition classroom.

Discourse Skill Development

The fourth important element of a hermeneutic composition classroom is the development of student discourse skills. Specifically, the discourse skills necessary for navigating the academic discourse community as well as society beyond the college curriculum. The term *discourse skill* development is used here as opposed to *writing skill* development because, while related and overlapping, they cover two different but complementary areas of composition. Discourse skills include the full range of social engagement practices including argumentative debate, active listening, group discussions, collaboration, peer editing, and even public speaking skills. Essentially, any action in a public sphere in which a person engages in whatever fashion with another or group of others is discourse. This includes writing as well, though the development of student writing skills in the composition classroom has its own specific practices. What we are primarily concerned with for the purposes of a hermeneutic pedagogy of composition are the broader discourse skills of engagement, and particularly with the study, interpretation, analysis, and construction of syllogistic reasoning and other rhetorical forms of influence.

Before we discuss the hermeneutics of discourse skill development, however, I would like to briefly discuss a concern surrounding the specifics of writing skill development. While Stanley Fish's dismissal of social engagement practices may be reductive and flawed, there is one specific area of criticism that Fish includes in *Save the World on Your Own Time* that deserves acknowledgement, and that is lack of attention paid in modern composition pedagogies to the basic skills of writing. The composition classroom, while rightfully emerging as a sphere for the development of a reflective personal identity and democratically engaged citizenship, is still a place where writing needs to occur.

We do our students no favors if we empower their voices as change agents of their world yet fail to provide them with the fundamental skills necessary to communicate their voices in writing. More than two decades ago, Peter Elbow sounded this alarm in resistance to the emerging academic discourse community pedagogies of the time: "When students leave the university unable to find words to render their experience, they are radically impoverished" (Elbow 137). Unfortunately, in the intervening years that Elbow's article appeared in *College English*, there has been no research published in that journal that provides insight into best practices for developing specific writing skills in the composition classroom. Only one article published in the last decade, Mike Duncan's "Whatever Happened to the Paragraph?" addresses such skill development in any way.

Outside of a few ESL journals and perhaps one or two articles in Writing Center journals, basic skill development as an area of pedagogical research has largely gone the way of the buggy whip. Perhaps this is due to the rejection of structuralist pedagogies that disenfranchised linguistically-diverse students and "teaching to the form" criticisms that

many scholars believe “chokes the life out of writing,” or “turns students into intellectual automotons” (Birkenstein 18). However, focusing on skill development in the composition classroom as an equal and important element in a hermeneutic pedagogy is not analogous to bringing back the five-paragraph essay or forcing students to write to a specified formula. On the contrary, skill development in writing is a necessary and important element in creating critically engaged citizens of a democracy because it empowers students with the knowledge, confidence, and skills to effectively engage in their communities as well as find success in the academy.

The lack of research or scholarly articles surrounding best practices for skill development in composition classrooms may also be a simple result of our privileged community. As composition scholars, we are writing primarily for other composition scholars who are often removed from the day-to-day student teaching practices relegated to graduate assistants or adjunct faculty. Our interests lie in theoretical development and discourse studies of varying cultural communities, and writing or reading about basic skill development techniques and strategies is low on our priorities. These strategies and techniques are more often relegated to composition pedagogy courses for new teaching assistants, though even in those courses the focus is generally more on lesson plan development and teaching strategies than on “which” methods work best for specific skill development.

Instead, writing skill development has primarily become the purview of scholars preparing textbooks that writing programs adopt, usually as a mandatory text across all sections, that composition teachers use with mixed success to help students develop their skills in various genres. While these textbooks are grounded in solid pedagogical theories

about composition practices and written by experienced teachers and scholars, their audience is primarily first-year students rather than other composition scholars. As such, I fear that valuable and important research in the area of student writing skills and best practices, particularly in the age of the Internet, may be falling behind the evolving needs of modern composition students.

For discourse skill development in a hermeneutic classroom, there are three strategies I have found through trial to error to produce the best results in my students. These are a study of syllogistic reasoning including the recognition of logical fallacies, a study of the rhetorical triangle including a hermeneutic counterpart that enriches and informs the classic Aristotelian appeals, and classroom practice in debate and consensus construction.

Recovering Syllogistic Reasoning in Composition Classrooms

In the ongoing debate between process and post-process pedagogies, ignoring for the moment the inherent oxymoron of “post-process pedagogy,” scholars across the field seem stuck in a dichotomy between product-oriented and social-oriented writing pedagogies for student writing. Others have attempted to wade through this chasm using linguistic gymnastics and pedagogical semantics, such as Paul Lynch’s embrace of “casuistry” and Sidney Dobrin’s “Beyond post-process” arguments (Lynch; Dobrin). Regardless of which side of this debate composition scholars stand, the debate itself seems to dominate the field, consuming most of the available oxygen in the room of composition scholarship without reaching workable solutions regarding best strategies for classroom teaching. In the midst of this debate, however, James Crosswhite has reemerged in recent years to recover the neo-Aristotelian structures of discourse

development without falling victim to either the process pedagogy's failures to teach basic and necessary skills and conventions nor to post-process pedagogy's inability to provide a generalizable writing process in the classroom.

In *The New Rhetoric Project*, Crosswhite recovers the Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca rhetorical traditional model that is concerned "with reasoning about practical matters in conditions of uncertainty" (Crosswhite 302). This recovery is timely and robust in its support of the apocalyptic turn and the needs of composition students to develop voices that are both their own and possess the kind of rhetorical reasoning skills necessary for validation in the civic community. Post-process theory may have much in common with the hermeneutic goals of identity construction and agency validation with its focus on interpreted, situated, and public writing, but it ultimately fails to provide the guidance necessary to help students craft legitimizing arguments in the public sphere. That is why teaching discourse skills is such an integral part of a hermeneutic pedagogy. While self-reflection, interpretive reading, and social engagement are crucial for helping students develop critical consciousness in support of an active and healthy democracy, those students still need effective discourse skills to productively shape their own communities and the broader world. In writing, as Crosswhite reminds us, "all argumentation takes shape and develops out of a relation to an audience, and the quality of an argument is a function of the quality of the [audience] that would assent to it" (Crosswhite 302). This connection between the audience and the speaker is an important function of the hermeneutic circle.

Teaching students syllogistic reasoning in a composition classroom does not privilege academic discourse at the expense of their own ideas or voices in the writing

process. On the contrary, it is a valuable skill development in the formation of their public identities that provide students with the ability to connect to and influence their intended audiences through the shared acceptance of logical, deductive reasoning. In addition, the shared exploration of logical fallacies and their common usage in the public sphere, and particularly in the political sphere, helps students connect their classroom work to their broader communities. It is also a highly useful tool in the practice of interpretive reading. If a composition teacher in a hermeneutic classroom supports the peer model of collective investigation and discovery, then the classroom avoids Freire's banking model and validates student agency while also helping students discover new strategies for more effective communication.

The Rhetorical Triangle and the Hermeneutic Mirror

Crosswhite argues in his discussion of the relationship between audience and speaker that the power of syllogistic reasoning lies in its "valorization of audience, of *receptivity* as a kind of rational agency" (Crosswhite 302). This recognition of audience, this recovery of audience in the rhetorical tradition, is important for understanding how the rhetorical pyramid and its *hermeneutic mirror* function in the service of discourse skill development in the composition classroom and communities beyond.

The rhetorical pyramid, also known as Aristotle's appeals of ethos, logos, and pathos, was brought into the field of composition theory by James Kinneavy in his 1971 book *A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse*. He referred to it as the "communications triangle" and grounded his recovery of this liberal traditional model of discourse in the modern language theories of Karl Buhler, Roman Jakobson, and others (Rickert 37). Kinneavy's communications triangle differs from Aristotle's only in the

symantics of the key terms. In the place of ethos, logos, and pathos, Kinneavy inserted speaker, reality, and listener respectively, but the overall rhetorical structure is the same.

Kinneavy's goal was to provide a foundational model around which the entire discipline of English studies could be structured, providing a stable framework for composition practices in what he viewed as a chaotic realm of composition theory. The endurance of the triangle as a teaching model in composition classrooms to this day is a testament to his success in that endeavor. Timothy Crusius points to the pyramid's "memorable, easily graspable schema...capable of almost endless application" as its defining strength (Rickert 37). Kinneavy also recovers *Kairos* as an important element in the process of communication, constructing it as the proper situational or opportune moment when discourse occurs. Today, the rhetorical triangle still appears in some form or another in even the most recent composition textbooks like *Writing Today*, published in 2010, that guide students through the use of reason, authority, and emotional appeal in the construction of arguments.

This argumentative framework is not without its critics, however, who argue the triangle is overly prescriptive, formulaic, and static, and that it is "essentially moralist and could lead its adherents away from genuine pluralism" (Hunter 280). Post-process theorists, anti-foundational as they are and skeptical of any blanket assertion, are particularly critical of Kinneavy's argument that "the aim of discourse determines everything else" (Fulkerson 43). In particular, Fulkerson takes issue with the privileging of the writer, or speaker, that Kinneavy implies in his argument "that a general aim, such as persuasion, determines the shape, logic, and verbal texture of a discourse" (Fulkerson 44). In this respect, I agree with Fulkerson. The pyramid is rhetorically focused in the

sense that it projects ethos, logos, and pathos onto an audience and the assumption is the relative value of those elements alone are sufficient for persuasion. Yet that is only half the equation in any act of discourse. As Crosswhite argues, *receptivity* has a rational agency as well, the degree to which an audience is receptive to these three appeals has as much to do with their effectiveness as their relative value does.

I recognized this imbalance while teaching the rhetorical triangle to my first-year composition classrooms in 2008 and set about examining the hermeneutic elements of my student audience that were necessary for effective discourse. What I discovered is that the rhetorical pyramid has a hermeneutic mirror in the audience, and the relative values of each of the three appeals are only as effective as their reflections in the members of that audience. *Ethos*, or authority, is only as effective as the *confidence* the audience has in that authority. *Logos*, or reason, is likewise balanced by the *knowledge* necessary to recognize the quality of that reason. *Pathos*, or emotion, is only as valuable as the *inspiration* it generates. This is why hostile audiences are so difficult to persuade. If there is a lack of any one element of the hermeneutic mirror, then the effectiveness of the appeals will always be mitigated regardless of their own value. *Kairos* serves as a bridge between the two, remaining unchanged in its concept.

Teaching both the rhetorical pyramid as an effective structure of argumentation and influence, as well as the hermeneutic mirror in a composition classroom helps students improve their discourse skills both as speaker/writer and audience/reader. Crosswhite's argument would seem to support this hermeneutic addition to the rhetorical form: "Validity is a result of a process of validating that includes attending to the particular situation in which argumentation proceeds, from anticipation by an arguer,

through experience by an audience, to an aftermath of evaluation within a historical rhetorical community that will have its own measures of the strength of arguments” (Crosswhite 304).

Classroom Practice in Debate and Consensus Construction

In addition to the recovery of the rhetorical forms for the development of discourse skills, actual practice in those skills under the guidance of a teacher-collaborator is a third effective strategy of discourse skill development. Such social engagement in the classroom, and particularly in a peer-oriented classroom, is the best way to coach and guide students in the development of civic discourse, both as influencers of their world and as active audience. As this dissertation has argued throughout, supported by Dewey, Arendt, Ricoeur, Vygotsky, and others, learning and knowledge are social constructions developed through the exchange of ideas and open discourse. If this is the case, then a student-centered classroom with a teacher-as-collaborator model provides an atmosphere of social engagement necessary for critical consciousness development.

Fortunately, there is a wealth of scholarship on student centered learning anchored in the constructivist educational theories of Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget and others who argue that students are better able to understand information they have constructed by themselves. This is supported in turn by Arendt’s and Ricoeur’s subjectivist notions that the actions of students in this discursive sphere only become meaningful when considered in relation to the actions of their peers. Moreover, foundational composition scholars such as Peter Elbow, Ken Bruffee, John Trimbur, James Berlin, Patricia Bizzell, and a score of others have embraced the student-centered classroom as a sphere in which students can

develop community, practice discourse, and direct the learning experience to best meet their needs. Such widespread promotion and acceptance of this model seems to demonstrate it is one of the few pedagogies that scholars from across the field embrace regardless of their other pedagogical ideologies.

There are a few voices of dissent, however, that have questioned the actual effectiveness of student-centered learning in practice. E.D. Hirsch Jr. cites a number of studies that indicate a significant number of students who prefer or have more success in traditional teacher-oriented classrooms (Hirsch), and Marshall Gregory criticizes the tendency of student-centered classrooms to teach down to student comfort levels rather than challenge them academically (Marshall). Yet these voices are few and far between. Today, student-centered classroom pedagogies have expanded to include sub-fields of study such as peer editing and group writing.

I have found the most success in my student-centered classrooms when I can physically arrange the desks so students can see each other rather than all facing me. I then engage students in discussions related to the class readings, current events, popular culture topics of interest, personal narratives, etc. As a facilitator rather than a lecturer, my goal is to help these students apply the hermeneutic strategies of self-reflection and critical discourse we have already studied and examined in previous classes, as well as ask questions that help them recognize cognitive dissonance issues and confirmation biases in their discourse. Interpretive reading is supported by careful textual analysis and open discussion, and discourse skills in syllogistic reasoning are practiced and coached both by myself as the facilitator and by other students.

It is important, however, to include variety in the student-centered processes. Some days involve a full discussion or debate about relevant issues by the entire classroom, other days have students working together in groups of three or four on argument development for their writing assignments, collaborative writing, or peer editing. Still other days include presentations by myself or one of the students related to the topic of examination or debate. All students produce at least six writing assignments during the course of the semester, and sometimes more, and all students are graded in part on their classroom engagement.

The most important outcome of student-centered strategies for discourse development is the ability by students to construct consensus in debates over issues where there is divergent opinions or beliefs, and we do not shy away from contentious social issues in the classroom. The very issues that one seeks to avoid in polite conversation, from religion to politics to social justice are often explored, interpreted, examined for cognitive dissonance and confirmation biases, and discussed in often lively, but always cordial, debate. My students learn the first day of class the fundamental rule of healthy civic debate, that there is no “winning” an argument in healthy democratic discourse, there is only a search for consensus. All other outcomes are failures.

A Combined Strategy Approach

The advantage of adopting a hermeneutic pedagogy for the composition classroom lies in the already existing practices of the four essential strategies in most writing programs today. The key differences lay in the understanding of hermeneutic theory and the primary goal that these strategies seek to attain, namely the construction of socially engaged, critically conscious citizens of a democracy. It is also very important

for composition teachers and writing program administrators to understand that these four strategies work together to inform, support, and construct one another, and all four of them must receive equal attention throughout the course of each semester. Failure to embrace any one of them undermines the success of all of them.

Onward Toward Freedom

The academy today is facing seemingly insurmountable challenges. Increasing economic disparity; ecologically destructive climate change; a decreasingly stable government under duress from extremist, intransigent elements within and multi-national corporate hegemony without; global terrorism; and increasingly powerful and frequent natural disasters. Enrollment has increased significantly as more people seek the advantages of higher education, yet the lack of government financial support to meet this increasing demand means university resources are strained, and class sizes are increasing while faculty and staff face pay freezes, furloughs, or even layoffs. In addition, increasing pressure from special interest groups and corporate forces outside the academy to seize control of university resources and dictate education standards is undermining the foundations of the academy itself.

We must stop and examine what things we do still have control over, and assess how we can re-invigorate the academy's original, and still most valuable function of preparing good citizens of a democratic society. I believe the composition classroom is ideally suited to this task at this time of critical need. According to the most recent statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, 30 percent of American adults now hold at least a bachelor's degree (Census Bureau), and 41 percent of all adults age 18-25 are currently enrolled in a degree granting institution (Department of Education), both all time records.

Considering that the majority of universities require all students to enroll in at least one composition course, then composition teachers can be among the most influential actors for developing new citizens capable of improving their communities and shaping the world through effective discourse, action, and other forms of civic engagement. Words, after all, will always have more power to enact real and lasting change in a society than violence.

“Only writing, in freeing itself, not only from its author, but from the narrowness of a dialogical situation, reveals this destination of discourse as projecting a world” (Ricoeur, *From Text to Action* 218)

Chapter 6: Conclusion

My purpose in writing this dissertation is two-fold. First, I hope to recover the rich philosophy of hermeneutics and bring it into the broader conversation of rhetoric and composition studies by demonstrating its value alongside currently prominent philosophies. Second, I want to explore and apply the unique qualities of hermeneutic theory to the composition classroom in an effort to address some of the pedagogical challenges faced by scholars in the field.

My goal is not to undermine the extant discourses of rhetoric and composition studies, but rather to enrich them and provide a new way of thinking about how students learn writing. Hermeneutics as an applied rhetoric has largely been ignored in favor of pedagogies that privilege the academy and teachers over students, though recent developments in student-centered practices have begun to emerge. Those student-centered practices have been partially informed by a handful of scholars who have explored the connections between hermeneutics and higher education over the past two decades, including discussions in hermeneutics and composition theory specifically (Grondin, Kent, Crusius, Mailloux).

These efforts have helped the field of composition and rhetoric gain better insights into student motivations toward civic engagement and the role narrative plays in enforcing cultural norms. However, this work has mostly demonstrated the viability of hermeneutics for composition studies but has otherwise failed to articulate a practical implementation (Brauer). That is the gap in the literature that this dissertation hopes to

fill, providing both a theoretical underpinning of a hermeneutic pedagogy as well as a pragmatic strategy of implementation in the composition classroom.

The theoretical underpinning for this dissertation is developed from the work of three 20th Century theorists, all of whom contributed significantly to the fields of both education and hermeneutic philosophy. John Dewey's hermeneutic contributions occur through his development of what he called *instrumentalism*, but is more widely associated with American pragmatism. Numerous scholars have directly compared Dewey's philosophy to hermeneutic philosophy, and Dewey's early influences by hermeneutic philosophers like Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel are evident throughout his works. Hannah Arendt was educated and trained in the German Hermeneutic tradition with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, and two of her most significant works, *The Human Condition*, and *The Life of the Mind* are primarily concerned with areas of hermeneutic philosophy. Paul Ricoeur embraced both phenomenological experience and hermeneutic interpretation to develop his philosophy of the will as well as his examination of narrative in support of that work.

John Dewey was an American educator whose progressive educational theories and systems implemented across the United States and around the world can be connected to the some of the greatest achievements in social, political, economic, and technological advancements in the history of mankind. His pedagogical influence in shaping American education policies and practices helped pave the way for nearly every 20th Century American social revolution, from the New Deal to the Great Society Programs to the Civil Rights Movement. John Dewey was an educator and a writer. He

was one man, and he changed the world with only his words and his ideas in lasting ways that Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin never could with their all their armies and weapons.

Hannah Arendt witnessed first-hand the threat and danger of totalitarian rule and the collapse of the German democracy. She worked to protect and rescue Jews from the holocaust and was forced to flee Europe. When she returned to cover the Nuremburg trials, she struggled only to understand how otherwise good people could come to support or become part of what she called the banality of evil. Arendt was not interested in vengeance or blame, but rather sought to forever prevent again the kind of totalitarian horror that consumed a democracy with the tacit acceptance of its people. Her philosophies and ideas are as valuable today in these uncertain times as they have ever been, and they provide an excellent foundation for a pedagogy of resistance to extremism and oppression.

Paul Ricoeur also endured the horrors of World War II, first as a soldier in the French army and then as a prisoner of war in a German concentration camp for five years. He was well aware of the propaganda and misinformation campaigns used by the Nazi party to seize the reins of power, destroy democratic discourse, and disenfranchise whole populations of their basic human rights and dignity. He was most interested in the ways that our previous experiences shape our comprehension of the world, and he was driven in part to understand how narratives can be used to influence our beliefs and behaviors so he could provide the understanding and tools necessary to challenge them.

Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur all recognized that political institutions are only effective in protecting social institutions like the freedom of religion, economic equality, freedom of speech and assembly, and basic human rights so long as those political

institutions serve and unite the people in a bond of common purpose. Stable political institutions that serve the needs of a society and protect the interests of the people also have an enduring power that makes it possible for the citizens who support it to live secure and productive lives. These theorists recognized the mutuality and intersubjectivity between healthy political institutions and the well-being of the people.

When the well-being of the people is not served, however, then those institutions can lose both the support of the people and the power of serving them that defines their purpose, leading to instability and the potential for collapse. The same can occur when those institutions are undermined by forces intent on destabilizing them for whatever purposes, whether ideological, economic, or political. Regardless, there is a clear connection between the preservation of political institutions in a democratic society and the well being of the people of that society. Thus, Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur were all concerned with ensuring the stability of the democratic political institutions through civic engagement and action on the part of critically conscious citizens who constantly challenge these institutions to serve their needs.

What these theorists understood, however, is that the realm of civic engagement is primarily a public sphere dominated by rhetorical practices of influence as well as hermeneutic practices of interpretation. Since both rhetoric and hermeneutics are susceptible to logical fallacy, false promises, sophistic manipulation, threats, etc., then the public sphere is always an unstable space in constant need of engaged citizens educated in the skills of rhetoric and dedicated to the purpose of speaking and acting against those destructive forces.

All three philosophers witnessed the rise of Totalitarianism in democratic countries of Europe and all three were concerned with the processes and politics that led to such tragic developments of the war and the Holocaust. The common heuristic drawn from their observations and philosophies is the role education plays in developing critically engaged citizens. Their examinations of identity-development, civic engagement, critical thinking, narratives, and culture, among other areas, help us see how individuals develop as unique ‘selves,’ as citizens, and as writers.

This provides a framework for the development of a hermeneutic pedagogy applicable to the composition classroom. The framing questions for this pedagogy are hermeneutically focused:

1. How do we take advantage of gaps in student learning and cultural differences to achieve common outcomes in critical thinking about philosophies of social justice, equality, and civic responsibility?
2. What are the unique differences in student educational experiences that we can draw upon to enhance and validate student phenomenologies in our approach to transcultural modalities of student discourse and writing?

These questions are unique in that they depart from traditional educational tendencies to seek lowest common denominators among students for the purpose of bridging differences. Instead, a hermeneutic pedagogy seeks out unique differences among students for the purpose of exploring biases, cultural screens, and meta-narratives that shape us both as individuals and groups. If we begin with the proposition that all people are equal, where *equal to me* does not have to mean *same as me*, then a pedagogy can be

constructed based on the theories of Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur that provides practice in developing the essential personal skills necessary for critically conscious, active citizens to emerge: self-reflection, interpretive reading, social engagement, and discourse. The ideal setting for this pedagogy is a student-centered classroom where teachers work as facilitators of student learning, as coaches, and as peers to their students with outcomes focused on validation of others and consensus building.

Opportunities for the Academy and Composition Classrooms

A survey conducted in 2011 by The Institute for College Access and Success found nearly 80 percent of all high school students in America believe college education and training are more important today than for previous generations (Success), and 90 percent of young people say they want to go to college (Kazis). Despite this interest by students in receiving a college education, however, three-quarters (75 percent) of students entering college in the fall of 2011 were unprepared for college-level studies according to the testing organization ACT (Wolfgang). This appears to be a glaring disconnect between modern students who desire a college education and the perceived readiness of these students to obtain that education, and statistics for students completing a college degree within six years of starting college supports the data. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports the graduation rate for first-time students entering four-year institutions in fall 2002 was 57 percent. That means more than four in ten of our students are failing to matriculate in a timely manner if at all, and that's simply unacceptable if we are truly in the business of preparing new citizens for the challenges of preserving our democracy. Fortunately, work in this area through the NSSE program is helping the academy recognize which educationally

purposeful activities are most successful for students. The key findings of the research by the NSSE supports the arguments developed in this dissertation, particularly in the essential skills of self-reflection, interpretive reading, social engagement, and discourse development.

One of the strengths of the academy in the past has been its generally conservative nature in avoiding rapid repositioning as cultural forces have shifted around it. That unwillingness to change however can be a problem when the technological and cultural needs of the population it is intended to serve are outpacing the academy's capacity for such repositioning. We are, as a culture and a species, in the midst of a massive and rapid alteration, driven by political, economic, and ecological instability on one hand, and on the other by technological advancement and an unprecedented worldwide access to knowledge systems that have never before existed.

The Internet that came to life a mere fifteen years ago has developed into a worldwide communications platform that provides two-way media access and an increasing panoply of outlets from social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to personal web pages, email, online news sources, and video sites like Youtube. Add to that the mass proliferation of new smart phone technologies capable of voice, video, and text messaging, and the world of instant knowledge available to students today is almost too large to comprehend. Modern students have instant access from virtually anywhere in the world to the kinds of information that was previously only available in physical campus or public libraries.

This represents a sea change in what composition teachers are faced with when engaging new student writers. We no longer need to acculturate our students with the

necessity of writing as a form of communication, they understand and embody that process in ways we are only beginning to study, much less understand. Rather, we are faced with a student population already prepared to produce the written word, but lack the discourse skills, interpretive strategies, and critical reasoning necessary to discern what is and isn't credible knowledge among those expanding resources, and that is where our challenge lies in developing a new pedagogy for the modern composition classroom.

I see a hermeneutic pedagogy as a potential solution to the problem of promoting "critical thinking" skills in the dramatically and rapidly changing environments of the academy and external communities experienced by new composition students. At a time of deep misgivings about the direction of our nation and the problems we face as a society, we wonder what we can do to affect change and shape our world, and we wonder what impact we can have from inside the academy on these seemingly insurmountable problems.

It is tempting to avoid this problem by situating the ideas presented in this dissertation solely in the field of rhetoric and composition and limiting its scope and potential with the argument that it's not going to save the world. Perhaps it should even restrict its discussion to the field of rhetoric and composition specifically and avoid issues of democracy, national politics, and the academy as a whole. But to do so would be to reject the very basis of hermeneutic philosophy, that of the hermeneutic circle. Our work in rhetoric and composition has meaning only because that greater world has meaning, and because we are preparing our students to active members of that world of greater meaning. Likewise, the greater world has meaning only because of the kind of work we do in our classrooms every day throughout the academy and around the world. It is not

possible to legitimately discuss the role that writing plays in our students' lives without also discussing how their writing shapes both themselves and their world. That is, to me, the very point of it all. Thus, my main contribution has been to argue for and present the framework of a hermeneutic pedagogy of composition designed to help new citizens of our democracy develop into active, socially-engaged, critically consciousness members of their communities and of society at large.

Writing as a Learned Skill

“Writing cannot be taught.” This is a claim made by such luminary writers as composition scholar Thomas Kent, poet Theodore Roethke, crime writer Lawrence Sanders, and even horror novelist Stephen King. It's a common meme that pops up from time to time and just as often is dismissed by composition teachers as merely the narcissistic glibness of some writers who want to claim their genius is innate and unavailable to those without it. Personally, I have been a writer since my second semester of college at San Jose State University in 1990, some 23 years ago when I bought my first computer and discovered the joy of filling the flashing screen with words and never having to hit the return arm or reload the paper again.

I switched majors and earned my degree in writing from that same school and then went on to a very successful professional writing career that included stops at *USA Today* newspaper, Hewlett-Packard, Motorola, 3M, Canon, Dell, and a host of trade magazines, advertising agencies, and freelance work. Writers do tend to get around. Now as my graduate school adventure comes to an end after seven glorious years of educational bliss and the conclusion of my dissertation on the topic, I feel I finally have the authority to respond to the argument that “writing cannot be taught.”

It's true. It can't.

However, writing can be learned, even great writing. This I know is true too.

What my research and work in hermeneutic philosophy has convinced me of is that writing is fundamentally a hermeneutic process. When we write, we are interpreting our world using the signs, symbols, and language skills developed just for that purpose. Our compositions skills, style, voice, and overall quality increase with practice, and like any other skill, it requires practice to improve. Composition classrooms can provide structure, opportunity, encouragement, and lessons in grammar and syntax, but the onus is on the student to learn, and there is no amount of lecturing, workshops, or pedagogical models capable of instilling that skill from the outside in. This is why I talk about composition teachers as facilitators, coaches, and peers. It's also why I discuss composition in the broadest possible terms to include all forms of discourse and social engagement as part of the learning process. In a hermeneutic composition classroom, students are not just composing essays, they are composing themselves.

That's why one of the unique advantages that hermeneutic theory brings to the realm of composition studies is its focus on learning rather than teaching. Hermeneutics privileges the learner, because it is a philosophy that develops from our innate human capacity to make meaning of the world around us through exploration and interpretation. What a hermeneutic pedagogy offers composition students is a specific set of strategies for developing these explorative and interpretive skills in ways that help students unfold their own identities through self reflection and recognition of the cognitive and cultural screens that limit them. It also encourages students to develop their own passions and interests as part of the learning process while still providing social engagement and

discourse training, including the basic writing and argument skills, necessary for navigating the academy and broader communities.

What a hermeneutic composition pedagogy offers the academy is the development of socially engaged, self-reflective, and critically conscious new citizens who can serve the interests of the academy through active engagement in their communities, both as students and as future graduates whose skills in discourse and engagement will only continue to improve with practice. What a hermeneutic pedagogy offers our democracy are students trained to recognize failed syllogisms, rhetorical fallacies, and sophistic manipulations that threaten the public sphere and the political institutions that support it. It also provides these new citizens with the critical interpretation skills necessary to actively challenge the kind of destructive rhetoric employed by extremist elements that are ever present in society.

This is a very promising, and, in my experience developing and employing these strategies in my own classrooms, highly effective pedagogy for training composition students in all of these skills. However, I do not claim that a hermeneutic pedagogy is magic bullet for addressing all of the problems faced by composition programs or its teachers. There are still a number of issues that this pedagogy does not address, including students who are unwilling to engage or who are intent on only getting past the class requirement with no interest in learning. Nor do these strategies adequately account for multi-linguistic environments where student-centered learning and social engagement run up against fundamental language barriers.

In addition, while individual student assessment in the classroom provides more flexibility for composition teachers to focus beyond basic writing production to the

development of skills like self-reflection, interpretive reading, discourse production, and class participation during social engagement exercises, I have not considered how the broader writing program, department, and university assessment needs might be met under this pedagogical shift.

For such a new idea to flourish beyond a few classrooms, there will also need to be research designed to examine whether a hermeneutic composition pedagogy actually improves text production, discourse, and critical thinking skills over standard classroom techniques. While my own experience suggests that it does, and does so significantly, and the anecdotal evidence and testimonies from my students support this belief, writing programs may be hesitant to experiment with such an unusual system without at least some measurable data, especially considering the necessity of training the composition teachers in basic hermeneutic theory who want to try it.

Nevertheless, the hermeneutic theories of Dewey, Arendt, and Ricoeur are widely accepted and validated across the academy, and those theories offer a grounded and logical construction of a hermeneutic pedagogy. The strategies I have developed from those theories and implemented with great success in my own composition classrooms have convinced me that the development of socially engaged, self-reflective, and critically conscious students who are motivated toward civic engagement and action in the public sphere may offer an evolutionary new option for addressing the challenges of our democracy in the 21st Century.

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