Composition studies has recently begun to examine in some detail the philosophical antecedents of its pedagogies. Mariolina Salvatori has shown how a phenomenological understanding of reading significantly redefines how students in composition and literature classrooms read and write. Timothy Crusius has begun to examine a composition classroom that translates philosophical hermeneutics into its practices. Louise Phelps has relied extensively on Paul Ricoeur in her investigations of composition studies, even making Ricoeur the theoretical base for her *Composition as a Human Science*. And, Thomas Kent has recently shown how Donald Davidson's philosophical concept of externalism (itself a form of philosophical hermeneutics) responds to the internalist or subjectivist premises of expressivism, collaborative learning, and social constructionist pedagogies. All of these works exemplify what Ann Berthoff has recently said about hermeneutics: "Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation and, assuredly, we must find a central place for interpretation in our teaching" (281).

My intent in this essay is to extend the work of these scholars who have begun to investigate composition studies from a philosophical perspective. I want to articulate the significant premises of a hermeneutic pedagogy as I have experienced them in my composition classrooms. Hermeneutics is now becoming a multidimensional investigation with various interpreters—Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, Donald Davidson, to name a few—and the pedagogical conclusions that one draws from each of these philosophers will differ in significant ways. I want to foreground the hermeneutical conclusions of Hans-Georg Gadamer as I attempt to articulate the salient features of a hermeneutic pedagogy.

In Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, particularly as it is investigated in his magnum opus *Truth and Method*, several concepts emerge that provide for significant classroom translations. Understanding, interpretation, and application are interconnected activities for Gadamer, and this connectedness helps us re-see the nature of reading and writing in the classroom. Further, Gadamer understands the activities of reading and writing as forms of dialogue—a to-and-fro movement between question and
answer in which the question has ultimate priority. These central Gadamerian concepts have thus allowed me to reconsider the nature of the essay assignment and how I evaluate it. Finally, in my articulation of a hermeneutic pedagogy, I have come to see how it differs significantly from the current pedagogies of our field—particularly those informed by expressivism and social construction.

Gadamer on Interpretation
Central to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is the emphasis he places on understanding and interpretation. His concept of textual interpretation is greatly influenced by Heidegger, particularly Heidegger's treatment of understanding in *Being and Time*. For Heidegger, understanding has its origin in his concept of *Dasein*: one's ongoing encounter with the world—one's questioning of it, questioning of others, and questioning of one's own being. Heidegger refers to *Dasein* as "Being-in-the-world," and he suggests the impossibility of separating human consciousness from one's encounter with the world, or the inability of separating subject from object. In so doing, Heidegger avoids the traditional philosophical dichotomy between subject and object. Further, for Heidegger, it is understanding which is the ongoing manifestation of *Dasein*. He also notes that understanding, like Dasein, is never fixed, that it is transformed in each historical moment. Finally, for Heidegger, understanding is always dependent upon and shaped by the object—or the world that the human being encounters. For Heidegger, then, understanding (rather than the subject or object) is the philosophical ground, or the ontological given, upon which he begins his investigations in *Being and Time*.

Gadamer also assumes that understanding is the prior phenomenon that informs his hermeneutical investigations—or his philosophical study of texts. For Gadamer, understanding is a social activity, or as he says in *Truth and Method*, a "sharing in a common meaning" (292). Gadamer posits that the human being is always understanding and understands by participating in a conversation with what he or she experiences. In regard to the reading of texts, then, the significant event for Gadamer is the understanding that occurs between reader and text, or the conversation that takes place between them.

Where does interpretation fit into Gadamer's hermeneutical scene? Gadamer is clear that interpretation is a special kind of understanding, but he is equally clear that it is not a tool for understanding. In *Truth and Method* he notes, "Interpretation is not a means through which understanding is achieved; rather, it enters into the content of what is understood" (398). For Gadamer, to call interpretation a tool for understanding is to distort and simplify its much more intimate relationship to understanding. Gadamer's avoidance of the term *tool* reflects his consistent distrust of methodizing any reading or writing activity. To make any interpretive activity a tool is to
destroy the conversation which is unique to each reader's understanding of a text. Gadamer's position here is significant, for it shows how any hermeneutical term for him is constantly re-seen in the activity of interpretation. Such a move calls into question any interpretive theory that reifies the codes and conventions that readers and writers use to interpret a text.

Gadamer agrees with Heidegger, who says that interpretation is simply "the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding" (189). A definition of interpretation thus emerges that one can translate into the classroom. Interpretation is the activity articulating the meanings of experience so that one can say that interpretation makes understanding more explicit. Further, interpretation can be seen as the linguistic manifestation of understanding which is always contextualized, always an understanding in relationship to something else. As a linguistic activity, interpretation is what teachers and students experience when they examine texts.

Just as interpretation works alongside understanding, so does Gadamer include application as an activity that works along with (neither before nor after) understanding. Application is another interpretive concept that speaks forcefully to the composition classroom. Like understanding and interpretation, application co-occurs with the other two hermeneutical activities so that these three activities comprise, as Gadamer notes, "one unified process" (Truth 308). Application for Gadamer is what locates the interpreter and the text within the historical moment, so that application allows the interpreter to appropriate what he or she reads into his or her present historical situation. Because of the temporal nature of application, Gadamer can conclude that a text "must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way" (309). Application thus gives to every reader a necessary participation in the act of reading because without the reader's history, the text cannot speak. This notion of application is the one that Salvatori foregrounds in her composition classroom. Gadamer also makes misunderstanding an essential element in textual interpretation. This move again has significant classroom translations. In regard to Friedrich Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, Gadamer notes that his major contribution was the premise that "what follows automatically is misunderstanding," not understanding (Truth 185). Student and teacher misunderstandings, then, become necessary activities in interpreting texts. No longer is misunderstanding seen as an impediment to interpretation.

To misunderstand a text is also related to Gadamer's conception of fore-understanding, or the reader's understanding of the entire text. Gadamer notes,

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. . . . Working out this fore-perception, which is instantly revised as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (Truth 267)
In misunderstanding a text, a reader projects a "meaning of the whole," which is not supported by what the reader experiences as he continues to read. Misunderstandings are thus always revised by the text, or using Gadamer's phrasing, by "what is there."

Finally, understanding, interpretation, application, and misunderstanding are closely connected to the dialogical scene that Gadamer uses to describe all hermeneutical activities. Gadamer's dialogue is always characterized by a partnership of two. In reading a text, the partnership involves the reader and the voice-like character of the text. Gadamer affirms that for understanding to occur, neither participant must dominate the dialogue; rather, both must allow the other to speak. Gadamer also emphasizes that reading is a particular form of dialogue or conversation. Though he finds face-to-face dialogue as the source from which the reading activity emerges, he is clear that texts speak differently from face-to-face participants in conversation. He notes,

"The mode of being of a text has something unique and incomparable about it. It presents a specific problem of translation to the understanding. Nothing is so strange, and at the same time so demanding, as the written word. (163)"

The hermeneutic challenge for Gadamer's reader in interpreting a text is to make a mute text speak. He is clear that it is never in reciting a text that a text speaks, but in translating it—in allowing the silent voice of the text to speak as the reader vocalizes or subvocalizes: "The word 'recite' should make us realize that speaking is something quite different. Reciting is the opposite of speaking" (548).

Gadamer further argues that in interpreting a text, a reader glimpses into the dialogical movement of all human thought. He notes, "Nothing is so purely the trace of the mind as writing, but nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind either" (163). Moreover, Gadamer contends that the reader cultivates an "understanding mind" through "a heightening for the inner ear—that is, the ear that readers use to listen to the text's silent voice (547). Reading and writing are thus disciplined hermeneutical activities.

Gadamer also uses face-to-face conversational terms to describe how a reader experiences a text. For Gadamer, the text is like a "Thou"—which "is not an object; it relates itself to us" (358). For every claim the reader makes, the Thou of the text makes a counter-claim. And interpretation can only develop through the I's revision of the thou's claim. In this re-vising activity, interpretations are made and remade. It is important to note here that Gadamer is not equating the text's voice with a human Thou; rather, he speaks of the text metaphorically: its response to the reader is like a Thou. Gadamer also affirms that effective interpretation recognizes rather than controls what the text has to say. By recognizing the text as a Thou, the reader willingly places his or her interpretations at risk, allows his or her understanding to be seen as misunderstanding. In this sense, Gadamer's
hermeneutics is also ethical. In establishing this dialogical scene between the I and Thou, Gadamer can conclude that interpretation never ends; textual meaning is never exhausted because readers continue to bring their unique and changing historical perspectives to the texts they examine.

Finally, Gadamer makes his concept of play prior to interpretation, understanding, application, and dialogue, for all are manifestations of play's to-and-fro movement. In his thorough-going treatment of play in Part I of *Truth and Method* ("Play as the Clue to Ontological Explanation," Gadamer argues that play is not simply the rules of the game, nor is it controlled by the player; it is neither dominated by the subject nor the object. Rather, "in each case what is intended is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end" (103). Textual interpretation, as a kind of play, becomes a dialectical movement without end. Further, the player's subjectivity disappears as it focuses on the object of the game, for "playing is always a playing of something" (107). The reader, for example, as a type of player, does not bring a successful strategy to unlock the text's meaning or to "win the game," for "the purpose of the game is not really solving the task, but ordering and shaping the movement of the game itself" (107). By assigning to play an ontological priority, Gadamer can thus avoid the subject-object dichotomy that he sees has dominated Western philosophy. Similarly, by seeing textual interpretation as an activity rather than as a separate subject (reader) and object (text), a hermeneutic pedagogy can also avoid, as Kent has noted, "the Cartesian claim that a split exists between the human mind and the rest of the world" (57). A hermeneutic pedagogy thus begins with fundamentally different premises from those of current composition theories.

**A Hermeneutic Classroom**

It seems to me that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, particularly his philosophical understanding of interpretation, forcefully speaks to the composition classroom, and it is my intent in this part of the essay to show how Gadamer's hermeneutics has interpreted my classroom experiences.

In a classroom foregrounding interpretation, the teacher assumes that there is no ultimate, immanent meaning in a text, that it is the activity of interpretation which continues to generate new textual meanings. Rather than asking students to tell me what the text means, I ask them to articulate what it says to them. In a classroom where interpretation takes center stage, the significant participants are always reader and text. Students may collaborate with others in determining meaning, but it is ultimately the meaning which each student takes from the text that he or she articulates. The teacher encourages each student to participate in interpreting the text from his or her perspective because without this individual response to the text, interpretation cannot occur. This is a daunting yet empowering understanding for students because they come to realize that they cannot locate meaning within
the text itself, or solely through the teacher’s interpretation, or only through
the consensus of their peers. Rather, each student engages in dialogue with
the text—learns how to open a text, how to recognize what it says to him or
her, and how to place his or her fore-understandings (often misunderstand­
ings) at risk.

Further, the teacher does not come to a composition classroom with
heuristics or tools that students can faithfully use to make texts mean. There
are no routine ways to interpret a text or to apply what a text says to one’s own
life. These effective reading ways emerge as the student, peers, and teacher
examine each text, engage it in conversation. The teacher also allows for
students to misunderstand a text, to re-vise what they had to say. Students
are, in fact, encouraged to realize that only in initially misunderstanding a
text can they participate in the activity of reading. What the teacher
foregrounds are the questions that the teacher and the students ask about the
text, for the teacher realizes that it is in questioning that the dialogue between
reader and text begins and continues. The teacher also encourages students
to see how interpretations can end with a question, and that in responding to
a text, one never fully interprets it.

In a composition classroom that foregrounds interpretation, it is texts
that drive the course, for in responding to a text a student is most effectively
able to understand his or her interpretive ways. Teachers and students
understand that interpretation is an open activity, enriched by questions and
counter-questions. And composition courses are often more successful
when students examine texts treating a similar topic, for then they can bring
their interpretations of one text to another, and they can then revise their
readings of previous texts. Though reading texts on a similar topic will not
provide ultimate answers for students questioning this topic, it will enrich
their interpretations. As they continue to read and write in such a course,
they will be encouraged to revise the questions they pose. By focusing on
interpretation in the composition classroom, the teacher encourages a
special kind of collaboration. Students are encouraged to question the text
collaboratively, but they are reminded that the interpretive group as well as
the text have something to say. Interpretation is thus not merely group
consensus; rather, the group serves to question and revise each reader’s
textual interpretations.

Similarly, the teacher sees interpretation not as the sum total of what the
group says, but as the particular response that each student finally brings to
the text. The teacher keeps in mind that interpretation is a dialogical activity:
the reader responding to the text, the text responding to the reader. The
teacher is constantly faced with the challenge of listening to several indi­
vidual conversations within the conversations of the collaborative groups
and those of the entire classroom. Further, in a classroom foregrounding
interpretation, individual responses are encouraged, but they are always in
relationship to the text the student is reading and to the student’s responses
to the textual interpretations of peers and the teacher. A classroom foregrounding interpretation assumes that knowledge is never created singly but in dialogue with others.

In examining my classroom experiences with Toni Morrison's *Sula*, I can more concretely demonstrate my understanding of the hermeneutic classroom. I teach *Sula* in my second semester first-year composition course, where I focus on the topic of the modern and postmodern hero. My students read plays by Arthur Miller, short stories by Eudora Welty, *Sula*, the poetry of Emily Dickinson, and a Third World novel: *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. Throughout the course, we consider how the characters in these works manifest various kinds of heroism. In my classroom, *Sula* is a particularly controversial character, one that many of my students refuse to see as heroic. They are horrified at her showing “interest” in her mother’s violent death by fire and are equally indignant that she stole her best friend’s husband. *Sula* goes against many of my students’ most fundamental beliefs. Yet, other students are deeply impressed with *Sula*, seeing in her independent power the makings of a new American female hero. The responses between these two groups of students are always impassioned.

*Sula* is a powerful interpretive medium because it shows my students how careful reading necessarily involves responses to the text as well as to their own beliefs and an ensuing re-assessment of their beliefs. Many of my most angry students want to select the most damaging evidence in the novel to judge *Sula*. Yet, I encourage these students to consider additional evidence, particularly the narrator’s comment that *Sula* is an “artist with no art form.” And, ultimately, I ask them: What does the narrator mean by an artist without form? I also encourage them to respond to the novel’s ending: with *Sula*’s best friend Nel, who has lost her husband to *Sula*, thinking about what *Sula* gave to her and to others, not about what she took away.

I encourage my students to recognize the narrator as a Thou. I ask them to incorporate the narrator’s evidence, ambiguous and open though it may be, into their interpretations of *Sula*. By characterizing *Sula* as an “artist with no art form,” the narrator, my students realize, is neither praising *Sula* nor absolving *Sula* of her anti-social behavior. The narrator’s comments remain open—encouraging my students to question and counter-question what the character means to them and to the narrator. Further, as I continue to teach *Sula*, it is my students’ interpretations of *Sula* that allow me to reexamine my own ambivalence to her character.

Thus, the questions I ask are necessarily open. Similarly, the essay questions that students write about in a hermeneutic classroom foster the questioning and counter-questioning of a text or issue. Students are encouraged to analyze the gaps in the texts they examine—further questions that the text discloses. Moreover, teachers and students in a hermeneutic classroom consider these gaps as necessary issues in the essays they write. Such essay assignments thus encourage the differences in student responses to these
open issues. For example, in asking students to write on Sula as "an artist with no art form," I am encouraging them to redefine, from their own perspectives, the concept of the artist and apply this understanding to Sula's character. Though there are no "right" answers to a question such as this, there are "true" interpretations, directed by the students' understanding of the questions they ask of the text. In a hermeneutic classroom, therefore, students and teachers examine the significance they assign to their textual interpretations. In creating essay assignments in a hermeneutic classroom, the teacher encourages students to explore the suggestive, metaphorical character of language. That is, the teacher encourages students to explore the multivocity of words and phrases rather than their univocal understanding.

In evaluating student essays in a hermeneutic classroom, teachers therefore examine the ways that their students analyze language's evocative nature and how this multivocity opens the text for their students' further questioning. Throughout, the teacher sees each student's writing development as unique, not merely in how it approximates the accepted "academic" voice of college discourse. The teacher's focus is consistently on the meaning possibilities of the text, not on the a priori clarity that expository writing seemingly demands.

Further, in the hermeneutic classroom, the teacher and student peers accept the commonplacesthat student writers bring to their textual responses. The writer's beliefs are accepted because readers of student texts realize that to silence what a reader brings to a text is to prevent textual dialogue. What Gadamer says about the relevance of commonplaces in his hermeneutics applies equally well to the hermeneutic classroom:

There is always a world already interpreted, already organized in its basic relations, into which experience steps as something new, upsetting what has led our expectations and undergoing reorganization itself in the upheaval. . . . Only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien. . . . (Philosophical 15)

In evaluating a student's text, a teacher therefore refrains from calling a student's belief a cliché, yet a teacher can ask a student how a particular moment in a text calls a student's belief into question, thus encouraging the student to place an accepted belief at risk. In the hermeneutic classroom, a teacher understands that neither the teacher nor the student's peers can change a student's belief by simply discounting it. Gadamer has consistently shown that an interpreter's beliefs are revised within the dialogical encounter; and, further, he adds that it is only in the interpreter's familiar understanding of experience that the questioning and transformation of beliefs are possible.

Though commenting on student writing foregrounds the possibility for meaning and for its revision, the evaluator also considers surface error concerns. As Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts has shown, even many surface errors reveal a student's attempt at making meaning (Bartholomae and
Petrosky 199-226). So in the hermeneutic classroom, teachers initially consider the surface error as a student writer's way of disclosing meaning. Teachers can thus see some surface error correction as a less mechanical task. Yet, other surface errors comprise the techne of writing and are not legitimately part of textual interpretation. In Part II of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer locates three major Aristotelian divisions of knowledge: episteme, demonstrable knowledge; phronesis, moral knowledge; and techne, the knowledge of one's craft (312-24). To build a kitchen from blueprint specifications is for Gadamer an example of techne, different in kind from phronesis, which can never bring an accurate blueprint to an understanding of a human issue. Courage, for example, is constantly redefined in its praxis. The interpreter brings an image, rather then a blueprint, of courage to the particular experience questioning courage. In a hermeneutic classroom, the questions that teachers ask of their own and their students' interpretations invariably lie within the discipline of phronesis.

Yet, technical issues are often also part of the hermeneutic classroom: how to save a document on a word processor, how to cite sources on the Works Cited page, and so on. Here the dialogue of question and answer is not the most effective way to teach. The user's manual has procedures for how to save a document on a computer that a student can learn either by reading the manual or by being taught them in lecture. In the hermeneutic classroom, the teacher knows that the teaching of writing procedures is part of a separate discipline of knowledge and thus teaches this part of the course differently. These technical aspects of writing are driven by rules, blueprints, that students need to copy faithfully into their texts. Further, in evaluating student writing from these technical concerns, the teacher can simply identify student responses as right or wrong, and the student can mechanically correct them. These technical aspects of student writing take up much less teacher time in introducing them and much less student time in correcting them.

In the hermeneutic classroom, the teacher keeps in mind the clear philosophical distinction between phronesis and techne, so that issues which belong to the study of phronesis are not incorrectly considered part of writing's techne and evaluated inappropriately.

**Experiencing Reading, Writing, and Language Philosophically**

The teacher in a hermeneutic classroom soon realizes that its necessary activities (reading and writing) and its medium (language) have philosophical significance. For Gadamer, reading, first and foremost, involves a "heightening for the inner ear" (*Truth* 547). Reading involves a special type of listening, one that hears the voice which translates the text. This voice is a construct of the reader's and the text's voices. The reader's task is an intense and easily distracted listening. Without the extra-linguistic cues of face-to-face conversation, student readers often face a mute text. In the hermeneutic classroom, the teacher realizes the unique conversation that reading is and
attempts in various ways, which depend on the classroom moment, to make the text less mute.

Student readers cannot appreciate their "heightening for the inner ear" by the teacher showing them where the text speaks. Rather, the teacher in the hermeneutic classroom is faced with the much more challenging task of examining the question which the student has asked of the text, and encouraging the student to see how (if) the answer to this question helps open the text. If the student's question does not further his or her reading, then the teacher must encourage the student to revise the initial question. In these instances, the teacher's authority is most keenly tested: students often want the teacher to read the text for them, while the teacher encourages the students to let the text speak for themselves. Here, teachers and students both experience Gadamer's I-Thou concept of textual understanding, for the teacher recognizes students as participants capable of making the text speak. When students make the text speak, then the teacher can at last enter into textual conversation with them. Student peers can also foster this recognition of student authority over texts.

In the hermeneutic classroom, reading is never seen as a technical skill of decoding. It is not in reciting a text that students ever come upon textual understanding but in responding to it. Reading is thus an art whose perfection is never achieved but whose possibility for further understanding is open both to student readers and the teacher. Those students and readers who can explore the power of reading in its praxis (rather than in a manual of reading do's and don't's) will continue to develop as readers. Also, in a hermeneutic classroom reading and writing are consistently seen as interconnected, concomitant activities. As one reads, one writes, either informally or formally. A reader's unwritten translations of the text while reading are a continued rewriting of the text, and they are in kind like written paraphrases, summaries, or evaluations of the text. That which is written is simply more formal, more studied and revised. For Gadamer, reading is always writing because the text is always already represented in writing's various forms.

Gadamer gives an example of how humans think, and it provides a philosophic explanation of why reading is interconnected to writing. He notes,

Let us take a well-known example. When I hear a tone, the primary object of my hearing is obviously the tone. But I am also conscious of my hearing of the tone, and by no means only as the object of a subsequent reflection. A concomitant reflection always accompanies hearing. A tone is always a heard tone, and my hearing of the tone is always intrinsically involved. (Philosophical 123)

In a hermeneutic classroom, writing always becomes the "concomitant reflection" or "the heard tone" of reading. There is no temporal relationship between reading and writing; that is, reading does not come before writing. As concomitant activities, reading and writing necessarily accompany each
other in textual interpretation. In this regard, the teacher in a hermeneutic classroom foregrounds this philosophical understanding of reading's interconnections to writing. The teacher realizes that by encouraging students to translate their reading through writing about it, they are also mirroring thought's dialectical movement. Thinking always involves a reflection on something, and it is manifested in the to-and-fro movement between experience and the thinker's concomitant translation of it.

Just as reading and writing about texts plays a central role in a hermeneutic classroom, so does its medium, language. For Gadamer, language always provides the possibility for understanding, and for this reason Gadamer affirms that users of language are "always already at home in language" rather than merely on the way to language (Philosophical 63). Words do not serve as a signs to particular meanings outside of language; rather, all meaning is possible because meaning is also inside language. This is the basis for Gadamer's and Heidegger's concept of the hermeneutic circle (Truth 265-77). For this reason, teachers in a hermeneutic classroom assume the power of language as an expressive medium. Their concern is with the ways that their students can best express their meanings through language, and they never assume that language is an impediment to their students' thinking. Further, teachers find examples of language's expressive and elucidating possibilities through the texts students read and write. They show how each word, phrase, or sentence is a unique expression, never equated with a synonym. Throughout, teachers in a hermeneutic classroom see language as a multivocal, fluid medium rather than a restricted, univocal relationship between words (signifiers) and meanings (signifieds).

**Hermeneutic Versus Expressivist and Social Constructionist Pedagogies**

The details of this hermeneutic pedagogy help teachers and theorists re-see currently practiced pedagogies. The consistent focus of a hermeneutic pedagogy is its steady gaze at the text and its emphasis on textual and classroom conversation as a partnership of two. Gadamer's hermeneutics contends that conversation is not orchestrated by several voices; rather, it begins with the often overlooked commonplace that one can only listen to one person and engage in one conversation at a time. A hermeneutic pedagogy thus assumes that texts are always interpreted by two partners. Moreover, only one listener, rather than a group of listeners, is engaged in conversation with a partner at any interpretive moment.

These interpretive assumptions respond to, and ultimately call into question, expressivist premises. Proponents of expressivism like Peter Elbow assume that knowledge originates from the self, not in the self's encounter with others, so that he can say, "Language is the principal medium that allows you to interact with yourself (55). Such a pedagogy rewards those students who can create their own dialogues, particularly those who have read widely and are familiar with the ways writing topics are generated and
texts are written. In beginning with the self, expressivists ignore the power of the reader-text encounter to disclose meanings. Moreover, an expressivist pedagogy minimizes the dialectical structure of thought, seeing knowledge-making, not as a to-and-fro movement between subject and other, but as a universe unto itself within subjective consciousness.

Similarly, collaborative learning pedagogies begin with the self; rather than a single self, collaborative learning theorists are concerned with the collective self, as Kent has shown in “Externalism and the Production of Discourse” (60-61). Knowledge is not generated through a dialectic between the self and the world but through the collective decisions of the group. Further, in collaborative learning pedagogies, the individual reader’s response to the text no longer plays a central role in meaning making. If a text is examined in a collaborative group, its meaning is determined by what the group says it means.

Social constructionist pedagogies, pedagogies James Berlin refers to as “social epistemic,” are in a sense the results of these collaborative decisions. A social constructionist pedagogy assumes that the knowledge a student receives is produced by the groups to which he or she belongs, or by their particular discourse agreements. Stanley Fish is an articulate spokesperson for the social construction of literary knowledge, and what he says about literary meaning effectively summarizes what social constructionists like James Berlin and Patricia Bizzell are saying about the composition classroom. In his Is There a Text in This Class? he emphasizes that “meanings come already calculated, not because of norms embedded in the language, but because language is always perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms. This structure, however, is not abstract and independent but social” (318). It is the reader’s use of these historical and social givens that forms the meaning he or she makes from a reading. Speaking like Kenneth Bruffee, Fish further argues that meaning always reflects a “collective decision . . . a decision that will be in force only as long as a community of readers or believers . . . continues to abide by it” (109). And like Elbow, Fish contends that meaning is an internal matter (albeit collective), that is then imposed upon the world.

In a later essay, “Change,” Fish attempts to establish a more fluid notion of interpretive communities. Here, he concedes that the standards of the interpretive community are always subject to change, yet he continues to place this change squarely in the hands of the interpretive community, not in the interpretive event. He notes that the community “is an engine of change, an ongoing project whose operations are at once constrained and the means by which those constraints are altered” (429).

One sees this same social focus on meaning making in Berlin’s social-epistemic pedagogy. Where Fish locates meaning in the decisions of the interpretive community, Berlin assumes that meaning emerges from ideology, so that his pedagogy “situates rhetoric within ideology, rather than
ideology within rhetoric” (477). For Berlin, ideology is a social given, not a body of knowledge continually revised by each interpreter. The goal of Berlin's pedagogy is to critique established ideology and thus to "liberate" the student and teacher from domination by it, so that Berlin can conclude that his “social-epistemic rhetoric views knowledge as an arena of ideological conflict” where this conflict allows students and teachers to “become agents of social change rather than victims” (489, 491). Yet, Berlin does not explore what comes after the student's and teacher's ideological liberation. Does ideology lose its domination once it has been critiqued? Or in being liberated, does one simply replace one ideology with another? As Gadamer has shown in his response to Jürgen Habermas, critique does not lead to liberation but rather to more critique (Truth 567-68). For Gadamer, it is interpretation, rather than liberation from ideological domination, which remains.

Patricia Bizzell has recently examined the details of her social constructionist pedagogy in “Power, Authority, and Critical Pedagogy.” Her goal, like Berlin's, is for her student to become “an active register, a politically alert or critically conscious citizen” (67). And Bizzell articulates the desired results of her pedagogy: “I want my teaching to have political impact and I want schooling in general to work for radically democratic ends” (67). To this end Bizzell favors a canon for her composition classroom of American political documents which would show her students and teachers the differences and similarities in the political beliefs of its American theorists and constituents.

A hermeneutic composition pedagogy would also encourage the use of readings on a common topic, as I have previously discussed in my course on the hero. Yet it would never conceive of ideology as a monolith, nor would it prescribe a set of learning goals. Teachers would allow their students' interpretations to develop individually. In a hermeneutic pedagogy, students and teachers may be loosely seen as members of an interpretive or discourse community, yet each member necessarily manifests his or her interpretation of what this membership entails, never giving a single group opinion. Though the language students and teachers understand is informed by the language they identify with, theirs is never identical with the community's language. That is, the language of each social or interpretive group is never finally fixed; each member presents his or her interpretation of the group he or she belongs to or wants to belong to. Further, in a hermeneutic pedagogy, change is a natural result of each reader's interpretation of a text. What a hermeneutic pedagogy foregrounds is not a collective body which decides upon change, but an individual reader who revises his or her interpretations in order to best understand a given text.

A hermeneutic pedagogy responds to writing-across-the-curriculum pedagogies in a similar fashion. When a discipline is understood simply as a set of reified codes and conventions that students “master” in order to
become a functioning member of that discipline, then the necessary element of interpretation is lost as students respond to texts in their field. In a hermeneutic pedagogy, students and teachers consistently re-present their interpretations of the codes and conventions that describe their particular discipline. Arabella Lyon comes to a similar conclusion in her critique of discourse communities, investigating how “a writer adapts conventions for personal and disciplinary aims” (282). This is not to say that in a hermeneutic pedagogy the social contributors to meaning are ignored. Gadamer carefully foregrounds what he terms “historically effected consciousness” in any textual interpretation. Each interpreter brings personal history (ideology, traditions, and so on) to the text, and Gadamer affirms that without this particular history, an individual interpretation is silenced. Yet, what Gadamer emphasizes about historically effected consciousness is that it is never a reified set of assumptions, but one that is constantly changing. In terms of reading’s influence on transforming one’s beliefs, Gadamer argues that one’s history is invariably revised by how one interprets the texts of history.

In a very important sense, a hermeneutic pedagogy serves to mediate the expressivist and social constructionist positions. A hermeneutic pedagogy does not deny that one’s history is essential to meaning making. Yet, it does not assume that one’s history or ideology is the sole contributor to meaning. Moreover, like the expressivists, hermeneutic theorists assume that the self does influence the understanding of this history; in order to interpret the histories of others, an interpreter recognizes his or her beliefs and places them at risk. What hermeneutic theorists assume is that both the self and society are necessary participants in the activity of interpretation, yet they can only emerge within this activity. So reader and text are never constructs that can be understood as single, independent forces. By making this move, theorists in a hermeneutic pedagogy can locate authority both in the reader and the text, or both in the student and the teacher. James Crosswhite examines the multidimensional nature of authority in “Authorship and Individuality: Heideggerian Angles,” where he uses Heideggerian phenomenology to understand the authority that both the text and the reader experience in the composition classroom. Crosswhite has a concern similar to mine with some social-epistemic pedagogies that ultimately see individuals as “objects produced by social powers” (94).

In a recent article, “The Future of the European Humanities,” Gadamer discusses the self and the other in regard to Europe’s intellectual future, and I think that it speaks powerfully to the hermeneutic classroom. He affirms,

However, one may still say this: Only where there is strength, is there tolerance. The acceptance of the other certainly does not mean that one would not be conscious of one’s own inalienable Being. It’s rather one’s own strength, especially one’s own existential certainty, which permits one to be tolerant. (206)

Gadamer’s insights here introduce a daunting, yet necessary, challenge to composition teachers: they must work toward developing authority in their
students' responses, because these teachers realize that only within a voice of authority can a student become tolerant of other, often discordant voices—those of their peers, of their teachers, and of those in the texts they continually interpret. In a hermeneutic classroom, one way to develop a sense of student authority and strength is to encourage students to bring their beliefs to the texts they interpret and to encourage them to revise these beliefs as they respond to the voices of others. The persistent question that one asks in a hermeneutic classroom and one that is found so often in Gadamer's hermeneutics is: What does the text mean to you? To ignore the necessary dialogical participation between self and other (reader and text) is to silence one of these necessary participants in the ongoing human event of interpretation.

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