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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

The University of New Mexico
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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APPLYING POSTMODERN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT IN A HIGH

SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

Cyrus Cramer

Graduate Thesis in Secondary Education

University of New Mexico

Abstract

This paper was inspired by my own instruction in philosophy as an undergraduate at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, IA and by my encounter with Robert Scholes' book <u>Textual Power</u> while a graduate student at the University of New Mexico. I wanted to examine a way to bring the more useful aspects of postmodern thought to my classroom practices as a high school language arts teacher and I was dissatisfied by the materials I found available as they seemed too much focused on the ideas espoused by the late Richard Rorty. Rorty's thought leads to relativism so severe that it seems no longer possible or at least no longer meaningful to teach literary interpretation, grammar, and composition. I argue in this paper that we might save ourselves from this problem by following the thought of the French postmodernist Michel Foucault and therein are to be found the more useful aspects of postmodernism that provide new life rather than a dead end in abject relativism.

Introduction

Teachers, when seeking new ideas to improve their professional practice, may draw from a variety of sources and resources. Many attempt to replicate ideas and practices which have worked well for others or were used by teachers whom they may have encountered as students. Others attempt to stay abreast of and to bring to their practice methods from data based research performed by educational researchers. A third way in which teachers seek to develop ideas to bring to and improve their classroom practices is by making use of theory. The American Heritage Dictionary's first definition of theory is "A set of statements or principles devised to explain a group of facts or phenomena, especially one that has been repeatedly tested or is widely accepted and can be used to make predictions about natural phenomena." This is essentially what we mean when we use the word theory in describing what some teachers go to when seeking ways to improve their practice. Often teachers will examine discipline specific theory and, when attempting to make use of broader theory, they will seek to make it specific to their discipline. An example of the former use of theory would be when a drama instructor reads the work of Konstantin Stanislavski, the father of method acting. An example of the latter, one which likely applies to all teachers, would be when an instructor, who is not a psychology instructor, studies Piaget's ideas about the mind's developmental stages or Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

In this paper, the intention is to examine the possible uses and potential impacts of the use of postmodern philosophical thought in relation to classroom practices and

methods for language arts teachers. I will attempt to examine the possible ways in which postmodernism may be used and fails to be of use to the teaching of language arts in a high school classroom. Postmodernism has been an influential philosophical standpoint in many fields, including education and literary theory, for several years now. As Robert Scholes points out in his book, *Textual Power* (1985), teachers are the primary consumers of books on literary theory and they are obviously those for whom educational theories are most relevant. Although teachers read these theoretical books for a variety of stated reasons, such as "to keep up with the field", they are all looking for things to guide and aide their pedagogical praxis. Knowing this Scholes makes it clear that there is an important relationship between theory and practice and therefore a need to examine the way in which contemporary thought might be applied to the contemporary classroom (Scholes, 1985, p.18f). Postmodern philosophical thought would seem to offer some very valuable ideas upon which to base one's teaching practices.

It is not the case that all fields which make use of postmodern thought or the term postmodern would offer the same definition of postmodernism or even that all those thought of as postmodern philosophers would define postmodernism in the same way. "Many writers begin with an admission that they have no clear definition of post-modernism and that it is not clear what is covered by the term, but then proceed to celebrate it at length—a curious procedure. There have been complaints of 'vacuous academic posturing' in this context" (Mautner, 2005, p. 483). The definition of postmodernism is a slippery fish and if one hopes to be clear in discussing postmodernism it necessarily follows that one must define as clearly as possible their definition of postmodernism or at least the definition they plan to use in a given

discussion. We shall attempt to eschew such posturing and to focus our definition on the sort of philosophical postmodernism which seems most useful in what it offers to teachers who wish to utilize its precepts in guiding their classroom practices. For the purposes of this paper, there are three important postmodern thinkers— Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, and Michel Foucault. Of the three, only Lyotard discusses postmodernism explicitly. Further complicating any attempt to define postmodernism is the discontinuity and fragmentary nature of the works and thought of Foucault (Gutting, 2006, p. 2). Finally Rorty is important to our definition of postmodernism because he represents what I will argue is the wrong sort of postmodern thinking—the sort which educators seem to have been drawing on that leads to an untenable relativism.

I feel that in large part we have followed postmodernism down the wrong path or at least focused on the ideas of the wrong sort of postmodernists. This has lead scholars and some educators to bemoan the end of various disciplines and indeed the very end of the possibility of teaching. In her discussion of problems imposed on graduate teaching assistants in composition Kristen Woolever asks if it "is even "possible to discuss pedagogy in the same breath as postmodernism" (Woolever, 1993). She claims that if we follow postmodernism "to its (il)logical conclusion, writing cannot be taught at all" (Woolever, 1993). It is this line of thinking which prompted my undergraduate philosophy professor at Coe College, Dr. Jeff Hoover, to title his class on postmodern thought *The End of Reason*; many late twentieth century thinkers and academics saw postmodernism as the harbinger of the end of philosophy, history, the primacy of reason and the scientific method, and all the disciplines of the modern era in favor of relativistic

and idiosyncratic knowledges. It was precisely this type of thinking which, in that undergraduate philosophy class, we discovered to be incorrect.

From my perspective there is not a little humor in teachers who argue that their discipline and profession is coming to an end while basing their arguments on ideas they themselves have learned from traditional academic writings of other teachers and philosophers. Moreover they have learned these ideas through mundane, if not well understood, practices such as reading texts, attending lectures and classes, and attempting to devise the meaning which these activities were meant to convey. Yet they will argue that postmodernism is the harbinger of doom for classes, lectures, teaching, *et cettera*. However, we may be spared this ironic contradiction if we avoid Rorty's brand of postmodernism and stick to that of Foucault.

I hope to redirect our investigation from the thought of Richard Rorty to that of Michel Foucault. The differences in their thought, many of which Rorty himself has pointed out, are important (Rorty, 1989, p. *xiii*, 61ff, 82f). These differences illustrate two distinct types of postmodernism and subsequently two different possible ways of applying postmodernism to the teaching of high school English. In my opinion, Foucault serves as the better starting point for a theory upon which to base one's own pedagogical praxis. In addition to Foucault I will consider the work of Umberto Eco whose thought provides a useful way of looking at how meaning is made and who has authority over meaning in a given scenario as well as a way to ground our use of postmodernism to avoid slipping into relativism. I will also attempt to integrate some of the ideas of Robert Scholes in whose books I have found what I see as the enactment of postmodern ideas into classroom methodology.

Although some discussions of what postmodernism means to the teachers and professors of English suggest that postmodernism is the death knell for the discipline formerly known as English, literary studies, or composition, as Bruce Pirie points out, "We should be skeptical of apocalyptic prophecies" (1997, p. 3). Rather we should take the view that Foucault espouses that "We do not experience the end of philosophy, but a philosophy which regains its speech and finds itself again only in the marginal region which borders its limits; that is, which finds itself either in a purified metalanguage or in the thickness of words enclosed by their darkness, by their blind truth" (Foucault, 1980, p.41). To put it differently, we have simply moved beyond the boundary and established a new boundary—expanded the limits of philosophy and truth so in the case of teaching we might claim that we have expanded the limits of teaching and of the discipline of English and need only to reacquaint ourselves with what have become the new rules of the game. English teachers who wish to find a useful basis for their classroom practices can find in postmodernism new life and vitality in the study of literature and composition. The work of Michel Foucault provides the most direct route to this renewed vitality in the discipline.

In what he refers to as "simplifying to the extreme" Jean-Françoise Lyotard, a well known French postmodern thinker, defines postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). This is a good starting point, but it is terribly vague in its simplicity and, even for Lyotard, raises a number of difficult questions as well as the possibility of slipping into relativism or at least a place where there is no authoritative meaning. Metanarrative is the term Lyotard uses to refer to the guiding rules—what is permissible and impermissible, of a language game. Language games, a

term first used by Ludwig Wittgenstein and later by Lyotard and other postmodern thinkers, are areas of human action and inquiry such as the sciences and the arts, or the specific branches of science and art such as physics or mathematics and literature or painting. What I wish to take from Lyotard's conception of postmodernism is simply that it is important to be skeptical of the rules and the authority which dictates those rules when one is entering into and engaging with any area of human activity and inquiry. "Simplifying to the extreme," Lyotard writes in the introduction of The Postmodern Condition, "I define *postmodern* as an incredulity toward metanarratives" (1984, p. xxiv). I also will use his term—metanarrative, to describe the rules of a language game or one's course of action in a certain circumstance which is always negotiated between the dominant and subordinate actors involved.

Richard Rorty exemplifies the problems raised by the relativism to which postmodernism might lead and troublingly seems to have been the basis for much of postmodernism's influence on education. Elizabeth Flynn's 1997 article in *College Composition and Communication* titled "Rescuing Postmodernism" defines modernism as a literary movement of the early twentieth century focusing on aesthetic formalism and as a philosophical movement of the Enlightenment focused on empirical science. Flynn also describes antimodernism as the rejection of the notion of objective knowledge or interpretations in favor of subjective knowledge and interpretations; this is in essence a relativism which celebrates the primacy of the individual and makes any shared knowledge impossible. Richard Rorty, she contends, is an example of this antimodernism (Flynn, 1997). Rorty's thought leads out to the logical conclusion of unmitigated relativism which precludes the possibility of teaching as anyone can be "right" or know

the "truth", thereby making teachers and their ilk unnecessary. Yet Rorty's ideas have been influential in the United States and have often formed the basis for postmodern writings regarding education and teaching practices.

One particularly strong example of Rorty's influence on educational theory directed at classroom practices is Ray Linn's book, <u>A Teacher's Introduction to Postmodernism</u>, published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Linn's book is clearly focused on the application of Rorty's ideas to classroom practices and gives only cursory treatment to Foucault and Lyotard while implying there is little difference among the three by failing to examine those differences (Linn, 1996). The second chapter of Linn's book is titled *Richard Rorty's Postmodern Synthesis* and he refers to Rorty's ideas on some twenty-five pages as well as to four of his major books and an equal number of Rorty's essays. Foucault is mentioned fewer times and often is describe by quotes from Rorty in Linn's book. Moreover, Linn makes use of only two of Foucault's major texts despite his having produced more books than Rorty. The problem with using Rorty as a primary source is that it leads to relativism so severe that it would make teaching literature impossible and irrelevant. This is clearly the logical conclusion one must reach after studying Rorty's works such as <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u> (1980) and <u>Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity</u> (1989) wherein he argues that truth exists only in sentences and utterances as opposed to existing in the external world. "Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot exist, or be out there" (Rorty, 1989, p. 5). While this position in and of itself may not seem too problematic it leads Rorty to the belief that texts have no meaning other than the meaning which a given reader may make them appear to have (Rorty, 1982 p.

151; Eco 1992, p. 25). This is tantamount to a radical reader response theory in which any interpretation is permissible regardless of what is contained in the text. Under such a notion I might well argue that the well known children's book The Cat in the Hat is in fact a cogent and meaningful critique of existentialism; of course I would need to develop such a thesis further, but that would be relatively easy since anything means whatever I say it does—or more accurately, whatever I can convince another it means. Umberto Eco has shown repeatedly that although we may not be able to know the exact intent of the author in creating a text we may assume that any text was created with the intent to convey something and further our attempts to derive meaning from the text must be constrained by the words that are contained in that text (Eco, 1984, 1992, 1999). "(T)he words brought by the author are a rather embarrassing bunch of material evidences that the reader cannot pass over in silence, or in noise" (Eco, 1992, p.24). "Between the intention of the author… and the intention of the interpreter… there is a third possibility. There is the *intention of the text*" (Eco, 1992, p. 25). Eco thus saves us from reaching the point where we must ask the question; does postmodernism preclude the possibility of teaching because it precludes the possibility of a teacher possessing authoritative truth about the meaning of a text, sentence, utterance, or word?

To focus our view here in terms of texts and language, Rorty makes the claim, in his titled Consequences of Pragmatism, that texts and language have value only in so far as they can be used by people to gain whatever they may wish and therefore they are open to any interpretation which might facilitate this (Rorty, 1982, p. 151). For Rorty, a reader or interpreter of a text, "simply beats the text into a shape which will serve for his purpose" (Rorty, 1982, p. 151). Eco points out that this favors the reader too much over

the text and the intentions of the author however unknowable those might be. It should be clear to anyone who cares to pursue this notion only a little way that Rorty's idea must lead quickly to a point where nothing means anything or anything means only what one wishes regardless of what that may be. If we take this as our beginning then it is true as Yeats said, "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold" (Yeats, 1996, p. 187) and the discipline of English and all other fields of human inquiry become simply personal vehicles to self-satisfaction and self-gratification. Something other seems to be the case and teaching and the study of literature still seem to offer some value; therefore, we must seek to find another postmodern thinker on whom to base our teaching practices.

Perhaps the best starting point for those seeking to utilize postmodernism as a basis for their classroom practices would be the work of the French thinker Michel Foucault. For Foucault knowledge is strictly tied to power and so the scientific modern metanarrative—the dominant discourse governing the modern era, is hegemonic and totalitarian in that it holds and seeks to maintain power over all other narratives. He argues that we should reject the modern metanarrative in favor of an open narrative which strives to think the unthought, but as soon as this unthought has been thought it becomes part of our system of knowledge which leaves us only able to further extrapolate. As most postmodern thinkers do, Foucault encourages a skeptical view of all metanarratives, or has he calls them *discourses*, to ensure one has a healthy suspicion of their hegemonic tendencies which will allow one to avoid being dominated by one narrative's set of rules. These metanarratives form a system of rules which define and limit an area of concern or interest—a society, discipline, language, or culture. What Foucaultian postmodern philosophy reminds us of is that these limits are not permanent

and may, in fact must, be transgressed—the rules were indeed made to be broken. Postmodernism also cautions us with regard to our understanding of transgression.

> "Transgression then is not related to the limit as black is to white, the
>
> prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as an opening of
>
> a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes on the
>
> form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust.
>
> (Foucault, 1980, p. 35).

Again, the system and its rules are ever expanding as the rules are broken and the system reformed like and ever expanding universe or the monster in that old Steve McQueen film *The Blob*. But do not get the wrong idea about the relationship.

> Transgression is neither violence in a divided world (in an ethical world)
>
> nor victory over limits (in a dialectical or revolutionary world); and exactly
>
> for this reason its role is to measure the excessive distance that it opens at
>
> the heart of the limit and to trace the flashing line that causes the limit to arise.
>
> (Foucault, 1980, p. 35)

Transgression is the recognition of the limit in the act of breaking through it and reestablishing it. Again to focus this idea on our subject—high school English, transgression, the very phonemes of which indicate a sort of crossing, is not to move beyond meanings—the limits of a text, statement, or word, or the rules of grammar, but rather to understand that those meanings and rules are in many ways flexible and capable of growth and change. Thus our job is to stay abreast of that growth and those changes and as teachers our role is to help our students first to realize the fact of transgression and its importance and then to help them develop the skills with which to understand and

adapt to if not to even cause such transgression themselves. Believe me, high school students will gravitate to the idea that they need to break the rules of grammar and language; in fact I would wager that many of them often do and with a little help they may be able to develop a solid philosophical underpinning for such action and possibly do it in a more meaningful and productive way, but first they need to be taught the rules as they stand—to learn the current metanarrative, and that is where we teachers come in.

Postmodern thinkers such as Foucault help us become more aware of these issues of metanarritves as well as power relations within and between narratives and seeking ways to understand them. It is important to take note of the fact that philosophical postmodernism does not make value judgments about the propriety of the power dynamic involved in a given narrative or discourse, but simply accepts that there is, implicit in the language game, a set of rules part of the purpose of which is to perpetuate the power structure as it exists. Those rules may be broken but the language game will simply stretch to establish a new set of rules encompassing the new territory into which rule breaking has led. It is a process of negotiation and the balance of power continuously shifts—one side does not hold unmitigated dominance consistently throughout. This has clear import and potential for teaching language arts—writing and literature.

Interpreting the meaning of texts is such a negotiation as well, but it is important to remember that while "…understanding one another" in both utterances and texts "is the effect of infinite negotiations (and acts of charity in order to be able to understand the beliefs of others, or format of their competence)" this does not mean "we can eliminate the notion of meaning" (Eco, 1999, p. 273). "To say that meaning is negotiated does not mean that the contract springs from nothing. On the contrary, also from a juridical point

of view, contracts are possible precisely because contractual *rules* are already in existence" (Eco, 1999, p. 273f.). So too, in the case of teaching writing there exists a metanarrative determining what it is to "write well" as well as several subordinate metanarratives determining how to properly write in various academic fields and other settings. Furthermore these metanarratives, even the very rules of grammar, are shifting and changing slowly over time in most cases due to public and private practice and preference.

Postmodernism is concerned with understanding the rules governing discourses (i.e. politics, science, culture, language arts, composition, literary studies *etc.*), the difficulties created by the differences of those discourses, and the way in which these discourses create and maintain power. This involves examining the ways in which meaning is negotiated within and between discourses. It is this concept which makes postmodernism especially pertinent to teaching language arts— composition, grammar, and textual analysis. Not only are postmodern thinkers such as Foucault focused on the role or roles played by language in the world—narratives, metanarratives, discourses and language games, but they are also intensely interested in how these games play out—how each player's role is defined and what the limitations, albeit mutable ones, are as defined by the rules of a given discourse. The application of these postmodern concepts to the teaching of high school English is clarified when viewed in conjunction with the contemporary ideas of those such as Umberto Eco whose work is in the field of semiotics. Far from spelling the end of the disciplines of English Foucault and Eco offer an opportunity to develop the field in a better and more meaningful, not to mention exciting, way. It is my belief that adopting a postmodern basis for ones teaching and

classroom practices will lead to new and better ways of helping students become self-reliant critical thinkers.

I would argue that Foucault's thought offers a potentially more fruitful direction to follow when attempting to derive a postmodern basis for one's teaching. It also presents us with a new problem. The problem is that what we typically do in interpreting a philosopher's writing—finding some underlying theme or overarching grand idea, which connects the thinker's works into a cohesive opus, will distort Foucault's work because "it is at root *ad hoc*, fragmentary, and incomplete" (Gutting, 2006, p. 2). This fragmentary aspect of Foucault's thought results from the fact that his works are specific to certain instances—"an archeology of discourse…a genealogy of power… and a problematization of ethics," and the methods he employs are "always subordinated to the tactical needs of the particular analysis at hand" (Gutting, 2006, p. 2). Archeology refers to the method of examining the development of a discourse by focusing on the concepts dominant at a given time in a given discourse which allow or give impetus to certain theories which explain the data as conceptualized (Gutting, 2006, p. 30ff). Foucault once identified genealogy as history of the present by which he means the study "concerned with the complex causal antecedents of a socio-intellectual reality" (Gutting, 2006, p. 34ff). Problematization is what Foucault is describing when he describes the history of thought as "the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience or set of practices which were accepted without question... becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices and, institutions" (Foucault, 2001, p. 74). Because each of Foucault's examinations and the methods employed in them are particular to the topic and moment

and also because it seems unlikely that Foucault is attempting to provide an all encompassing metanarrative it is necessary to be very careful when attempting to apply his thought to other areas.

In the texts Foucault produced one will curiously note that each successive text does not refer to any of the previous texts. Each text is a critique of specific terrain and an attempt to suggest "liberating alternatives to what seem to be inevitable conceptions and practices" (Gutting, 2006, p. 3). It is not that we need to renounce the practice of finding general interpretive models with which to frame all his work but realize that he himself applied varied frameworks throughout his life in referring to his own thought and therefore so might we depending on the needs of our current critique of Foucault. His books are for the most part specific to the topics which they cover and it can be a mistake to attempt to transfer the concepts and analytical tools Foucault brings to bear on a given area to things outside that area. Thus it is important to tread carefully when lifting ideas from his work to apply to other areas and to attempt to be fair to the broad range of his thought and writing. In light of this let me be clear that what I want to take from Foucault is his method of approaching a topic—the flexibility of employing any useful method or tactic, and his habit of using archeological, genealogical, and problematizing frameworks to re-examine what it is we think we know, the connection between what we know and power, and how power/knowledge is related to and divided between an individual and an institution.

Postmodern philosophy, especially the thought of Michel Foucault is often interpreted as being the rejection of continuity in favor of discontinuity—as a complete break with and reversal of the traditional methods of seeing ideas, history, or literature as

developing steadily and continuously one type from another. Foucault is often credited as being responsible for this idea, but wrongly (Dilger). It is usually a book entitled <u>The Archeology of Knowledge</u> which people who wish to see Foucault in this light refer to. The fact that one of the main themes of the book is "to formulate a general theory of discontinuity" (Foucault, 1972, p. 12) and its somewhat convoluted written style are probably largely to blame for this. Also the fact that those who seek to make this interpretation fail to see that in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault is careful to say that he merely seeks to reestablish the value of discontinuity while continuity "must not be rejected definitively of course, but the tranquility with which they are accepted must be disturbed" (Foucault, 1972, p. 25). Foucault "seeks a more balanced form of analysis in which continuities are controlled and prevented from dominating and distorting history" (Dilger). Postmodernism is not the signal of the oncoming end of history, but rather the development of a healthy skepticism about the smooth continuity with which it is so often interpreted.

The prefix *post-* may suggest a break or continuation, but it certainly describes something which follows as opposed to *pre-*. In most instances there are two senses of the term postmodernism which should be clearly understood. One might reasonably refer to these as temporal postmodernism and philosophical postmodernism; the latter being the one upon which I suggest the teaching practices of the postmodern language arts classroom can be most effectively based.

Temporal postmodernism is the simple notion of the era which follows upon the modern era; it might be called chronological postmodernism. There are a number of late twentieth and early twenty-first century thinkers who are temporally postmodern yet do

not exhibit truly philosophical postmodern thinking in their work; they are simply writing in the postmodern era. Philosophical postmodernism is characterized by a skepticism toward traditional epistemologies and knowledge that facilitates a re-examination of the truths of a given discipline, discourse, or language game and makes it possible to see the power dynamics which have lead to them and which might make possible to divination of new truths.

So we shall define postmodernism as follows and we shall necessarily include some of what it is not in hopes of clarifying what it is. Postmodernism is not a relativistic philosophy of language and meaning that allows us to give credence to any and all interpretations, but rather is constrained by what is or was extant in a text or in reality. Postmodernism is a *healthy* skepticism in the face of all established facts and truths which seeks to approach things in an archeological, genealogical, and problematizing manner to thus determine or re-determine what is true, what the rules are governing truth, and how truths are established in a given discourse. In this case the discourse with which we shall be concerned is that of teaching high school English—literature and composition.

The remaining sections of this paper will deal with what I believe are the implications of Foucaultian postmodern philosophy which are most useful to teaching reading and writing. I will include an extended account of the ways in which I attempted to integrate postmodernism into my own classroom practices and some examination of which of those efforts appeared most successful and which seemed not to play out as I had hoped.

Postmodern Composition

High school language arts does not separate out the discipline of writing from the discipline of literature; high school classes are about both composition and the study or analysis of literature simultaneously. This is in fact true of most literature courses at any level, but this fact is especially true in high school as students at that stage are learning both the rules for interpretation and the rules for grammar and writing in conjunction and simultaneously. For this reason high school teachers need to have a good writing pedagogy to accompany their literature pedagogy and postmodern theory is perhaps the best basis for such praxis. Postmodern approaches to composition, properly devised and enacted, can lead instructors and students to something quite extraordinary and useful in terms of quality professional instruction and the useful development of skills in formal and academic writing.

The most useful and comprehensive review of the effects or lack thereof of the rise of postmodern theory on the field of composition is found in Lester Faigley's book entitled <u>Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition</u> (1992). Faigley makes two important points in this book which are relative to this project. The first is that the field of composition was slow to be effected by postmodern theory or to consider it as a basis for instructional practices. This is likely because of the nature of teaching composition; learning to write necessitates learning a variety of established rules, techniques, and methods which are often peculiar to a given academic or creative discipline. This being the case it is difficult if not impossible to adopt a theoretical basis which requires one to throw out the rules and authoritarian aspects of one's pedagogy and

discipline. Indeed this is the second point which Faigley seeks to make about

postmodernism and composition; there exists an idea of what it means to write well and

that idea is underpinned by various standards which are upheld by those in the forefront

of the varied fields and disciplines to which a piece of writing belongs. So long as that is

the case, postmodernism can only serve to reemphasize the importance of understanding

the rules governing each different type of writing.

Many composition instructors of the last few years, again mostly at the collegiate

level, have expressed rather dramatic concerns over the impact of postmodern thought on

their discipline. Many have openly wondered if adopting a postmodern basis for one's

teaching practice actually made it impossible to continue to claim to be able to teach

writing at all. Just as before them, caught up in the heady rush of postmodern excess,

others claimed that history and reason were themselves at an end as we entered into the

postmodern era. Also like these dizzying claims, such claims about the teaching of

composition are misguided and excessive. Postmodernism does not spell the end of the

possibility of teaching composition any more then it signals an end to the profession of

teaching itself. Such a claim can only be made by persons who adopt the relativism of

Rorty and claim they have adopted a postmodern basis for their pedagogical praxis.

While it is true that relativism, especially absolute relativism as is so often attributed to

postmodern thought, precludes the possibility of any act, including the act of teaching,

from having meaning this does injustice to the true value of postmodern thought.

In truth, postmodern thought means that an entirely different type of change must

be made in the teaching of composition. Instead of simply demanding that students

conform to the expectations, often unclear and unspoken expectations, of a writing

instructor, or leaving them to blindly fumble through the dark on their own

postmodernism forces writing teachers to consider the power dynamics at play in the

writing classroom and in the act of writing under other circumstances. It forces them to

consider this dynamic while making explicit their expectations of student writing, and the

rational behind these expectations, thus being honest and forthright about who has the

power and what those under that power are required to do. Further, by recognizing and

calling attention to the fact that this power dynamic exists only under these particular

classroom conditions and in fact the purpose of the classroom experience is to build the

student writer's confidence and broaden their understanding of the rules of various

writing circumstances a writing instructor can teach from a postmodern perspective.

      As many creative writing instructors have often said, a student who wishes to

write well should learn the rules in order that they may break them in interesting and

meaningful ways. This is a very postmodern sentiment, despite having come about

organically and, to the best of my knowledge, without the formal aid of postmodern

theory. Students are not persons who have been created knowing the rules of a standard

or formal language; language is a construct and thus has rules which are agreed upon by

those who use the language and therefore may be learned and taught. These rules are not

stagnant and stable but they are not entirely fluid either; they change but they do so

slowly like some nearly frozen water that is an icy viscous gel or even like an inexorable

glacier moving ceaselessly forward. Nonetheless there are rules which govern language

uses in writing in given situations. In the academic world there several such situations

and each must be taught to students before they are able to accomplish them effectively.

As an example, students need to learn the American Psychological Association's writing

guidelines or the Modern Language Association's guidelines before they can be expected to create written works which adhere to them.

Younger students, high school aged students, must begin at an even earlier place than the MLA or APA style guidelines. They must learn the basic rules of grammar, syntax, and punctuation for formal or Standard English. This is true of students regardless of their socio-economic background. All students need to learn the expectations for the use of Standard English in a language arts classroom although some who come from the dominant segment of society, whatever that dominance is based upon, may begin with an advantage. Every student will require guidance and practice in the formal application of language to the various types of academic writing. A key difference in teaching the rules of Standard English with a postmodern approach is that time must be spent examining who dictates these rules and why they are important to know. Simply put, those in power—people who control wealth and can offer employment, will make judgments about the worthiness of another based in part upon their ability to speak and write clearly, effectively, and correctly; all of those adverbs describe a person who has command of what is called Standard English.

Another important difference is that writing instruction based on a postmodern philosophical perspective will strive to make students aware that the type of writing which they do in school is a formal exercise and not necessarily authentic outside of the classroom. Academic writing within a discipline, such as the study of English, must admit to being only just that and not pretend to hold sway outside of its area of authority. This by no means spells the end for the need to teach writing or composition; in fact it re-

emphasizes the importance of these endeavors, but it shifts their focus and requires that they not attempt to lay claims to authority beyond the borders of their kingdom.

Some may think this spells the end of such apparently useful efforts as writing across the curriculum, but again this is not the case. Writing across the curriculum is a wonderful idea as long as it requires that instructors who teach so called "writing-emphasis" classes make clear the rules governing writing in their given disciplines as well as their personal expectations of student writing in their respective classrooms. That is to say, these instructors must make clear where the power lies and what is expected by those in power from those over whom they hold power, and furthermore, they must make clear that this power dynamic is both local to the given discipline and idiosyncratic to the given instructor.

This being the case writing instructors might continue to teach the five paragraph essay so long as they emphasize the arbitrariness of the number of paragraphs and explicate in no uncertain terms their personal reasons for believing in the value of the five paragraph essay. At the very least this would likely put an end to the poor misguided student who insists that for a piece of writing to be an essay in must contain exactly five paragraphs. Even better might be the instructor of writing who randomly assigns a minimum and maximum number of paragraphs as such a methodology might serve to reinforce the somewhat arbitrary or idiosyncratic nature of the number of paragraphs, which are really secondary to the other aspects of formal academic writing. Similarly, the number of sentences in a paragraph should not be set by an instructor as is often the case in high school writing assignments. Rather it is important to encourage students to write complete paragraphs and to make clear to them the concept of what a complete paragraph

entails. They must be taught to understand the overarching rule is that a paragraph needs to be a thorough examination of an idea or relevant aspect of a topic and not that a paragraph must be, for example, eleven sentences long.

Furthermore, a postmodern writing pedagogy does not disallow the teaching of grammar, syntax, and fluency, but merely requires that the instructor lay bare the truth of the power dynamics at play. What does that mean? In truth English grammar is not the hard and fast unchanging monolith one is often led to believe it is. The rules of English grammar are adaptations from Latin grammar with healthy doses of arbitrary rules invented by grammatical pundits over the centuries that the English language has developed and has been used in academics. One such arbitrary rule which would serve as an example here is the notion that one should always eschew ending a sentence with a preposition. In fact, there is no reason not to end a sentence with a preposition as it is a perfectly legitimate grammatical construct. The idea that a so called dangling preposition is incorrect was probably first pointed out by John Dryden in an essay written in 1672, and the idea was reinforced by the influential grammar written by Bishop Robert Lowth around 100 years after Dryden's essay. Slowly, from these points, the idea became a codified rule of grammar and began appearing in grammar textbooks in the nineteenth century; interestingly, teachers and textbooks have never been able to eradicate the so called dangling preposition from common usage. Although this is a grammatical rule which one's English teacher may demand be followed, it is not one which the world at large will hold a writer to. Thus the truly more fluid and varied concepts of the rules of grammar can be taught more effectively if one adopts a postmodern philosophical

perspective because that necessitates that one examine the rules and the source of authority for those rules

Therefore a postmodern pedagogy could allow for a general rubric which includes elements that are based on the formal rules of Standard written English as well as the preferences of the instructor and the general expectations of persons who write within a given discipline. This is much as it was before and has always been, but what is different is that in order to be postmodern in this approach an instructor must explicitly detail the various authorities and the scope of their authorities to the student. Instructors must explain that certain things are considered the standard in the given discipline while others are personal expectations of the individual instructor and still others are departmental or school system expectations or even result form state educational standards as the case may be.

Further, because students do not arrive in the world knowing the rules of the various academic disciplines or the rules of formal, written Standard English, they must be taught these conventions as appropriate. In order to accomplish this some shared vocabulary and understanding must be created, thus some grammar and instruction in the parts of speech, their rhetorical function, and other rhetorical devices and techniques is necessary. However these things should be taught not as immutable truths dictated by omnipotent powers, but simply as rules of the system established by those who hold power in the system. Therefore these rules must be learned by those who would seek to curry favor with those in authority or even those who might hope to wrest some of that authority for themselves.

Here we have hit upon the true dynamic at play—the thing that is really important in the adoption of a postmodern perspective in the teaching of writing and composition. The system has been set up long before the arrival of the latest batch of students to their writing and composition lesson. These students all seek a place in this established system. Some seek merely to be recognized and rewarded for making some effort to be so, while others seek to take power for themselves in this area and perhaps change the rules or possibly become the one to hand out the rewards to those who prefer to be subordinate. Regardless of the place each ultimately seeks in the system, the student requires the aid of one who has already acquired more power than they in that system. Thus students require writing instructors who understand the current conventions and expectations of formal academic writing in Standard English and who are able to transmit these concepts, rules, and ideas to them. As well as something more, these students really require and truly deserve a composition instructor who will be honest with them about the less than concrete nature of the rules of writing in academic settings or non-academic settings; they need instructors who are unafraid to tell them that the language can and will change and that the rules as they learn them now will not be the rules they are always required to follow. In fact, they themselves may be the instruments and affecters of this change in the rules. Instructors must find the daring to be able to teach this to their students if they are truly interested in helping them acquire the power of writing—if they wish to adopt a meaningful postmodern basis for their own pedagogical praxis.

The truth is less dramatic than the end of the discipline of composition or the demise of the possibility of teaching writing. The reason postmodernism's impact was slow to come to composition studies is that it was not really that great a change; in truth

postmodernism simply requires that slightly more emphasis be placed on understanding

who dictates the rules for composing in a given circumstance and what those rules are

given the circumstance of one's writing.

Teaching Postmodern Literary Analysis

There persists a great deal of confusion about whether it is possible for one to teach literature from a postmodern perspective. There are many who would argue that any attempt to do so is by its very nature modernist and thus doomed to failure because to teach is to be an authority and to be an authority is to assert metanarrative dominance. This, it must be said, is simply not the case. It is quite possible for an instructor to function as a knowledgeable guide and to lead students to a better understanding of interpretive strategies and theories so that they may then apply them themselves and acquire the skills necessary to enter the fray and argue for their interpretations effectively.

The study of literature has gone from the strict New Criticism's notion of a single correct interpretation based on the author's intent, to a free-for-all based on the premise that the individual is the start and sole creator of meaning. Neither of these are the best possible positions especially when one considers the postmodern. In some sense the New Criticism approach tacitly accepted the fact that truth—in this case the best interpretation of a work of literature, was achieved through argument based on the text; there was never really a single interpretation which reigned wholly supreme, but rather a number of solid scholarly interpretations vying for dominance and the potential for more to enter the fray. As we shall see, postmodernism is in some sense related to this truth of the old method rather than a radical break or discontinuity. The idea that meaning may be interpreted by an individual in any way they see fit leads quickly to an indefensible and radically relativistic position where author create texts without intentions to convey any meaning at all and texts themselves become blank slates or looking glasses reflecting the reader's

ideas. A proper interpretation of postmodernism can save us from this idea that is often,

and incorrectly, associated with postmodern theory; the notion that a text can be endlessly

interpreted and reinterpreted as any individual so desires results from following the

wrong sort of postmodernism down the rabbit hole. Between the author's intent and an

interpreter who "beats the text into a shape which will serve for his purpose" (Rorty,

1982, p. 151) and the unlikely possibility of understanding the author's intent there is a

third choice, that of the intention of the text (Eco, 1992, p. 25). We may easily arrive at

this third choice and a place from where it may be taught to our students through the

ideas of postmodernism.

The notion of seeking the author's intention s in a work are problematic as they

cannot be ascertained without interviewing the author, which is impossible in the case of

most literature taught in school. The idea of asking what the author intended is however a

useful question nonetheless; it is useful as long as it is understood to as a shorthand

version of what we really want to ask which is, "What was the author's likely perspective

given what we can know about his or her life experience, the socio-economic conditions

at the time of the text's creation, and the common use and meaning of the words chosen

by the author to represent the story of the text?" It is this more lengthy and complex

question which postmodernism and modern semiotics make possible, and it is this

question which makes more fruitful interpretations possible. Thus the postmodern

language arts teacher is seeking to facilitate his or her students' understanding of this

question of the author's intention in the framework of the more complex version of the

question—in a postmodern way. Students need to learn how to answer the questions of

"…how an author was individualized in a culture such as ours; the

status we have given the author…; the system of valorization in which

 he was included; or the moment when stories of heroes gave way to

the author's biography; the conditions that fostered the formulation of the

fundamental critical category of `the man and his work'

(Foucault, 1980, p. 115).

This then is a clear continuation and development of traditional practices in literary

interpretation rather than a radical break from the old modern to leap into the pseudo–

postmodern abyss or abject relativism.

One of the few times that Foucault comes close to directly talking about literature

or topics of concern to those who teach literature is in a book entitled Language, Counter-

memory, Practice (1980). This collection of essays and lectures contains one piece where

Foucault speaks at length about what an author is. His stated intention for the piece is to

examine his own relation as an author to several ideas that have been put forth,

developed, and changed in his own writing, but there are some bits which we might

transpose to the world of authors at large. The most useful of these is his notion that the

traits of an author "…are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our

way of handling texts" (Foucault, 1980, p. 127). This is to say that the traits we see as

pertinent in an author's life or personality are those we choose to use to create an

interpretive framework—they are a tool useful in interpretation. "In addition all these

operations vary according to the period and form of the discourse concerned" (Foucault,

1980, p. 127). This is tantamount to saying that these traits we assign to an individual

who is an author differ according to the time period in which he or she wrote as well as

the society and the genre in which the text was written. Thus what Foucault is describing

is his view that an author exists as a snapshot of an individual at the time of the creation

of the text and the text he or she creates reflects both the author at that time period as well

as the possibilities allowed for texts by the social realities of that period. Therefore the

question of the author's intent in writing a certain text or even choosing a certain word is

an acceptable one if viewed properly and understood as a shorthand question for the more

complex postmodern questions.

.   It should be apparent that there is more to teaching literature—literary analysis,

from a postmodern perspective, than teaching students that texts exist solely as tools for

their use and may be manipulated by them in any way they wish to any ends they see fit.

This overly individual centered and relativistic perspective is espoused by Richard Rorty,

but even he fails to achieve it in his own textual analyses, as Umberto Eco points out in

Interpretation and Overinterpretation (1992). Rorty writes a response to, or an

interpretation of, Eco's novel: Foucault's Pendulum, to which Eco then has the luxury, at

least it must seem so for an author, to respond directly to what Rorty has claimed about

his work. Eco suggests that "to pay homage to such a reader" one should react as Rorty

suggests "and ask: What is your paper about?" (Eco, 1992, p. 139). Thereby adhering to

Rorty's notion that one may interpret a text any way one wishes and only the author may

know what its intended meaning might be. This however leaves us with several problems.

"…it would be unjust to ask what Rorty's paper was about. It

was undoubtably about something. It focused on some alleged

contradictions he found between my (Eco's) novel and my (Eco's)

scholarly papers. In doing so Rorty made a strong implicit assumption,

namely, that there are family resemblances between different texts

by a single author and that all these different texts can be seen as a

textual corpus to be investigated in terms of its own coherence"

(Eco, 1992, p.139).

Thus Rorty has not actually freely interpreted the text to suit some idiosyncratic need or

desire of his own, but has performed a rather typical act of interpreting the text as part of

a larger body of work by a single author.

 Aside from being difficult to actually accomplish, interpretative perspectives

such as Rorty's shares many of the problems which Pirie points out in reader response

theories in his work Reshaping High School English (1984). According to Pirie (1984, p.

8ff) the more extreme reader response perspectives ignore the limits of interpretation

placed upon the reader by the text itself; it is simply not the case that any text can be

construed to mean anything the reader deems fitting or finds expedient. Umberto Eco

makes this argument abundantly clear in the example he cites form John Wilkins' work

of 1641 entitled Mercury: or the Secret and Swift Messenger. In this illustration a native

slave is sent from his master to another person bearing a basket of figs and a letter

indicating the number of figs sent as a gift. On the way the slave eats the delicious figs

and arrives at the intended recipient with an empty basket. The recipient reads the letter

and then accuses the slave of being less than faithful to his duty; the slave's response is

that he did no such thing as eat the figs, but the recipient indicates that the letter says he

was carrying a basket full of them. To this the slave replies that the letter is in fact a false

witness and lies. The example continues a bit further, but the point is made; language

does in fact reflect reality and in so far as it does so truly leaves only a certain amount of

room for interpretation. It is the attainment of the tools for recognizing and, if possible,

expanding the possibilities of interpretation of a text that is the responsibility of the literature teacher. While it must be accepted that language mirrors reality, it is not necessarily the case that it does so fully, faithfully, and wholly accurately, or at least it does not always do so, and it may sometimes be impossible to discern if it is or is not in a particular instance. Despite this fact we should realize that language does *attempt* to reflect reality and its discernable accuracy in doing so is one place where we have room for interpretation.

How does an instructor go about teaching students about the interpretation of literature without simply dominating them and instructing them as to the correct interpretation of a given text?

As should be apparent to most readers who have come this far, the questions and complexities of how to apply cotemporary postmodern literary theories to actual classroom practice can be daunting. This is especially true when the theories themselves are complicated, philosophical, and difficult to read or understand. Robert Scholes, humanities professor at Brown University and literary critic, has offered one of the more coherent efforts to aid English teachers by addressing the application of postmodern thought to the literature, rhetoric, and composition classroom in his book Textual Power (1985).

Scholes sees a division in contemporary theory between the positions he calls secular and hermetic "The secular or worldly critics see texts as historically grounded in public occasions and socially supported codes. The hermetic interpreters see texts as radically self-reflective and non-referential…" (Scholes, 1985, p. 76). The secular position is the one which coincides with what we are referring to as postmodern and the

hermetic refers to what is here called anti-modern, relativism, or pseudo-postmodernism. Scholes is a proponent of the secular view and feels that the hermetic view, of which Derrida is perhaps the most well known proponent, leads to impossible obscurity of texts and the inability to teach or criticize them. Thus it is that the teacher's role is "not to intimidate students with our own superior textual production; it is to show them the codes upon which all textual production depends, and to encourage their own textual practice" (Scholes, 1985, p. 24f). This would seem to parallel the earlier distinction offered in this examination between those who are modernist or antimodern and those who are truly postmodern or between the temporally and philosophically postmodern

What Scholes argues is that as teachers "we must help our students come into their own powers of textualization. We must help them to see that every poem, play, and story is a text related to others…" (Scholes, 1985, p. 20). It is his position that contemporary theory both demands this and makes it possible. For Scholes this occurs in a three stage process which students, or readers, must undergo. The first stage is reading wherein the individual submits to the authority, or power, of the text. At this point the instructor may help the reader by furnishing background information on the author, their historical moment, and their society. "The supposed skill of reading is actually based upon knowledge of the codes that were operative in the composition of any given text and the historical situation in which it was composed" (Scholes, 1985, p.21). Reading is followed by interpretation which "depends upon the failures of reading. It is the feeling of incompleteness on the reader's part that activates the interpretive process" (Scholes, 1985, p. 22). This is very similar to what Umberto Eco calls the taking of "inferential walks" or the filling in of gaps by the reader. It is a hitch in the reader's ability to easily

infer these missing portions that causes the shift to interpretation. This is similar to what

Kathleen McCormick and Gary Waller describe as the mismatch of repertoires between

reader and text (McCormick, Waller, p.205). Interpretation then, makes possible the

criticism of the text where readers differentiate themselves from the text and author and

assert their authority over that of the text. "(C)riticism involves a critique of the themes

developed in a given fictional text, or a critique of the codes themselves, out of which a

given text has been constructed" (Scholes, 1985, p. 23). Through this process—reading,

interpretation, and criticism, individuals gain textual power although they first must

submit to the power of the text. The reader submits to the authority of the text to read it,

interprets the codes represented in the text and upon which the text's creation was based,

then criticizes those codes in relation to their own whereby individuating themselves

from the text and author and asserting power over the text.

Scholes has described a very applicable approach to classroom practice that is

well informed by contemporary postmodern philosophy. Although he advocates the

application of this theory for college-aged students, it would seem to be applicable, with

varying degrees of complexity, to younger students as well. Scholes has done an

excellent job of providing a cogent method for the application of postmodern thought to

the literature classroom.

Another place where one might find it easy to begin to help students approach

texts from a postmodern perspective, provided students have acquired the basic skill of

reading and are competent in parsing the meaning of words and sentences, would be to

teach an overview of literary theory. An invaluable guide and anecdotal reference on

what it means and what it is like to teach literary theory to high school students is

Deborah Appleman's book <u>Critical Encounters in High School English</u> (2000). In explaining and justifying this approach Appleman quotes Stephen Bonnycastle on the merits of studying theory; studying theory

> "…means you can take your own part in the struggles for power
>
> between different ideologies. It helps you to discover elements of
>
> your own ideology, and understand why you hold certain values
>
> unconsciously. It means no authority can impose a truth on you in a
>
> dogmatic way— and if some authority does try, you can challenge
>
> that truth ina powerful way, by asking what ideology it is based on….
>
> Theory is subversive because it puts authority in question. (Appleman,
>
> 2000, p. 3; Bonnycastle, 1996, p. 34)"

Despite the misplaced commas and the hint of romanticized notions of power and fighting authority, this justification for teaching high school English students directly about theories of literary criticism has much value. Further, learning to view texts and the world through multiple critical and theoretical lenses will not only aid students in understanding postmodernism, which so often defines itself in terms of what it is not or what it is reacting to, but it will "help them as we explore the differences between and among us" (Appleman, 2000, p. 3).

Appleman's essential notion, explained through brief examples of the contemporary competing interpretive perspectives—reader response theory, feminist criticism, and Marxist criticism, and anecdotes about students and teachers, is that by teaching students the rudiments of these interpretive stances—critical lenses in her terms, students are better able to read, understand, and interpret literature and the interpretations

of it by others. While this is true, teaching students these critical lenses also would facilitate teaching to understand how to look at a text from a postmodern perspective. This would be especially true if one were to emphasize how each of the other competing lenses seeks to assign power and authority to a particular group or to the individual reader.

Finally, the teaching of literature from a postmodern perspective would require that authors and texts be examined from a slightly different perspective than the traditional literature class might use. An author must be viewed as a snapshot of an individual at the time of the creation of a text; an individual is a self negotiated with the socio-technological, economic, and linguistic constraints present at the time and place of their existence. Texts must be understood to be about something, that is they must be assumed to have some intended meaning, and although we can not know for sure what the author's intention was we can construct a good argument for what it appears to have been; we must negotiate the meaning of the text based on this premise and our own understandings of the language. Students should be taught to examine what authorities and powers combined to make possible or necessary the creation of a given text and how that text submits or transgresses these authorities and powers.

An Anecdotal Account of One Teachers Use of Postmodernism in the Language Arts Classroom…I Think….

In this section I will use Foucault's postmodern thought to analyze and describe the institutional context in which I work. Following that analysis I will elucidate my philosophy of teaching and its influences and inspiration. The latter portion of this section will describe my own attempts to use postmodernism as a source of ideas to guide my classroom practices. Foucault's own published works consisted of efforts to examine institutions, both physical and intellectual, through their developments in history to get a clearer understanding of how they existed and came to exist in the present. Though my genealogy of the Albuquerque Public School System, the Manzano English Department, and my personal thoughts on the role of a teacher will not be as exhaustive and complete as Foucault's study of madness and its place in civilization, prisons, or medical science, it will attempt to make apparent the "causal antecedents" to the "socio-intellectual reality" in which I attempted to apply postmodernism to classroom practice. In my description of the metanarratives dominant in my situation I will not be tying them directly to Foucault's ideas about other areas because, as I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, that this can be a dubious practice. What I will be attempting to accomplish is an analysis in the style of Foucault's geneologies—to attempt to determine the sources of authority in my situation and the types of negotiations with that authority that were possible within the system as described. Further, it would seem obvious given the debate of the merits of the numerous competing theories meant to guide classroom practice and even the debates regarding the usefulness of postmodernism that this area has already been problematized; nonetheless I shall attempt to be specific about those areas that I sought to problematize in my own situation. Finally, my examination will not be pure

genealogy but will also include some archeological elements. After a brief description of the context in which I was teaching and some explanation of the postmodern and other ideas which inform my beliefs regarding teaching, I will illustrate how those practices I attempted to apply are derived from Foucault's postmodern thought. In an effort to be thorough I will describe those things which seemed to be successful in their application as well as those which were not.

It seems to make sense to begin our genealogical and archeological examination of the context of my effort to apply postmodern thought by describing the general make-up of the student body and English department. The episodes I am going to recount here took place over the course of my first three years in teaching high school English while I was still working on completing a master's degree in secondary education at the University of New Mexico. I taught at what we will call East High School which is a high school of roughly 2800 students on the east side of a small city in New Mexico. The student body was predominantly white and Hispanic with a small number of black and Asian students, and the socio-economic status of these students ranged from quite poor to fairly well off though the predominant group hailed from what could best be described as middle class backgrounds. I do not mean to make it sound too much like the ideal school to those who seek socioeconomic reasons for student success, but I do wish to illustrate the diversity of the student body and the predominance of middle class students.

The English department of fourteen teachers was split more or less evenly between the genders, and was comprised of what might be called three generations of hiring—the old guard many of whom had been there for twenty or more years, those who had been a part of the department for five to eight years, and the relatively new hires such

as myself. The old guard folks offered guidance and information to the newer teachers regarding the traditions and methods of the department—the departmental metanarrative. As is often the case with teachers who have a great deal of experience, the old guard had accrued what they considered to be invaluable wisdom about teaching over their long years in the classroom. The long timers, the group that had put in the five to eight year stints, had learned well the rules of the departmental metanarrative and were in the process of honing the application of its expectations in their classroom practices. Then there were we new bloods all of whom came from places which made us well qualified and highly confident of our own classroom abilities. The newly hired teachers seemed to fit into three basic categories. The first were those who were explained the department metanarrative and allowed to proceed on their own because they were highly educated in the field of education are had a number of years experience teaching prior to arrive at East High School. The second group was made up of those who sought to fit in and bring their own skills and flair to the department's programs who were offered and accepted a great deal of departmental support. Finally there was me, the one teacher who sought to do things his own way, in a sometimes confrontational and apparently rebellious manner.

Allow me to translate this further into postmodern terms. What we are talking about is the English departmental metanarrative and the manner in which various groups interacted with that narrative. The old guard teachers are the ones who dictated the terms of the narrative while the long time teachers are those who found a niche in the narrative or already negotiated their terms with the narrative as dictated. The new hires are engaged in varied types of negotiation for their own role or in, or relationship to, the departmental metanarrative. My negotiation tactic was to problematize this departmental

discourse. I sought to do this because I feel that we commonly accept too readily these time honored traditions as truth and those long serving individuals as arbiters and guardians of truth. By problematizing these things we may find valuable and alternative truths have gone unnoticed and unemphasized under their hegemony. Unfortunately, as one might imagine such a gadfly is rarely beloved and so I would caution others when employing such a tactic.

Let us look more closely at the dominant narratives in place in my teaching, classroom, and school. We might start with the dominant concepts in the field of literary analysis and composition which were seen as accepted truth in the East High School English department. In the case of teaching literature these concepts were essentially the traditional methods derived from the various types of pragmatic, expressive, and objective criticism which were popularized during the early twentieth century. In my opinion these forms of literary criticism often seem to seek to understand the author's intended meaning and leave one with the impression that there exists a single correct interpretation of a given work. The authorities who dictate what the correct interpretation is are professors and teachers who have ostensibly agreed upon a particular interpretation of a work. One of the downsides to this approach to literature is the fact that it often gives students the idea that there is a single interpretation upon which all the authorities agree; they rarely realize or have explained to them that there are in fact competing interpretations among the authorities and thus they do not learn to interpret themselves, but only to reiterate the interpretations of the authorities dominant in their sphere—their experiential reference frame. There was little to no discussion of the interpretive models being employed by the teachers with their students, which I would argue further

deepened the impression that there was both a correct way to interpret a text as well as a single correct interpretation. To be fair, there had been a variety of other movements in the field now known as language arts such as reader response theory, feminist criticism, and Marxist criticism, but these had not made many inroads with the department nor had they been an impetus to any substantive teacher discussion with the students about interpretive models. That is to say that these alternative interpretive models had not succeeded in problematizing the method which was dominant in the East High School English Department. The exception would be the multicultural narrative which had found a place within the department metanarrative and manifested as the effort to include works by authors of differing gender and cultural backgrounds or dealing with issue of cultural identity such as Rodolpho Anaya's <u>Bless Me, Ultima</u> and Paul Fleischman's book <u>Seed Folks</u>. Still this addition of multiculturalism's precepts occasioned little to no discussion of the role of interpretive models and the disciplinary authorities in defining those models.

The teachers of the English department also made use of many of the short stories contained in the district approved textbooks (the Prentice Hall Literature series). The district approved textbook contained short stories which were drawn from what is typically called the canon of Western literature as well as a number of stories from the multicultural canon. As can clearly be seen the metanarrative of the English department was mostly typical of many such departments around the country. That metanarrative and the old guard teachers who espoused it held authority through the weight of tradition. The noteworthy exception would be the narrative of multiculturalism as it is not so much

traditional, but rather holds its power through its assumed moral authority—the notion that it is right and just to assume the value of non-dominant authors, cultures, and texts.

There was of course also a governmental metanarrative defined by the various local, state, and federal agencies, bureaucrats, regulations, and standards in place, but there is not really much need, nor is there the time and space, to deal with those in detail in this paper. Allow me to point out simply that my tack in negotiating with this governmental metanarrative was to ignore its specifics and assume that if I was doing my job well and correctly it would appear, through my students standardized test scores, that I had adhered to them. I cannot report full and accurately on the efficacy of this approach though I do know that many of my students were successful on the various standardized tests they completed after they were my students.

So we come to the school's expectations which we might usefully separate into two groups— disciplinary and academic, the former covering classroom management and the latter being about the course material. The metanarrative governing classroom management was fairly standard— students should be on time, prepared, respectful, and attentive. The administration had imposed a rule against any eating or drinking in the classroom, as well as a prohibition against wearing hats indoors, and a rule against the use of cell phones by students on campus. Teachers were expected to enforce these rules. The perennial problems of tardiness and skipping class were also left to the individual teachers to devise punishments for until they became chronic or habitual and then they became the problem of the administration. The school's principal apparently subscribed to the "broken window theory" which essentially states that if you take care of the small things the large issues—in this case drugs, gangs, and other forms of adolescent gross

misbehavior, will take care of themselves. I did not seek to negotiate much with the tenets of the disciplinary metanarrative and accepted it as more or less effective which it seemed to be. The one thing I did seek to problematize was the prohibition against eating in the classroom; my arguments were based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs—students need to be fed before they are ready to learn, and this is a simple thing to accomplish when the school food service makes snack carts available between periods and the teacher keeps snacks in his desk. Other faculty members found the no eating policy problematic because it seemed incongruous to offer hungry students food during a five minute passing period and not allow them to finish consuming it in the classroom to avoid being tardy. This issue was never fully resolved.

The academic metanarrative in place for the English department when I arrived had been devised and codified by the old guard and several of the recently retired instructors. Though it had not been written down or possibly not even really discussed as an overarching metanarrative there certainly existed an expected and approved method of doing things in the English department. To start with each grade was to read one specific work of Shakespeare per year; the plays were grade specific so as to avoid the problem of having each grade level repeatedly read the same play. Another aspect of the dominant narrative of the East High School English department was the expectation to teach grammar; in fact, the expectation was that particular concepts of grammar be taught in a particular way and a specific order beginning with the freshmen and ending with the sophomores. The idea was that then juniors and seniors could then be held accountable for adhering to, or failing to adhere to, these rules—the rules of EHS grammar. Yet another important tenant of the metanarrative in place when I began was the bookroom

list; there existed a list of the texts available from the bookroom which had been broken down into subgroups of texts available for classes by grade level and to honors or non-honors classes at a given grade level. It should be noted that the book list did not in fact include all the texts available from the book room, but only those deemed useful or possible to teach to high school students by the old guard who had devised the list. Which leads us to one last concept which was accepted dogma by the old guard and long serving folks; the honors kids were smart and the rest were merely public school students of adequate to sub-par intellectual curiosity and ability. In truth, many old guard teachers would maintain, even the honors students were not nearly as sharp as the honor students of yesteryear had been; the entire department was reminded of these truths in department meetings and occasionally individually when discussing possible lessons and texts to be used with the old guard teachers. It was this conception of the honors and regular students that I sought to problematize as well as the available texts deemed unworthy of the list and the book list itself. It appeared to me that honors students were largely selected as such due to certain socio-cultural advantages rather than innate intelligence or conspicuous diligence in their academic performance and therefore not a sound basis for the partitioning of available texts. Beyond that I believed and later argued that there was little reason to reserve certain texts for honors students and deny them to the regular students though there were certain necessary differences in the method of teaching such texts depending on the type of students being taught—teaching complex texts to less talented students requires more effort on the teachers part. Also I felt that several of the texts dropped from the approved reading lists were invaluable for teaching high school students certain important concepts. This basically outlines the situation as I found it—

provides the genealogy of the institutional and intellectual metanarrative. Lastly, it explicates those items I wished to problematize in hopes of discovering new truths— renegotiating the metanarrative.

Now that we have used a Foucaultian or postmodern perspective to analyze the institutional context of my teaching let us progress to my philosophy of education and the role of the teacher before getting to the content of my coursework and my efforts to bring a postmodern perspective to it. As I entered into my first year of teaching I realized that it would be necessary for me to have a plan or theory to serve as the backdrop for my teaching and classroom practices. Or to put it into postmodern terms, I realized the need to develop my own metanarrative and would need to negotiate the terms of that narrative with the metanarratives under which I was a subjected as well as with those who would be subject to it—I would need to fit my narrative into place with those of the school district, the school administration, and the department as well as make it fit the needs of my students.

My passion for teaching comes from the years of my own classroom education during which I had the good fortune to meet a number of fantastic teachers and the bad luck to run into some really bad teachers, which I would imagine is the case for many. I was determined to remember what life was like on the student's side of the teacher's desk and not to get caught up in myself, my authority as the teacher, my department, or the curmudgeonly teachers who ought to have stopped teaching years ago. I believed then and believe now that establishing some rapport with your students is the best way to get them to engage with the curriculum. I wanted to share my love of literature with as many students as I could in whatever way they were interested in sharing it. I was assured when

I interviewed for the position that aside from the one Shakespearean text read in each

grade year and some grammar I would have a relatively free hand to design my own

lessons and units. In order to make my thought process clear and my lessons defensible I

knew I needed a philosophy upon which to base my intended class structure and material.

Feeling confident that I could easily devise a metanarrative on my own I did not look to

the other teachers of my department for help in this regard, but set about examining my

own philosophical beliefs and attempting to discern their relevance to education,

particularly my own classroom practices. I began with the four thinkers whose thought

had the most impact in my own life—Plato, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Foucault. It may seem

strange to some to try to achieve some cohesive philosophy of teaching from such

disparate thinkers, but they are in fact more closely connected to one another than might

be assumed. I shall attempt in the next few paragraphs to explain what I took from each

of these thinkers and how I feel it fits together to comprise my teaching philosophy—my

teaching metanarrative. To the ideas gleaned from these philosophers I added healthy bits

which I had taken from the work of Umberto Eco and the writing of Robert Scholes and

arrived at something that I thought would work for me, provide meaningful instruction to

my students, fit my intended postmodern perspective, and be viewed as unassailably

legitimate by those who had authority over me.

Plato famously said through his character Socrates that he was "that gadfly"

whose role it is to constantly be "arousing and persuading and reproaching" those who do

not think beyond the constraints of dogma and what is expected of them—those who do

not examine themselves, their beliefs, and their lives (Plato, 2001). One may well wonder

how an idealist like Plato and postmodernism can get along at all, but remember

postmodernism is not relativism. Postmodernism stresses the need to recognize the

metanarratives in place and to challenge their authority with a view to discovering a new

truth which in some sense is really what Socrates is asking the people of Athens to do

when he challenges them to examine their lives and beliefs. From Plato I also took the

notion "that life which is unexamined is not worth living" (Plato, 2001) which struck me

as being tied to the postmodern ideas of being suspicious of metanarratives as well as the

need to negotiate one's own narrative with, within, along, beside, around, over, and under

the other narratives of the world. Plato also inspired me to adopt a modest view of my

own knowledge and importance as Socrates did when questioning the citizens of Athens,

as well to use the Socratic Method to bring students to the realization that they need to

consider what they think they know. The Socratic Method is no mere question and

answer session, but consists of asking a question which requires a complex answer then

picking apart the answer which almost necessarily will be incomplete. I would argue that

Socrates is urging us to problematize all that we think we know and thus to problematize

our very existence, and through examining what we believe we know and our very lives,

to search for truth which may not be the truth we thought it was. That seems to me to be

completely in keeping with Foucault's postmodernism.

 From Nietzsche I took an understanding for the need of both the Apollonian order

and the Dionysian passion—concepts he elucidates in The Birth of Tragedy and The

Genealogy of Morals—as well as the belief that like Zarathustra, the protagonist of

Nietzsche's eponymous novelization of his philosophy, one may not live only in the

heights but must occasionally descend as well. In context of my own teaching and school,

the Apollonian seemed to be a respect for the decorum and order afforded and expected

by the school district, the administration, and English department as well as an appreciation of the order that the rules and expectations of the metanarratives of literature and composition impose. The Dionysian then would be the more visceral feeling one has for certain texts or aspects of writing— the personal, exotic, heartfelt, or dynamic, which does not necessarily conform to or agree with the rules imposed by the disciplines; idiosyncratic uses of language or inspiration found in literature which may be personal or different from the typical interpretation would be examples of this. For me, in postmodern terms, this means that we need to make room, perhaps next to the traditional interpretations, for more personal interpretations and allow the two to renegotiate the true interpretation.

Not keeping to the heights, by which Nietzsche seems to mean places of intellectual and moral height which are aloof from the rest of the world, I took to mean that I ought not to expect the majority or even any of my students to feel the same way I do about literature or writing and that I should not attempt to play the domineering intellectual—the know-it-all, but rather seek to meet them on their own terms or turf and bring literature and composition to them in a way that they would find useful and engaging. The role of the teacher, Nietzsche seems to say, is that of a guide to initiate students into the mysteries of a given discipline—the one who explains the metanarrative of the field to the students. "An educator never says what he himself thinks, but always only what he thinks of a thing in relation to the requirements of those he educates. He must not be detected in this dissimulation; it is part of his mastery that one believes in his honesty" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 512). This seems to me to be clearly related to the need for students to begin by learning the rules and expectations of a discipline's metanarrative. I

also found in Nietzsche the notion that the educator cannot get by on mere instruction and "brain drill", but must also attempt to awaken in each individual to "the supreme value-problem of his nature;" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 484). This supreme value problem of one's nature seems to me to be tied into the postmodern notion of the negotiated self; the idea that one creates one's self from an endless series of negotiations with others and an almost endless array of metanarratives under, over, and within which one must seek to be. It also recalled Socrates' role as gadfly and Foucault's notion of the need to problematize things which have been passively accepted in order to closely examine them.

From Sartre I took the notion of personal responsibility. From the perspective of existentialism this means that you are responsible for everything that ever happens to you as whatever occurs to you ultimately does so due to choices which you have made (Sartre, 1985, p. 23). This found its expression in my encouraging students to recognize the foreseeable outcomes of their own actions and choices. Primarily this pertained to the issues of tardiness, attendance, preparedness, and grades. In essence I told students that it was their choice to be there or not, to be on time or not, or to pass or not; however, there were consequences to face if one chose not to attend, be on time, or do the assigned work, and those consequences would be meted out regularly and evenly unless proper mitigating explanations were presented. I also made a point of explaining and continuously reiterating the fact that being in class regularly makes doing the assigned work easier and makes the likelihood of passing the class much greater. Further, I explained that they would likely think I assigned a lot of homework, but that it was their choice to do it or not; of course the consequence of not doing it was an adverse effect on

their grade for the class up to and including failure. These negative outcomes were theirs to choose if they wanted them. Only in one or two rare cases did this not work out well for me when I was faced with utterly recalcitrant students—the sort on which nothing works, who really believed they did not need any further education. What I sought to accomplish was to give the students authority to negotiate with the disciplinary metanarrative and the homework narrative though I did assert some hegemonic authority in the form of threats for failing to choose as was expected of them; nonetheless I reinforced for them, or tried to, the fact that the choice was theirs and the negotiation as well as its outcomes were their responsibility.

The aspects of postmodern thought that seemed most useful to me came from Foucault. They included the notion that the rules of the game—the language game, or metanarrative, are fluid and alterable and in fact must be challenged and re-established continuously; thus I became determined not to be too set on doing things my way or the way things had always been done. Furthermore, I tried to devise ways of encouraging students to disagree with my interpretations of texts, argue for their idiosyncratic usage over the usage prescribed by Standard English, and even to question my rules and authority. This last item may seem a dubious stance to many and indeed, it did not work out terribly well for me at first. Indeed I am afraid that I may have carried things too far and slipped into the sort of postmodernism that leads to or allows for relativism which makes authority impossible. In my first year my control of the classroom was woefully inadequate to the point that it compromised the amount of things which could be accomplished by me as well as by the students. I struggled with this and strove for a way to reconcile my effort to take a postmodern stance with the need to ensure a functioning

classroom where all my students had the opportunity to learn. I finally came upon some

of Foucault's examination of limits and discontinuity as well as secondary sources

looking at these ideas in Foucault's thought. In the collected essays and speeches of

Foucault entitled Language, Counter-memory, Practice and in an online essay by Bradley

Dilger on http://www.thefoucauldian.co.uk entitled *The Discontinuities of Foucault* I

found an answer—postmodernism is not the rejection of authority but a skepticism of it

which allows one to move past it as that becomes possible and necessary (Foucault, 1980,

p. 35; Lyotard, 1984, p. *xxiv*; Dilger). I had discovered that I had fallen into the trap of

relativism to which the inaccurate application of postmodern thought can lead, and I had

to amend this position in order to ensure an appropriate classroom environment where all

students could learn. While I still encouraged the questioning of interpretations and other

aspects of the material by the students, it was necessary to ensure that they recognized

that I was the local authority in the classroom and would exercise that authority as

necessary to maintain order and discipline. This is an important part of the answer to

those who decry the end of teaching as we have known it; teachers are necessary to keep

order and explicate the terms of a given narrative as it exists to students who have yet to

encounter or master it so that they can begin to negotiate their own terms with that

narrative and cause it to change if they are able and so desire. Without teachers, learning

falls apart amidst the chaos of being a distracted teenager or the difficulty of reinventing

geometry for oneself.

　　To these notions I added Eco's precept that the text as an artifact exists because

some person (the author), wanted to convey some intended meaning or story; that is to

say that all texts are created with a purpose which is to express some thought, idea, or

story to an audience. Authors create texts for a purpose, but whether or not we as readers

might be able to correctly divine that purpose is irrelevant. Eco reminds us that we should

attend to the "*intention of the text*" (Eco, 1992, p. 25). The notion that "between the

intention of the author (very difficult to find out and often irrelevant to the interpretation

of a text) and the intention of the interpreter who (to quote Richard Rorty) simply 'beats

the text into a shape which will serve his purpose', there is a third possibility" (Eco,

1992, p. 25). Eco's notion of the intention of a text is complex and he explains it at length

in Interpretation and Overinterpretation (1992); for our purposes we may conceive it as

the limits on interpretation placed on an interpreter by the words actually contained in the

text. The potential interpretations of the words in the text are different from the author's

exact intent and from the reader beating the text "into a shape which will serve his

purpose" (Rorty, 1982, p. 151). We need only give the text the benefit of the doubt that it

was intended to convey something and, further, then we must allow our attempts to

interpret that something—meaning, story, or idea, to be constrained by what is actually

contained in the text. Any text may not be interpreted to have any meaning which one

desires, but all texts may be interpreted to have multiple meanings limited only by what

words those texts do or do not contain. Although what is and is not contained in a given

text is to some extent debatable, there is a certain point at which it ceases to be so. Take

the example of an engine manual; one may not argue that it says something about the

nature of human love and still be within the realm of what is realistically contained in the

text. This is an extreme or even absurd example, but it serves to illustrate the point clearly

(Eco, 1992, 24ff). This idea quickly becomes much more complicated and convoluted

when looking at fictional texts, but nonetheless remains true. This grounds our

postmodernism and disallows the sort of relativistic postmodern ideas which lead to a

loss of authoritative meaning.

Another of my guiding concepts, which I found in Robert Scholes' book Textual

Power (1985), is the notion that it is not one's job as an instructor of literature or writing

to overawe one's students with one's own superior textual power. The place to show off

one's own textual power and whereby impress others is in published pieces or perhaps

the faculty lounge and not in the classroom. Textual power is "the power to select (and

therefore to suppress), the power to shape and to present certain aspects of the human

experience" (Scholes, 1985, p. 20). Textual power, in Scholes' view, is comprised of

three elements—reading, interpretation, and criticism, while writing—textual creation, is

related to and a part of all three (1985, p 20ff). Scholes maintains that one's job in the

classroom is to assist students in acquiring textual power—the power to create, interpret,

and critique texts, for themselves (1985, p. 20). This is best accomplished by initiating

those students into the current rules for textual production—grammar, Standard English,

MLA documentation style, APA style, and the standards for interpretation of texts—the

various interpretive frameworks one might apply. In a postmodern classroom, it should

also be made clear that there may exist or that students may create other interpretive

frameworks should they choose to after acquiring the necessary skills. Thus part of

helping them acquire power over texts is showing them enough models so that they are

then able to produce such frameworks. For me this explained clearly the role of the

teacher in a postmodern classroom; a postmodern teacher seeks to acquaint students with

the rules of the discipline's narrative and to equip those students to negotiate for

themselves with that discipline's narrative. As Scholes puts it we are trying to teach our

students "textual knowledge and textual skills" (1985, p. 20).

I also had some ideas of my own which became part of my metanarrative. These

concepts are mostly not particularly postmodern in nature, but they arose from my own

examination—problematization, of my beliefs about the role of a teacher. I include them

only to complete my genealogy and archeology of my philosophy of teaching which

guides my classroom practices. Having some rapport with one's students is important to

making class interesting and productive. Students need to be challenged rigorously and

held unflinchingly accountable for meeting those challenges. Despite the fact that many

of the students I encountered would not become English majors and some would not ever

be college students, or even life long readers, I had an obligation and opportunity to try to

provide them with meaningful and positive experiences with literature and writing.

Moreover, I felt that it was important to encourage them to work through challenging

texts while they had the benefit of a skilled guide to help them parse out what meanings

we could. Lastly, each group of students was different, the makeup of each class would

likely be different and therefore I would need to be flexible in the type of material I chose

to use; in truth the material is not the main point, but rather functions as a vehicle for

teaching the concepts important to the mastery of the discipline—the metanarrative of

English. The difference in class makeup would also require flexibility in the manner I

attempted to teach any selected material. Although this is the case, it is also an important

opportunity to introduce students to what I like to call cocktail party fodder texts; these

are the big name literature texts, some from the old canon and some from the new, which

might be employed impressively in casual conversation if to no other end. I suggested my

students imagine themselves at a cocktail party with their future boss or a spouse much smarter and more cultured than they, at which point they might find it useful to be able to say, "Back in school when I read Kafka I think he was saying something about the separateness of all of us from one another." I was being silly with them but what I was getting at was that they may find themselves at a point in the future when it would be beneficial to be able to impress someone with their own textual power. Similarly I worked to get them to recognize that their ability to produce coherent texts may also be of value to them in some unforeseen future life. Finally, it seemed to me that it would be important for me to try to use material which I was excited about in order to make it more likely that that excitement might transfer to those students with whom I was trying to share it.

The preceding paragraphs then account for the metanarrative I set for myself and the metanarratives I found in place when I began teaching. I hoped to accomplish the things that the best of my instructors had accomplished—to make my classes challenging, interesting, dynamic, and rewarding, and I felt that I had laid down a sound philosophical grounding that would help me to reach that goal. Hopefully I have managed to set the stage in a clear manner and we can now begin to look at some of the classroom practices all these things led me to. Rather than speak about specific students or specific moments when things seemed to work or not work I will attempt to describe the practices in broad terms and to elucidate some of the problems and success I had.

I have already referred to the fact that my classroom management was compromised by my foolish notion that the students ought to be encouraged to question my authority in the classroom. I had to find a more circuitous way of teaching them the

concept of questioning authority to avoid the disruption of my own authority in the classroom. The notion of questioning authority is central to much of what Foucault's thought sought to accomplish; it is what he intended when he proposed the re-establishment of discontinuity (Foucault, 1972, p. 35) and what Lyotard seems to intend by his suggestion of the need to be skeptical of metanarratives (1984, p. *xxiv*). I realized that it would be best to teach such a thing in the abstract along with the notion that questioning or challenging authority can have consequences which may be unpleasant. One of the ideas I had to this end was the use of texts like Solzhenitsyn's <u>A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</u> and <u>Brave New World</u>. These texts worked well to that end but proved to create other problems. They worked because they are texts about persons living in difficult or heavily rule laden settings and how they accept and struggle against those rules. However, they created problems for me as they were texts which the departmental metanarrative dictated I was not to use, though it should be said that this too reinforced the notion of challenging authority appropriately for my students. By using these texts to convey the possibilities and problems of challenging and accepting authority I had problematized, somewhat inadvertently, the aspects of the departmental metanarrative dictating which texts were to be used with which students.

Before going into detail about specific texts and how and why I used them in my classroom I should probably describe generally how I approached the use of all texts. With each text, or in the cases when reading several texts by a single author, I would begin with a discussion of the author's life and the times in which he lived; the goal here was to try to establish a sense or understanding of the metanarratives at play when the text was created—what sort of text was possible at that time for that individual? Does this

text fit the standards of its time and place and the expectations of the disciplinary and cultural metanarrative or is it in some way dramatically transcendent of them and thus responsible for the establishment of a new metanarrative?

> "Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives from it his own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return, does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true? What is the status of the individuals who—alone—have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridically defined or spontaneously accepted, to proffer such a discourse?" (Foucault, 1972, p 50)

The attempt to answer these questions was the reason I would begin this way. Also this method seemed to make sense because of the notion of an author put forth in Foucault's piece entitled *What Is an Author* (1980, p. 113) and described previously in this paper in the section on postmodern literary analysis. I refer to the concept of the author as a sort of still photo of a person from a particular moment in time and existing in a specific place. Under such a conception it becomes useful to look at that time and place and the person who is an author as they were then as closely as we can; this seems especially true in the case of high school students whose historic and cultural knowledge is limited.

Following a day or two of these preparations we would begin reading the book as a class; reading assignments for homework and writing and discussion as class work. Each class while reading a book would begin with a writing prompt and a ten to twenty minute timed writing drawn from the previous night's reading assignment. For the most

part this had little to do with anything postmodern except that it forced the students to offer up their own ideas on the story rather than to simply take what interpretations I offered as the only correct answer. Its real motivating purpose for me was the practice of timed writing as one would often, and perhaps only, encounter in an academic or testing situation and one way to check who had been doing the assigned reading. During classroom discussions I would attempt to steer things in a postmodern direction by rarely offering my own ideas first, but asking students what they thought or how they might behave in a given character's place. I also found it useful and productive to ask them to attempt to explain why the character's actions must be as they are or why they at least make sense given the circumstances of the story. What I believe to be postmodern about such discussions is that they seek to determine the authority and power involved in a text's depiction of a character's acts—the metanarratives he or she is operating under as well as those under which a given author has created him or her.

Another general aspect of teaching the interpretation of literature to students from a postmodern perspective involves teaching them that different interpretive models— interpretive metanarratives, might lead one to derive different things from one text. This is related to Deborah Appleman's ideas about teaching literary theory to high school students which she lays out excellently in her book titled Critical Encounters in High School English (2000). In postmodern terms it involves helping students to recognize the authority and criteria of various interpretive frameworks and to then see how the likely interpretation of a text changes based on which of these metanarrative one uses. This was not a concept I found easy to apply and seemed to require more time than I ever found to give it to really take hold. Although I was able to do some of it, I rarely got beyond trying

to apply a cultural, feminist, or existential perspective to a text and often only one of those to a given text. For instance when reading several short stories by Anton Chekhov we tried to look at what he may have been telling us about the serfs and Russian culture under the Czars. Likewise, while reading <u>A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</u>, we found it useful to look at episodes in Solzhenytsin's life and the culture of Russia under Stalin's rule to help us determine what points the text might serve. With a class of seniors we were able to find new meaning, or perhaps it should be called more full meaning, in Camus <u>The Stranger</u> when we applied an existential metanarrative to our attempts to interpret the book as opposed to when we simply read it and tried to make sense of it under a more general interpretive model. My only other attempt at applying these sorts of different metanarratives—interpretational frameworks, would be in looking at the portrayal of female characters in Shakespeare; Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, and Juliet are great for this sort of thing. The shortcoming of applying a single interpretive framework to a single text is its failure to reinforce the idea that one might apply a variety of such frameworks or construct one for oneself. Despite my limited ability to apply this idea and the limited success I had when attempting to do so I think it is a valuable and important idea and intend to attempt to work it into my classroom practice more fully in the future.

Solzhenitsyn's book, <u>A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</u>, was one that did not appear on the approved and class specific bookroom list when I began teaching, yet there were several class sets of thirty copies each available in the bookroom. No one in the department had taught it for years and I suspect none who remained had ever read it. After I used it, it reappeared on the bookroom list as a book for seniors; I had been teaching it to sophomores. I was told in no uncertain terms that <u>A Day in the Life of Ivan</u>

Denisovich was beyond the capacity of my sophomore classes to read or comprehend by

the matron of the old guard teachers. I made arguments to the contrary such as the

narrator is a peasant in a gulag—hardly an erudite intellectual, who swears a lot and thus

is not only easily understood by sophomores but serves to titillate them and make them

think they are reading something forbidden. Moreover, many of my students were able to

draw parallels between Ivan's life in the gulag and what they humorously perceived as

their own draconian treatment at the hands of the authorities in their lives. Therefore it

was a useful text not only for teaching about the relationship between authority and those

under authority and the negotiation between the two, but also for teaching the concept of

trying to relate to a character in a story as a method for interpreting the text's meaning. In

postmodern terms it was a text that offered many opportunities to me and to my students.

I had the chance to negotiate with the metanarrative of the department in an effort to have

included ideas that I believed to be valuable and important. My students, in reading the

book, had a chance to look at how people survive in extreme conditions of control and

deprivation—how one negotiates such circumstances. Though direct comparison to their

own lives is an exaggeration, such exaggeration is useful in dealing with the teenage

mind. Finally, it allowed us an opportunity to transgress the boundary or rule—the books

relegation to disuse and perceived suitability only for upperclassman and honors students,

to attempt to reestablish a new rule—the meaningful use of the text for regular

sophomores.

A Brave New World was placed on the sophomore honors list and the fact that I

chose to use it with regular sophomore classes was met with a great deal of resistance. I

chose it because it was a book about authority and control and negotiating a life for

oneself under extreme instances of these things and I sold it to my students as a book about sex and drugs and having sex while on drugs—an irresistible pitch to a teenager. Again the matron of the old guard instructed me to stop using such a book as it was well beyond my students' abilities and again I was forced to challenge the established metanarrative of the department. I argued that the book fit extremely well with the overall body of works I was having them read and that knowing it was one of the most challenging texts we would work with other than *Othello* (this again being a class of sophomores) I would spend extra time on it. In the end it worked out well for my students who found the notions of authority versus individuality and the use of drugs and sex— decadent pleasures, as control mechanisms interesting. They also were very conscious of the fact that the rules were different for different people in the story and that in some cases in some ways it was possible for individuals to alter the rules. Brave New World also served the purpose of helping my students to acquire what Scholes calls textual power for themselves. It did so because they knew they were reading a book reserved for the "smart kids" and when they compared their understandings of the text with those of the "smart kids" whom they knew, they found that they understood it as well, or could express their ideas about it as clearly, as the honors students did.

Another text that I think is invaluable to teaching students about the limits and flexibility of interpretation is Kafka's The Metamorphosis. This text had also slipped from the list of approved texts and languished in the bookroom for years though there were nearly three full class sets available. Once again, when I brought it out the old guard went into a tizzy; the matron of the old guard actually gave me a copy of Scholastic Magazine which had some puerile and mutilated version of the story in it and

cockroaches on the cover which she suggested would be all that my students would be able to handle. I refrained from telling her that Kafka had nearly pulled the story from publication when the publisher tried to adorn the cover with a cockroach. Once more I had the opportunity to engage in a negotiation with the dominant metanarrative of the department. To my students, I would begin talking near the start of the year about this crazy book we would read and how it was about this guy who wakes up one morning as an insect. If this had not been enough to pique the interest of the students I mentioned that he was still his full size—a six foot bug, and that no one knew why or what the story was really even about. I suggested that possibly the author did not know what it was about and that there were likely literature professors who came to blows arguing about the story's meaning and interpretation. The bit about the fighting literature professors may be an exaggeration, but it served the purpose, which was to make my students comfortable, before even approaching the text, with the idea that the interpretation of its meaning was essentially wide open. It should probably also be pointed out that when the students checked out copies of <u>The Metamorphosis</u> from the bookroom they were pleased and excited by how short the story was—about seventy-eight pages in the Bantam Books edition. While we were working with this text we did not simply run willy-nilly claiming it meant whatever we thought it did *a la* Rorty, but we strove to ground any interpretation in the material available from the text and in what we new about the time in which it had been written and the life of the author. Our efforts gave the text and author the benefit of the doubt as Eco might put it (Eco 1992).

In all these cases though we began as Eco suggests we must, by giving the author the benefit of the doubt and assuming that they had created a text in order to convey some

meaning. Having accepted that starting point we also knew we had some power over the text and that it was up to us to construct a plausible argument to describe its meaning, given that it was unlikely that we could actually know the intended meaning of the author. And this is what we would attempt to do during class time through the daily writing prompts and teacher directed class discussions. As the teacher in the room my role was not to dictate to students the conventional interpretation of a given text but to ask questions that prompted them to devise an interpretation soundly based in the words of the text. These would be questions like "Why do you suppose this character does this at this point in the story?"; "Would you, in this character's place, have acted the same way?" Why or why not?"; "Do you see any reason why the character must do this at this point?"; "What are the rules governing the character's behavior in his society or time?" These are not dramatically different from the types of questions that any literature teacher might ask. What is different is how they and the responses to them are framed. We assume that the text was created by an author who existed in a certain place and at a certain time to convey some meaning or point, but we also accept that we are unlikely to be able to know exactly what the author intended and we will have to recreate the intended meaning based on the information provided in the text. To that end, we can utilize knowledge about the metanarratives in place when the author created the given text as clues to what was his or her likely meaning.

While these are three texts that I found useful and easy to use in the classroom, the ideas are in no way only valid in application to these texts. Others should be encouraged to use the texts they prefer in ways they, their departments, or their students find meaningful and useful. Any texts can be taught in a postmodern fashion as the key is

to make clear that there are a number of power dynamics governing the creation of the text as well as its interpretation, and it is necessary to be clear as to what those dynamics—metanarratives are. I would argue that the goal is to attempt to understand as fully as possible the socio-cultural and personal metanarratives at play for the author when creating the text as well as the disciplinary and socio-cultural metanarratives in play for those attempting to interpret the text. By striving to do this and approaching the text and its meaning in this way one can claim to be teaching from a postmodern perspective.

To segue into how I attempted to teach writing in a postmodern way we might begin by looking at my first essay assignment. The first essay assignment was a take-home assignment of a three to four page paper on a group of short stories. In the case of the sophomores, this was typically several short stories from Chekhov. The assignment was to write a paper that attempted to argue for the existence of a similar theme through the stories or a similar stylistic element that seemed to unite them as work by the same author, but this is not the most important aspect of the assignment. What was always important to me with the first formal writing assignment was seeing what sort of relationship each student had with academic written Standard English—how well had they mastered the metanarrative. Typically they generally had good ideas in their papers that were often explicated in the most rudimentary or simply poor Standard English and academic style. Upon receiving the papers I would read through them and make detailed comments. Then I would return them without any sort of grade. After which, I would proceed to examine with the class all of the errors committed in the essays and explain that what we were trying to accomplish was quality academic writing in Standard

English. Further I would tell them that this was not easy and not necessarily natural for them, but that this was how educated people expected these sorts of things to be done. If they wanted to be accepted by those people and have an opportunity to get some of that authority for themselves they would need to improve their writing skills. We would spend some time discussing the fact that educated people were usually the ones who had employment to offer and that often promotion might rest on whether or not one is capable of clearly expressing oneself in writing. I would stress to them regularly that academic or "school" writing is more formal than what they did and were likely to do out in the world and that even the rules of academic writing would change depending on the field or discipline they were writing in. The best example of the latter was to have the students consider their math textbook versus their English textbook and how each was written differently. Also we would cursorily discuss the MLA style versus the APA style as well as the way various teachers had expected them to write over the years; in connection with this discussion I would often talk a bit about how I was taught to write over the course of my own education. To reframe these practices in a postmodern context, what we were doing was examining the established metanarratives of composition as well as the authorities which maintain them. Further, by suggesting that if they can master the expectations of this narrative and those who have authority in it, they can come to a place where they have enough authority to alter this narrative and thus that the fact that these "truths" were not entirely immutable was established.

Successive writing assignments would vary in length and often have no assigned theme or expectation other than being an essay which argues some point about a given text. We would sometimes negotiate the length of the paper based on the due date of the

assignment, and we would often discuss the fact that the length of the essay was essentially caprice on the part of the instructor; I wanted them to be sure to understand that there was nothing sacrosanct or even meaningful about the lauded five paragraph essay. I also made a point of always answering a different number when confronted with the silly question of how many sentences would be required per paragraph. On many occasions I would instruct students that a paragraph needed to contain as many sentences as were required to make their point clearly and that it seemed unlikely that this might be accomplished with any less than three. For many students I found that this was in contradiction to what they had previously been taught; they often seemed to believe that a paragraph required a certain number of sentences. My favorite counter to this is to begin by reading the dictionary definition of a paragraph which contains no reference to a specific number of sentences. From there I engage the students in a discussion about why they feel a paragraph needs whatever number of sentences to which they always seem to answer "Because Mrs. So-and-so taught us that." Then we talk about why Mrs. So-and-so might have made up such a rule; we usually quickly come to the idea that Mrs. So-and-so was trying to encourage them to write more and to show them that often times ideas required several sentences to be made truly clear to a given reader. At that point I usually suggest we try to write all our paragraphs twice as long as suggested by Mrs. So-and-so, but it is invariably too late—the students now understand the rules and can not be fooled into trying so difficult a task. Often I would hand back papers without any grade after marking them up and ask for rewrites to force students to focus on their writing and think about the expectations of Standard English and academic writing in literature analysis. So it was that we problematized various notions about what it meant to write well in an

English class and through brief archeological and genealogical analyses students were able to move to new truths about writing.

The other writing exercise I used extensively in my classroom was daily timed writing in response to a writing prompt taken from the previous night's reading. The rules—metanarrative, for this exercise were very different. Though they were encouraged to use proper spelling and grammar when answering these prompts, these things were not as important as getting some ideas down on the paper. We spent some time prior to the first one of these assignments talking about the different rules for them so that the students would be clear what the expectation was. I would explain my reasons for using this type of assignment which were as follows. It seemed a good way to check on who was doing the reading and what their understandings of the text were up to that point. Also it was good practice for the various sort of timed writing exercises common to standardized tests which seem to be ever increasing in their frequency if not their popularity. Finally it was a good warm up activity to get the class focused on English after coming from math or science or whatever other class they had arrived from. The students would then engage in questions and suggestions regarding the time allotted and the expected length for each writing and attempt to negotiate the point in the class period at which the writing would take place and the potential complexity of any writing prompt. This assignment itself is not particularly postmodern, but the way it was approached *is*—by laying out the rules and expectations in detail first with some limited opportunity for negotiation from the students. There was also some leeway to negotiate the allotted time for each response based on the complexity of the prompt that day at the moment of its assignment—the start of a given class period.

At this point it should be clear that my goal was not to teach postmodern writing; I am not even sure what that would mean. My intention was to try to teach writing postmodernly; that is I sought to engage students in a conversation about the rules and who made them as well as why it might be useful for them to master them while trying to get them to practice and develop their formal academic writing skills. So the classroom practices themselves—essays and in-class writing assignments, remained the same as what one might expect to find in any high school English class only our approach to them was changed.

This was also largely the case with the teaching of grammar and usage taught in my classroom. As mentioned before there was a departmental expectation that certain grammatical concepts be taught to students in their freshmen and sophomore years. There was also a departmental method for teaching these concepts as well as required midterm and final exams based on these concepts and their teaching methods. The grammar and usage that was to be taught was relatively useful, such as the proper use of commas and semicolons, the distinction between confusing words such as "to" and "too" or "like" and "as," and the method, devised by a former EHS teacher, was a fairly good one. The teacher who devised the rules retired prior to my tenure but was still friends with many of the older teachers and among the faculty we often referred to the rules and method as Deb's comma rules, as her first name was Deborah. For the students who did not know of this former teacher we commonly referred to these grammar rules as EHS grammar; East High School being the name of the high school. I and at least one other teacher referred to the grammar rules we taught as EHS grammar in order to differentiate these rules from other often conflicting rules available in the textbooks we used, those we had learned

ourselves while in school, and those commonly used by various authors in the texts we read.

Once the students began to master the departmental expectations for the use of commas and these other points of grammar I would engage them in a discussion of the history of the English language and its development through culture mergers and conquests. From that conversation we would proceed to a discussion of commonly held grammatical rules which are not really rules and their likely origins. One of my favorites which I mentioned previously is the notion of a dangling preposition. If you are like me, then several English teachers in your academic life browbeat you with the notion that one must always avoid putting a preposition at the end of a sentence. I say notion because there is no such rule in English. It was fabricated out of thin air, as I discussed in the section on postmodernism and writing. A careful reading of nearly any of the literary greats will quickly show that the rule of avoiding dangling prepositions is at best ignored and at worst simply no rule at all. I believe Winston Churchill put it best when he purportedly said, "Dangling prepositions are something up with which I shall not put." Even if this comment is apocryphal its awkwardness still illustrates the silliness of this alleged rule. We would also look at EHS grammar rules that differed from what I had been taught in school as well as from the commonly held rules in other English speaking parts of the world. By discussing the rules in this way we managed to teach grammar from a postmodern perspective and also, I would contend, to give students a real sense of authority over and ownership of the current rules of Standard English.

It should be fairly apparent that the classroom activities I have described are mostly the tried and true activities that have taken place in high school English, literature,

and composition classrooms for generations. It makes sense then that one might ask "What so postmodern about this stuff?" The differences, although perhaps small, are very significant. Postmodern teaching is a difference in the method of approaching teaching. That difference is that students are engaged in a discussion of the rules and authority of experts governing the practice of the discipline they are studying. Also open to discussion are the ways in which they are to practice and study these rules Finally, they are encouraged to challenge and change the dominance of these rules and authorities. I would argue that this is what it means to teach from a postmodern perspective and that this sort of teaching can have powerful positive impact on helping students to become productive critical thinkers and negotiate a place for themselves in the world.

This seems dramatically different from the typical ideas about the use of postmodern thought in teaching such as are described in Linn's book <u>A Teacher's Introduction to Postmodernism</u> (2000). The difference arises from following the postmodernism of Foucault rather than that of Rorty. The importance of this is that Rorty's conception of postmodernism leads to a place of abject relativism where all authority to make meaning fails and a text becomes whatever an interpreter claims it to be while Foucault's postmodernism leads us to a point where we can analyze the nature, sources, and power of truth with a view to expanding it and redefining it. As Linn describes it, Rorty's basic tenet is that determining "whether a proposition is true" is less important than "finding out whether a vocabulary is good" (Rorty, 1982, p. 142). A proposition's truth is a function of how well it reflects a shared physical reality while a good vocabulary is one which achieves the desired result for the one who employs it (Linn 2000, p. 35; Rorty, 1982, p. 150). The trouble with this is that it willfully ignores

the fact that there exists something, in our case a text, about which one is employing propositions and vocabularies. The fact that we might perceive a text differently does not mean that it does not exist or only exists as we allow it to and further, that we do not share some experience of it; in order for the relativism implicit in such a view as Linn ascribes to Rorty to hold, the text cannot exist as a separate entity in the world, nor can we share any similar experience of it. This quickly leads to the point where teaching literature or writing become meaningless activities or at least become solely the transmission of the notion that the world exists, and so then do texts, only as idiosyncratically perceived by an individual and that all interpretations which provide the interpreter with a desirable outcome are valid. However, if we instead use Foucault's thought as our basis for our examination of this given text and further color it with the limits that Eco tells us exist—that there is a text about the meaning of which we might speculate as far as the words contained therein allow, we arrive at a very different place. We instead must examine the text and its creation in terms of the powers and authorities involved and then offer our interpretations as constrained by what is and is not contained within the text in terms acceptable to the discourse in which we operate unless or until we are able to renegotiate the expectations of that discipline's metanarrative in order to allow for a different interpretation of the text. In order to do this well, students will require guides who have mastered the demands of the metanarrative of the field of English to initiate them into that field and make their own acquisition of textual power possible.

Conclusion
or
How Does this Affect My Pedagogy?

This is the question on every high school teacher's mind and some times on their lips as the exit another professional development seminar or workshop. While one may still have such a question in mind upon reaching this point in my paper I hope that one also has some sense of what the answer is. Basing one's pedagogy on the correct postmodern philosophical thought of Michel Foucault, offers a meaningful way to rethink one's profession al practices and change the things one chooses to do in a language arts classroom or at least to change the way one does them. However, much of what ought to be done in a postmodern oriented language arts classroom will look much like what language arts teachers have done for decades. It is not necessary and is actually rather silly to talk about the end of the discipline of English or to wring one's hands and shake one's head while mumbling about how the teaching of literature is no longer meaningful and the teaching of writing in a postmodern world is impossible. Postmodernism is not the harbinger of doom for the arts of teaching or the discipline formerly known as English any more that it is the clarion for the end of history and reason. It is however an important move towards problematizing the way we seek, acquire, and defend truth and so too the way we approach the interpretation of literature and the critiquing of writing. Moreover, it requires the recognition of truth as knowledge and of the fact that truth— knowledge that is meaningful and valuable, changes over time just as the preferred interpretation of a text changes under certain guiding metanarratives—new criticism, Marxist criticism, feminist criticism, *et cettera ad infinitum*. Also necessary is recognition of the fact that the rules of correct grammar are altered through usage and custom as well

as by situation and situational authorities. This is what a postmodern teacher must strive to get across to their students, an understanding of truth as at once hegemonic yet alterable—the need to learn the rules so that one might reshape them in their own way.

By examining why we teach and study the texts we do, we broaden the discipline of the study of literature in a way which is valuable and may increase student by-in and student success; that success may be greater not only in academic environs but may even be greater in those areas where we hope our students will someday apply those things they have gleaned while in our charge. By making the value, meaning, and authority of the knowledge we teach of part of the focus of what it is we are teaching, we might succeed in aiding our students to acquire power over texts—the power to derive meaning from them effectively as well as the power to create meaningful texts themselves.

High school teachers do not have the luxury of time to choose highly focused and highly segregated course materials and must, by virtue of their role in the educational process, seek to acquaint students with as wide a variety of authors and material as constraints allow. Culturally appropriate materials would necessarily be those of the dominant culture at this point in a young person's education because they need to encounter those things which have had the greatest impact on the greatest number of people to gain as much insight into the origins of that culture in which they live. What postmodern teachers will seek to do is to encourage their students to examine these cultural artifacts—these texts, with a view to seeing how they are products of the power structures of the times in which they were created and the result of the role of a given author within a given power dynamic. The questions of who is and is not part of the canon and what voices have or have not been suppressed or propagated becomes one of

the important questions to be asked regardless of the text being taught. In other words, no matter what text, the student should always be encouraged to wonder why this text and not another. They should ask and seek the answer to the question: what forces and subjectivities have conspired in what ways and under what circumstances to create this cultural artifact. In this way, the material being taught is, itself, problematized and made the focus of the teaching and learning.

The idea that literature, grammar, and composition must no longer be taught at all is a bit more than silly. A quick and cursory glance at the work of Foucault and Lyotard, or even Rorty ironically enough, will make one very aware of the fact that these men, their thought, and the texts by which they explicate them are very much dependent on the existence of grammar and the generally agreed upon meaning of words, although that meaning may be more broad than a dictionary definition, in order to convey these ideas which inspire gibberish about the end of literature, grammar, and composition in the first place. Moreover, and especially in the case of Foucault, postmodernism relies heavily on the interpretation, or possibly it would be better termed re-interpretation—archeology and genealogy, of texts to parse out new and interesting readings which coincide with what is understood and accepted as fact, but shows a different light upon those facts and thus causes their relations to the other facts—the body of human knowledge, to itself appear changed.

So it is that adopting a postmodern perspective for one's pedagogical praxis is not so much a matter of changing what one does but how one goes about doing it. It is not a matter of throwing out the venerable discipline of the study of literature and its interpretation, but rather a means by which we may encourage students to more fully

reflect upon the role of literature in the world—in their world, its value, uses, and origins. Instead of merely teaching them what we think the book is about or what the scholars say the meaning of a given text is we must choose to teach them how to examine the issue of meaning for themselves and the tools by which this is accomplished in the discipline of language arts. It is not that we as teacher need no longer teach the rules of grammar, but rather that we must teach them more grammar, more of the history of grammar, and the idea that grammar and language are fluid tools of which they may become masters. When one stops to think about it, this has always been the true ostensible goal of teaching in the first place and thus postmodernism offers us a way to get closer to more fully achieving the proper goal of teaching.

The complex and difficult texts of Foucault and Eco may not be easily accessible or many may simply not have the time to do the extensive reading to synthesize the thought of these men into something useful for classroom practice. For those who would like to examine these sorts of ideas further, Robert Scholes has described a very applicable approach to what is in essence postmodernist classroom practice that is well and thoroughly informed by contemporary theory in his book <u>Textual Power</u> (1985). Although he advocates the application of this theory for college aged students it would seem to be applicable, with varying degrees of complexity, to younger students as well. Scholes has done an excellent job of providing a cogent method for the application of postmodern thought to the literature, rhetoric, and composition classroom. It is my hope that this paper has also succeeded in making the useful ideas of postmodernism—the ideas and methods presented by Foucault, accessible to my fellow high school language arts instructors. I believe that this type of postmodern teaching, based on the work of

Foucault and colored by the ideas of Eco, will empower students and make them better

readers of all types of texts and more confident and capable creators of all manner of

texts as well.

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