

Book Review Editor

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Effective Teaching of Technical Communication: Theory, Practice, and Application

Michael J. Klein, Editor

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Technical communication has greatly changed since Katherine Staples and Cezar Ornatowski (1997) published *Foundations for Teaching Technical Communication* 24 years ago. Program administrators and instructors must address social concerns about accessibility, social justice, and globalization; they must keep pace with rapidly developing technologies; they must integrate innovative, virtual collaborative methods; and they must continually assess curricula and programs to better prepare students for highly specialized, distributed technical workplace environments. To help instructors address these changes in their curricula and programs, Michael Klein's (2021) edited volume, *Effective Teaching of Technical Communication: Theory, Practice, and Application*, brings together contemporary theories and pedagogies of established and emerging technical communication teachers and scholars. The book's primary goal is to augment Staples and Ornatowski's (1997) foundational text so that instructors can enhance their knowledge of current teaching practices. For the most part, Klein's collection achieves its objective, nicely balancing chapters on pedagogical methods with those on workplace applications and theoretical critiques.

Klein divides the 16-chapter text into four parts: pedagogy, curriculum, technology, and community. In the first part, "Expanding Pedagogy," chapter authors Jennifer Bay, Liz Lane, Kira Dreher, and Derek Ross reflect on the ways that instructors can integrate social justice issues into their teaching. Bay's "Beyond Situated Learning: Rethinking Internship Theory and Practice in the Distributed Workplace" encourages instructors to see internships as opportunities to teach soft skills. Such skills, Bay notes, are rhetorical in that they require students to interpret and to "respond effectively" (p. 14) to others in diverse situations and contexts. Emphasizing these skills in internship courses allows instructors to promote discussions about gender, sexual harassment, race, and microaggressions in the workplace. In the book's second chapter, "Interstitial Design Processes: How Design Thinking and Social Design Processes Bridge Theory and Practice in TPC Pedagogy," Lane argues that instructors should teach students about interstitial design, which combines social design theory with design thinking processes. Lane contends that interstitial design can help instructors address social justice issues because social design theory examines how design methods create social change and the design thinking process requires students to empathize with users, define user needs, ideate solutions to those needs, prototype their ideas, and test ideas and products. Perhaps the most controversial chapter in the section for some readers is Dreher's "Engaging Plain Language in the Technical Communication Classroom." Dreher acknowledges that plain language has been historically tied to issues of "race, class, and linguistic privilege" (p. 54) but suggests it can also be used to support social justice issues because it emphasizes "prioritizing and protecting users" (p. 62). Dreher includes discussion prompts that require students to reflect on how plain language can be used as a tactic to disrupt power structures. In the last chapter, "(Teaching) Ethics and Technical Communication," Ross overviews ethical models of decision-making and shares a scenario used in his classes to help students analyze the ways different ethical frameworks affect actions and outcomes. Ross encourages instructors to teach not just traditional ethical models but also indigenous ethical models and feminist models. In this first section, then, authors do show how technical and professional communication pedagogies can be enhanced to address current social issues. They describe assignments and activities in enough detail for other instructors to apply them easily in their courses, but they do not provide comprehensive lesson plans. Additionally, because the section's goal is to expand current

pedagogies, some readers may feel that the treatment of social justice issues is peripheral.

In the book's second part, "Shaping Curriculum," authors with varying levels of technical communication teaching experience share the different ways they've successfully revised courses and programs to better bridge students' academic experiences with professional workplace skills. For instance, in "Creating the 'Through-Line' by Engaging Industry Certification Standards in SLO Redesign for a Core Curriculum Technical Writing Course," Julianne Newmark and Joseph Bartolotta describe how they integrated nine competencies from the Society for Technical Communication's Foundational Certification Exam into their program's student learning objectives. Similarly, in "Regenerating a Once Fallow Ground: Theorizing Process and Product in 21st-Century Technical Communication Ecologies," instructors Adrienne Lamberti and David Grant discuss the ways they redesigned a software- and skills-based program into one that incorporated theory-based learning and community engagement. While these authors discuss revisions at the programmatic level, Chen Chen's "Trial and Error: Designing an Introductory Course to Technical Communication" notes the challenges she encountered while trying to design a face-to-face course at a four-year university that had no technical communication program or instructors. Unlike other chapters in the section, Halcyon Lawrence and Liz Hutter's theoretical chapter "Confronting Methodological Stasis: Re-Examining Approaches to Technical Communication Pedagogical Literacy Frameworks" takes issue with Kelli Cargile Cook's (2002) layered literacy framework, often used by programs to develop curricular (and course) competencies. Lawrence and Hutter maintain that Cook's framework is undertheorized and problematic, and they attempt to develop a more inductive "framework that is responsive, multidimensional, and sustainable" (p. 107). The collection of essays in Klein's second section will be most valuable for administrators looking to design or redesign their technical communication programs. Chapter authors carefully walk readers through their processes, and they include substantial discussions about the strengths and limitations of those redesigns. Some, like Lamberti and Grant, discuss how they acquired interdisciplinary and community partnerships, which administrators will also want to consider.

The third section of Klein's book "Incorporating Technology" introduces technologies instructors are using in their classes to prepare students for the virtual workplace, but it also includes chapters relevant to online learning and assessment. For instance, in

“The Rhetoric, Science, and Technology of 21st Century Collaboration,” Ann Hill Duin, Jason Tham, and Isabel Pederson discuss how online collaboration platforms, such as Slack, and collaborative online repositories, such as GitHub, can be used in technical communication classrooms. Elisabet Arnó-Macià and Tatjana Schnell’s “Preparing Future Professionals in and for a Global Context: A Case for Telecollaborative Educational Initiatives” discuss their class’ engagement with the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP), a global network of university instructors and students who virtually partner and collaborate on “complex projects that involve writing, translating, and usability testing of technical documents” (p. 233). Although Luke Thominet’s “Designing a Team-Based Online Technical Communication Course” does not focus on collaborative technologies, he does show how instructors can effectively implement teamwork in online classes. In a similar vein, Julie Watts’s “Using the Community of Inquiry Theory to Assess Online Programs and Help Students Analyze Their Learning” shares a theoretical approach she used as an administrator to assess online technical communication programs at her institution. Ultimately, the chapters in this section will inspire instructors to use various collaborative technologies even if they are somewhat hesitant to do so.

The final section of Klein’s book, “Engaging Communities,” takes a broad look at different forms of community engagement. Elise Hurley’s “Visual Communication in Community Contexts” recounts her class’s partnership with the Pima County Juvenile Court Center (PCJCC) and their revision of brochures and other documents to improve PCJCC’s community image. Elizabeth Angeli’s “Technical Communication Pedagogy and Layered Literacies in Workplace Training Courses” offers insight into the workplace writing practices of firefighters, who integrate “embodied and multisensory” (p. 289) literacies (among others) when writing patient care reports. Similarly, Jessica McCaughey and Brian Fitzpatrick’s “Hidden Arguments: Rhetoric and Persuasion in Diverse Forms of Technical Communication” demonstrates how a certified public accountant, a labor and delivery nurse, and a physician’s assistant subtly integrate argument and persuasion when completing standardized workplace forms. Additionally, Lisa DeTora’s “Competing Mentalities: Situating Scientific Content Literacy Within Technical Communication Pedagogy” asserts that students need to develop scientific literacies in addition to those described in Cargile Cook’s (2002) layered literacies framework. The chapters in this final section will help instructors make connections between class assignments and competencies and the documents and

literacies that technical communicators practice in their workplaces.

Ultimately, Klein’s collection will be a valuable resource for both technical communication instructors and administrators. Together, the chapters in the collection not only illustrate the field’s growing complexity and the challenges faced by 21st century technical communication instructors, but they also offer strategies and ideas to address these challenges in the classroom.

References

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Author Information

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