

## USF Tampa Library Interlibrary Loan & PRONTO



This material has been supplied by USF Tampa Interlibrary Loan & PRONTO for use in your personal research and scholarship.

All materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title XVII, U.S. Code). All patrons are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

Please visit our [Copyright guide](http://guides.lib.usf.edu/copyright): <http://guides.lib.usf.edu/copyright> for more information.

Please feel free to contact the ILL Office with any questions.

Office: LIB103

Hours: Monday - Friday 8:00am - 5:00pm

Phone: (813) 974-1607

Email: [illreqs@lib.usf.edu](mailto:illreqs@lib.usf.edu)

Web: <http://www.lib.usf.edu/ill/>



ILLiad TN: 1185563

**Journal Title:** Technical Communication  
Quarterly

**Volume:** 2

**Issue:**

**Month/Year:** 6 1993

**Pages:** 249-270

**Article Author:** Thralls, Charlotte,

**Article Title:** The social perspective and  
pedagogy in technical communication.

**Imprint:** EBSCO:eue

**Call #:** T11 .T3362

**Location:** USF LIBRARY--Tampa  
Periodicals

**Item #:**

**CUSTOMER HAS REQUESTED:**  
Hold for Pickup

Lisa Meloncon (U37900200)  
327 Sunnyside Rd  
Temple Terrace, FL 33617

# The Social Perspective and Pedagogy in Technical Communication

Charlotte Thralls

Iowa State University

Nancy Roundy Blyler

Iowa State University

As teachers integrate social theory into the technical communication classroom, it is clear that they interpret the connection between writing and culture in different ways. The result is a range of socially based pedagogies rather than a single paradigm for writing instruction. This essay describes four of these social pedagogies—the social constructionist, the ideologic, the social cognitive, and the paralogic hermeneutic—distinguishing them by their pedagogic aims and classroom practices. The essay closes by discussing the implications of the differences among socially based pedagogies for both teachers and programs in technical communication.

Interest in socially based pedagogy has steadily increased since Lester Faigley's groundbreaking work ("Competing"; "Non-academic") defining the social perspective and describing its major theoretical presuppositions. In this work, Faigley posits that a social view of writing is characterized by one basic tenet: "Human language (including writing) can be understood only from the perspective of a society rather than a single individual" ("Competing" 535). Thus, stresses Faigley, "communication is inextricably bound up in the culture of a particular society" ("Nonacademic" 236).

Influenced by this social perspective on writing, theorists and researchers have attempted to work out the implications of social theory for the classroom. The late 1980s and the early 1990s, for example, have seen greater use of techniques such as cases and collaboration, designed to give pedagogic shape to the connections social theory posits between communication and culture.

Although these techniques have certainly revitalized instruction in technical communication, enabling teachers to go beyond the positivistic emphasis that characterized earlier discussions of the discipline (Rymer 179-80), the profession has tended to view socially based pedagogy as a unified classroom approach, informed by a single theoretical position. Profound differences, however, are now emerging among theorists endorsing a social perspective (Thralls and Blyler)—differences that are causing social theorists to interpret the links between writers and culture in radically alternate ways. As a result, we have an emerging menu of socially based pedagogies rather than a single social paradigm for writing instruction.

Our purpose in this essay, thus, is to assess these various pedagogies in order to illustrate how competing interpretations of the social translate into distinct classroom practices. More specifically, we will describe four socially based pedagogic orientations—the social constructionist, the ideologic, the social cognitive, and the paralogic hermeneutic—showing that, although all share a belief in the connections between writing and culture, each subscribes to a different pedagogic aim and recommends different practices for the technical communication classroom. Ultimately, we hope to show that these differences are rooted in competing philosophical notions about the nature of communication and the teachability of writing, with important implications for teachers and programs in technical communication.

## Social Constructionist Pedagogy

Social constructionist pedagogy stresses the central role that communities play in both writing and writing pedagogy. To be more specific, social constructionists assert that communities shape and even determine the discourse of their members through communal norms (Freed and Broadhead; Lipson)—norms that include not only textual practices but also more abstract practices such as “the kinds of issues that the discipline considers it important to try to resolve, the lines of reasoning used to resolve those issues, and shared assumptions about the audience’s role, the writer’s ethos, and the social purposes for communicating” (Herrington 405).

Because community members share a belief in these norms, they are able to agree about what they will call knowledge. (Kenneth Bruffee [“Social”] discusses this agreement, which he terms consensus.) In addition, a shared belief in communal norms enables community members to produce what Bruffee—based on Richard Rorty’s work—calls “normal discourse” (“Collaborative” 642-43).

Social constructionists’ belief in communities and communal norms, then, influences constructionists’ pedagogic aim.

## Pedagogic Aim

Constructionist pedagogy focuses on acculturating students to the communities they wish to enter—a process that James Porter terms socialization (44) and that Chris Anson and L. Lee Forsberg call “social and intellectual adaptation” (201). Bruffee describes this process of acculturation or socialization as learning to produce normal discourse (“Social” 643) and to participate in the conversations of communities: learning to think in the ways community members think and write about topics that matter within those communities in ways that members endorse (“Collaborative” 638-41). Through this process of acculturation, students come to understand how a given community uses discourse to reach consensus about knowledge. Students also adopt the communal norms governing discourse practices, thus acquiring the tools to become what Bruffee terms “knowledgeable peers” (“Collaborative” 777).

To engage students directly in the conversations of communities, social constructionists advance the concept of collaborative learning, which Bruffee defines as “a process that constitutes fields or disciplines of study” (“Collaborative” 635). Collaborative learning is based on the rationale that the task of learning to think and write as a knowledgeable peer is not solely an individual and mental endeavor but instead occurs through interaction (Bruffee, “Collaborative” 640). In collaborative learning, then, interaction among students in the classroom “provides the kind of social context . . . in which students can practice and master the normal discourse exercised in established knowledge communities in the academic world and in business, government, and the professions” (Bruffee, “Collaborative” 644).

Constructionists’ classroom practices focus on means for facilitating this process of acculturation through collaborative learning.

## Classroom Practices

Constructionists believe that teachers can facilitate students’ acculturation if the classroom mirrors the professional communities students will enter. Constructionists also believe that including collaboration in technical communication classes will enable collaborative learning to take place.

## Mirroring Professional Communities

So that professional communities can be mirrored in the classroom, constructionists believe that teachers should base their classroom activities on research findings, such as Anson and Forsberg’s, and Carol Berkenkotter, Thomas Huckin, and John Ackerman’s findings concerning socialization and initiation, Anne Herrington’s on the intellectual and social conventions demarcating two engineering

courses, Rachel Spilka's on writer-reader interactions in the workplace, or Carol German and William Rath's on the rapidly changing environment of technical communication. Spilka underscores this concept of basing classroom activities on research when she suggests that her findings

might cause technical communication instructors to question seriously what they have been asking novice writers to read in the textbooks about how to compose in the workplace, and to consider making adjustments in how they teach audience analysis and adaptation in their courses. (219)

Employing these findings from research, constructionists then advocate several kinds of activities for the technical communication classroom. One such activity involves the use of cases (e.g., Quinn; Hilton; Karis), which Barbara Couture and Jone Rymet Goldstein argue "give students problems in real-world communication set in organizational contexts that replicate in detail their technical and professional roles" (v). Among teachers, however, there may be concern about the ability of students to envision these roles adequately or about the lack of information provided in some cases (Butler). A second constructionist activity, therefore, involves the use of assignments asking students to construct cases using their experience or the research they conduct (Mahin). Finally, a third activity involves having students write within actual professional situations (Olds), at times provided by internship programs (Mahin). All of these activities, constructionists feel, enable realistic "conversations" among peers within communities to take place and thus facilitate students' acculturation. Collaboration, however, also enables conversation and acculturation.

### Collaboration

Constructionists believe that classroom activities involving collaboration will best encourage collaborative learning and thus best facilitate students' acculturation to professional communities. John Beard and Jone Rymet, for example, assert that "scholars and researchers of collaboration . . . view learning as a cooperative, social enterprise, not only as a competitive, individual activity" (1).

So that students can be involved in learning through collaboration, constructionists endorse such classroom activities as peer review of documents (e.g., Bruffee, "Collaborative") and co-authoring and team writing, where students "gain experience with collaborative writing as it is used in the business and professional worlds" (Morgan et al. 20). In such co-authoring and team writing, however, teachers are cautioned to reflect practice in professional fields by using writing tasks that "(1) are large enough to require a division of labor, (2) benefit from a breadth of specialized skills, or (3) need to represent the synthesis of divergent views" (Morgan et al. 20). In addition, com-

puter-aided instruction is providing new means for supporting collaborative activities that mirror "most business people's work today" (Easton et al. 34). Annette Easton and her colleagues, for example, describe the software that supports collaborative work. This software includes both systems that writers do not use simultaneously—such as word processing, computer conferencing, electronic mail, and group authoring systems—and systems that writers do use simultaneously. Ann Hill Duin and Mary Elwart-Keys and Marjorie Horton then discuss particular tools for computer-aided collaboration: software that functions as "an interactive learning and productivity tool" (Duin, "Terms" 46), and the "Capture Lab" or computer-supported conference room (Elwart-Keys and Horton).

Classroom activities such as those enabling the teacher to mirror professional communities in the technical communication classroom and those involving collaboration will, constructionists believe, provide the pedagogic apparatus necessary to support and encourage collaborative learning, engagement in communal conversations, and thus acculturation to professional communities. Pedagogy influenced by the ideologic critics of social construction, however, views classroom activities differently, as means for rectifying some of the more negative aspects of acculturation that ideologic critics claim social constructionists have ignored.

### Ideologic Pedagogy

Ideologic—or liberatory—pedagogy has been most currently articulated by composition scholars—James Berlin, Patricia Bizzell, Greg Myers, Carolyn R. Miller, John Trimbur, John Schilb, John Clifford, James Sledt—who, in turn, have been influenced by Aristotle as well as such cultural and education theorists as Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Henry Giroux, and Paulo Freire. Although important differences exist among these scholars, they generally share key assumptions in constructionist theory. These scholars tend to agree, for example, that reality, discourse communities, and the self are social constructions; and that language is processed within a framework of community norms—conventions of grammar, style, logical development, rules of evidence, and so forth—which authorize notions of effective communication.

Ideologic critics depart sharply from constructionists, however, on how the discourse norms of communities should inform the focus and aim of writing instruction. For ideologic critics, the fact that community norms govern knowledge and notions of good writing within discourse groups is no reason to valorize those norms in the classroom. For example, C. Miller, T. Miller, Myers, and Trimbur assert that when we uncritically teach students the discourse norms that will enable them to function in their professions as social workers, engi-

needs, or lawyers, we downplay the hierarchical structures of authority that privilege and protect "normal" ways of knowing and speaking within communities. By Myers' account, "consensus in usage, although it seems democratic, ignores the conflicts that characterize language change, and leaves the authority of certain types of language unquestioned" (160).

Holding that constructionists' acculturative pedagogy downplays this link between community norms and authority structures, ideologic critics are primarily interested in raising questions about the political implications of community norms: How do conventions of discourse come to be codified as normal within academic and professional communities; how does this privileging impact on individuals and the larger social good? More specifically, whose interests are protected and reproduced through community norms in disciplinary, professional, and other social groups? What voices and interests are silenced, suppressed, or marginalized when the good, the normal, and the possible are encoded and prescribed through community norms?

## Pedagogic Aims

For ideologic critics, these questions translate into writing pedagogy aimed not at acculturation but at resistance, which Joy S. Richie defines as "the process of critiquing and intervening in oppressive ideologies," helping students "see where they are located within ideology and within the interplay of conflicting ideologies and their own experience" (117). Resistance thus is emancipatory, involving a transformation of critical consciousness. For Giroux, this transformation is expressed in terms of "theoretical opportunities for self-reflection and struggle in the interest of *self-emancipation* and *social-emancipation*" (109; emphasis ours). Self-emancipation encompasses both students and teachers, as students move toward what Berlin calls their "full humanity" (490; see also Shor), and as teachers develop what Myers describes as "awareness" and "belief"—"awareness that one's course is part of an ideological structure that keeps people from thinking about their situation, but also a belief that one can resist this structure and help students to criticize it" (169). Social emancipation then follows, because students and teachers are empowered to act as agents of social change, controlling rather than being controlled by normalized social arrangements in educational, professional, and governmental institutions.

Although scholars advocating liberatory pedagogy see resistance as the pedagogic aim of writing classrooms, they are reluctant to assert that resistance actually constitutes a method of instruction—Myers prefers the term "stance" (169). Scholars do seem to believe, however, that this stance can be facilitated through classroom practices designed to demystify and transform relations of power.

## Classroom Practices

Advocates of liberatory pedagogy in the technical communication classroom believe that problematizing discourse and social interaction are two classroom practices that can reveal to students the ideological work of discourse conventions and promote opportunities for more ethical and egalitarian social relations.

### Problematizing Discourse

Problematizing discourse entails any type of rhetorical analysis that situates language conventions within ideology for the purpose of identifying privileged or dominant systems, including the way social systems reproduce themselves while, at the same time, they dissimulate the fact of domination. In the technical communication classroom, problematizing activities can focus on either written or visual conventions in professional documents. For written discourse, for example, students might emulate M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Dean Steffens' analysis of environmental impact statements or Susan Wells' analysis of instructional manuals in order to see how seemingly objective conventions construct a subject position for readers that protects a dominant group's way of talking and knowing. For graphic elements, students might deconstruct the innocence of maps, following, for example, Ben F. Barton and Marthalee S. Barton, to see how visual arrangements often position readers to view information from the perspective of a dominant order.

Because such analyses encourage students to take a critical perspective on the structures and signs that are traditionally employed in technical documents, liberatory pedagogy shifts the classroom agenda away from acculturation. Instead of helping students adopt the normative conventions of professional communities, problematizing activities lead students to reevaluate rhetorical principles—such as objectivity and unity—valued in much technical writing, and then to experiment with alternate discourses, such as narration (Brodkey) or visual strategies that denaturalize the act of reception (Barton and Barton).

For those advancing an ideologic orientation, problematizing activities also shift the skills orientation away from a mastery of normative rhetoric for fitting into communities and toward "deliberative" or "prudential judgment," which C. Miller defines as "the ability (and willingness) to take socially responsible action" (23; see also Sullivan 381). Because technical communicators should promote the larger community good within which the corporation operates rather than merely reproduce private or corporate interests, students should be encouraged to consider technical rhetoric, Miller maintains, "as a matter of arguing in a prudent way toward the good of the community rather than constructing texts" (23). Problematizing community

discourse facilitates this process by giving students a way to identify and challenge the authority claims implicit in community norms.

### Social Interaction

Like problematizing activities, social interaction, as interpreted within an ideologic orientation, entails strategies for revealing ideology and promoting more responsible social relations. Although constructionist pedagogy also stresses social interaction in the classroom in the form of collaborative learning and writing, liberatory pedagogy emphasizes social interaction as a way to challenge traditional authority structures and even advocate alternate social relations.

Advocates of liberatory pedagogy believe, for example, that collaborative activities in the technical communication classroom can change relations among students by drawing attention to these relations and thus revealing entrenched patterns of class, race, gender, and authority. For Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford and for Elizabeth A. Flynn and her colleagues, collaborative activities can require students to develop nonhierarchical or asymmetrical relations of power, for Mary Lay, collaborative groups can foster androgynous modes of interaction; for Rymer, having students view a videotape of their collaborative interactions can heighten their awareness of how groups privilege or suppress members' voices. For those endorsing liberatory pedagogy, the computerized classroom can offer further opportunities for egalitarian interactions among students. For example, researchers exploring network theory—Duin ("Computer-Supported"); Sara Kiesler, Jane Seigel, and Timothy McGuire; Cynthia L. Selfe and Billie J. Wahlstrom; Thomas T. Barker and Fred O. Kemp—see teleconferencing, which eliminates many cues of status and authority, as a way of fostering more democratic social interchanges.

In terms of the social interactions between students and teachers, proponents of liberatory pedagogy believe the computerized classroom has the further potential to forge new patterns of shared responsibility for learning. Because computer labs are typically incompatible with a presentation mode of instruction—with the teacher as the center of attention—the lab can be used to create a more student-centered classroom, with teachers serving as editors, collaborators, mentors, and problem posers.

Classroom activities that problematize discourse and enable more socially responsible interaction can, ideologic critics suggest, help students understand and resist the authority structures in professional communities. Like the constructionists and their ideologic critics, social cognitive pedagogy is interested in "the social and ideological forces that circumscribe thought and action" (Greene 152). Social cognitivists, however, add a cognitive dimension to this interest.

### Social Cognitive Pedagogy

Social cognitivists unite their concern for social and ideologic forces with their traditional area of study: the mental processes of individual writers. By joining these two interests, social cognitivists view themselves as correcting a deficiency in other social theories about writing. More specifically, social cognitivists believe that because constructionists focus on the power of communities to determine—rather than simply facilitate—communication, constructionists have not fully accounted for the role human agency plays in communication. (See, for example, Greene 150-54; Flower, "Cognition" 282-87.) Social cognitivists wish, then, to redress this imbalance. As Linda Flower says, "I want a framework that acknowledges the pressure and the potential the social context can provide, at the same time it explains how writers negotiate that context" ("Cognition" 284).

In keeping with this dual focus on the social and the cognitive, social cognitivists assume that communication is shaped in two ways. First, social cognitivists subscribe to the constructionist concept of discourse communities, believing that systems of norms help community members create knowledge and communicate. Thus, Sarah Warchauer Freedman and her colleagues posit that "learning to write . . . is learning to enter into discourse communities which have their own rules and expectations" (3). Similarly, in a study of reading-to-write, Flower views her students as "*attempting to enter a new discourse community posed by college*" ("Negotiating," 222; emphasis in original). In this new discourse community, students have "to learn the textual conventions, the expectations, the habits of mind, and the methods of thought that allow one to operate in an academic conversation" (Flower, "Negotiating" 222). These conventions, expectations, and methods of thought then, in Ackerman's words, "strongly influence," but do not determine, community members' discourse (173).

Second, however, social cognitivists believe that the conventions, expectations, and methods of thought that mark specific communities are internalized by individuals as mental constructs or schemata that influence the way people comprehend writing tasks. These schemata "provide procedures for acting in accordance with cultural and contextual expectations" (Ackerman 176), thus facilitating communication. By viewing communal conventions, expectations, and methods of thought as internalized constructs, social cognitivists are able to integrate their belief in community norms with their focus on cognition.

This integration is clear in social cognitivists' concept of strategic knowledge, which Flower defines as "*the goals writers set for themselves, the strategies they invoke, and the metacognitive awareness they bring to both these acts*" ("Negotiating" 222; emphasis in original). To social cognitivists, strategic knowledge is not merely individual and mental. Instead, it is doubly social: it is both drawn from the socially based schemata that writers have internalized and—as Flower claims—



"geared for action within a specific context" where a writer sets goals and calls on certain strategies in "response to the social and rhetorical context as the writer interprets it" ("Negotiating" 222).

Social cognitivists believe that this strategic knowledge, which both expert and novice writers exhibit, can be examined and described. The strategic knowledge of experts, however, becomes the standard to which novices should aspire, because this knowledge enables experts to produce more effective documents than novices are capable of doing. Social cognitivists' belief in the power of expert writers' strategic knowledge then influences their pedagogic aim.

## Pedagogic Aim

Because strategic knowledge can be taught to novices whose repertoire of thinking strategies may be unsuitable for particular communities and contexts, social cognitive pedagogy has an integrated, dual aim: both adaptation to communities and negotiation of new writing situations (Flower, "Negotiating" 227-30). Social cognitive pedagogy seeks to accomplish this dual aim through a growth in metacognitive awareness, which—according to Flower—"means an *increased sense of rhetorical options and an expanded power to direct one's own cognition*" ("Negotiating" 229; emphasis in original).

Metacognitive awareness, thus, allows students to represent more accurately to themselves the demands of writing tasks and increases their strategic knowledge about their rhetorical options for a given writing task (Flower, "Negotiating" 243). Social cognitivists' classroom practices are intended to further this dual process of adaptation and negotiation.

## Pedagogic Practices

Social cognitivists believe that teachers can facilitate adaptation and negotiation through classroom practices that enable students to reflect on their writing processes and that model the strategic knowledge of expert writers. Both types of practices, cognitivists believe, will help technical communication students expand their metacognitive awareness.

### Reflecting on Writing Processes

To engage students in reflection on their writing processes, social cognitivists advocate such activities as the use of protocols and self-studies, where students tape-record their thoughts while they are performing a writing task and then analyze the protocols they generate (Ackerman 191; Flower, "Negotiating" 8). Through such analyses, social cognitivists believe, technical communication students can better understand their writing processes and critique what they do. A

related activity involves audio-taping collaborative writing groups, so that students can be alerted to the collaborative strategies they employ and can alter these strategies if they are ineffective (Burnett 11-12).

### Modeling the Strategic Knowledge of Expert Writers

In order to model the strategic knowledge required in various professional communities, social cognitivists advocate basing classroom practices on research that investigates both the larger social contexts in which writing takes place and the thinking strategies used in those contexts. Concerning larger social contexts, for example, Ackerman and Kathleen McCormick describe the cultural and ideological roots of reading-to-write as an academic task, finding these roots in the legacy of schooling that students have internalized. Concerning thinking strategies, Flower and her colleagues use such methodologies as think-aloud protocols, blind ratings of the quality of texts, and interviews to study the strategies that both expert and novice writers in academe use (*Reading*).

In social cognitivist pedagogy, research such as this then serves as a foundation for classroom activities modeling the strategic knowledge of expert writers. Technical communication teachers can, for example, employ on-line computer aids, heuristics, and—in the case of collaborative strategies—role-playing, as prompts for effective strategies (Burnett 11-13; Flower et al., *Planning* 48). These activities, social cognitivists believe, will enable students to incorporate into their own repertoires the strategic knowledge exhibited by expert writers. In doing so, novice writers may enhance their metacognitive awareness, gaining greater control over their writing processes and their responses to writing tasks in various professional communities and contexts.

To sum up our discussion thus far, then, constructionist, ideologic, and social cognitivist pedagogies all embrace the idea that a system of norms enables communication within communities and thus links writers, writing, and culture. All three orientations, however, offer a unique spin on these norms as they function in technical communication pedagogy: for social constructionists, acculturating students to norms; for ideologic critics, demystifying structures of power that regulate these norms; and for social cognitivists, enabling students to internalize the norms as cognitive strategies for negotiating communities and contexts. Although these different emphases are acknowledged by advocates of paralogic hermeneutics, paralogic theorists suggest that the differences among the constructionist, ideologic, and the social cognitive orientations are less significant than their shared beliefs about the nature of communication and the sense in which writing is teachable. By challenging these shared beliefs, paralogic hermeneutic pedagogy thus poses a radical departure from the other socially based pedagogies.



## Paralogic Hermeneutic Pedagogy

The most recent of the socially based orientations to emerge in composition and technical communication pedagogy, paralogic theory has been articulated most fully by Thomas Kent ("Paralogic Hermeneutics"; *Paralogic Rhetoric*) and Reed Way Dasenbrock, who draw on an anti-Cartesian tradition in linguistics and philosophy, including most directly the work of Donald Davidson. Pedagogy informed by this orientation is based on the idea that communication is a hermeneutic skill refuting codification and therefore that writing must be taught as an unsystematic and paralogic (uncodifiable) activity. Paralogic theorists see the other three socially based pedagogies as holding an antithetical view: that communication is a systemic process that can be codified and taught according to certain internal structures or schemes.

To explain these oppositional claims, paralogic theorists posit the existence of two theoretical camps: an internalist camp, which would include the three socially based pedagogies we have discussed thus far; and an externalist camp, which would include paralogic hermeneutic pedagogy. According to Kent (*Paralogic Rhetoric*), the internalist camp holds that a split exists between the mind and reality—a split mediated by some internal scheme that makes knowledge of the world possible. In terms of language and communication, this emphasis on a mediating scheme means that language is always processed within a systematic, codifiable framework—community norms for constructionists, structures of power that control community norms for ideologic critics, and certain thinking processes for social cognitivists. Because meaning and understanding are always relative to these authorizing schemes, the schemes themselves are what allow people to communicate. Some kind of scheme, according to Kent, is at the heart of all internalist pedagogies; for all "presuppose that discourse production can be reduced to a process that represents, duplicates, or models" these schemes (*Paralogic Rhetoric* 101). In internalist pedagogies, learning to write thus consists of mastering a particular scheme.

Kent and other paralogic theorists reject internalist-driven pedagogies because they believe that internalism cannot explain how communication operates as a social phenomenon. They also believe that internalist schemes attempt to impose control on a communication process that defies such control. To counter what they see as flaws in internalism, paralogic theorists advance an externalist position which holds that meaning and understanding do not derive from internalized schemes that structure language: Neither communal norms, nor the exclusionary power of norms, nor again cognitive strategies based on norms make communication possible. From an externalist perspective, meaning and understanding derive from on-the-spot interpretations people make as they communicate. As an external and social act, communication requires that we interpret the

language of others in the give and take of an interaction in an attempt to arrive at understanding. In Kent's words, "Discourse production . . . always embodies interpretation, for in order to produce discourse that will be comprehensible to others, we must first interpret the other's code before we can attempt to match ours to it" ("Paralogic Hermeneutics" 26).

Because externalists assert that this interpretation is never codifiable or systematic, they reject the idea that writing is teachable as a formalized process involving norms as an authorizing scheme. For externalists like Kent, "no formal pedagogy can be constructed to teach the act of writing or critical reading" ("Paralogic Hermeneutics" 36) and thus writing is teachable only as an uncodifiable negotiation of interpretive moves. This emphasis on unsystematic interpretation informs the aim of a paralogic pedagogy.

## Pedagogic Aim

For those endorsing a paralogic hermeneutic orientation, writing courses should aim to reveal to students the external, social, interpretive, and unsystematic nature of communicative interaction. Under this pedagogic orientation, students would come to understand, for example, that communication is always fluid and indeterminate because norms and cognitive strategies do not themselves stabilize meaning. Thus, writers who are steeped in their own interpretive codes must try to ascertain the codes of prospective readers or other language users. Because these codes of writers and readers, which Davidson labels "prior theories" (442), never match perfectly, writers must engage in what Kent calls "hermeneutic guessing" ("Paralogic Hermeneutics" 29), the development of provisional assumptions about the meanings readers might have for certain words. Readers undergo a similar process in discourse analysis, as they try to ascertain what writers mean by their words. The result of this guessing is a "passing theory" (Davidson 442), a concept that denotes the contingent hermeneutic strategy that writers and readers develop to understand one another. When writers and readers come to share a passing theory, they have reached understanding, although this understanding is itself temporary because additional interactions will lead to further guesses and adjustments among communicants.

Because, for paralogic theorists, writing is a matter of this guessing about another's interpretive strategies, these theorists believe that the acculturative, resistive, and adaptive/negotiative aims of the other three socially based pedagogies are possible only if framed within the larger conception of writing as an open-ended dialogue—the hermeneutic interplay of prior and passing theories. Regarding the aim of resistance, for example, paralogic theorists would embed issues of empowerment—confronting and overturning communal norms—within specific dialogic interactions. For these theorists, it is through

our efforts to understand one another and arrive at a passing theory that we are drawn out, in Dasenbrock's words, "of the prisonhouse of our beliefs and prior theories" and led "to a new understanding or passing theory."

In as much as paralogic hermeneutic pedagogy stresses writing as an open-ended dialogue resisting codification, advocates of this orientation envision classroom practices that bring students into dialogic interaction with others.

## Classroom Practices

Paralogic theorists challenge classroom practices in technical communication that attempt to systematize the language of communities or expert writers. More specifically, paralogic theorists oppose the idea that classroom practices designed to mirror the conventions of communities, problematize these communities' conventions, or expand metacognitive awareness can ever guarantee that students will learn to write. From a paralogic perspective, these practices may help students develop useful background knowledge, but this background knowledge—be it community norms or thinking strategies based on norms—cannot be reduced to a process that students then can apply to subsequent writing projects in order to assure effective communication. For paralogic theorists, students learn by "entering into specific dialogic and therefore hermeneutic interactions with others' interpretive strategies" (Kent, "Paralogic Hermeneutics" 37). To facilitate this learning, paralogic pedagogy would create activities in the technical communication classroom that engage students in dialogic conversations and in student/teacher interactions.

## Dialogic Conversations

Both Kent and David Russell, who have explored the implications of paralogic/dialogic pedagogy, emphasize immersing technical communication students in conversations that occur within their disciplines. Through such conversations about actual problems in their fields, students would bring their knowledge of a discipline into the fluid give and take of actual dialogue, learning firsthand that communication requires active interpretive interaction with another.

For Russell, disciplinary writing is essential if students are to understand this dialogic process: "Students may learn to parrot the phrasing or structure of some genre, but unless they are then involved (directly or vicariously) in the problems, the activities, the habits of those who found a need to use writing in those ways, the discourse is meaningless—except as a requirement of a powerful institution" (194). For Kent, such disciplinary writing argues against the use of cases in the technical communication classroom. Writing generated from cases, according to Kent, promotes monologic instead of dialogic

writing: Such writing "never affects the world in the sense that it engages the other in a dialogic/collaborative way, for in order to engage the other, the writer obviously must possess a conception of the other's identity which is impossible to grasp in the case study approach" ("Paralogic Hermeneutics" 38). This emphasis on dialogue also informs a paralogic perspective on student/teacher interaction in the classroom.

## Student/Teacher Interactions

Paralogic theorists question that, as a method, collaboration will acculturate students to community norms, help students to critique the authority implicit in those norms, or help students internalize expert writers' strategic knowledge. Instead, paralogic pedagogy advances student/teacher interactions as a model of dialogic discourse. As one who grasps the paralogic/dialogic nature of writing, the technical communication teacher would model the hermeneutic interactions with another that must take place in discourse production. By working one-on-one with students—discussing students' writing and making suggestions—teachers would show students that communication is actively linked, in a Bakhtinian sense, to others who have preceded a writer and to others whose responsive reactions a writer anticipates (Bakhtin 91-93). The teacher would help sensitize students to this complex interplay, helping them to "adapt their discourses to the discourses of others" (Kent, "Paralogic Hermeneutics" 40) and thus to understand the paralogic nature of communication.

In describing the paralogic hermeneutic, constructionist, ideologic, and social constructionist pedagogies, we have attempted to point out how differently theorists have interpreted the link between communication and culture and thus envisioned the aims and practices of the technical communication classroom. In the last section, we explore how these differences speak to our concerns as teachers and administrators as we try to sort out socially based pedagogies and consider their implications for technical communication courses and programs.

## Implications of Diverse Social Pedagogies

Clearly, the differences among pedagogic orientations within the social perspective have implications for technical communication teachers as they design their classroom practices. These differences, however, also have broader institutional implications for technical communication courses as they are currently configured in the academy.

## Implications for Teachers

One implication of these differences concerns the degree to which the aims and pedagogic practices of various orientations can be melded in the technical communication classroom. Can teachers, for example, mix the aim and activities of one pedagogic orientation—say the paralogic hermeneutic—with those of the other orientations? Although this question merits lengthier study, we are skeptical that such melding is possible.

Most obviously, because the paralogic position on the nature of communication and the teachability of writing are antithetical to what paralogic theorists characterize as the internalist position, the aims and practices of paralogic pedagogy would seem to be incompatible with social constructionist, ideologic, and social cognitive approaches in the classroom. More specifically, because paralogic theorists believe that communication is an uncodifiable hermeneutic activity and therefore that writing must be taught within the framework of dialogic interactions, paralogic pedagogy cannot be integrated with a focus on communal norms as the authorizing force behind communication or the basis of writing instruction. For example, although paralogic theorists advocate a form of collaboration in the classroom, the dialogic cast that this pedagogy gives to student/teacher interactions makes the paralogic version of collaboration fundamentally different from the acculturative acts of collaboration that social construction endorses, the resistive forms of collaboration that ideologic theorists espouse, or the adaptive and negotiative strategies for collaboration—as evidenced by expert writers—that social cognitivists advance. It would seem, then, that technical communication teachers cannot, at one and the same time, espouse a paralogic hermeneutic and a constructionist, ideologic, or social cognitive approach to pedagogy.

On a less obvious level, however, the superficial agreement among social constructionist, ideologic, and social cognitive theorists about the influence on the writing of communities and their norms may mask a basic incompatibility as well. It is difficult to imagine, for example, how ideologic theorists' focus on resistance to communal norms can be joined with constructionists' focus on acculturation. Because ideologic theorists' problematizing practices are intended to lead students to question their roles as writers in professional settings, these practices appear to undermine the very basis of acculturation. Similarly, although constructionists and social cognitivists agree that acculturation or adaptation to communities is a pedagogic aim, social cognitivists' interest in expanding students' metacognitive awareness leads to classroom practices that position social concerns within the sphere of mental activity. Given social construction's announced opposition to cognitive principles (e.g., Bruffee, "Social" 776-79), such a positioning would seem to signal—at the very least—an incompatibility concerning the focus of pedagogy as it directs classroom teaching.

If, as we suggest, these four socially based pedagogies appear to be incompatible in their aims and classroom practices, technical communication teachers should consider the theoretical underpinnings of their pedagogical practices in order to ensure that these practices will achieve the objectives teachers have set. On the plus side, however, understanding the pedagogic aims that underlie certain classroom practices may assist inexperienced teachers in clarifying for themselves possible objectives for a technical communication class and the ways those objectives might be reached.

In addition to these implications for the technical communication teacher, the differences we describe among pedagogic orientations also have broader institutional implications for technical communication programs.

## Institutional Implications

Given that, of the four socially based pedagogies, only the paralogic hermeneutic rejects the assumption that writing is teachable via a scheme or formalized method, paralogic pedagogy poses the most significant challenge to our institutional structures for teaching technical communication. In its most radical form, we could interpret the paralogic position to mean that we abandon technical communication courses as they are envisioned within internalist pedagogies. From a paralogic perspective, the fact that technical communication cannot be taught through a formalized process based on norms renders internalist-driven writing courses untenable. Such courses can never fulfill their objectives—teaching students to write—and thus there can be little reason to support such courses in the academy.

As an alternative, paralogic theorists would support technical communication courses that are externalist driven. Even with these courses, however, the responsibility for writing instruction would not be the exclusive domain of English departments or writing faculty. Rather, as Kent suggests, writing instruction would be integrated throughout the disciplines: "When we view writing and reading as paralogic/hermeneutic acts, we come to see that writing and reading instruction resides at the very center of every student's academic curriculum," with every instructor "responsible for providing information about discourse production and analysis" ("Paralogic Hermeneutics" 39-40).

Finally, a more modest, though still controversial, implication of the paralogic orientation has to do with the size of college and university courses. The intense one-on-one dialogue between students and teachers required by paralogic pedagogy argues for smaller teacher-to-student ratios than are conventional in most university and technical communication classrooms, and certainly argues against large lecture sections for engaging students in the conversations of their disciplines.

Although we have touched on only a few implications of diverse socially based pedagogies for technical communication teachers and programs, a more detailed discussion is beyond the scope of what we can reasonably address here. Given, however, the growing complexity of the social perspective, we urge the profession to pursue in a vigorous way the discussion we have begun to in order to debate the impact of socially based pedagogies and to clarify competing visions of the social perspective for technical communication.

## Works Cited

- Ackerman, John. "Translating Context into Action." *Reading to Write: Exploring a Social and Cognitive Process*. Ed. Linda Flower et al. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. 173-93.
- Anson, Chris M., and L. Lee Forsberg. "Moving Beyond the Academic Community. Transitional Stages in Professional Writing." *Written Communication* 7 (1990): 200-31.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986.
- Barker, Thomas T., and Fred O. Kemp. "Network Theory: A Postmodern Pedagogy for the Writing Classroom." *Computers and Community*. Ed. Carolyn Handa. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1989. 1-28.
- Barton, Ben F., and Marthalee S. Barton. "Ideology and the Map: Toward a Postmodern Visual Design Process." *Professional Communication: The Social Perspective*. Ed. Nancy Roundy Blyler and Charlotte Thralls. Newbury Park: Sage, 1993. 49-78.
- Beard, John D., and Jone Rymer. "The Contexts of Collaborative Writing." *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 53 (1990): 1-3.
- Berkenkotter, Carol, Thomas N. Huckin, and John Ackerman. "Conventions, Conversations, and the Writer: Case Study of a Student in a Rhetoric PhD Program." *Research in the Teaching of English* 22 (1988): 9-44.
- Berlin, James. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Classroom." *College English* 50 (1988): 477-94.
- Brodkey, Linda. "Writing Ethnographic Narratives." *Written Communication* 4 (1987): 25-50.
- Bruffee, Kenneth A. "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" *College English* 46 (1984): 635-52.
- . "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographic Essay." *College English* 48 (1986): 773-90.
- Burnett, Rebecca E. "Benefits of Collaborative Planning in the Classroom." *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 53 (1990): 9-17.
- Butler, Marilyn S. "A Reassessment of the Case Approach: Reinforcing Artifice in Business Writing Courses." *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 48 (1985): 4-7.
- Couture, Barbara, and Jone Rymer Goldstein. *Cases for Technical and Professional Writing*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1984.
- Dasenbrock, Reed Way. "A Response to Language, Writing, and Reading: A Conversation with Donald Davidson." *Journal of Advanced Composition*, forthcoming.
- Davidson, Donald. "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs." *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*. Ed. Ernest LePore. New York: Blackwell, 1986. 544-46.
- Duin, Ann Hill. "Computer-Supported Collaborative Writing: The Workplace and the Writing Classroom." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 5 (1991): 123-50.
- . "Terms and Tools: A Theory and Research-Based Approach to Collaborative Writing." *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 53 (1990): 45-50.
- Easton, Annette, et al. "Supporting Group Writing with Computer Software." *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 53 (1990): 34-37.
- Ede, Lisa, and Andrea Lunsford. *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990.
- Elwatt-Keys, Mary, and Marjorie Horton. "Collaboration in the Capture Lab: Computer Support for Group Writing." *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 53 (1990): 38-44.
- Fagley, Lester. "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal." *College English* 48 (1986): 527-42.
- . "Nonacademic Writing. The Social Perspective." *Writing in Nonacademic Settings*. Ed. Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami. New York: Guilford, 1985. 231-48.
- Flower, Linda. "Cognition, Context, and Theory Building." *College Composition and Communication* 40 (1989): 282-311.
- . "Introduction: Studying Cognition in Context." *Reading to Write: Exploring a Social and Cognitive Process*. Ed. Linda Flower et al. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. 3-32.
- . "Negotiating Academic Discourse." *Reading to Write: Exploring a Social and Cognitive Process*. Ed. Linda Flower et al. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. 221-61.
- Flower, Linda, et al. *Planning in Writing: The Cognition of a Constructive Process*. Technical Report # 34. Berkeley and Pittsburgh: U of California and Carnegie Mellon, 1989.
- Flower, Linda, et al. *Reading to Write: Exploring a Social and Cognitive Process*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Flynn, Elizabeth A., et al. "Gender and Modes of Collaboration in a Chemical Engineering Design Course." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 5 (1991): 444-62.

- Freed, Richard C., and Glenn J Broadhead. "Discourse Communities: Sacred Texts and Institutional Norms." *College Composition and Communication* 38 (1987): 154-65.
- Freedman, Sarah Warchauer, et al. *Research in Writing: Past, Present, Future*. Technical Report #1. Berkeley and Pittsburg: U of California and Carnegie Mellon, 1987.
- German, Carol J., and William R. Rath. "Making Technical Communication a Real-World Exercise: A Report of Classroom and Industry-Based Research." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 17 (1987): 335-46.
- Giroux, Henry A. *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition*. South Hadley: Bergin, 1983.
- Greene, Stuart. "Toward a Dialectical Theory of Composing." *Rhetoric Review* 9 (1990): 149-72.
- Guinn, Dorothy Margaret. "The Case for Self-Generated Cases." *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 60 (1988): 4-10.
- Herrington, Anne J. "Classrooms as Forums for Reasoning and Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 36 (1985): 404-13.
- Hilton, Chad. "Campus and Community: Sources for Writing Cases that Work." *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 49.2 (1986): 30-31.
- Karis, Bill. "Climbing the Corporate Ladder: Becoming Aware of the Rungs." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 5 (1991): 76-87.
- Kent, Thomas. "Paralogic Hermeneutics and the Possibilities of Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Review* 8.1 (1989): 24-42.
- . *Paralogic Rhetoric: Writing and Reading as Hermeneutic Acts*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1993.
- Kiesler, Sara, Jane Siegel, and Timothy McGuire. "Social Psychological Aspects of Computer-Mediated Communication." *Computer-Supported Cooperative Work*. Ed. Irene Greif. San Mateo: Morgan Kaufmann, 1988. 657-82.
- Killingsworth, Jimmie M., and Dean Steffens. "Effectiveness in the Environmental Impact Statement: A Study in Public Rhetoric." *Written Communication* 6 (1989): 155-80.
- Lay, Mary. "The Androgynous Collaborator: The Impact of Gender Studies on Collaboration." *New Visions of Collaborative Writing*. Ed. Janis Forman. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1992. 63-81.
- Lipson, Carol. "A Social View of Technical Writing." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 2 (1988): 7-20.
- Mahin, Linda. "Replies to Marilyn S. Butler's Article 'A Reassessment of the Case Approach: Reinforcing Artifice in Business Writing Courses.'" *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 49 (1986): 2-4.
- McCormick, Kathleen. "The Cultural Imperatives Underlying Cognitive Acts." *Reading to Write: Exploring a Social and Cognitive Process*. Ed. Linda Flower et al. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. 194-218.
- Miller, Carolyn R. "What's Practical about Technical Writing?" *Technical Writing: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Bettie E. Fearing and W. K. Sparrow. New York: MLA, 1989. 14-24.
- Miller, Thomas P. "Treating Professional Writing as Social Praxis." *Journal of Advanced Composition* 11 (1991): 57-72.
- Morgan, Meg, et al. "Collaborative Writing in the Classroom." *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 50 (1987): 20-26.
- Myers, Greg. "Reality, Consensus, and Reform in the Rhetoric of Composition Teaching." *College English* 48 (1986): 154-73.
- Olds, Barbara. "Beyond the Casebook: Teaching Technical Communication through 'Real Life' Projects." *The Technical Writing Teacher* 14 (1987): 11-19.
- Porter, James E. "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community." *Rhetoric Review* 5.1 (1986): 34-47.
- Richie, Joy S. "Resistance to Reading: Another View of the Minefield." *Journal of Advanced Composition* 12 (1992): 117-36.
- Russell, David R. "Vygotsky, Dewey, and Externalism: Beyond Student/Discipline Dichotomy." *Journal of Advanced Composition* 13.1 (1993): 173-97.
- Rymer, Jone. "Collaboration and Conversation in Learning Communities. The Discipline and the Classroom." *Professional Communication. The Social Perspective*. Ed. Nancy Roundy Blyler and Charlotte Thralls. Newbury Park: Sage, 1993. 179-95.
- Selle, Cynthia L., and Billie J. Wahlstrom. "Computer-Supported Writing Classes: Lessons for Teachers." *Computers in English and the Language Arts*. Ed. Cynthia L. Selle, Dawn Rodrigues, and William R. Oates. Urbana: NCTE, 1989. 257-68.
- Shor, Ira. *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. 1980. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.
- Spilka, Rachel. "Studying Writer-Reader Interactions in the Workplace." *The Technical Writing Teacher* 15 (1988): 208-22.
- Sullivan, Dale L. "Political-Ethical Implications of Defining Technical Communication as a Practice." *Journal of Advanced Composition* 10 (1990): 375-86.
- Thralls, Charlotte, and Nancy Roundy Blyler. "The Social Perspective in Professional Communication. Diversity and Directions in Research." *Professional Communication. The Social Perspective*. Ed. Nancy Roundy Blyler and Charlotte Thralls. Newbury Park: Sage, 1993. 3-34.
- Trimbur, John. "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning." *College English* 51 (1989): 602-16.
- Wells, Susan. "Habermas, Communicative Competence, and the Teaching of Technical Discourse." *Theory in the Classroom*. Ed. Cary Nelson. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986. 245-69.



**Charlotte Thralls** is an associate professor at Iowa State University, teaching in the graduate and undergraduate rhetoric and professional communication programs. Her research focuses on socially based communication theory, including most recently the rhetorical function of visual media in organizational culture. **Nancy Roundy Blyler** is an associate professor at Iowa State University, where she teaches in the undergraduate and graduate professional writing programs. Her major research interests include social aspects of professional communication and narration and professional communication. Together, Nancy Roundy Blyler and Charlotte Thralls were the co-founders and co-editors, for five years, of the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. They have co-authored a number of articles, and their most recent collaborative effort is an edited collection, *Professional Communication. The Social Perspective* (Sage, 1993).

## Live In Japan

Take a career break! Individuals with experience in technical writing, public relations, media and communication, or other related fields interested in teaching English in Japan for one year to employees of major corporations, research firms, and governmental agencies and doing technical documentation work should send (via fax/post) an in-depth résumé to:

International Education Services (IES)  
Shin-Taiso Building  
10-7 Dogenzaka 2-chome  
Shuya-ju, Tokyo 150 JAPAN  
Fax: (81-3) 3463-7089