

RESEARCH BRIEF

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Toward an Accessible Pedagogy: Dis/ability, Multimodality, and Universal Design in the Technical Communication Classroom

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The Article

As a participant researcher, Walters discusses her experience in teaching a technical communication class at Temple University. Technical communication is a broad field including, but not limited to speaking and writing about technical topics, such as computer applications, medical procedures and environmental regulations. Any type of instructions, regardless of the level of complexity is considered technical communication. Walters taught the class through the lens of communication for the disabled. She journaled experiences, discussed various assignments and quoted students from their wiki discussions. Two important themes emerge in the article. One is that substituting one mode of communication for another is an oversimplified method to address the needs of people with a wide range of disabilities. For example, treating those with low vision in the same manner as those who are sightless does not communicate material to the user in the *most* accessible way. Two, very few technical communicators account for temporary disabilities, age and different learning styles. The most profound qualitative finding was a class visit to the campus Assistive Technologies Lab which changed how students processed “ability” as compared to “disability.” She found that tools often used by students with disabilities were highly desirable to students without disabilities.

What This Means for General Education Teachers

Teachers are technical communicators! They provide instructions, communicate procedures and discuss a myriad of concepts to a variety of learners in addition to people with disabilities. Walters identifies tools and methods that are useful to teachers. Her assignments are inspired and could be adapted to a number of subjects. In addition, Walters concentrates on ability rather than disability providing ample examples of how good design is good for all.

Citation

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