

**CONTENT MANAGEMENT**  
**Bridging the Gap Between**  
**Theory and Practice**

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*Baywood's Technical Communications Series*

Series Editor: Charles H. Sides

**BAYWOOD PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.**  
AMITYVILLE, NEW YORK

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## CHAPTER SIX

## Topography of Educational Place(s): Technical Communication, Instructor Preparedness, and Hybrid Courses

*Lisa Meloncon*

It was to satisfy man's curiosity concerning differences of the world from place to place that geography developed as a subject of popular interest.

*Richard Hartshorne (1939, p. 15)*

In the broadest sense, Hartshorne's idea of satisfying man's curiosity about differences in place is the focus of this chapter. More specifically, my focus is the difference in the educational places that technical communication teachers are facing. Far more than writing about this place or that place, taking place as a key component of research means "thinking about the implications of the idea of place" (Cresswell, 2004, p. 122). In this chapter, the implications of the idea of place focus on the shifting dynamic of the classroom into places beyond four physical walls. What I mean by educational places are actual, material, or virtual spaces where technical communication instructors teach. I became curious about the difference of place for instructors if the class is in a traditional location—all meetings are held in a brick and mortar building where students and teacher(s) are face to face; hybrid—some (or all) meetings are held in a brick and mortar building where students and teacher(s) are face to face *and* the course is enhanced through technologies like e-mail, online collaboration, discussion boards, and online delivery of supplemental course content; or online—all meetings and interactions are held in an online environment where the students and teacher(s) are in different physical locations.

Changing educational places, like making the decision to use a content management system (CMS), raises specific questions regarding instructors and educational places: How do instructors know if they can be comfortable in these new places? How does the instructor's role change when she is in a different educational place? How do instructors prepare themselves for the difference of place? And how do we manage multiple, the physical and virtual in particular, educational places? The existing literature for technical communicators offers little in the way of help to answer spatial questions related to instructor preparedness in hybrid courses. I focus on the hybrid course because it seems most technical and professional writing programs offer courses that fit the definition of a hybrid course. In addition, most instructors will offer a hybrid course before a fully online course. The hybrid course would then be the first step in changing *educational places*, and this move is usually facilitated through a content management system (CMS), making explicit the connection between changing educational places and CMS technologies. "These tools [course management systems] were initially developed for use in distance education pedagogies, their use in on-campus classroom settings to complement traditional courses is now considered a viable and often preferred option" (Harrington, Gordon, & Schibik, 2004, para 2). If, as Kenneth Green (2003) believes, the true technology challenges facing higher education are not in specific technologies or products, but instead, about people, policy, and programs, then it is time to bring the people aspect to the foreground. Technical communication instructors, in particular, teach practical writing behaviors and skills that the students will use frequently in the workplace with clients and colleagues. Therefore, in a hybrid course, an instructor not only interacts with students, but also models behaviors and skills that the students will use with their future colleagues and clients—often in similarly hybrid settings. The proliferation of technologies and the pressures, like increased enrollments, competition from corporate universities, student demands for more flexibility, and industry practices that necessitate understanding multiple communication platforms, from inside and outside the academy to, at the very least, supplement courses online warrants an emphasis on preparation strategies for instructors.

Therefore, instead of focusing on more common topics—specific course design using technologies, tips and techniques, or reporting on successes or lessons learned—I focus on theoretical constructions of building new educational places for teaching technical communication and what that means for the technical communication instructor. By using "*place* as an analytical concept that involves the process of shaping meaning and practice in a material sense" (Cresswell, 2004, p. 81, emphasis added), I introduce a theory for understanding the role of place in educational settings. Topographies of educational place(s) merge constructions of place with Edward Relph's (1976) "outsideness and insideness" and his (1984) research method of "seeing, thinking, and describing"

to enable technical communication instructors to make informed decisions about the impacts of expanding educational places.

This theory answers a practical need for ongoing discussions of educator preparation that Hewett and Ehmann (2004) illuminated with their principles for preparing educators to teach writing online and works in tandem with Selber's (2004) metadiscourse heuristics that help educators critically assess the use of technologies in their classrooms. Even though this theory is potentially useful for educators in any discipline, I target technical communication educators specifically throughout my discussion. First, I explain the importance of geography and place to technical communication, then I construct the theoretical topography of educational place. This theory considers how places are constructed and how instructors determine whether they are "inside" or "outside" the constructed place. The final section models this theory by examining a typical CMS, since they are the dominant way technical communication instructors implement and deliver hybrid courses. In addition, a CMS becomes the tool that allows technical communication instructors to change educational places. A CMS is unique in the sense that no other technological tool currently in widespread use alters the educational place like it or allows instructors the ability to control and manage the spatial configurations of their classrooms. Understanding the construction and influence of place and the impact technology has on these constructions is a critical step in developing powerful and useful instructional settings, because it helps instructors understand the pedagogical implications of using a CMS to alter the spatial configurations of their classrooms.

### GEOGRAPHY, PLACE, AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

A CMS not only manages course content, it manages the spatial configurations of the course. So when an instructor asks, for example, students to respond to a discussion thread online, they are asking students to enter into an extended educational space separate from their physical classroom. How to understand if the instructor is ready for such a move is a distinctly geographic question. Geography derives from the Greek words meaning *earth* and *to describe* or *to write*. Geography, then, is the description of Earth's surface and the written expression about Earth. Historically, geography has three branches: (1) physical, which examines the physical aspects of the world around us; (2) human, which studies the impacts of people on the physical world; and (3) regional, which analyzes the political and economic issues associated with the other two branches. All three branches interrelate to provide a comprehensive picture of the world premised on concepts of space and place. Geography's emphasis on spatial relations of the physical environment and human interaction with that environment coincides and connects to teaching, especially teaching technical communication, in interesting ways. David Gillette (1999) reminded instructors that

one "reason we move classes to a virtual environment is to escape the physical constraints of the classroom" (p. 21), which makes geography ideally suited to discussions of hybrid courses in technical communication. Since hybrid courses extend the boundaries of traditional classroom spaces, geography, specifically the concept of place, provides an exceptionally useful choice for analytic examination.

But why all this talk about place? How does place matter to technical communication? To begin, technical communication, as Tony Scott (2006) has reminded us, is unique in that it is an academic field and a profession in the nonacademic working world making it an "in here" and "out there" field. The *where* of technical communication is as important as the *how*. Material constructions of writing and communication are intimately and directly tied to the places that create them. For instructors of technical communication, notions of place matter a great deal as they teach students about the nuances that different work sites bring to bear on the writing experience. Documentation of two similar applications produced by two different companies will look remarkably different. For example, both company A and B use the same piece of specialized hospital equipment. Company A's documentation emphasizes how to use the equipment with patients because they offer direct care, while company B's documentation emphasizes the use of the equipment itself because they focus on training technicians. Technical communication, as a nonacademic field, has always been marked by the sites and locations—the places—where writing happens. Place offers technical communicators another way of understanding the world in which we work as well as understanding how we can contribute to knowledge making within different sites, regions, and locations.

What place means for the technical communication classroom is that fundamentally the classroom changes its *spatial* configuration when it is altered from a traditional course to a hybrid course. The technologies used to implement hybrid courses expand the classroom beyond the material, physical construction of a room. This change in spatial configuration means that teachers have to adapt to a new learning environment. In effect, they create a new place to learn. No longer is the classroom inhabited simultaneously by the students and instructors, nor is it a shared space like an online chat room. The education place is new in the sense that it has different characteristics than before—like anytime access, extended asynchronous discussion forums, and links to multiple sites. This emphasis on place allows teachers to understand and theorize about the material contexts of technical communication instruction and practice.

Geography's attention to place provides a way to systematically reflect on one's expectations and readiness to teach a hybrid course. Carl Sauer (1889-1975) was instrumental in changing the face of geography. In 1925, Sauer wrote *The Morphology of Landscape*, which initiated the discipline's movement toward including human interventions in transforming the surface of Earth and started cultural geography, which "is a sub-field of human geography that focuses

on the impact of human culture, both material and non-material, upon the natural environment and the human organization of space" (Cosgrove, 1994, p. 111). After a decline in practical application, cultural geography experienced a renewed interest in the early 1990s. The new cultural geography movement began with different theoretical assumptions grounded in conflicts, differences, and inequality. How these cultural attributes are distributed spatially and how they relate to the spatial distribution of wealth, power, and justice ground the new cultural geography movement.

Cultural geography has provided valuable insights into better management and design of built environments, which are the man-made material constructions (like buildings, roads, and parks) that surround us. For example, the work of Doreen Massey (1994) has emphasized how space and place connect in profound and intricate ways to concepts of gender, while Don Mitchell (2003) highlighted the politics and power structures found in and produced by space. Mitchell claimed that all cultural clashes are territorial and "literally take place" (p. 5) on the streets during a protest rally, on editorial pages, and in the chambers of city hall as decisions about public spaces are discussed. As these two examples show, cultural geographers have a stake in built environments, in places, and technical communication instructors can use the same methodologies to understand differences in educational places and the impact on how it can change their attitudes about teaching and their approaches to teaching.

The critical emergence of place in the geographic tradition began in the late 1970s. Geographers who labeled themselves humanist geographers published a series of landmark works (Buttimer & Seamon, 1980; Ley & Samuels, 1978; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977) that brought the study of place to the forefront of academic exploration. "After decades of devaluation in orthodox social science—and within human geography itself—place has reemerged with an intellectual vigor that few would have predicted" (Adams, Hoelscher, & Till, 2001, p. xviii). This renewed interest in place enables critical discussion of hybrid courses in technical communication, because extending our classroom places into virtual realms means that teachers are literally redefining the educational places.

Scholarship in technical communication, rhetoric, and composition draws heavily on geographic metaphor for explanation. Scholars have built strong traditions in a variety of places—*contact zone*, *frontier*, *city*, *town*, and *borderland*. Additionally, these metaphoric places provide educators and students the opportunity to build *architecture* and *maps* and work in and from *margins*, *sites*, *paths*, and *locations*. The georhetorical tradition has continued from early work in composition (Shaughnessy, 1977) to an increasing scholarly interest in geography and space/place as it relates to writing (Bolter, 2001; Dobrin & Weisser, 2002; Ede, 2004; Johnson-Eilola, 2005; Mauk, 2003; McComiskey & Ryan, 2003; Nagelhout & Rutz, 2004; Payne 2005; WIDE, 2005). What has not been fully developed in this literature, however, is a sustained emphasis on material places and the effect of those places on writing.

Recently, scholars have begun to take up the issue of material spaces in a critical and useful fashion. In her *Geographies of Writing*, Nedra Reynolds (2004) uses postmodern geographic theories to introduce a robust interpretation of spatial metaphors and to connect cultural geography and composition as she argues for "geographic rhetorics," which study writing and "inquire into the relationships between writers, writing and all places, spaces, sites, and locations" (p. 4). Reynolds's walking tour with geography students from Leeds provides a good example of differences in place and the impact material places have on students. The best example of the consideration of material spaces, especially for technical communicators, is from Rebecca Rickly and Locke Carter (2005).

Rickly and Carter incorporated spatial concerns into their discussions of online instruction by cautioning online educators to identify and "mind the gaps." They noted that they became "mindful of space first and foremost" because it is the most obvious gap between traditional face-to-face classrooms and online learning (p. 124). Rickly and Carter's astute discussion of physical, virtual, and cognitive space shows the complexity of spaces incorporated into any—traditional, hybrid, or online—classroom environment. In a hybrid course, the spaces and places shift throughout the length of the course, which makes the need for instructors to be "mindful of space first and foremost" even more pressing. This emphasis on spatial dynamics and the acknowledgment of gaps as important educational tools helps in situating the rest of my discussion, since it implicitly acknowledges the importance of a material geography of place.

So what does place mean? Place is physical, intellectual, and emotional. Place is physical in the sense that one can identify and name places based on physical features of that place. Place is temporal because they can be conceived in the mind without physical attachment, and place is emotional because people give places their characteristics. Place is also an obvious, complicated, and contested term. Place is obvious in the sense that at any given moment people know *where* they are, where they come from, and in many ways where they are going; place is complicated because the physical area is embedded with cultures, identities, politics, and economics, which brings a variety of complex interactions into how to define the term; place is contested because of its physical locations and its complicated narrative woven together with identities, politics, cultures, economics, and power. Or as in *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) argued, "a place achieves a concrete reality when our *experience* of it is total" (p. 18, emphasis added). Tuan's totality of experience is particular to each person, but generally, for a place to be totally experienced, one must be immersed into the place and form some sort of affective bond with it. Total experience is a fluid construction. For example, most people can easily define home as place because they have experienced it totally. Home brings forth memories; home is a material location; home is a figurative ideal that marks a beginning or ending. Home is totally experienced because it can be lived and remembered. Historian Philip Deloria (2006) characterized place this way: "A place becomes a place only with

the passage of time, and with human *experience*" (p. 26, emphasis added). Extending Tuan and Deloria's "definitions," Relph (1976) characterized places as "fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centers of our immediate *experiences* of the world" (p. 141, emphasis added). The common theme among these "definitions" is that places are constructed and given meaning and value by a person's experience within them, which causes a new set of problems for instructors as they create hybrid educational places.

In his discussion of creating communities in online settings, Terry Anderson (2004) argued that "it may be more challenging than we think to create and sustain these communities and the differences—linked to the lack of placedness and synchronicity . . .—may be more fundamental than the mere absence of body language and social presence" (p. 40). The spatial barrier Anderson describes illustrates the need for a set of principles, a theory, to understand place. To achieve this understanding I want to construct a theory of reflection that provides teachers of technical communication a framework to assess if and when to expand their classrooms into virtual places. As Stephen Daniels (1992) said, "it is the move from 'knowing about' places . . . to 'understanding places' . . . that remains the hallmark of humanist geography" (p. 311), and it is this move to understanding that teachers need to be able to facilitate the change of educational place. It is imperative that teachers of technical communication know the topographies of educational places so they can be better equipped to offer hybrid courses.

## TOPOGRAPHY OF EDUCATIONAL PLACES

The topography of a place is a precise description of it or an analysis showing the relations among its components. The topography of educational places does both. It describes how places are made, and then it analyzes the components of educational places based on the concept of belonging inside or outside the place. Combining both definitions of topography gives technical communication teachers a more complex schema to apply to their own particular explorations into new educational places.

Current scholarship in technical communication, rhetoric, and composition overlooks questions about teacher willingness and preparation. The notable exception to this oversight is Beth Hewett and Christa Ehmann's (2004) book on teacher preparedness, but their emphasis is on one-on-one tutoring of writing. Most scholarship starts with the assumption that teachers have already made the decision to teach a hybrid course. While Kelli Cargile Cook and Keith Grant-Davie's (2005) edited volume is extremely useful because of the depth and breadth of exploring issues in online education from a technical communication perspective, no chapter deals explicitly with helping teachers answer these questions: Should I teach a hybrid course? Am I prepared to teach a hybrid course? Cook and Grant-Davie are not alone in assuming teachers who are

investigating teaching a hybrid course have already decided to do so. Guest editors, Blakelock and Smith (2006), made clear that the special issue of *Computers and Composition* they edited was for teachers already teaching online because they wanted the issue to "address the shift in the interests of DL [distance learning] teachers from the basic principle of how to teach online to research regarding effective online pedagogies and methodologies" (p. 1). Directly addressing the lack of scholarship on teacher preparedness, Pamela Takayoshi and Brian Huot (2002) explained that current composition scholarship "does not address very well the needs of instructors new to a computer teaching environment" (p. 2). Further, as Catherine Schifter (2004) pointed out, "what is missing from this [distance education] literature is a significant discussion of the faculty, full- or part-time, who teach the courses and why some faculty members participate while others do not" (p. 23). One possible answer to the unwillingness of some faculty members to make a shift to hybrid courses is in the concept of place making.

### Place Making

Since one's teaching practices are constituted by and constitutive of the places in which one teaches, teaching a hybrid course extends and complicates one's present practices, which makes it important to understand how places are created. Yi-Fu Tuan (1991) wrote, "A central task for geographers is to understand the making and maintenance of place" (p. 684), and one can also say that a central task for educators is to understand the making and maintenance of educational places. Place making is a complex process that has been the source of debate for many years in geography scholarship, but as the discussion above suggests, specific definitions of place—although elusive—share a common characteristic in *experience*. But how does one gain experience of a place? One way is through dwelling.

Martin Heidegger's (1971) essay, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," proves helpful in understanding how one creates or builds a new educational place and how one experiences that place. One builds something new by noticing differences, and as Hartshorne pointed out in the opening epigraph, the curiosity about the differences can lead instructors to building courses in new educational places. Heidegger exemplifies the idea of place making in his essay. His question, "in what way does building belong to dwelling?" helps the instructor consider moving to hybrid courses because of its emphasis on creating or building new educational places and experiencing—dwelling—in those places. Heidegger limits his discussion to things constructed and uses the construction of a bridge as an example. Building the bridge allows the stream to maintain its course and allows people to cross from one side to the other. The building of the bridge allows the dwelling, but it was the initial desire for dwelling, for a specific location on the other side, that prompted the bridge being built; "Thus the bridge

does not first come to a location to stand in it; rather, a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge" (1971, p. 150). The new location—the other side of the stream—came into existence because of the building of the bridge.

Heidegger insists that one cannot dwell until one has built a location. In this sense, location and place are interchangeable because both Heidegger's location and place are identifiable areas. What this means for the instructor is if they are willing to dwell in a new place then that place can be built. Heidegger, however, posts a caution against describing building as a means to an end, dwelling. This conception of dwelling and building is limiting. Instead, Heidegger wrote, "only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build" (p. 160). Teachers have already made the commitment to dwell in the most basic of Heideggerian ideals. Teachers already dwell in an educational place, the traditional classroom. Because they are capable of dwelling, they are able to build a new dwelling, a hybrid classroom. Teachers can examine traditional courses, an original dwelling, to learn *how* it came to be built. Those lessons can then be applied to new buildings and the subsequent dwelling in those new places. "Building and thinking are, each in its own way, inescapable for dwelling," and it is this process of reflection that gives us the ability to dwell and therefore build.

Building and dwelling enable teachers to gain valuable experience that in turn makes them more attached to their educational places. This increased or new attachment to place through experience is the foundation of place making. A CMS becomes particularly valuable in the process of place making because it facilitates the change in spatial configurations of the classroom. As the tool for expansion, a CMS helps to make educational places "placeless" in the sense that they allow the material constraints of the classroom to be eliminated while simultaneously providing a location for the instructor to dwell. Place making through dwelling is especially important for teachers because it can help alleviate misconceptions and expose new faculty members to hybrid (or online) educational places. In their limited survey, Blakelock and Smith (2006) found a reluctance and stagnation of teachers teaching online, which can be offset by understanding place making as the first step of a teacher's exploration into their willingness and preparedness. Understanding how teachers can help in constructing educational places equips faculty for the move to online courses, technologies of mobility, wireless communication, and whatever the next stage of educational technologies may bring.

Technical communication teachers need to pay particular attention to their identity in this new place. John Brinkerhoff "Brinck" Jackson (1909-1996) explained that place provides people with their identities (1984, p. 152). So if teachers are moving to a different educational place, they need to redefine themselves in light of the change in landscape. This notion of changing or shifting identities is a common refrain in scholarship about online writing instruction. Gillette (1999), Nancy Coppola (2005), and Susan Miller (2001) discussed the

changes of the instructor's role and identity while Stuart Blythe (2001) and Wilhelmina C. Savenye, Zane Olina and Mary Niemczyk (2001) called for instructors who develop Web-based courses to "act like designers." Kristen Walker (2005) was surprised at the difference between teaching technical communication face-to-face and online (p. 207), and Patricia Peterson (2001) wants teachers' roles to be part of a larger conceptual map of issues faced in online learning. Although these authors specifically addressed the instructor's role or identity, they did not provide a way for an educator to understand why their old identity with the educational place is not sufficient for the hybrid educational place. Relph (1976) offered a way around this disconnect by asserting "the identity that a person or group has *with* that place, in particular whether they are experiencing it as an insider or as an outsider" (p. 45) is as important as the place itself.

### Insideness and Outsideness

As the previous discussion has shown, places come into being through experience. Once a space is experienced, it becomes a built place, which means one can now dwell within it. Building for Heidegger is part of dwelling, so if instructors want to extend their classroom places, they are learning to dwell within them as they go through the decision-making process. This does not mean, however, that they can automatically dwell comfortably within the new educational place they have built. It simply means they are capable of dwelling once they gain more experience in/with the place. This is why Edward Relph's conceptions of insideness and outsideness are so helpful, because they provide a way for instructors to view the educational place they have built—even if only in their own thinking—in terms of their own pedagogies and beliefs.

Relph (1976) discussed attachments to places through what he calls modes of insideness and outsideness. He argued that outsideness and insideness constitute a primary aspect of human life and that through varying combinations and experiences of outsideness and insideness, different places take on different identities for different people. In the technical communication classroom, the instructors' feelings of insideness or outsideness depend on their interpretation, creation, and experience of the new educational places. Relph's modes, as they are adapted to the technical communication instructor's identity within academic places, enable instructors to locate their level of experience—how they identify—with hybrid classrooms. Table 1 is a summary of the Relph's modes of insideness and outsideness.

Although Relph classifies seven different modes of insideness and outsideness, his overall concept of place making is normally reduced to a binary, where one is either on the inside or on the outside; actually, the opposite is true. Dualism is not what Relph is trying to show. He is instead trying to relate a continuum of

Table 1. Modes of Insideness and Outsideness

Insideness	Outsideness
<b>EXISTENTIAL</b> A situation involving a feeling of attachment and belonging. Place is fully experienced, holds full significance, and is characterized by a deep and complete identity and affinity with the location.	<b>EXISTENTIAL</b> A situation involving complete uninvolved and separation. Place is where the person feels separate from or alien and cannot be significant centers of existence.
<b>EMPATHETIC</b> A situation involving deliberate effort of perception in which a person willingly tries to be open to place and understand it more deeply. This kind of experience requires interest, empathy, and heartfelt concern.	<b>OBJECTIVE</b> A situation involving a deliberate dispassionate attitude of separation from place. Place is a thing to be studied and considered in terms of their locations and as a distinct object.
<b>BEHAVIORAL</b> A situation in which place is seen as a set of objects, views, or activities. Place is created by deliberate attention to the appearance of place. Place is clearest when it is restricted to a defined area.	<b>INCIDENTAL</b> A situation in which place is the background or setting for activities. Place is incidental to activities and is most common since what we are doing is usually overshadowed by where we are doing it.
<b>VICARIOUS</b> A situation of secondhand involvement with place usually through imagination.	

Source: Relph, 1976, pp. 51-55.

insideness/outsideness. Figure 1 represents Relph's modes adapted for use by technical communication teachers.

In Figure 1, Relph's modes have been adapted to a continuum that better represents the concept he was trying to make. In the adaptation of Relph's modes, vicarious insideness was omitted because it did not provide a useful category for the classroom experience, and objective outsideness and empathetic insideness were combined into one category. This combination of the outside and inside modes connects the two sides of the continuum. Relph's original explanations of objective outsideness and empathetic insideness were so close in meaning that to combine them clarifies the concept to one of a continuous



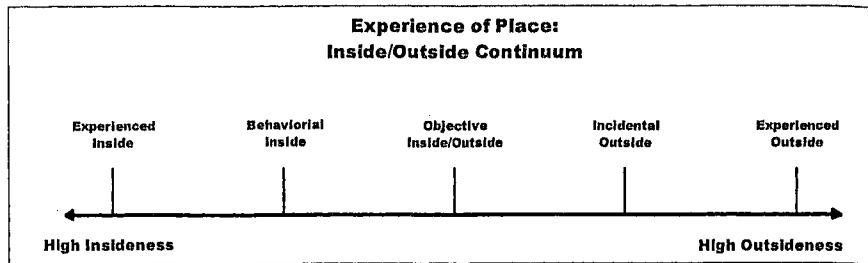


Figure 1. Instructor's experience of place.

exploration and a continuum of meaning rather than rigid binary categories. Teachers can use the continuum to determine their level of insideness or outsideness as it relates to the hybrid classroom. Each end of the scale represents the highest level of experience with the place.

Teachers (and students) can choose how inside or outside they would like to be in this new educational place. One can have a meaningful experience both inside and outside. For example, a new teacher may feel a sense of experienced outsideness on the first day of class but by the end of the semester may feel more like an objective inside/outside. A veteran teacher may feel a sense of incidental outsideness when she teaches a new course because she has not fully experienced the new educational place. As these examples show, inside/outside does not set up boundaries, but allows free movement, which illustrates the flexibility and application of Relph's conceptual structure.

A technical communication teacher can use the continuum as a way to gauge her experience or perceived experience or expectation with teaching a hybrid course. If a teacher has never attempted teaching a hybrid course, she can reflect on her own feelings of doing so by analyzing experience of place in relation to aspects of teaching a hybrid course. For example, a primary component of a hybrid technical communication course would be the use of online discussions. The teacher would need to assess her experience with discussion forums in general and any experiences that may be helpful or harmful to the implementation of online discussions. These experiences would be then categorized as feelings of insideness or outsideness. If she has had limited personal experience with discussion forums herself, she may feel a sense of incidental outsideness because she does not feel totally proficient in managing discussion forums. Or she may feel an objective inside/outside because she is aware of how they work, and she feels she can handle this task accordingly.

Most teachers of technical communication will be able to locate themselves, with regard to specific tasks, tools, assessments, or administrative functions, on the inside/outside continuum that Relph describes. The teacher needs to remember that if she locates herself on the outside of the continuum it may not be

detrimental to classroom pedagogy. Sometimes an outside perspective can bring an additional richness to the classroom. In this case, instructors need to understand that they are entering a new place as an outsider who is willing to dwell. For example, travelers are initially incidental outsiders, but by the time they return home from their trip, they could be considered behavioral insiders. Relph's modes of insideness and outsideness provide a vocabulary for teachers to determine their own attitudes, biases, perceptions, and feelings toward hybrid educational places. This is an important first step in instructor preparedness, especially for hybrid teaching environments.

Doreen Massey and Pat Jess indicated that "our views of place are products of the society in which we live and to that extent the future of those views, even if constrained by circumstances, is in our hands" (1995, p. 50), allowing the instructor to move from the idea of experience of place—insideness and outsideness—to one of systematic methodology of place. To fully appreciate and determine one's level of experience with a place, one needs to see the place, think about the place, and then describe the place.

### Seeing, Thinking, Describing

Relph's contribution to geographic methodology has often been overlooked because seeing, thinking, and describing seems so elementary and obvious. However, teachers often displace, deconstruct, and deflect their own feelings by giving in to pressures from administrators, students, or colleagues or by giving in to perceived needs of the workplace. "In this age of scientific explanation and technology, mere description based on personal efforts of seeing and thinking does strike people as laughably futile" (Relph, 1984, p. 222), but personal efforts of technical communication teachers drive courses and programs that directly affect the learning outcomes of students. Technical communication scholarship needs more emphasis on the personal efforts of teachers, especially as they decide whether to move their classrooms into different spaces; and one way of accomplishing this is by using Relph's methodology, whose seeing, thinking, and describing, are "analytic categories . . . distinguished by reflection" (Relph, 1984, p. 212). The reflective process is key for technical communication teachers. Most teachers take the time to reflect on their teaching practices. When teachers consider shifting or altering the classroom place, reflection takes on greater urgency.

Seeing is direct observation. It is meant to be self-centered and a reflection of what the teacher sees. In this sense, it can be joined with the experienced insider and behavioral insider modes. In thinking, one must not impose fixed methods or strategies but should allow things to "manifest in their own being" (p. 217) while also considering inherent "biases, recollections, and intentions which condition our thinking" (p. 218). Thinking should be "held in tension" (p. 217) with seeing, so thinking is best aligned to the incidental outsider and the experienced



outsider modes. Describing is the final step, where the information one gathered in the seeing and thinking phases are ordered into a tangible and accurate description of a place. In this sense, description contains characteristics of objectivity and is then aligned with the objective insider/outsider mode (see Figure 2).

The move to align seeing, thinking, and describing with stages on the continuum of experiences of place is an important and fundamental one. It forces teachers toward a methodological and analytical framework so they can experience all the parts of the inside/outside continuum. In doing so, teachers are able to understand how they dwell within new educational places.

This theory moves toward a robust analytical tool that helps to offset the rapid deployment of technologies into our pedagogies. Geography and place maintains its significance because as much as hybrid (and online) courses extol the virtues of anytime and anywhere, annihilating the mediating properties of time and space, technical communication classrooms, whether traditional, hybrid, or online, are still bound by place; they are still educational places. Relph (2001) tries to reconcile his methodologies and ideas in time of "confused geographies" where the "world continuously outruns theories and descriptions of it, and in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the pace of social and technological change has created a sort of theoretical vacuum that is now filling with simple concepts that are not always well connected with the everyday world" (p. 159). The theory of topography of educational places described here is an attempt to fill the vacuum and move away from simple concepts. It also moves toward Relph's idea of "critical description" which is a "revision and qualification" (p. 164) of his original seeing, thinking, and describing. His critical description calls for a grounding in everyday places, which is a crucial aspect of the theory introduced here. The technical communication classroom is an everyday place experienced by teachers. Teachers can approach decisions about what to teach, how to teach, and *where* to teach by using the topography of educational place to question what

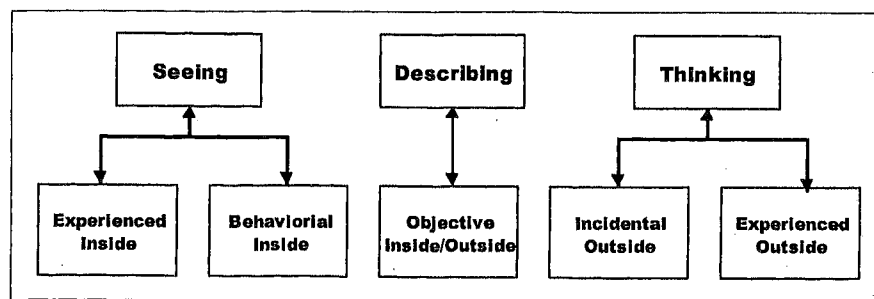


Figure 2. Relph's methodology aligned to the Instructor's experience of place.

they see, balance their thinking with student concerns as well as ethical and social concerns, and describe *critically* how they see *their* classroom in the age of technology. When teachers do this, they create powerful instructional settings and mimic what students should be doing when they enter the *workplace*.

## AN ASSIGNMENT FOR TEACHERS

In proposing the topography of educational place, I realize the abstractness of it, especially in light of weaving together different disciplinary strands. So to make the connection from theory to practice, I will model this theory by examining a typical course management system (CMS), since these systems dominate the delivery and implementation of technical communication hybrid courses. CMS as developed for higher education are designed to enable teachers, with little or no technology expertise, to design, create, deliver, and assess courses delivered totally or partially online.

Kate Kiefer (2006) pointed out that the "teacher can shape the emergent dynamic of a class by the choices about the ways a course is set up" (p. 135). Two important points are embedded in Kiefer's comment: the importance of instructor willingness and preparedness and the specific impact technological decisions have on the class. Technical communication classrooms are differentiated from other types of writing classrooms because of their aims. Technical communication courses focus on bridging the theoretical/practical divide and providing students with a foundation of rhetorical skills they can bring to the workplace. When the CMS is added to the classroom, it expands the places and spaces of the classroom. Topography of educational places, as Graham (1998) suggested, helps to maintain conceptual links between new technologies and place. This linkage enables a fuller understanding of the interrelationships between them (p. 181). Therefore, the imperative facing instructors lies in making good decisions about the way hybrid courses are set up, including choosing which parts of a CMS to use.

CMS seem to be dual edged swords: offering teachers the hope of saving time and effectively "managing content" while restricting pedagogical approaches by being too normalizing and too uniform. Unlike decisions in the workplace, the major stakeholders, teachers, are usually not consulted when the CMS decision is made. The economic push and the technological pull found at many colleges and universities are encouraging teachers to increasingly consider using all or parts of course management systems. In their limited survey to assess the use of open-source tools, Reilly and Williams (2006) found teachers normally "make do" with the universitywide system because of ease of use, support, and student expectations (pp. 80-81). Harrington and colleagues (2004) and Blakelock and Smith (2006) also found a great reliance on commercial CMS software. What these studies show is that while CMS is an integral and visible part of higher education, it still falls to teachers to implement technologies into the

larger pedagogical aims of their courses. It still falls to the teacher to determine whether using a physical blackboard or the commercial Blackboard will best facilitate the learner's construction of knowledge.

### CMS as Place

An important reminder for those involved in teaching and learning is that "place serves as a multiple reality and many different kinds of projects might find their realization in a particular site" (Ley, 2001, p. 6). The projects of instructors, students, and administrators are all somewhat different in relation to CMS. Oddly, CMS has become somewhat synonymous with the phrase "course-in-a-box" software. A box, as a closed, fixed unit, removes any hint of the dynamic and fluid capabilities the Web has to offer. The CMS not only extends the classroom to a different place, it simultaneously creates a fixed location where students must enter. This dual role of expansion and contraction, mobile and fixed, highlights the important need of instructors to examine the CMS as a topography of educational place (see Figure 3).

### Principle 1: Place Making

As I have outlined above, the first principle of the theory of experienced place is to understand how place is made and experienced. Before instructors can begin the specific tasks of determining the experience of place, they need to understand how their institutional place is created and why they are considering teaching a hybrid course. The following questions can act as a guide. These questions are by no means all the questions one can ask, and the questions are largely dependent on the teachers' experience and their location.

- Have you considered all the *places* affecting your educational place(s)? Personal, educational, technological?
- Do you know why you are considering teaching a hybrid course?
- How does the place operate?
- Are you ready to shift existing relationships among faculty/institution, faculty/student(s), faculty/pedagogy, and faculty/beliefs?
- Are there institutionwide (e.g., university, college, department, or corporation) initiatives for online learning?
- Can you agree with the institutional reasons for wanting to use CMS in hybrid courses?
- Is the traditional place functioning well?
- Are you willing to relinquish part of your classroom structure to the CMS's template-driven design controls?
- Has your institution offered you support and encouragement in the transition to hybrid instruction?
- Has your institution offered training and development?

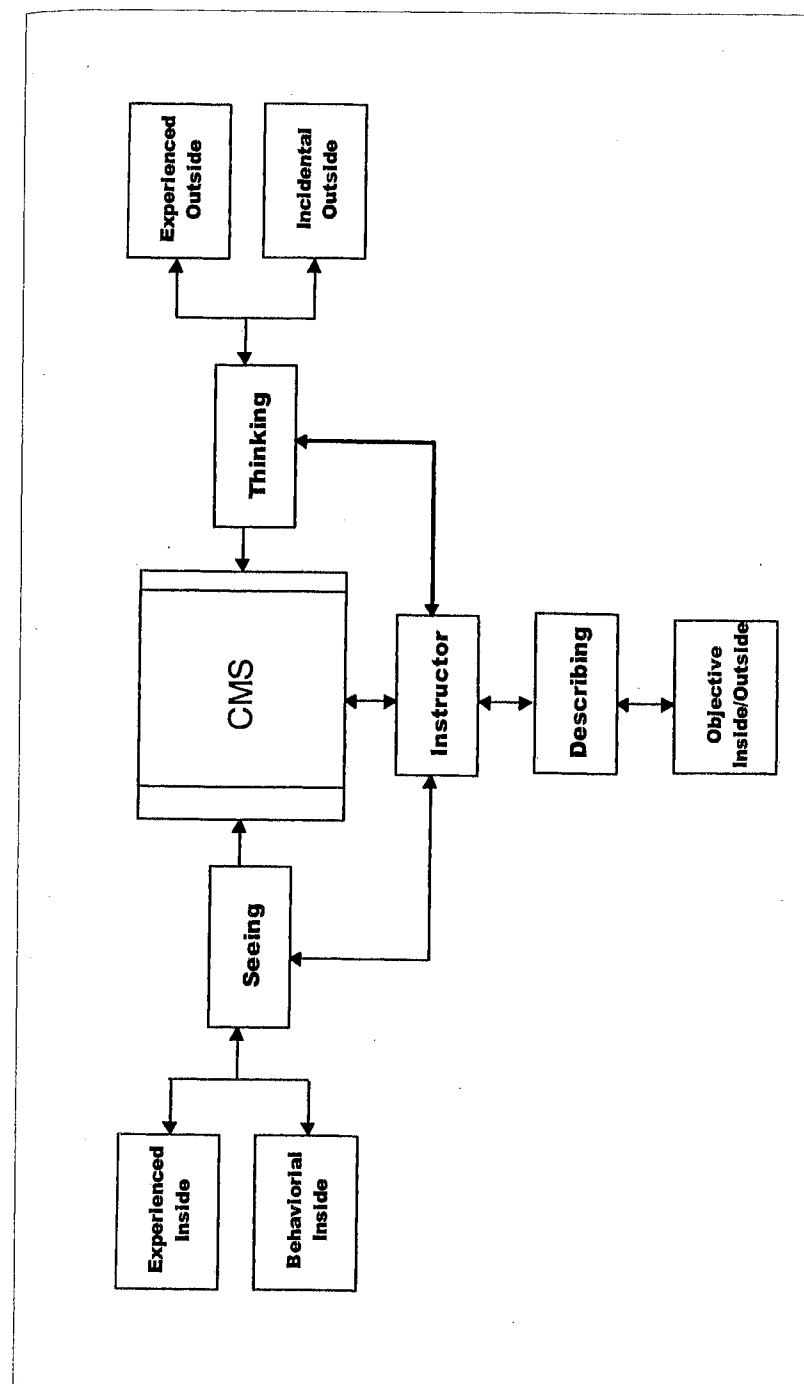


Figure 3. CMS as topography of educational place.

- Is hybrid teaching valued, expected, devalued?
- Are you ready to extend your teaching body, both in the physical and the knowledge-base sense, into another space?
- Are you ready to deal with the potential feeling of being disconnected from your students?

### Principle 2: Assess Modes of Inside/Outside

- What are your present roles as teacher? Are you ready to change them?
- What tools are available to you?
- How can you change your content for this place?
- What is available to you for assessment?
- How can you manage administrative functions?
- What is important for you in a hybrid course?
- How can CMS help? How can CMS hurt?
- What do writing classrooms in particular have to gain from CMS?
- How do planning, implementation, and management issues change for instructors when using a Web-based course-management system?
- What are the time costs?
- How should the state of the landscape be described in context, space, and time?
- How does the place operate?
- What are the functional and structural relationships among its elements?
- How might the educational place be altered: by what actions, where, and when?
- What predictable differences might the changes cause?
- Should the place be changed? Can materials be adapted to a hybrid course?
- How should recent developments and innovations in online education cause us to reexamine our roles and responsibilities as educators in technical communication?

Table 2 provides a matrix for the instructor to see how they can use the experience continuum to assess their readiness to teach online. The matrix is useful in regards to specific tools as well as broader, more conceptual questions. The answers in the last area—ready and willing—are the starting point for the critical description. The teacher needs to explain why she has answered yes, no, or maybe to get a complete picture of her readiness.

### Principle 3: Describe Your Educational Place(s)

Armed with your understanding of how your institutional place is made and your seeing and thinking assessment, your next step is to describe your educational place. The primary objective of this principle is to get a complete,

Table 2. Example of Instructor Preparation to Determine Willingness to Teach a Hybrid Course.  
Example Contains Course Tools Options Found in a Common CMS

Tools	Experience of place				Ready/Willing			
	Experience inside	Behavioral inside	Objective inside/outside	Incidental outside	Experience outside	Yes	No	Maybe
Announcements								
Send e-mail								
Discussion								
– add forum								
– decide settings								
– control								
– rules								
Collaboration								
– lecture hall								
– office hours								
– groups								
Digital dropbox								
Team site								
– use it?								
– edit/no								
– public								
– dates available								
Tasks								

critical description of the existing educational place *and* the hybrid educational place *and* the instructors' thoughts and feelings about both. This principle involves the greatest time and energy investment because, as Relph acknowledged (2001), "it is easy to propose a critical description. It is less easy to accomplish it" (p. 165). A word of caution at this point: one must be aware of histories and biases within the larger places of the university and department and within the instructor themselves. Following is a set of questions that may help guide the description process and work in tandem with the specific questions the instructor has already answered.

- How do technical communication teachers systematically determine whether we should be using a CMS in our classrooms?
- How do we as technical communication teachers understand and talk about the differences the CMS makes on our classrooms?
- In what ways do we see the CMS as empowering or disempowering our roles as teachers?
- How does the CMS help or hinder our abilities to be creative and innovative in our pedagogies?
- How does the use of the CMS situate teachers in relation to university, college, and departmental goals?
- How do these technologies situate our pedagogies against and in relation to what our students will need in the workplace?

Once the description is done, one may find that the feeling of outsideness is the most profound. In cases such as these, the instructor needs to remember that sometimes being a complete outsider provides the best views about what is going on inside. Even if an instructor feels total outsideness, it does not mean she should not teach a hybrid course; it simply means she should be self-aware of her concerns.

#### **Principle 4: Build Your Educational Place**

Deloria (2006) made clear that the forces of globalization redefine existing places as new spaces ready to be named, mapped, and claimed. The process of place making can be depicted as a practiced colonialization that is all about power and domination (p. 29), which is a sentiment echoed by Darin Payne (2005) in his discussions of Blackboard in the composition classroom. Content management systems with their rigid template structures can be seen as a way to dominate both teachers and students. Reilly and Williams (2006) found that "personal labor practices and institutional business decisions have a much greater influence over which tools are chosen than do ideology or pedagogy" (p. 68), which can be seen as disheartening. But Tony Scott (2006) encourages teachers to continue

to be "dedicated both to helping students get along in the world as they find it *and* recognizing theoretical/analytical perspectives that are critical of the terms of work and the broad grim effects of late capitalism" (p. 239). A first step in this pedagogical process is for teachers to understand the topography of educational place and their feelings toward it; because even if instructors have to make capitalist-type decisions and implement the institutional CMS, the time saved should enable the teacher to create open educational places where critical discussions can emerge, even discussions about technologies that create the educational place.

#### **FROM PLACE TO PLACE**

Technical communicator instructors need to take educational place(s) very seriously, because technical communication as a practice is decidedly rooted to location. As Hartshorne suggested in the opening epigraph, geography helps to understand the differences from place to place. Using the topography of place the technical communication teacher can understand how the shifting of place affects the teachers' (and students') basic concept of classrooms and educational places. Teachers must first understand how places are created, how they experience those places through dwelling and being on the inside or outside, and finally how they can use the methodology of seeing, thinking, and describing to assess their readiness and willingness to teach a hybrid course. The CMS offers a practical model of the theory in use.

Instructors often devote so much time and energy to focusing on the students' "sense of place" within classrooms that they forget to attend to their own sense of place. When technologies change the classroom space, especially technologies like a CMS that control the spatial configurations of the classroom in such material ways, the students are not the only ones affected by that change. Technical communication instructors need to be aware that they too can feel displaced.

As institutions continue the push to educate more students with limited staff and resources, CMS and prepackaged course content will become permanent parts of universities and classrooms. Instructors need to be aware that even if the administration advocates use of a CMS, instructors can better prepare themselves for this change and teaching in this educational place by using the techniques outlined here. Even though she may not be completely comfortable in the hybrid or online space, the instructor has a better chance of negotiating and dwelling in this space when she understands how places are made and how she can feel on the inside or outside of those places. When change occurs, the topography of educational place becomes a tool for an instructor's critical and reflective assessment.

Place as a construct is constantly being reinvented, readjusted, and reinterpreted. Place as constructed in a hybrid technical communication course mimics the exigencies of the global business environment where “anytime, anywhere,” and “24/7” are redefining place, but teachers do not need to be caught off guard. The assignment—or practical application of the topography of place—described here is a necessary part of the reflective process advocated by Cook and Grant-Davie (2005, p. 12). The emphasis on instructors to include their perceptions, thoughts, fears, and joys, fills a void in present scholarship and places the reflective gaze on those who drive courses, programs, and student learning. This type of critical self-reflection will also enable our students to approach decisions on the job with the same systematic awareness, which leads to better decisions. The act of critical descriptions matches Tony Scott’s (2006) call to help our students “recognize, articulate, and change how they are situated as citizens/workers/writers by new technologies and coinciding labor trends” (p. 230), and the topography of place is the first step in answering the call of Reilly and Williams (2006, p. 89) to “interrogate the pedagogical efficacy” of distance learning applications.

As I have argued elsewhere (Meloncon, 2007), teacher willingness and preparedness is a key factor in any online education initiatives, and the topography of educational place can help teachers in their preparation. Teacher willingness is as necessary as technological and institutional realities, and this makes teachers’ abilities to determine their own readiness and willingness to shift or extend educational places—to use a CMS and how much to use a CMS—especially important. The challenge for educators and administrators is whether or not and when “faculty attention can shift from preoccupation with adaptation of existing course structures and the mastery of difficult and newly evolving technology to a thoughtful experimentation with customizable pedagogies” (Katz, 2003, p. 58). Once technical communication teachers—both new and experienced—understand topographies of educational places, customizable pedagogies will follow that extend and modify the classroom beyond the physical, material construction of four walls.

What I hope I have done is to provide a reading of a particular place—the hybrid technical communication classroom—from a particular viewpoint, the instructor’s. This particularized reading will generate an interpretation where the instructor becomes and is part of the interpretive circle. Most importantly, however, this reading is not totalizing, since place making is in a constant state of evolution, change—processes. Moreover, by seeing, thinking, and describing the classroom space through modes of insideness and outsideness, one senses the impact of extending learning places, particularly on the instructor’s view of the classroom space. Technical communication teachers need to be proactive in understanding the ramifications of different educational places so they can help their students find their place too.

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