Writing for an International Audience in a US Technical Communication Classroom: Developing Competences to Communicate Knowledge Across Cultures

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Abstract
This paper confronts the local dimension of a U.S. scientific and technical communication program with the new challenges globalization raises, and shows how an assignment sequence implemented in an advanced technical communication course has enacted and nurtured new "communities of practice" (Wenger 1998) that cross institutional borders and favor a social orientation to learning. This paper argues that writing for and collaborating with an international audience helps students to develop a more sophisticated knowledge of their own communication practices, and to perceive the movement from local to global as a transition enabling the creation of knowledge and of new learning processes.

1. Introduction

If the globalization of the workplace increasingly requires that students be prepared to work in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts, U.S. curricula in technical communication often do not meet these new demands. In their 2005 study, Sandi Harner and Anne Rich found that only 1% of undergraduate technical communication programs in the U.S. require a course explicitly in the topic of global or international communication, and only 5% of programs offer such a course as an elective. It is thus essential that programs in technical communication define educational practices that better respond to the needs of the workplace. Since 2007, the authors of this paper, Ann Brady, a faculty member who serves as the director of the undergraduate program of scientific and technical communication at Michigan Technological University (MTU), and Laurence José, a Ph.D. candidate from France, have conducted

curricular research to incorporate more international and intercultural issues in the program.[1]

In this paper, we confront the local dimension of a U.S. scientific and technical communication program with the new challenges globalization raises, and we show how an assignment sequence we designed and implemented in an advanced technical communication course has become a means to enact and nurture new "communities of practice" (Wenger 1998) that cross institutional borders and that favor a social orientation to learning. Ultimately, we argue that writing for and collaborating with an international audience helps students to develop a more sophisticated knowledge of their own communication practices, and to perceive the movement from local to global as a transition enabling the creation of knowledge and of new learning processes.

2. The Scientific and Technical Communication (STC) program at MTU

2.1. Describing the program

In several significant ways, MTU's STC program has successfully kept pace with current understandings of how knowledge is constructed and acquired in social contexts. Throughout its history, the program has consistently valued the integration of theory and practice. An important influence on writing in the program is the incorporation of a critical perspective with particular focus on ideologies and rhetorics. Student writing is not limited to practical applications and many STC courses teach critical perspectives from both theoretical and rhetorically strategic approaches. The technical communicator as a socially situated "author" is thus a hallmark of the approach to writing in the STC program. This approach sets the technical communicator within larger social, political, and historical currents and questions the accepted roles of conduit and translator. In

short, it places STC students in multiple and interdependent "communities of practice" (Wenger) where they actively negotiate what it means to communicate across a variety of organizational and institutional boundaries.

The program's social approach to writing has also been increasingly influenced by concerns over the artificial boundaries delimiting written from oral and visual communications, echoing Etienne Wenger's (1998: 53) argument that negotiating meaning may involve language but does not require it. An emphasis on design as a critical feature of writing is reflected in the emergence of a set of courses devoted to visual communications, computer applications, multimedia, and web developments. The argument that writing is visual and design-intensive has thus influenced the approach to writing throughout the STC curriculum. In so doing, it also gives students opportunities to see that communication practice, as all practice, is "not stable" (Wenger 1998: 93), that it uses a multiplicity of means to accomplish "sustained attention and readjustment" (Wenger 1998: 53), in this case, writing-as-design to engage with a range of different audiences.

Most recently, the program's approach to writing has confronted the issue of technology head-on by promoting writing literacies across media and genres. This puts the emphasis on literacies rather than disciplines and thus on the negotiation of meaning with community members rather than on the reification of that meaning (Wenger 1998: 61). The current curriculum is based on user-centered (Johnson 1998), student-initiated pedagogical commitments and an emphasis on contemporary rhetorical and critical-social theories (Herndl 1993; Miller 1979; Wells 1986). Writing is not subordinated to technologies; rather, the program promotes multimodal skills and literacies and a critical vigilance over technological fascinations. Writing instruction intersects with rhetorical, critical, and technical literacies with a focus on expanding creative uses of and for these knowledges.

Located in a program with such theoretical dispositions, classes share a resolve to prepare students to think critically and act responsibly as members of the scientific and technical communication community. Assignments encourage students to consider the social and ethical ramifications of their work at the same

time they promote students' efforts to craft quality documents and become familiar with effective composing processes. Co-ops and internships offer workplace experience and outreach to local and national communities. Active student organizations initiate and carry out client projects that support ventures, such as attendance at national conferences. The program's Speakers Series and Worksite Visits project introduces students to writers, clients, and prospective employers, thus increasing their understanding of what it means to work as a professional communicator in U.S. communities of practice.

2.2. Critiquing the program's curriculum in the global context

We have worked hard to provide humanistic contexts for the educational experience of students who will live and work in an increasingly complex society, but, up until two years ago, we had not offered systematic instruction in how cross-cultural and international communication plays into that complexity. Although a 2005 recipient of the "Certificate of Excellence," awarded by a national professional organization, College Composition and Communication, the program did not devote classes to issues of linguistic and cultural diversity.

In many ways, the program thus exemplified Harner's and Rich's (2005) findings cited earlier. We do require, for instance, that students earning B.A. degrees take a modern language. And, language instruction in our department is imbued with an appreciation for the cultural contexts in which the languages are used. The problem, however, is that these classes are not fully integrated with other coursework in the program, or with students' overall programs of study.[2] An STC major might, for instance, be

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[2] Of the 80 programs that Harner and Rich (2005) examined, 7 included a modern language component as a part of the curriculum, a requirement that typically stands as the only distinction between the BS and BA degrees (215, 216).

working toward a modern language certificate, proof of literacy in a language other than English. To complete the certificate requirements, this student might take an advanced Spanish course that poses questions precipitated by intercultural communication, or by issues in business, technology, or science in Hispanic cultures. At the same time, the student may be enrolled in advanced technical communication and design classes, but will find no cross-references there to the Spanish class. In other words, while the STC classes raise questions about social and ethical implications of professional work, they do so in U.S. contexts and without consideration of how those implications are altered or complicated when placed in cross-cultural or international locations.

The result is that while students, such as this one, may graduate with the ability to communicate in another language, they are not necessarily aware of how the cultural dimensions of the languages they speak intersect with the cross-cultural workplaces in which they will find themselves. Students are thus not fully prepared to work in diverse contexts since our curriculum reinforces the myth of linguistic homogeneity (Matsuda 2006).

This lack of cross-reference also appears in other parts of our curriculum, specifically in the relationship between electives and degree requirements. In some respects, we have achieved a modicum of success here since MTU's program is among the 5% of undergraduate technical communication programs in the U.S. that offer courses in global or international communication as electives (Harner and Rich 2005). However, these courses are not necessarily integrated with others that we require. More specifically, to encourage students to see professional communication as an interdisciplinary field, the program organizes its electives around "related subjects pathways," clusters of three courses that focus on similar subjects, such as "language-in-use," "diversity," and "language and culture." The goal is for students to identify relationships among classes they elect to take and to appreciate the interconnectedness of the knowledge the classes represent. Such relationships do indeed exist. For instance, a student electing the "language and culture pathway" may take one course based on a comparative study of interpersonal communication in a variety of cultures, both U.S. and international. To complete the elective

cluster, the same student might take a second course in French, German, or Spanish culture, each offering an historical perspective complimented by literature, film, art, and music, all taught in English.

The problem with this configuration is fourfold. First, not all pathways are clustered around cross-cultural and international issues; students may elect to take a suite of courses in philosophy and rhetoric or in journalism, among others, so some may graduate without any cultural or language instruction. Second, it is up to the individual student to pinpoint the relationships among these classes, a task that not all undergraduates can manage. Compounding the second drawback is a third: very few, if any, opportunities for related or overlapping experiences exist across the pathways courses, so students receive little support if they attempt to make connections between, for instance, German interpersonal communication patterns and German cultural values. Finally, the clusters encourage students to focus on one culture and one language, be it French, German, or Spanish. While better those students be exposed to at least one culture beyond that of the U.S., the related subjects pathways are not completely satisfactory in interrupting linguistic homogeneity or in helping students to understand the rich complexity of cross-cultural communication, or its ubiquity. The pathways promise students the possibility of developing important linguistic and cultural understandings that would allow them to view communication problems from a range of perspectives, but the pathways courses do not fulfill that promise satisfactorily.

One obvious way to interrupt linguistic homogeneity is to place STC students in co-ops—to move them out of Michigan's remote Upper Peninsula, or the Keweenaw, where MTU is located, to places where they might gain experience working with clients and colleagues from a range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Writing proposals, designing websites, and producing informational, instructional, and promotional materials with diverse end users and shareholders in mind offers students invaluable experiences with sustained negotiation and thus a glimpse into the practices of their chosen professional communities. Many of our graduates, in fact, report having gone on co-op. Several have worked in locations at a distance from MTU, such as Virginia and Minnesota. Most of the

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placements, however, are local and remain in northern Michigan and the Keweenaw Peninsula. While local co-ops are as challenging and rewarding as those at a distance, they do not often include international or cross-cultural experience since local economies are not strong enough to support hiring new workforce members or attract new businesses. Several very practical and interrelated reasons explain why students do not often take co-ops beyond the local area: location and money. Michigan's Upper Peninsula is remote. The closest city, with co-op opportunities, is a two-hour drive south. Major metropolitan centers, such as Chicago, are more than eight hours away by car. If students secure a co-op in areas beyond the northern Midwest, they must fund their own travel arrangements, find and fund their own living accommodations, and support themselves in areas that are a great deal more costly than the Upper Peninsula. So, while the STC program has offered co-op opportunities in California for the past three years, the price of getting and then living there discourages most students from applying.

Given these limitations, if we consider three conceptual frameworks, outlined by Constance Kampf, that can help us understand how to prepare students for the international workplace, we see that STC students at MTU benefit from only two at best. The first, "culture as dimensional" (Kampf 1999: 152) focuses on different cultural attitudes and values, such as a preference for feminine versus masculine interaction or collective versus individual negotiation. The second framework, "culture as learnable" (Kampf 1999: 153), foregrounds particular skill sets that can be learned and developed, such as the ability to adapt to different living situations in cross-cultural contexts. STC students who take electives in related subjects pathways with a cultural emphasis will likely be exposed to the ideas and skills represented in these two frameworks, although those who choose other elective pathways will not be exposed to even these two. The third framework, "culture as interactional" (Kampf 1999: 153), both augments and enriches the first two. It suggests that intercultural sensitivities develop fully only when they are practiced "in situ," in sustained face-to-face conversations or exchanges, for instance, with members of different cultures. "This approach compliments the dimensional and learnable approaches to

culture by modeling ways to apply knowledge from the dimensional approach to culture along with competencies from the learnable approach to culture" (Kampf 1999: 155). While STC students and instructors would agree that people acquire the skills and sensitivities of a culture by interacting with it and its members, two years ago, no classes in our program offered the opportunity to do so.

The risk this absence represented was that though trained in rhetorical and critical approaches to technical communication, our students would graduate with an instrumental approach (Moore 1996) to communicating in cross-cultural and international contexts. Given our commitment to thoroughly rhetorical and critical approaches to communication, such an outcome was unacceptable for several reasons. Without interacting with members of cultures other than that of the U.S., our students would not have practice in thinking about these complex audiences in sophisticated ways. Audience analysis and needs assessment would be limited to demographics and "best guesses" about why these audiences would need the information in a particular document or how they might use it. Lacking these insights, students would, of necessity, fall back on a-rhetorical formats and genres in their writing and design work, using them to organize information without the means to make it accessible, thus useful, for their audiences. Even if these students never found themselves interacting with international audiences— highly unlikely in our global economy—if they remained in the northern Midwest throughout their entire working lives, we were committed to a pedagogy that would foreground the relationship between the local and global. In other words, if students could come to appreciate more fully the multiple, intersecting, and at time competing needs of international audiences, their appreciation for the diversity of local U.S. audiences might be enhanced as well.

2.3. Responding to the exigencies of the global context

For quite some time, calls had gone out to the field for increased attention to international and cross-cultural issues in technical communication classrooms (Hunsinger 2006; Miles 1997; Thrush 1993). Scholars had theorized frameworks for developing such

pedagogies (Kampf 1999; Thrush 1997). And, a few researchers had reported what they had learned by working in international classrooms and organizations abroad (Dautermann 2005; Thatcher, 2006). What appeared unavailable were practical applications of this scholarship and research into its successes and shortfalls.

Responding to calls for action and to the needs of our program, in 2007, we began to design a course assignment. We intended for students completing this multi-staged assignment to demonstrate increased sensitivities to the cultural dimensions of language and to the linguistic diversity existing in the classroom and the workplace. Further, we intended that the assignment would take into account the best interests of domestic and international students, as well as those of our program and a second, located in our department, the International Graduate Teaching Assistants Assistance Program (IGTAAP). Theorists such as Etienne Wenger and Robert Johnson informed our pedagogical design, specifically, Wenger's insights into how novices, or outsiders, are initiated into communities of practice and Johnson's work on user-centeredness. We decided to develop the assignment for an advanced technical communication course (Humanities 3120), one that is a core requirement for STC students and fulfills a general education requirement for students throughout the university. As such, the course also draws on a culturally mixed group of students from a variety of locations in the U.S. as well as those that are international. The resulting mix of professional communication students with those from engineering, the sciences, and business—and with some representing different cultural traditions—constitutes HU 3120 as one of the few interdisciplinary classes offered at MTU. Building on this distinct advantage, HU 3120 is designed to advance collaborative work across students' areas of expertise. The rationale for this interdisciplinary and collaborative pedagogy is straightforward. If students come together to negotiate their disciplinary understandings of what it means to write and design documents for complex audience needs, they will enter their own professional communities with a greater appreciation for a variety of perspectives and approaches to solving problems as well as a deeper respect for what it means for others to function in their own communities of practice. Such a rationale made possible the implementation of our assignment

on writing for international audiences, which will be discussed in the following sections.

3. Writing for an international audience

3.1. Describing the assignment and the methodology

In spring 2007, we implemented an assignment on international technical communication in select sections of Humanities 3120 (HU 3120). This assignment requires students to work in teams and to compose instructional documents for an international audience. More specifically, we ask students to design pamphlets to ease the cultural transition of new incoming international students at MTU. For this assignment, we set up the classroom as a fictional communication consulting firm: the students are the employees of the firm, and Michigan Technological University is the client. The specific directives for the assignment are as follows:

> For this assignment the class will function as a communication consulting firm. Each team (3 or 4 students) will function autonomously of each other, reporting directly to your instructor who will fulfill the role of you "boss." Here are the directives:
>
> Michigan Technological University – in its endeavor to sustain the enrollment of foreign students and to make its Campus welcoming to International Students – has contacted our firm to design a series of documents that would ease the cultural transition of international students. The documents the University is seeking have to be informative, welcoming, and easy to use for an international student who just arrived on campus. Naturally, these documents must be user-friendly and clear. The goal of our firm will be to provide our client with a series of short instructions booklets to help new international students adapt to their new environment. Each of these documents has to contain instructions on one specific topic, such as: "Driving in the U.S." "Health Insurance in the U.S.", "Banking in the U.S.", "Eating and cooking in the U.S.", "Being a Student in a U.S. University", etc.
>
> After deliberation with your boss and your co-workers, each team will be given the responsibility to design and produce one booklet. Each team will also be required to make a case for their document in a 10 minute persuasive pitch. The final version of the document will be

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To assess the effectiveness of the assignment, we use a baseline and an end survey. These anonymous surveys are a means for us to determine the students' experience in international communication and to measure how writing in English for an international audience impacts and eventually alters their understanding of the concepts of intercultural and international communication.

3.2. Developing communication process to cross borders

One of the core components of the assignment pertains to the nature and purpose of the pamphlets students work on: these documents are instructions sets. Instructions are the perfect genre for incorporating more intercultural issues and workplace writing in the classroom. The reason for this is twofold: first, as emphasized by Kristin Woolever, "instructions and procedures are the most likely technical documents to be translated into many languages or to be read in English by people from many cultures." (Woolever 2005: 236). Second, the problem-solving orientation of instructions epitomizes the function of workplace communication practices in the "knowledge economy" (Deborah Brandt).

Writing instructions consists indeed of putting a specialized form of knowledge "in a tangible, and hereby transactional, form" (Brandt 167) so that it can be understood and applied toward a specific purpose. As Woolever appropriately reminds us, "people do not want to read the instructions, they want to get things done" (Woolever 2005: 224). Therefore, having students work on developing a medium for a communication knowledge process helps them to get a better sense of the meaning, and the end of literacy practices in the workplace; as a corollary, it also renders their role as meditational means more concrete. In the specific situation called for by the assignment, students have the responsibility to convey knowledge that will allow the new international students to successfully

transition into a new culture. If students are free to choose the topic of their document, they must be able to articulate how their pamphlet targets and answers the specific needs of international students at MTU. Their documents can indeed develop instructions on general U.S. practices ("How to open a bank account in the U.S.," "How to be a successful student in a U.S. classroom," "How to order in a fast-food restaurant," etc.) or, they can offer more specific instructions for adapting to the immediate cultural environment of MTU ("How to drive during the Winter in the Upper Peninsula," "How to enjoy the outdoor life in the Upper Peninsula," etc.).

The second major component of the assignment concerns the collaborative dimension of the design and writing process and the nature of their audience (international students for whom English is often their second language). Placing students in a situation where they have to engage in joint composition processes that simultaneously focus on culture and are aimed at crossing cultural borders becomes a means to enable students to consider the complexity of the connections existing between their own communication practices, their identity as writers and as members of a specific culture. Following Dànielle DeVoss and al, "we believe students can begin to see the complicated nature of intercultural communication only if they begin to see themselves as part of a distinct culture as well" (DeVoss 2002: 77). In order to define and delimit the ramifications of what belonging to a specific culture means, students need to engage in intensive reciprocal interactions. These discussions become often a locus for not only unveiling the identity and borders of the community they belong to, but also for underscoring the heterogeneity existing within this same community. This speaks directly to our endeavor to building a learning environment entailing an interactional approach to intercultural communication (Kampf 1999) that breaks the "homogeneity myth" (Matsuda 2006) and that foregrounds meaning negotiations. Designing resources for international students requires students to not only reflect on the meaning of the concept of culture and of how it defines them as a community, but it also leads them to define practices for communicating knowledge enabling outside members to join their community. The definition of these practices is entirely subordinated to the students' ability to examine and understand the

proprieties of their own linguistic and cultural identity, these factors being the substance of the communication process they are engaging in.

The following questions illustrate the preliminary interrogations underpinning the task the students undertake:

- What is culture?
- What is our culture?
- How does our culture define us as a community?
- What does belonging to a community mean?
- How does belonging to a community impact our ways of interacting, and knowing?
- What kind of knowledge do outsiders need in order to join our community?
- How do cultural and linguistic differences affect communication processes? In other words, how do linguistic and cultural differences impact the content and organization of a document aimed at providing instructions for performing tasks within a specific cultural environment?

These questions, by connecting literacy practices to identity and social structures, enact a conception of literacy that draws directly from James Paul Gee's (1996) approach. Students are encouraged to view their communication practices not as an acontextual concept, but as "ways of being in the world", "forms of life" and as "social and products of social histories" (viii). They are part, to use Gee's metaphor, of their "identity kit."

3.3. Following a multi-step design process

To make the reflections described above as useful as possible for the students, we provide specific steps to guide them through their design process. These steps are meant to structure their work, but also to inscribe their design process into a user-centered approach (Johnson 1998). Such an approach obliges students to constantly connect their design with their audience's needs and expectations. The design itself becomes therefore an interactive process between

the designers (students of HU 3120) and users (the international students.)

More specifically, the design of the documents entails the following phases:

- **A user analysis**: Students begin their work by researching the demographics of their audience. The results of this inquiry serve as a basis for students to get a better idea of who their audience is and to measure the intrinsic heterogeneity of the group they are targeting. Far from being an end in itself, the demographical analysis is a means for building an audience analysis that does not essentialize international students as a group. By leading students, early in their design, to correlate the communication process they are engaging in with the concept of cultural identity and with the heterogeneity of their audience, we foreground a rhetorical approach to communication (Johnson 1998; Miller 1979). A user analysis is essential for helping students to plan the content of their document.

The following questions are handed out to students to guide their reflections:

- In what context will your audience likely use your document?
- Can you imagine the scenario that led the user to 'acquire' the document?
- What does your audience already know about being a student in the United-States, and about American Campuses? Where did they get this knowledge? Do they hold any misconceptions that need to be addressed? What can you safely assume the user knows and doesn't know?"
- From the onset, what is your audience expecting to get from your document?

- **A task analysis:** This step consists of determining the content and organization of the document. Based on the results of the user analysis, students plan an organizational strategy for their document.
- **Prototyping:** Drawing from the information students developed in their user and task analyses, they design several different mock-ups, or "lo-fidelity prototypes," of their document. The reason for prototyping is so that they can consider an overall

document design strategy without committing too many resources to making polished drafts. The prototype will also provide the plan to guide their group as they put together a final document.

- **Usability testing:** After they have agreed on a mock-up and have drafted a set of instructions, students begin to plan a usability test. This process is essential for ensuring the user-centeredness of the document, as usability testing often reveals unforeseen—and sometimes surprising—problems with documents when they are used by an audience in context. For this assignment, we encourage students to develop a questionnaire that allows them to test various aspects of their documents, such as "its navigability," "its visual design," "the relevance of the information," "its clarity," *etc*. The usability testing is conducted with staff of the International Graduate Teaching Assistants Assistance Program (IGTAAP), international students, domestic students, and other instructors of HU 3120. Usability testing activities, by opening the classroom door and eliciting interactions between designers and potential users, further grounds the assignment in the program's social approach to writing and sets students in contexts where they have to negotiate meanings and where learning becomes reciprocal.

The reflections underlying the design process are also nourished by scholarly articles on international technical communication. We rely on such works to trigger discussions regarding the significance of cultural differences in communication processes. While some articles provide students with specific examples of intercultural communication in the workplace (see, for example, Carol Barnum and Li Huilin's work on "Chinese and American Technical Communication"), others, by adopting a more general perspective, give students a methodology to approach their design process (see Emily Thrush's work on "Multicultural Issues in Technical Communication"). Such readings are invaluable pedagogical tools: not only do they inscribe the assignment in the reality of today's workplace, they also help students to better identify the multi-level challenges of their task and, they further emphasize the inaccuracy of a monosemic definition of the concepts of audience, culture, and communication itself.

3.4. Planting the seeds for new communities of practices

For many students, this assignment is their first opportunity to write for an audience of non-native speakers, and consequently the first time they really have to question the cultural and social embeddedness of their communication practices. When, after the completion of the assignment, we ask students about what they consider to have been the biggest challenges, they generally emphasize the difficulty they had in determining the appropriate quantity and quality of information in order not to sound condescending.

The surveys and the in-class discussions show that, prior to the assignment, many students did think that sharing the same language is a guarantee for a perfect inter-comprehension. Students often equate language to an abstract and autonomous system detached from any contextual consideration, and embrace a "window-pane theory" of language (Miller 1979). Placing students in a situation in which they need to negotiate, to discuss and to confront their communication practices with members and non-members of their linguistic community spurs them to reflect on and to gain a more sophisticated knowledge in the concept of communication process. Composing documents in their native language for a non-native audience leads students indeed to question what it means and takes to be fluent in a language. It also draws attention to how belonging to specific social and cultural groups impinges on how they feel, on how they act, on what they say, and on how they say it. In other words, it makes the concept of "community of practices" (Wenger 1998) more tangible.

The active implication of IGTAAP in the design process has been key in our endeavor to develop communicative competences for intercultural contexts. IGTAAP is a program located in the Writing Center that works with international graduate students on communication and cultural understanding skills. These skills are developed through individual interactions with undergraduate coaches, or through small group discussions led by the coaches. Sylvia Matthews, who serves as the director of IGTAAP, regularly participates in the user analysis by visiting sections of HU 3120. During her presentation, she shares her experiences of working with

international students within the context of IGTAAP and helps students identifying specific needs for which their documents could provide an answer. By explaining IGTAAP's functioning to the students of HU 3120, Sylvia Matthews contributes to inscribing the assignment in a social approach to communication knowledge and language acquisition. The participation of IGTAAP also gives students an opportunity to test their documents directly with the coaches and with the international students working with the program: this enhances the user-centeredness of the documents as it gives students a chance to collect "valuable 'insider' information" (Huckin 2002: 11). By positioning the international students as experts, the collaboration between IGTAAP and HU 3120 complicates the expert-user dichotomy, and reveals new dynamics in the fixed notion of the coach-student relationship. The usability testing process becomes thus a way to cross cultural borders, but also institutional borders (from the classroom to the Writing Center). As a result, the design process gets situated in an in-between space where "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt 1991). This "contact zone" (Pratt) becomes a space where HU 3120, international students, and coaches gain new perspectives, engage in mutual learning processes, and as result, collectively create knowledge and define new practices for connecting their respective communities. In this respect, the pamphlets created by the students have become a medium for planting the seeds of new communities of practices. Many of these pamphlets are used today in IGTAAP: they provide useful information, while serving as conversational basis between the coaches and the international students.

Although the assignment in its current form has definitely facilitated the incorporation of more international and intercultural issues in the classroom, we plan on modifying and expanding its context in the near future. We are indeed exploring ways to find partners abroad to provide students with opportunities to work in international teams on the design of pamphlets for cultural transactions. This will not only increase the international dimension of the assignment, but it will also pose an even greater challenge to the students who will have to negotiate ways for working in international and intercultural teams. In addition, such an endeavor

will also emphasize the fact that much of technical communication in English is received by an audience outside of the US.

4. Conclusion

Our commitment to incorporating intercultural issues in MTU's STC curriculum has produced a learning context emphasizing the social dimension of knowledge production and management. Designing documents for cultural transactions increases students' sensitivities to the complexities of audience and engages them in communicative practices that correspond to the contingencies of global workplace communication processes. Because the audience is constructed as "English speaking," the assignment obliges students to think of international and intercultural communication not solely as a linguistic translation issue, but as a challenge that must be met by considering cultural and contextual factors. Finally, by encouraging students to reflect critically on their writing and design practices, assignments such as this one require students to question their own definition of literacy, thus allowing them to acquire more agency and responsibility in their own communication. In the future, we plan on exploring ways to find partners abroad to initiate.

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