

## INTRODUCTION

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Instructors across the country, excited about the possibilities of combining technology with writing instruction, are obtaining monetary support for the construction of computer classrooms. For this task, they have plenty of guides to grant writing and people from whom to gain advice regarding computer equipment. What they lack, however, is a strategy for designing the actual learning environment.

Once funding is acquired, the technologically complex nature of computer composition generates many questions about electronic facilities. What is the next step? How do I plan an electronic classroom, and what equipment goes into such a facility? What options already exist? What mistakes have others made that I can avoid? More importantly, which room design will best suit the pedagogical goals of my institution and its instructors? And ultimately, what are some possible alternatives for future classrooms? This book specifically addresses these concerns. The strategies within this volume comprise an essential, comprehensive menu, an assortment of actual experiences from which readers can gain insights into designing their own computer-assisted writing environments.

From these models, readers can see what options might be considered with electronic writing environments. Those who are just beginning the process of room design and construction will find valuable guidance in these essays. Those who wish to renovate their rooms also will find helpful ideas here. And those who are generally pleased with their room designs may find useful means of reviewing and perhaps refining their designs.

Readers can approach these essays along two different but intersecting routes—classroom layout and pedagogical method. Because some essays detail the design and construction of specific computer composition classrooms or labs, readers can compare their own available space to the spaces actually used by the authors. Because other essays describe the practical teaching

applications suitable for particular environments, readers can compare pedagogical goals and adopt a design suitable to their pedagogy. Finally, several essays emphasize electronic networks, networks that model the author's reconceptualization of electronic learning environments and envision teaching that transcends the walls of the traditional classroom.

To insure approachability and comprehensiveness, a variety of tenured, associate, and graduate student instructors from a variety of educational institutions—private, public, and community—were invited to detail the planning and structure of their classrooms and the way that structure affects their teaching. The essays move from explicit discussion of room design and construction, through pedagogical descriptions and concerns, to theoretical hypotheses for future learning environments. This book does not advocate any particular pedagogy, software package, or hardware system, but rather provides a collective experience from which the reader can learn and thus create the environment that suits his or her needs without recreating others' past mistakes.

The essays are personable, informative, and as jargon-free as possible. Important computing terms are defined briefly the first time they appear, and in the Glossary. Change never occurs in a uniform, predictable manner, particularly in academe, which is filled with a profusion of variants reflective of change. Content and style are not standardized within this text. Thus, the essays may seem irregular at times, inconsistent in voice and style or redundant in emphasis. Each instructor presents her or his design as she or he decides is best. This variety reflects the irregularity of change, and any overlap demonstrates the importance of the design elements that have worked well in several schools.

Although this book attempts to be generic regarding specific products and other details, each college and university has selected either Apple or IBM-compatible products, and some have decided upon software packages. Such choices do not influence the room design as a whole, nor does this book attempt to advocate any particular hardware configuration or software system. Thus, hypertext environments are not singled out for discussion, because software is not the focus of this text. Any of the configurations presented may house any software decision. Similarly, virtual reality classrooms are not discussed within this volume.

Virtual reality technology has created an irreversible research momentum, but there has been no clear connection to writing. While virtual reality may indeed serve to release imagination, it involves no actual writing, and therefore no critical reading, on the part of the student. The goal of the writing classroom is to create physical space for reflective, critical writing. Some feel that technology is desired to relieve, if not supplant, the teacher's

burden.<sup>1</sup> This is not what we in English desire; at least, I sincerely hope it is not. We seek room designs that allow access, not substitution. The teaching of writing is as personal as the act of writing itself. This personal connect-edness is what our classroom structures need to foster.

Good theories are eminently practical. In this collection, learning methods are discussed by instructors alongside their ideas for room construction. Each instructor has a firm theoretical foundation and has written a practical essay at my request. By reading about the instructors' experiences within the particular environments, we see more than various structural designs; we also see pedagogical theories in practice.

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The initial essay, by Trent Batson, traces the problematic history of teacher-centered classrooms and offers new student-centered, interactive design concepts. Batson's historical overview of design processes includes traditional classrooms, the entrance of computers, and the introduction of networks. This detailed synopsis suggests theoretical implications to remember while reading the practical description of the networked ENFI (Electronic Networks for Interaction) writing environment in which Batson currently teaches. Such implications include support for change in current composition theory, dualistic thinking about teaching and learning, environmental versus presentational design approaches, detailed description of ENFI's effect on teaching, physical setup, technical design considerations, and the network's social factor.

Much electronic instruction emphasizes collaboration, supporting the current composition theory that writing is interactive. The expansion of networked instruction from teacher-student to student-student is Fred Kemp's emphasis in the second essay. In his argument for networks, Kemp laments that in English departments, rooms never intended for computers are assigned to be computer-based classrooms. Kemp discusses physical considerations of a networked classroom, costs, behaviors associated with computer-based facilities, the "virtual" environment of networked computers, and how computer use depends upon the instructors' understanding of how computers affect writing pedagogy.

Gail Hawisher and Michael Pemberton, in the third essay, analyze the results of an electronic writing classroom design survey. The survey seeks to "identify some of the questions worth asking." Responses from the editorial board of *Computers and Composition* and their colleagues provide insightful answers from a cross-section of instructors from four-year institutions and community colleges across the country. Considerations focus around public

versus private spaces, and the roles of instructors and students. Hawisher and Pemberton conclude with a presentation of intriguing proposals for tomorrow's learning space.

The fourth essay, by Deborah Holdstein, raises essential questions regarding the design process: What are the needs of the students in the writing program at my particular institution? Can lab assistants teach the software so that I can teach writing? How can I convince my department chair and my colleagues that the computer should be used throughout the writing curriculum? What should the room look like? How can I make the room reflect my pedagogy? After construction, what other support and alliances will I need? Along with possible solutions for these concerns, Holdstein emphasizes important alliances that composition and English faculty must forge in order to form a learning environment that is successful both functionally and pedagogically.

In the fifth essay, Barbara Sitko examines the logic behind the planning of the lab she uses, instructional expectations, implementation of these plans, and the actual results. Sitko specifies the physical structure of the lab: equipment, locating the facility in adjoining rooms, layout and furniture, temperature control, and security, as well as the lab's virtual structure: links between file servers, use of course sections as shared writing groups, and software support.

In the sixth essay, Cynthia Selfe, Richard Selfe, and Johndan Johnson-Eilola, tell a story about the process of building models. These instructors present their past model of room design strategy, their colleagues' commentary about this model, and how the model worked—and didn't work—in practice. The opportunity to design another computer-assisted classroom provided these instructors with a chance to reconceive their model. They present a "less linear, more robust" model of how computer-supported writing facilities are designed and redesigned on a daily basis, along with practical applications using hypertext, Storyspace, laserdiscs, CD-ROMs, and high-end multimedia programs.

After instructing in electronic environments for a number of years, Carolyn Handa received the opportunity to serve on a committee charged with designing the electronic learning space for writing instruction that she describes in the seventh essay. Handa describes her shift in pedagogical stance caused by instructing in an electronic room. This shift caused her to set new goals which she strove to meet by serving on the planning committee. Handa's detail regarding layout, hardware, software, and even how to form an aesthetically pleasing environment emphasizes that the "classroom's design should reflect a student-centered pedagogy."

The eighth essay, written by Robert Green, discusses a way for those on a tight budget to encourage collaboration without the use, and cost, of a network. With use of computer projection systems, the lab at Green's institution can make each computer a "platform" to support effective peer response. While detailing his lab's design history, instructional uses of space, and ultimate benefits for the student and for the instructor, Thomas offers his experience with major instructional problems.

In the ninth essay, Valerie Balester's description of three rooms traces the physical and pedagogical evolution of room design from a traditional "row" approach to an innovative "cluster" design. Each plan—from the proscenium, through the perimeter, to the cluster—corresponds to a theoretical, pedagogical strategy. Balester also highlights networking and the importance of a room design that makes the best use of software capability.

In the tenth essay, Lisa Gerrard proposes criteria for an ideal computer classroom, able to accommodate multiple, and sometimes contradictory, space requirements. Gerrard's comparisons among three lab/classroom experiences provide a valuable overview of the advantages and disadvantages of various room designs. Gerrard emphasizes the benefits of a cooperatively planned room and suggests alliances to form and opinions to solicit before actually designing the space.

Karen D'Agostino received the opportunity to enter the room-design process. In the eleventh essay, D'Agostino offers a comprehensive, detailed discussion of her training and preparation for electronic classroom instructing, and the way in which her ideas regarding room design and pedagogical goals were formed while she was instructing in an electronic room. A firm belief that students need access both to computers and to each other guides D'Agostino's arrangement of computers, tables, and chairs, as well as her decisions regarding software selection. This essay concludes with helpful warnings about potential problems such as maintenance contracts and lack of developmental teacher training.

Gordon Thomas concludes the essay collection with reflections on lessons he has learned through teaching experiences in a computer lab. Thomas's reflections cover the three phases in which his room developed: establishing a permanent facility, developing pedagogical advantages of word processing for composition and revision, and integrating the full power of Unix-based hardware and software into course work. Thomas concludes with helpful recommendations about hardware, lab administration, and ways of adapting to continually changing circumstances.

The sheer number of assumptions, expectations, questions, theories, pedagogies, methods, approaches, complexities, and continual changes rel-

evant to the construction of electronic writing classrooms prevents instructors—regardless of their excitement about computers—from easily sitting down and sketching out a classroom design. This book provides design options, experiences, and fundamental concerns that, once considered, will enable instructors to pick up their pencils.

#### NOTES

1. Rheingold 19, 49.