

Crafting Inclusive Classrooms: Applying Invitational Rhetoric to Technical Communication Pedagogy

Shuvro Das

Introduction

This paper proposes invitational rhetoric (Foss & Griffin, 1995) as a vital and operationalizable pedagogical framework for addressing persistent marginalization in technical communication classrooms. Specifically, I argue that implementing invitational rhetoric offers concrete communication strategies that are grounded in feminist scholarship and recent social justice work in technical communication—for creating more inclusive, socially just learning environments where marginalized students can direct learning guided by their lived priorities and values. Rather than treating this framework as merely theoretical, I ground this argument in a practical, implementable project. I call it the Social Issues Informative Guide Project, which is designed to teach invitational principles through hands-on, community-centered collaborative work. In this multi-week collaborative assignment, student teams select a contemporary social issue, identify the discourse community most affected, conduct community outreach and listening, and co-create an informative guide tailored to that community's own priorities and resources. The project has been piloted in undergraduate technical communication courses and serves as both the motivating example and the practical culmination of the theoretical argument developed throughout this paper.

This paper addresses a critical gap: while recent scholarship in technical communication has called for social justice-oriented pedagogy (Jones et al., 2016; Walton et al., 2019), few resources provide concrete, teachable models that practitioners can immediately implement in their classrooms.

Invitational rhetoric emerges from feminist scholarship as an ethical alternative to traditional persuasive rhetoric (Foss & Griffin, 1995). Whereas persuasion seeks to change others' attitudes and beliefs through argument, often in ways that privilege already dominant groups, invitational rhetoric aims to foster understanding across differences by "offering perspectives without imposing them on others" (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 15). At its core, invitational rhetoric rests on three central philosophical tenets articulated by Foss and Griffin: (1) equality—recognizing all participants as valuable contributors with expertise worth hearing; (2) immanent value—assuming each person possesses inherent worth deserving respect, regardless of social position or status; and (3) self-determination—honoring people's right to make choices about their own lives, identities, and intellectual contributions. Invitational rhetoric invites participation by creating external conditions that allow others to present their perspectives in their voices, and on their terms (Foss et al., 2004, p. 83)—conditions that explicitly challenge hierarchical structures where certain voices are authorized while others are marginalized or silenced.

Invitational rhetoric provides a necessary framework for developing inclusive pedagogies that counter the ongoing marginalization of certain groups in technical communication classrooms and knowledge production. As Haas (2012) argues, despite claims of neutrality and objectivity, technical communication has been complicit in "the exclusion of non-white, non-male, non-Western peoples from full participation" in knowledge-making (p. 278). This systemic exclusion privileges certain voices and perspectives while rendering others inferior, invisible, or in need of remediation. Agboka (2013) similarly critiques "the hegemonic practice of dismissing or devaluing the communicative styles of some groups" in technical communication pedagogy (p. 29)—a practice that reflects deeper assumptions about what counts as "proper" or "effective" technical communication. Yet technical communication is not frozen in this exclusionary practice. Over the past decade, scholars including Jones, Moore, and Walton (2016), Cañas (2019), Itchuaqiyag & Matheson (2021), and others have initiated what Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) term "the social justice turn" in technical communication—an explicit commitment to examining how technical communication pedagogy and practice can advance equity, access, and justice for historically marginalized communities. However, while this scholarship brilliantly identifies problems and advocates for change, few resources provide practitioners with concrete, step-by-step pedagogical models they can immediately implement. Invitational rhetoric fills this gap by offering not abstract principles but actionable practices.

An invitational pedagogical model fosters classroom conditions welcoming all students to share diverse experiences and approaches without fear of dismissal, critique, or the necessity to assimilate to dominant norms. Foss and Foss (1994) argue that invitational rhetoric constitutes an offering of perspective, not an argument or a lecture that listeners must accept. Rather than positioning the instructor as sole arbiter of knowledge, students' narratives, experiences, and ways of knowing are treated as equally valid "sources of insight and knowledge" compared to empirical research or theoretical abstractions (Foss & Foss, 1994, p. 39). This decentering of institutional authority creates potential space for marginalized voices to emerge and gain legitimacy. However, this is crucial to acknowledge that decentering authority alone does not guarantee inclusion. Rather, it requires intentional, conscious implementation by instructors aware of power dynamics and committed to justice work. Teachers must deliberately structure classroom conditions, communication practices, and assessment approaches to realize invitational principles.

Several communication scholars and pedagogues have articulated the potential of invitational rhetoric to transform classrooms into more egalitarian, inclusive spaces. Pineau (2002) argues invitational pedagogies enable "the flowering of multiple voices" and foreground "opportunities for connection between self and other" (p. 51)—opportunities that cultivate belonging and mutual recognition. Similarly, Rudick and Golsan (2012) present invitational rhetoric as an activist teaching stance designed to empower students traditionally marginalized by social institutions like education. Applied to technical communication, adopting an invitational approach helps teachers relinquish exclusive "expert" authority and instead foster horizontal learning environments where

all students' contributions are valued as knowledge production. This shift from expert-driven to collaborative knowledge-making aligns with recent work in narrative inquiry (Frost, 2015; Kalodner-Martin, 2022; Vealey & Gerding, 2021) demonstrating that lived experience and embodied knowledge constitute valid epistemological resources.

Technical communication education stands at a critical juncture. As the demographics of our students and fields continue diversifying, and as our society grapples with entrenched inequities, our classrooms must evolve to embrace alternate ways of communicating, learning, and producing knowledge. An invitational approach provides concrete, teachable strategies toward this goal. This project investigates how applying invitational rhetoric to technical communication pedagogy can practically transform teaching and learning, ultimately empowering marginalized students to become agents of change in their disciplines and communities. By centering both theory and practice, this paper demonstrates that invitational rhetoric is not a distant ideal but a framework teachers can implement tomorrow.

The Social Issues Informative Guide Project: A Concrete Application of Invitational Rhetoric

Before examining the theoretical foundations of invitational rhetoric in depth, it is essential to ground this work in practice. The Social Issues Informative Guide Project offers some concrete, immediately implementable way for technical communication instructors to enact invitational principles in their classrooms. This project serves as both the motivation for this paper's theoretical arguments and the practical culmination of invitational rhetoric principles. By foregrounding the project, we establish that invitational rhetoric is not merely aspirational but teachable and learnable.

Here is how the project works: In this collaborative endeavor spanning multiple weeks, students work together to collectively choose a contemporary social issue and identify the specific discourse community most impacted by that issue. Contemporary social issues might include homelessness, healthcare access disparities, immigration policies, disability rights, environmental justice, food insecurity, incarceration and criminal justice, gun violence, student debt, or other issues of systemic inequity. After educating themselves about the issue and community through research and ideally through direct outreach and listening, students co-create an informative guide suited to that discourse community. The guide highlights customized solutions, resources, and next steps developed in direct dialogue with community members themselves, not imposed from external expertise.

The project operationalizes invitational rhetoric by rejecting extractive approaches to marginalized communities. Rather than researching groups affected by issues like homelessness as "service objects" to be studied and written about, an invitational approach conceptualizes working-class individuals, undocumented migrants, unhoused people, disabled individuals, and other marginalized populations as equals whose priorities must foreground technical communication efforts. This reframes the student

role from external expert to collaborator and listener. Thus, the guide production process emphasizes listening, dialogue, and centering community knowledge such that format, content, recommendations, and even the communication strategies employed emerge collaboratively (Foss & Griffin, 1995). This conscious attention combats problematic power dynamics by validating oppressed groups' agency, insights, and self-articulated aspirations—promoting social dignity rather than perpetuating further marginalization or reinforcing deficit narratives.

This project facilitates development of key ethical competencies for technical communicators, including participating inclusively in civic issues; understanding concrete impacts of communication choices on marginalized groups; taking responsibility to mitigate harm through rhetorical awareness, cultural humility, and conscious advocacy against injustice. By centering this project early and giving it substantial space, the paper establishes that invitational rhetoric is not an abstract concept but a practical, learnable pedagogy with immediate, real-world classroom applications. For the complete project description, including objectives, key guidelines, and outcomes please see Appendix A: Social Issues Informative Guide Project Overview.

Why Invitational Rhetoric for Technical Communication Pedagogy?

Historically, technical communication pedagogy has been grounded in privileged sites of knowledge production such as scientific empiricism and corporate workplace norms, while systematically excluding vernacular discourses from marginalized identity groups (Scott, 2004). Early technical writing curricula centered efficiency, clarity, and transparency as universal, neutral standards—values reflecting masculine Western paradigms—while denigrating feminine, embodied, relational, or non-Western communicative styles (Flynn, 1988). Despite increasing student diversity in recent decades, contemporary technical communication classrooms continue judging minority groups and multilingual learners as deficient “others” in need of remediation or assimilation to dominant expectations (Agboka, 2013). Students with disabilities, non-binary students, working-class students, and international students frequently encounter curricula that position them as exceptions to default assumptions. These systemic inequities manifest in whose communication styles are validated as effective technical knowledge warranting instruction and whose are dismissed as inefficient, unclear, or improper.

Yet recent scholarship demonstrates that deliberate, equity-oriented pedagogical interventions can interrupt these exclusionary patterns. Jones, Moore, and Walton (2016) show how disrupting traditional narratives about technical communication creates conceptual space for alternative ways of knowing and communicating. Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) document how recognizing technical communication as a “discipline of conscience” repositions the field toward justice work and accountability to marginalized communities. Cañas (2019) articulates decolonial feminist methodologies that center marginalized knowledge producers and challenge Western epistemological dominance. Simultaneously, scholars working in decolonial technical communication

including Haas (2012), and Itchuaqiyaq (2021) extend decolonial approaches specifically within technical communication contexts, examining how technical knowledge itself is racialized, gendered, and linked to colonialism. Further, Frost (2015), Kalodner-Martin (2022), and Vealey & Gerding (2021) demonstrate persuasively that personal narratives, testimonies, and lived experience function as epistemically valid ways of knowing—particularly for those whose experiences of marginalization provide unique insights into systemic functioning.

Invitational rhetoric is specifically well-suited as a pedagogical framework for technical communication because it provides concrete, implementable practices grounded in this recent scholarship, rather than remaining abstract principles. As Scott (2004) argues “technical communication pedagogy needs models explicitly designed to handle postwar pluralism and globalization” while embracing diverse ways of knowing beyond Western norms (p. 285). Unlike creative writing spaces, which have longer traditions of accommodating diverse voices and personal expression, technical pedagogy has not prioritized inclusion and must therefore employ explicit counter-hegemonic strategies. Invitation provides concrete, teachable corrective practices for fostering classrooms where students can challenge standards privileging certain groups and collaboratively challenge what constitutes good technical communication, such as- expanding definitions to value multiple vernacular traditions, embodied ways of knowing, and marginalized perspectives.

An invitational paradigm provides specific pedagogical interventions enabling marginalized technical communication students to bring full selves and communities to their work rather than conforming to paradigms that have historically oppressed the communities from which they come. Importantly, implementing invitational rhetoric does not guarantee inclusion; rather, it requires intentional, conscious work by instructors aware of power dynamics and personally committed to justice. In these ways, invitational rhetoric constitutes an essential, culturally responsive framework for addressing endemic issues of marginalization within technical communication education—not as an add-on or special topic, but as foundational to the discipline.

Core Principles of Invitational Technical Communication Pedagogy

Invitational rhetoric functions as a pedagogical framework through four interconnected principles: creating external conditions for equal participation, establishing safe and trusting communication across power differences, legitimizing subjective rhetorical strategies and embodied ways of knowing, and co-constructing knowledge through horizontal dialogue. Rather than merely describing what invitational rhetoric is theoretically, the following sections explain how each principle operates in technical communication classrooms and provide concrete visualization of what it looks like in practice. Throughout, I connect each principle to the Social Issues Project as instantiation.

Principle 1: Creating External Conditions for Equal Participation

Invitational rhetoric emphasizes the critical need to construct "external conditions that constitute an invitation for the audience to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does" (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 7). In classroom contexts, this means deliberately restructuring the material, social, and epistemological conditions of learning to facilitate genuine equal status participation rather than token inclusion. Traditionally, technical communication pedagogy has not created such participatory conditions for marginalized students. Rather, classroom norms have reflected "traditional west-centric values" positioning marginalized groups as rhetorical "others" expected to conform or be remediated (Agboka, 2013; Haas, 2012). However, as Pineau (2002) notes, positioning some students as inherently deficient is profoundly exclusive and self-defeating, which communicates that their knowledge, experiences, and ways of knowing are lesser, which undermines the possibility of genuine inclusion.

Creating equal participatory conditions entails specific, actionable structural changes. Teachers should relinquish the stance of sole expert, instead showing "willingness to yield... institutional place of authority" (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 8). Concretely, this might involve multiple practices: inviting students to co-design the course syllabus and learning objectives so curricula reflect their priorities and questions; allowing substantive student choice in assignment topics and formats rather than prescriptive requirements; incorporating multimodal learning opportunities welcoming diverse backgrounds, abilities, communication preferences, and modes of expression; and critically important, having students collaboratively determine participation guidelines, evaluation criteria, and even grading metrics (Rudick & Golsan, 2012). When students collectively establish what constitutes good work, and when they have voice in determining how their labor will be evaluated, dominant norms about excellence lose unquestioned centrality. This creates groundwork for marginalized perspectives to emerge, gain authority in classroom discussions, and shape collective knowledge-making.

The Social Issues Informative Guide Project exemplifies this principle in multiple ways. Most directly, it enacts the principle by dismantling the instructor's role as the sole architect of the learning agenda: no topic is assigned from above, no community is predetermined, and no format is pre-specified. Instead, every structural decision, for example, what issue to investigate, whose voices to center, how to conduct outreach, what the deliverable should look like—is made collectively by students. This structural openness is not incidental but constitutive: it creates the material conditions for equal participation that invitational rhetoric demands.

Rather than assigning students a specific social issue to address, students collectively identify which issue matters most to them and which community they wish to serve—ensuring the project reflects their own investments rather than external mandates. During the project, students collectively decide which community voices to prioritize, how to conduct respectful outreach and listening, and what forms the final guide should take. Assessment includes student reflection on whether invitational principles were honored throughout—whether community members were treated as collaborators or

research subjects, whether power was shared or concentrated. Importantly, this is not relativism; rather, it recognizes that those most affected by issues possess expertise and should direct problem-solving.

Principle 2: Establishing Safe, Trusting Communication Across Power Differences

Safety and care are vital for creating conditions where marginalized students can comfortably share standpoints that may contest dominant paradigms which have historically disadvantaged them. Drawing on Conquergood (1985), who documents how marginalized groups participating in academic contexts have experienced knowledge colonization—their experiences appropriated and repackaged as research subjects—we understand that communication across asymmetrical power lines cannot be neutral or presumed safe. Ethical engagement across difference requires acknowledging historical legacies of exclusion and one's own embeddedness within relations of dominance.

Invitational classrooms predicated on understanding across differences must establish explicit trust and care through intentional communication practices. Teachers should discuss power, privilege, and difference transparently as constitutive factors shaping classroom dynamics and policies (Ahmed, 2013). Rather than pretending neutrality or colorblindness, instructors acknowledge that they, too, are shaped by their positionality and that this positionality grants certain perspectives while limiting others. Invitational rhetoric also suggests having students collaboratively develop communication guidelines to govern respectful interactions (Foss et al., 2004). This dialogue itself becomes foundational practice: students gain trust when they see their voices matter in determining how the classroom functions and what counts as respectful engagement. Such explicit dialogue becomes particularly important when the classroom discusses sensitive social issues—homelessness, immigration, disability, racism—where students lived experiences may be directly implicated and potentially pathologized by dominant discourse.

In the Social Issues Project, establishing safety is crucial. Students from marginalized communities may be hesitant to speak about social issues affecting their communities if they fear judgment, othering, or having their experiences treated as data. Invitational approaches address this by creating explicit norms that center and protect vulnerable voices, that acknowledge personal stakes in social issues, and that refuse to reduce lived experience to academic abstraction. Reflection prompts might ask: Did we create conditions where community members felt safe sharing? Did we resist treating people's experiences as mere information to extract? Through this care-centered approach, technical communication education becomes accountable to justice.

Principle 3: Legitimizing Subjective Rhetorical Strategies and Embodied Ways of Knowing

In contrast to traditional technical communication's valorization of detached objectivity and universal principles, invitational rhetoric argues that revealing subjective positioning, emotions, and lived experience can build shared understanding and

generate new insights (Foss & Foss, 1994). Miller (1979) critiques how technical communication has long privileged "objectivity rather than subjectivity, intellect rather than emotion, the technical rather than the personal" (p. 614)—values that systematically marginalize ways of knowing more common among women, people of color, working-class people, disabled individuals, and other historically excluded groups. Fricker (2007) demonstrates persuasively that personal narratives and testimonial knowledge are epistemically valid; they reveal dimensions of human experience, structural injustice, and situated knowledge that detached analysis cannot.

Invitational technical communication classrooms make deliberate space for students to draw from lived experience, personal narrative, creative expression, dialogue journals, performance, and other embodied methods that valorize emotive, experiential, and relational ways of knowing (Jones, 2016). This is not replacing rigor with feeling; rather, it is recognizing that embodied knowledge—the knowledge that comes from living through systemic inequities, from navigating institutions as a marginalized person, from carrying multiple identities—constitutes valid evidence worthy of consideration. Trauma-informed pedagogy research similarly shows that when students can bring whole selves to academic work, learning deepens and psychological safety increases. In the Social Issues Informative Guide Project, this principle is enacted when students solicit stories, testimonies, and lived experience narratives from community members. Rather than replacing these voices with external expert analysis, the guide centers community members' own articulations of their experiences, needs, and solutions. A guide on homelessness might center unhoused individuals' own accounts of barriers and resources rather than social worker perspectives; a guide on disability justice might foreground disabled people's own definitions of access rather than medical model assumptions.

Pineau (2002) argues that minoritized positionalities offer vital insights that dominant worldviews systematically lack, and that invitational pedagogies can facilitate "permanent disequilibrium" through deliberate juxtaposition of clashing standpoints that spark critical reflection. Through witnessing connections between subjective standpoints and broader social/structural dynamics, students' consciousness expands beyond reductive assumptions toward understanding systemic complexity. This furthers goals of promoting critical thinking and rhetorical dexterity in diverse contexts, which are the very competencies employers and communities need from technical communicators.

Principle 4: Co-Constructing Knowledge Through Horizontal Dialogue and Productive Dissonance

At its core, invitational rhetoric seeks collaborative knowledge production through horizontal dialogue rather than expert transmission. Traditional technical communication has prized top-down information transmission, with instructors delivering fixed content and students receiving it passively. This model obscures knowledge's situated, partial, contestable nature and considers the fact that all knowledge is shaped by the knower's position, perspective, and stake in outcomes. In contrast, invitational classrooms

recognize students as equal agents co-constructing contextual understandings that reflect multiple perspectives.

Importantly, invitational pedagogy deliberately holds space for dissonance and unresolved tensions rather than seeking hasty consensus or closure. Foss and Griffin (1995) explain that a key assumption is that the effort should be not to persuade others but rather facilitate the play and interplay of divergent perspectives even when they conflict. Seeking consensus prematurely is problematic and potentially harmful because marginalized voices have been systematically excluded from shaping dominant notions of "common sense" and universal truth. An invitational approach understands that allowing marginalized perspectives to surface, clash with, and challenge privileged narratives is generative—it prompts deeper analysis of complexity and reveals taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in dominant thinking.

Rudick and Golsan (2012) describe this as a “pedagogy of uncomfortable conversations” where differences in interpretations are foregrounded deliberately to complicate thinking (p. 242). Rather than resolving tension toward comfortable agreement, students gain practice grappling with interfaces of complex social positionalities and power dynamics. Dissonance becomes pedagogically productive. Through ongoing reflective dialogue that holds—rather than resolves—contradiction, students gain critical fluency in engaging complexity. The Social Issues Project creates multiple moments for such dialogue: when student teams negotiate which social issue to address, disagreeing about priorities and stakes; when they engage with community members holding different perspectives on solutions; when they encounter contradictions in their own assumptions, when they collaboratively revise their guide based on feedback revealing unexamined biases. This meaning-making through inclusive dissonance aligns with goals of social justice education centering critical multiplicity over assimilation toward dominant paradigms.

Principle 5: Enacting Citational Justice and Knowledge Equity: Classroom Applications of Invitational Principles

A particularly generative application of invitational rhetoric emerges when we consider citational justice—the practice of consciously, equitably referencing and platforming scholars from marginalized groups. Calls for citational justice within academic disciplines emphasize the need to critically examine whose voices are referenced as authorities shaping knowledge production (Ahmed, 2013; Liu, 2021). Citational marginalization mirrors and sustains inequities encoded within communication practices, granting legitimacy only to dominant paradigms while erasing minoritized peoples' intellectual contributions. This matters because citations function as currency in academic communities—they accumulate power and influence for referenced scholars while rendering uncited scholars invisible.

Invitational technical communication classrooms grounded in power-consciousness and democratic knowledge construction provide ideal sites for students to develop critical awareness of citational politics. Rudick and Golsan (2012) describe invitational

pedagogies as consciousness raising endeavors illuminating systemic inequities through collective analysis from plural standpoints. Instructors can facilitate open scholarly dialogue about citational marginalization, helping students understand how omission and erasure constitute harm. This critical lens then empowers students to notice and question effaced voices within their course materials, and to consciously seek out and incorporate counternarratives from scholars of the global majority, from scholars writing from decolonial and critical race theory frameworks, and from disabled scholars, indigenous scholars, and others marginalized in technical communication. Importantly, students learn that citation is not a bureaucratic requirement but an ethical practice—an act of recognition, accountability, and justice.

In the Social Issues Informative Guide Project, invitational citational practice appears when students consult scholarship and resources during research. Rather than relying on dominant sources, students can consciously seek scholarship by and about marginalized communities. When creating their guides, students can cite community organizations led by marginalized people, can feature testimonies from affected community members, and can credit traditional knowledge alongside academic expertise. This enacts citational justice in the service of social issues work.

Implications: How Invitational Rhetoric Addresses Systemic Exclusion in Technical Communication

The four principles of invitational rhetoric outlined above—equal participation, safe communication, subjective knowing, and co-constructed knowledge—together offer vital, integrated strategies for addressing endemic exclusion within technical communication education. When these principles work together, they create classrooms where marginalized students can direct their own learning guided by lived priorities, values, and questions. This disrupts the privileges of dominant paradigms, allowing alternate worldviews to shape what counts as knowledge and good practice. Students learn that technical communication is not a neutral transmission of information, but a relational practice shaped by values, stakes, and power.

Such epistemological pluralism could radically transform assumptions about what constitutes effective, ethical communication within technical fields. No longer defined by detached neutrality and universal standards, good technical practice becomes facilitating meaningful participation across differences for democratizing social change (Jones et al., 2016). Classrooms embracing counterhegemonic knowledge production resituate technical communication as what Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) call "a discipline of conscience"—committed to empowering marginalized communities through communication, not maintaining inequitable systems of power. Practitioners shaped by such pedagogy carry these commitments into professional and civic contexts, challenging exclusionary norms by invoking new relations of radical inclusion and participatory justice. When communication educators teach students to view marginalized communities as knowledge partners rather than research subjects, to

center lived experience alongside data, and to see their work as accountable to justice, these practices ripple outward through professional networks and organizations.

The proliferation of counter-hegemonic discourses in workplaces and public spheres remakes standards of ethical practice centered on democratization rather than control. In this vision, technical communication education embracing invitational principles constitutes an essential starting point for catalyzing what Foss and Griffin (1995) call "ripples of transformation" toward more liberatory disciplinary and social futures. This is not naive utopianism; rather, it is grounded recognition that education shapes practitioners' values, that values shape professional decisions, and that professional decisions ripple through society.

Considerations, Challenges, and Honest Limitations

While this paper articulates the promise of invitational rhetoric for technical communication pedagogy, important considerations and honest limitations deserve articulation. First, implementing invitational pedagogy requires significant emotional and intellectual labor from instructors—labor that is often unpaid, unrecognized, and gendered feminine in academic contexts. Teachers must navigate their own positionality and potential complicity in systemic oppression while creating conditions for others' liberation. This is sustainable work only when institutions recognize and support it—through course release, professional development funding, and explicit departmental commitment. Without such structural support, invitational pedagogy risks becoming another burden placed on already overburdened faculty, particularly faculty of color and other marginalized faculty.

Second, implementing invitational pedagogy in classrooms does not automatically translate to institutional change or to employment conditions respecting these values. Students may learn invitational principles in classrooms only to enter workplaces with entrenched hierarchies, efficiency-only mindsets, and cultures of surveillance and control. The transformation must be systemic, not merely individual. This limitation does not negate the value of classroom pedagogy—education shapes values and consciousness, which over time reshape institutions—but it does mean that invitational pedagogy alone is insufficient without structural change in workplaces and disciplinary cultures.

Third, the paper relies significantly on theoretical application rather than empirical investigation of actual technical communication classrooms enacting these principles. Future research should inquire into lived experiences of invitational technical communication classrooms through case studies, ethnography, and discourse analysis of classroom interactions and student work. Such investigations could illuminate benefits and challenges of adoption across diverse institutional contexts—large universities and small liberal arts colleges, predominantly white institutions and historically black colleges, community colleges and research universities. Each context brings different resources, constraints, and student populations.

Fourth, questions remain about how invitational frameworks transfer across diverse educational contexts and student demographics. Longitudinal, multi-site assessments of learning impacts and post-graduate application would illuminate whether invitational training in the classroom transfers to students' professional writing, community organizing, and social justice work. Understanding this potential scale of impact could elucidate the deepest promises of invitational pedagogies as sites of empowerment seeding systematic restructuring toward equity. Additionally, research examining whether these approaches work equitably across different student populations—exploring how race, class, disability, gender identity, and other factors shape students' experiences of invitational pedagogy—would deepen understanding.

Conclusion

This paper has proposed invitational rhetoric as a vital, operationalizable framework for addressing endemic marginalization within technical communication classrooms and fostering more socially just, inclusive pedagogical spaces. The four core principles explored—creating external conditions for equal participation, establishing safe communication across power differences, legitimizing subjective and embodied ways of knowing, and co-constructing knowledge through dialogue—provide concrete, integrated strategies to counter exclusion. Implementing these practices reorients classroom dynamics to invite minoritized students to direct learning guided by lived priorities and values, thereby decentering institutional authority over knowledge production. Yet as articulated, this work requires intentional teacher labor and cannot succeed without institutional support.

The power of an invitational approach within technical communication pedagogy stems from its capacity to radically reconfigure what counts as valid ways of communicating, knowing, and being. Traditional technical communication's privileging of detached objectivity and universal standards has obscured how all knowledge is situated and shaped by the knower's privileges, positionality, and stakes. An invitational model challenges this objectivity myth, recognizing students as equal participants co-constructing meaning. It welcomes marginalized narratives as exposing dominant assumptions. Through horizontal dialogue across differences, consciousness expands beyond reductive thinking toward grappling with complexity.

The Social Issues Informative Guide Project exemplifies how these principles translate into meaningful classroom practice. Students learn not merely about invitational rhetoric in abstract but through enacting it—by listening deeply to communities, centering marginalized voices in their research, collaboratively designing solutions accountable to community priorities, and taking responsibility for communicative impact. This project transforms technical communication education from a transmission model into a relational, justice-oriented endeavor where students see themselves as potentially accountable to communities beyond the classroom.

Equipped with invitational rhetoric and the practices it enables, students carry these approaches into professional and civic contexts, disrupting exclusionary norms by

invoking new relations of radical inclusion and participatory justice. When communication educators teach students to view marginalized communities as knowledge partners rather than research subjects, to center lived experience alongside data, to understand their own positionality and stakes, and to see technical communication as potentially serving justice, these commitments ripple outward. The proliferation of counter-hegemonic communication practices remakes standards of ethical practice centered on democratization.

In this vision, technical communication pedagogy embracing invitational principles constitutes an essential, though insufficient alone, starting point for catalyzing ripples of transformation toward more liberatory disciplinary and social futures (Foss & Griffin, 1995). With both theoretical contours and applied empirical investigations still emerging, this work initiates an important arc of scholarship and practice around invitational rhetoric as a means for technical communication to actualize its commitments to access, democracy, and justice. Teachers can guide students uncovering their own voices, understanding their stakes and positionality, and authoring expanded realities. As Foss and Griffin (1995) suggest, such proliferating invitational spaces constitute small but important steps to create social change. Classrooms embracing these principles have potential to transform communication education and spark larger ripples advancing participatory democracy and justice across society.

References

- Agboka, G. Y. (2013). Participatory localization: A social justice approach to navigating unenfranchised/disenfranchised cultural sites. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 22(1), 28-49.
- Ahmed, S. (2013). Making feminist points. *feministkilljoys*.
<https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/>
- Cañas, D. (2019). Notes toward a decolonial feminist methodology in technical communication. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 33(1), 52–75.
- Conquergood, D. (1985). Performing as a moral act: Ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance. *Literature in Performance*, 5(2), 1-13.
- Flynn, E. A. (1988). Composing as a woman. *College Composition and Communication*, 39(4), 423-435.
- Foss, K. A., & Foss, S. K. (1994). Personal experience as evidence in feminist scholarship. *Western Journal of Communication*, 58(1), 39-43.
- Foss, S. K., Foss, K. A., & Griffin, C. L. (2004). *Feminist rhetorical theories*. Waveland Press.
- Foss, S., & Griffin, C. (1995). Beyond persuasion: A proposal for invitational rhetoric. *Communication Monographs*, 62(1), 2-18.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.
- Frost, E. A. (2015). Apparent Feminism as a Methodology for Technical Communication and Rhetoric. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 30(1), 3-28.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651915602295>
- Haas, A. (2012). Race, rhetoric, technology: A case study of decolonial technical communication theory, methodology, and pedagogy. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 26(3), 277-310.
- Itchuaqiyaaq, C. U. (2021). Inupiat Iliquisiat: An Indigenist Ethics Approach for Working with Marginalized Knowledges in Technical Communication. In R. Walton & G. Y. Agboko (Eds.), *Equipping Technical Communicators for Social Justice Work: Theories, Methodologies, and Pedagogies* (pp. 33–48). University Press of Colorado.
- Itchuaqiyaaq, C. U., & Matheson, B. (2021). Decolonizing decoloniality. *Communication Design Quarterly*, 9(1), 20–31. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3437000.3437002>
- Jones, N. N. (2016). Narrative inquiry in human-centered design: Unfolding culturally situated stories of use. *Research in Technical Communication*, 1(1), 36-51.
- Jones, N. N., Moore, K. R., & Walton, R. (2016). Disrupting the past to disrupt the future: An antenarrative of technical communication. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 25(4), 211-229.
- Kalodner-Martin, E. (2022). Workplace Preparation or Social Justice Work? Joining Goals in a Technical and Professional Communication Classroom? *Intercom*, 69(4), 32-35.
- Liu, X. (2021). The Use/Less Citations in Feminist Research. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 36(108), 212–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2021.1995845>
- Miller, C. R. (1979). A humanistic rationale for technical writing. *College English*, 40(6),

610-617.

- Pineau, E. L. (2002). Critical performative pedagogy: Fleshing out the politics of liberatory education. In N. Stucky & C. Wimmer (Eds.), *Teaching performance studies* (pp. 41-54). Southern Illinois University Press.
- Rudick, C. K., & Golsan, K. (2012). Between social act and political activism: Invitational rhetoric and feminist pedagogy. In M. Ryan & N. Myers (Eds.), *Rethinking ethical rhetoric* (pp. 235-250). Routledge.
- Scott, J. B. (2004). Rearticulating civic engagement through cultural studies and service-learning. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 13(3), 289-306.
- Vealey, K. P., & Gerding, J. M. (2021). Introduction to the Special Issue: "The Work of Storytelling in Technical Communication." *Technical Communication*, 68(4), 1–6.
- Walton, R., Moore, K. R., & Jones, N. N. (2019). *Technical communication after the social justice turn: Building coalitions for action*. Routledge.

Appendix A: Social Issues Informative Guide Project Overview

The following worksheet provides a complete overview of the Social Issues Informative Guide Project as designed for use in undergraduate technical communication courses. Instructors are encouraged to adapt objectives, guidelines, and assessment criteria to suit their institutional context.

Project Objectives

- Practice principles of invitational rhetoric by co-creating an informative guide that genuinely values diversity of input, facilitates participation on equal terms, and seeks to empower rather than exploit marginalized groups
- Build contextual and situated rhetorical knowledge to match community needs and priorities rather than imposing predetermined formats or frameworks
- Develop critical consciousness regarding intersections of social issues, specific discourse communities, technical communication practices, and systemic inequity
- Learn to recognize and resist extractive or othering approaches to marginalized communities and instead practice reciprocal, relational communication

Key Guidelines

- Student teams will identify a contemporary social issue (e.g., homelessness, immigration, healthcare access, disability justice, food insecurity) and impacted discourse community (e.g., unhoused veterans, migrant farmworkers, undocumented immigrants, Deaf individuals) through deliberative dialogue rather than top-down assignment, ensuring investment in the chosen focus
- Solutions and recommendations should be shaped based on priorities and perspectives actively solicited from discourse community members themselves through interviews, focus groups, surveys, or other outreach methods—not assumed personal knowledge or external expertise
- Design and communication strategies should demonstrate awareness of systemic factors including racism, poverty, disability, gender, language, and other dimensions to work toward authentic rather than performative inclusion
- Teams will share findings with class and collaboratively write reflective memos examining tensions, contradictions, and challenges that arose during the process, and suggesting revisions or next steps to strengthen invitational aims
- Assessment should evaluate both the final guide and the process by which it was created—with particular attention to whether invitational principles were genuinely honored in community engagement, or whether hierarchies and extraction occurred

Outcomes

Outcome	Evidence of Achievement
Community-Distributed Guide	Finalized guide(s) distributed to chosen community organization or directly to community members, demonstrating accountability beyond course completion
Rhetorical Reflection	Written reflection demonstrating rhetorical knowledge tailored to community context and a conscious approach to communication promoting genuine empowerment and access
Community Engagement Evidence	Documentation of authentic co-constructive learning, including reflection on moments where invitational aims were achieved and where challenges arose
Professional Identity Statement	Student articulation of how this project connects to their roles as future technical communicators accountable to justice