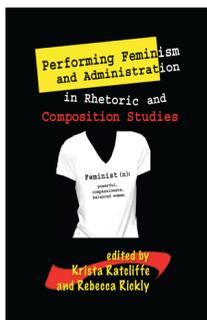


Book Review EditorJosé Laurence, *Grand Valley State University****Performing Feminism and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition Studies****Editors*

Krista Ratcliffe and Rebecca Rickly

New Jersey

Hampton Press

2010. 261 pp.

Reviewed by Alex Layne*Purdue University*

Performing *Feminism and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition Studies*, edited by Krista Ratcliffe and Rebecca Rickly, provides administrators a way to call into question traditional hierarchies that can stifle growth and innovation in academic fields such as rhetoric and composition and technical communication. This 15-article collection offers administrators practical methods for facing the material conditions of administration while working to further principles of feminism, such as collaboration, interruption, ethics, and agency. It also provides theoretical meditations on what it means to be simultaneously a feminist and a defender of principles that institutions value. However, the major strength of this book is its consistent connection to the context-driven, material conditions that administrators, instructors, and graduate students face. In other words, it is pragmatic, not idealistic. In a field such as technical communication that is striving to be more inclusive—evidence of which can be seen in the recent *Programmatic Perspectives* issue on diversity in technical communication—this type of feminist work can be immeasurably useful in opening our borders and enriching our practice.

The collection is divided into five parts, each part centering on a particular set of challenges feminist writing program administrators (WPAs) face. Part I, consisting of three chapters, explores the ethical, antifeminist, and problematic

situations confronting WPAs. Sybille Gruber ends Part I with a rich discussion of the conflict between utopian WPA theory and actual WPA practice. She calls for WPA scholars to create theories that allow for honest practice, rather than advocating for the unachievable: "What I suggest. . . is to ground our theories more fully and honestly in the reality of our practices" (p. 50). Gruber creates a counterbalance to the first two articles, which call for a stricter adherence to feminist theoretical principles. For technical communicators struggling to ground their teaching, research, and theory in contextual frameworks, Part I provides strategies for using theory and practice in ways that are situational, yet not so esoteric that they are unhelpful.

The four chapters in Part II interrogate the differing roles collaboration plays in a feminist approach to administration. In Chapter 4, Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Letizia Guglielmo argue that collaborative administration is a key factor in getting WPA work to be seen as intellectual work. Collaborative administration can flatten traditional academic hierarchies, instead dispersing authority diversely (p. 56–57). However, the authors of Chapter 6, Ilene Crawford and Donna Strickland, call this collaboration-centric approach into question. They argue that "collaboration, although useful, needs to be tempered with a commitment to the performance of interruption" (p. 77). For practitioners looking beyond reflection, Part II provides practical ways to use techniques that otherwise may seem counter to administrative duties.

Part III, three chapters, and Part IV, two chapters, continue to challenge assumptions found in the institution of the university. In Chapter 10, Kathleen Blake Yancey provides several narratives from her WPA career covering a wide range of topics from family, to budgets, to discipline. As do many authors in this book, she implicitly models a way for administrators to move beyond reflection to action. For technical communicators, action is a key part of our practice; thus learning how to move beyond reflection ethically is a topic of concern. Carol Mattingly and Paula Gillespie discuss the role of the writing center in fostering feminist goals of administration through "how we train our tutors to engage in good pedagogy and in how we mentor future leaders and administrators" (p. 179). As those currently teaching future technical communicators well know, mentoring is a key part of the field's success. Because technical communication does not have a unified set of universal principles and standards dictating practice, mentoring allows for a unique type of hands-on, situated instruction.

The final three chapters in Part V round out the book by looking at what is traditionally seen as nonintellectual work (for instance, editing) to see how this work can be enriched by a feminist theory of administration. For example, Kristine Blair and Lanette Cadle provide readers with a pragmatic method of mentorship through editing that they adopted when they reviewed graduate

student submissions at *Kairos*. They argue, “even at the word and sentence level, mentoring can lead to a more efficient work environment and also has the potential for higher quality of work in the future” (p. 209). Their success in using feminist principles in a traditionally hierarchical situation demonstrates the gains to be had from opening up spaces for alternative theories to exist alongside traditional ones.

Graduate students studying technical communication will likely find this collection valuable, as it provides methods for maintaining one’s ethics and principles while still participating in an environment that may run counter to those ethics and principles. Technical communication instructors may find the book useful as a source for helping them create systemic change while they participate as productive members of those systems. Administrators will find this collection an echo of their experiences as well as a guide for those who may feel they have had to resign their values to maintain the necessary level of management and bureaucracy.

It is somewhat unfortunate that the book is so firmly labeled a feminist work, as it will likely be passed over by those who need to read it the most—particularly administrators who have drawn the line between those who want to teach students to navigate the system and those who want to change the system. Beyond providing a feminist perspective, which is sorely needed in the field, this collection provides realistic ways for administrators to balance multiple alliances, whether they are to the university, industry, students, scholarship, tradition, or their fields of origin. Technical communication is inherently interdisciplinary, and thus administrators may find that this collection gives a voice to their experiences. Although the collection does focus on rhetoric and composition, the authors cover issues that administrators face in all disciplines, particularly those committed to interdisciplinarity. Ratcliffe and Rickly have provided readers with a way to face challenging administrative situations productively, without resigning deeply felt alliances. If technical communication is to become more diverse, this type of scholarship must become part of our body of knowledge.

Author Information

Alex Layne is a PhD student in Rhetoric and Composition at Purdue University. She specializes in Professional Writing and Rhetoric, Technology, and Digital Writing. She writes for the blog and podcast, *Not Your Mama’s Gamer*, where she researches and discusses gender issues in the video games industry. Currently, she is writing her dissertation on conducting ethical video game research.