the SVSU Literacy LINK
November 2003 Volume 8: Number 1

Information Literacy: *Making it Work*

by Anita Dey, Reference Librarian

Reference librarians at SVSU have been educating students in the use of information since the library's door first opened forty years ago. Teaching students how to efficiently and effectively search for the right information to succeed in their work continues to be the primary goal in 2003, whether at the Reference Desk or in classroom instruction.

As the availability of information exploded in the late eighties and early nineties, librarians became well aware that students needed to develop skills beyond those required for class assignments to function in the working world and in their personal lives. They needed to be "information literate". Brief encounters with students at the Reference Desk and in one time instruction sessions requested by the faculty only skimmed the surface of this issue.

As an attempt to determine the interest of students in a course devoted to information literacy and to fill the need for more in-depth instruction, in 1997 a one credit class (HUM 290 "Information Literacy") was offered between winter and spring semesters. Although the timing was unusual, the course filled immediately. Twenty-five students registered for the class. During one intensive week (6 hours each day), librarians covered in detail what is now outlined in the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) information literacy standards. However, one week's time did not prove enough to allow for more than minimal hands-on experience and almost no time for discussion or reflection after lecture. Despite the limitations, several course evaluations were positive, with a few commenting that they wish they could have taken the course earlier in their academic careers.

Information literacy standards, as defined by the ACRL, are touched upon every day at the Reference Desk. The challenge begins with encouraging students to ask questions that expose the vast resources and services available to them. It is at this point librarians address "information literacy" at the most basic level. Before the re-

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From the Editors' Desk(tops):

Lynne Graft

Helen Raica-Klotz

In winter semester of 2003, two sections of Helen's Advanced Composition class engaged in a service learning project in collaboration with Lynne Graft's Writing in Cyberspace class, creating a unique service learning website for our entire campus. The assignment for Helen's composition students was a relatively simple one: students were asked to research a community non-profit agency of their choice, and then spend three hours volunteering for that agency. Their first hand experience, along with their academic research, was combined into a persuasive letter addressed to SVSU students, encouraging them to volunteer their time with that non-profit organization.

Ten of these letters were given to the web design students in Lynne's course. Their responsibility was to showcase this student writing based on what they had learned about visual literacy and web design. The result was a our service learning website, a great resource for the entire campus to read about service learning through students' first-hand experiences, photographs, and links to the various agencies and their resources.

In fact, if you are thinking of using service learning in your course, it might be worth taking a look: http://www.svsu.edu/projects/servicelearning

To pull off this project, we met several times throughout the semester, talking about ways we could make this experience valuable for our students, engaging for us as course instructors, and useful to the university community as a whole.

In a few of these discussions, we began musing about the ties between our collaborative project and our roles as co-editors of *The Literacy Link*.

After all, we understand the word "literacy" in its broadest sense: to be an educated voice in an academic community. And "link", of course, means to bring together. So the journal *Literacy Link* should do on a much larger scale the same work that we were attempting last semester: to bring the university together to listen to educated voices discuss ways of teaching academic literacy in our various disciplines.

To facilitate this goal, we've made some changes to the journal. First, thanks to the hard

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Lynne Graft Helen Raica-Klotz	Danyelle Freeman	Tim Inman	Saginaw Valley State University Graphics Center
co-editors	graphics & layout	photography	printing

The SVSU Literacy Link is published two times per academic year. Those interested in submitting articles may contact either Lynne Graft at x4030 or lgraft@svsu.edu, or Helen Raica-Klotz at x2066 or klotz@svsu.edu. Articles may also be mailed to SVSU Dept. of English, 7400 Bay Road, Brown 326, University Center, MI 48710.

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work of Danyelle Freeman in the Student Technology Center, we have a new look our journal this year: larger print, photos of our contributors, a more useful table of contents. We think you'll agree that these changes in our layout make the *Literacy Link* a much more reader-friendly journal.

And in addition to the print version, you can now find the *Literacy Link* online at www.svsu.edu/newsletters/literacylink. Here, you can access past articles, and use our dialogue box to respond to a series of questions related to the current issue. We also included our contributor's guidelines and the editor's emails, so if you have an idea for an article, you can drop us a line and tell us about it. After all, another contemporary meaning of the word "link" is web-based definition: a location on the web to access further information quickly.

Finally, each year our journal will focus on a theme. This year, our two issues will be examining the topic of technology. We are interested in articles that examine how you use technology in your teaching, discussions of how technology has changed your teaching, and your personal journeys to becoming "technologically literate."

We hope you like this issue of *The Literacy Link*.

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search begins, librarians work with students to recognize the nature and extent of the information they seek. This is the focus of the first information literacy standard.

It is not unusual for students to be intimidated and confused by libraries and information technology. For example, when navigating the library home page students must distinguish between the library's online catalog and the myriad of electronic databases and how they work together. Recognizing the various formats, such as print resources from electronic, can be a challenge with thousands of e-books and e-journals available. In addition, a significant amount of time is spent on teaching the effective use of software menus and navigation buttons. This encompasses the second literacy standard, which addresses the need to search effectively and efficiently for information.

Librarians also stress the need for student to be discriminate when selecting material whether they are searching a database, the Internet or other sources as outlined by the ACRL information literacy guidelines. The entire process of evaluation is often new to students who are unfamiliar with the variety and quality of information sources available beyond their high school or public library.

Appointments with individual Reference librarians are offered to students who have extensive research needs. Librarians can then build on a student's information literacy skills by teaching more involved search strategies. Suggesting specialized databases and revealing software intricacies that retrieve information which is difficult to find, gives students a new perspective on research and may offer additional possibilities.

The library's instruction program offers specialized classroom presentations and an op-

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portunity for hands-on experience. Librarians work with faculty on an individual basis to tailor classes to assigned projects and papers. During the basic library orientation session librarians outline resources available, discuss basic strategies students can use to find the most appropriate information for their needs and talk about library services. Advanced sessions for upper level classes focus on specialized databases, resources and search strategies. Librarians realize that students have a difficult time absorbing all the information presented during these sessions. Reference staff encounter many novice researchers who prefer to search web sites on the Internet or select only full-text databases, making choices based only on expedience.

As an added means to reach students, special software was purchased to allow librarians to create online interactive tutorials. The first tutorial focused on CARDCAT, the library's online catalog. Included in the tutorial are explanations and examples of search options, limiting choices and the recently purchased "Scopes", which allow users to search designated library collections. A quiz covering materials in the tutorial was also created with this software to assist students with gauging their understanding of the concepts. Many more tutorials are planned since content can be focused, providing detailed information on products and research strategies while also being convenient for students.

More problematic are the information literacy standards which require students to work as group members to accomplish specific purposes (Standard 4) and to understand the economic, legal, ethical, and social issues surrounding the access and use of information (Standard 5). These facets of information literacy require quality time between students and librarians in a setting that is conducive to collaboration, discussion, and reflection.

In the future, SVSU librarians, in conjunction with academic departments on campus can offer students viable options to expand their information literacy skills. One option is to add an expanded one credit course to the SVSU curriculum which includes the positive elements of the course offered in 1997, while encompassing faculty input and the ACRL Literacy Standards. This avenue of reaching students, as well as continuing the traditional classroom sessions and other services, would provide a well rounded approach for teaching students valuable information literacy skills required to be successful during their academic years as well as at work and home. LL

A.L.A. STANDARDS:

The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.

The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.

The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.

The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.

The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

Writerly Research:

Helping Students to Take Charge of Their Knowledge

". . . the goal of literary work (of literature as work) [which] is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text."
-Roland Barthes, S/Z

by Elizabeth Rich, Department of English

The script is familiar. Just a couple of weeks into a new semester, you have delivered to your students a research assignment that you have fine-tuned, based on student performance and feedback over the years. Just when you thought that all of the bases are covered, that the assignment would be clear to someone who is not even in your class, a student's concern arises: "I've been searching for a week, but I just can't find ANYTHING on the Salem witch trials!" To the bemused instructor, this articulation of frustration is a student-style "secret code." This student is really saying any or all of the following: "I cannot find a source that says just what I want to say." "I do not know what to do with what I have found." "Do I really have to read five books on the subject before I can start this paper that is due in a week and a half?"

Roland Barthes makes a distinction between the "readerly text," that which can be consumed with little or no thought, and the "writerly text," that which demands the reader to participate, think, react, and engage with it. As students can produce tens of thousands of web sites and articles on a given topic instantaneously with the use of new research technologies, they enter what can be either a stimulating or frustrating experience. Sometimes, the search yields so much information that students move into what appears to be "passive activity," an oxymoronic state in which they do and produce but remain dissatisfied with being unable to gain meaningful knowledge from the research project. Some examples of how they can find sources and produce meaningless writing may include skimming only online articles that appear in the first page of a Google or database search and / or stringing together short summaries of their sources in each body paragraph of their paper, so that the research paper looks like a research paper but fails to have taken a critical look at the sources and synthesized the information. What is at stake is teaching quality thinking and writing

". . . the goal of literary work (of literature as work) [which] is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text."
-Roland Barthes, S/Z

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when technology has made the process easy to fake. What results is dissatisfaction on both sides: Teachers, frustrated with reading weak papers and students, feeling as if their time were spent on busy work.

Those of us who introduce students to academic writing and research skills in classes like Freshman Composition and Topics in Critical Writing, try to teach students how to locate,

Directing the complex activity of research writing, much of which happens in the students' own thinking, is often difficult.

evaluate, synthesize, and assimilate information so that it becomes a part of their knowledge base, instead of a litany of facts that stores itself momentarily in the students' short-term memories. As students and teachers alike can attest, this process is difficult. As the same questions and concerns arise year after year, we fill up our bag of tricks with things to help, brainstorming key words with which to do searches, discussing strategies for generating research questions, and getting students to go use several different kinds resources, like on-line databases, CardCat, student-created surveys, and the worldwide web. Directing the complex activity of research writing, much of which happens in the students' own thinking, is often difficult. It contains many activities and details to keep in mind at once to stave off such shortcuts as staying too close to the sources, causing the final paper to be more of a summary than an analysis or synthesized effort, being too general, or using so much opinion and / or personal experience that the sources lose their integrity.

On the one hand, electronic research methods have made it easier to find material and have increased the number of sources to which students have access. On the other hand, students often look for an article, preferably on-line, that will cover the topic from an angle that they have in mind. Instead of owning the angle, that is to say having a sense of purpose for how the students bring their research together in writing, and using sources to support what they think, students often become dependent on the sources and panic when the perfect source does not present itself. I have found that taking my classes to the Melvin J. Zahnow Library for a variety of introductory approaches to library and Internet resources has benefited my students, discussion, and final papers in my classes. Scott Mellendorf, Gloria Lawler, and Thomas Zantow have all taken my students through introductions to the library resources that are course specific. While freshmen might need a survey of databases and a quick how-to lesson on using CardCat, junior-level Writing in the Professions students might need to focus on articles in a variety of databases, and English majors need to know how best to use the English databases. These introductory sessions keep in mind the Association of College and Research Libraries' Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.

After a particularly noticeable improvement in my Writing Interpretive Papers students' research papers, I spoke with Linda Farynk, the library's director. I told her that I ha begun to see the students researching sources that were slightly

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off their specific topics, because they thought that they could use the information as it applied to a different context. For example, looking up a particular topic on a novel that a student did not read for class would appear to be "off the topic" to an inexperienced researcher. However, a critical and creative approach that is necessary to researching might just include looking at the treatment of a similar idea applied to a different text, for example, and this sort of strategizing is just what a good research writer needs to do. With some coaching, the student is able to perform at this level in one semester after she or he is made aware of the process. After I told her of my positive experience, Linda gave me a copy of the Competency Standards, which help to articulate this complicated part of our teaching.

What this means is not that writing is not important. It means that the writing process begins earlier than students consciously recognize.

The standards, which clearly identify many of the "thinking steps" involved in doing research, demonstrate that most of the work that is set out in five standards has to do with deciding on, evaluating, and using information and sources. The standards also follow the process in a chronological sequence that begins with defining the way that the student will approach the topic, not knowing in advance what the paper will say or even (the exceptionally vague phrase) "what the paper will be about" but rather determining what questions must be satisfactorily answered in the paper. What is most striking about the standards is that the writing of the paper is not addressed until the fourth standard, which is quite late in the process. What this means is not that writing is not important. It means that the writing process begins earlier than students consciously recognize. Writing happens every day that the students perform research strategies, think about their topics, and collect and read their sources. In this sense, writing is much more of a collective and interactive event than the popular image of a person staring at a blank sheet of paper or computer screen, thinking about what he or she will say. By engaging with a mass of texts in a "writerly" way, to borrow Roland's concept of the active and stimulating "writerly text," students change from being passive consumers of information to active owners of their own knowledge. Although many of the standards set out by the Association of College and Research Libraries are what we do when we teach research and writing, the standards articulate what we do clearly and would be well worth covering with students in class. These standards can be found at the American Library Association website (http://www.ala.org) and typing "information literacy standards" into their website search window in the upper right-hand corner of the screen. These standards complement what we, as instructors do, what the library helps us to do, and, most importantly, they help students to articulate specific needs during the most solitary part of the research / writing process. LL

Letting Technology Work for You:

The Use of the Smart Podium

by James Geistman, Department of Criminal Justice

It is not uncommon for students in lecture classes to feel overwhelmed, especially when their class meets once a week in a three-hour block. The professor may feel overwhelmed, as well. She is confronted with the daunting task of synthesizing what the students have read for class with additional material from her own reading and research. She is attempting to offer students not only the basic factual knowledge of the course, but also to offer a context in which to place this knowledge. Ultimately, the professor is attempting to get students to be able to think critically on their own.

And both are frustrated when the lectures don't seem to be working. Exams often reveal that many students have neither absorbed the necessary factual information nor the thinking strategies necessary to deal with that information. Conversations with students may reveal that they are having a hard time seeing the connections between the text and the lectures. Course evaluations may reveal dissatisfaction with the professor's pedagogy, especially her organizational skills.

Is there a way for professors to maintain the lecture format and still offer the students more in the way of both comment and context? Yes, through strategic use of the Smart Podium. Professors can display the lecture outline on the screen for students to follow. I have found that it is best to display major points from the assigned reading on the overhead, along with added material that I wish to cover.

Using the Smart Podium is a relatively simple task. First, use the M drive. All faculty members have access to this from their office computers, and it is a convenient place to store course material. The professor simply prepares the lecture and saves it to the M drive. When she arrives at her classroom, she simply logs on, opens up Word or WordPerfect, selects the M drive, and opens the appropriate file. She then turns on the overhead projector, selects the Podium Computer feature, and the lecture notes are displayed on the screen.

Using the Smart Podium serves five purposes:

Monitoring Material.

The first purpose is to monitor both what and how much material has been covered. This is important in terms of pacing the class and in order of keeping track of the material to include on examinations. Because the material is accessible

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and easy to alter, the professor knows just where she is during the semester, and she is certain about the material that she may expect students to know.

Modeling Reading Strategies.

The second purpose is to model the way in which to choose main points from the assigned reading. As I noted above, recording material from assigned reading to use as the basis for lecture allows me to model a reading strategy. It also allows me to demonstrate how quotation may be used, as well as the documentation of a quotation. I can also comment on the structure of the assigned reading, since I am not sure that the majority of students necessarily see the ways in which authors have connected their ideas. This has ramifications for the students' own comprehension as well as their own writing and thinking. Perhaps if I can demonstrate to them the careful thought that such writing reveals, I may be better able to teach them about organizing their own thinking and writing.

Integrating Material.

Third, I can integrate material from other sources. At this point, the reader may be thinking that I am simply describing another method of lecturing straight out of the text. I'm not. I do feel that it is important to base lectures on what they have read for two reasons. First, it drives home the necessity of doing the reading—many students tend to feel that all that matters in a course is what is discussed in class. By basing lectures on the reading, I am able to dispel that notion. Second, I am able to integrate material from other reading and research as a way to provide examples and further explanations about concepts.

Or example, in my Domestic Terrorism course this semester, I am using Jonathan R. White's *Terrorism: An Introduction*. It is a compact, readable, and well-researched text, but it tends to sacrifice depth for breadth. Consequently, I find it necessary to provide more depth with material from other texts, film, and websites. Such material is integrated into the lecture, allowing students the benefit not only of White's expertise, but that of other authors and sources as well.

Using the Smart Podium serves five purposes:

1. *Monitoring Material*
2. *Modeling Reading Strategies*
3. *Integrating Material*
4. *Expanding on and Explaining Material*
5. *Recording Responses to Small Group Work*

Expanding On and Explaining Material.

Fourth, I can expand on and further explain material in the readings. A complaint frequently heard from students is that their professor "does not answer the question." Students will

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also contend that professors "go off on tangents" and get off the subject of the question or comment. There may be some truth to this. Very often a student question or comment, especially an astute one, will trigger further ideas in the mind of the professor, and she will be eager to share these ideas and insights with the students. Unfortunately, all the student is looking for is a relatively simple response, and the student often has a hard time gleaning an answer from the professor's wide-ranging response.

By using the Smart Podium to answer the question, the professor can both answer the question directly and suggest further ideas for the student to consider. The best way to answer the question directly is to go to the place in the lecture notes where the question originated. Here, after the professor has spoken, she can actually type a brief response for students to see. In this way, the student can both hear and read the answer to his question. In addition, the professor can type further ideas to consider, and briefly discuss how they relate to the question the student asked. Such expansion can be brief, although composing an answer is another way of modeling how to think about and answer a question. The major point I am making is that the answer to the question as well as explanation of related material is reinforced by being both spoken and then *written*.

Recording Responses to Small-Group Work.

Finally, use of the Smart Podium allows me to record material from and interact with students when they do small group assignments. When done well, small-group work can provide for a serious exchange of ideas about the subject matter and/or an opportunity to apply course knowledge in some way. For example, in the Domestic Terrorism class, we spent time discussing ways in which terrorists groups are organized as well as how they plan and carry out their attacks. As a way to reinforce this knowledge, I composed a small-group assignment (see below) based on an idea in White's text. Students were then divided into groups of four to discuss the questions and respond to them, basing their responses on material we had discussed so far.

After they had worked through each of the steps, we came together as a class to discuss their "plans." While they were working, I opened up the file that held their assignment and had that on display on the screen. When each group began giving its responses, I would keep track of key points they had made in regard to each item on the list, and we discussed how the decisions they had made related to the material we had read and discussed. This allowed students to discuss issues in their own group, but to see what other students had to say as well. It allowed me to "anchor" what was said in the pertinent course material. I also used this as an opportunity to let them know that I would probably draw test questions from the discussion.

Some Caveats.

While I have found that the Smart Podium has allowed me to convey information and critical thinking skills more easily, I have also noted some drawbacks. First of all, many students feel the need to copy down *everything* that is on the screen. The drawback here is that they are not then listening to the lecture. I urge them to jot down the main points on the board and supplement them with what I'm saying, but they still insist on writing down every word.

One way that I have tried to counter this problem is by designating 2-3 students to copy down the information during class. They then

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type up their notes, and I put copies of them in the library. In this way, the majority of the students are allowed the luxury of listening to the lecture and asking questions, knowing that they can always make copies of the notes that are in the library.

Unfortunately, this leads to another drawback. Some students think that, since the material on the screen is based on the text, and, since the notes will be in the library, they need not take notes. I have no easy way of dealing with this situation, other than to urge them to interact with the material. It seems that one fallacy about technology is that it makes things "easy." To these students, it appears that I have done all of the work and am presenting them with a neat package, which, in a way, I am. But it is a package that has to be opened and used.

Strategic use of the Smart Podium allows the professor to prepare lessons in which to deal more thoroughly with material, as well as to provide students with more in the way of material and methods for learning that material. Strategic use of the Smart Podium can also provide students with a wealth of information; it can allow professors to experiment with new ways to present material; it can improve the comprehension of material from the text; and it can help students better synthesize text material with other material that the professor wishes to incorporate. It is a "smart" investment of our time.

Sample Assignment: Planning a Terrorist "Attack"

Because you and a group of your friends strongly oppose the widespread use of computers, as well as the seemingly unchecked growth of technology in general, you plan to start a war against technology. Currently, there are only five of you, but you think that your ideas are right, and you are certain that you can attract more followers. Your goal is to form a group of 100 like-minded indi-

In your groups, discuss

- How you would recruit people to your cause;
- How you would justify your actions;
- How you would organize the group (draw up an organizational chart);
- What type of terrorist act you would perpetrate;
- How you would go about perpetrating it (timetable, weapons, escape, etc.);
- How/if you would claim responsibility (by the way, you'll need an appropriate name);
- How you would maintain secrecy and loyalty.

Draw from what you have read and what we have discussed in class to make your plan as realistic as possible. Understanding how terrorists think and operate is a way to prevent terrorist actions.

Technical Literacy in the Disciplines

by Sally Decker, Department of Nursing

Literacy is most broadly defined by the as the ability to read and write at a specific age (CIA World Factbook). My first response to this definition was that it did not capture the idea of literacy within a discipline, let alone technical literacy within my specific discipline — nursing. On reflection, however, I started to think of the words we use to describe some of the interventions performed by a nursing professionals: "read" the patient's face for response to experience; "read" the ECG tracing; "read" the X-ray; "read" the chart; "read" the family or community dynamics; "read" the literature. All of these suggest the ability to "make sense" of information in a variety of textual, technological and human formats. So in that sense the ability to "read" is very important and being literate as a nurse, especially technically literate, involves the ability to make sense of technical outputs in the context of human outputs (e.g. The EKG tracking may be a flat line, but you don't do resuscitation if the person is talking to you and in no distress as the EKG leads have probably gotten disconnected).

The International Reading Association (2002) issued a statement about literacy in an increasingly technological world: "..traditional definitions of reading, writing and viewing, and traditional definitions of best practice instruction—derived from a long tradition of books and other print media—will be insufficient." This is very much the case within the disciplines where the ability the "read" includes much more than data in a textual format. It also means the idea of reading a situation for the type of informational needs and assessing the usability of the information.

Using this same broad conceptualization of the Census definition of literacy, nursing professionals "write." They use multiple methods of textual and non-textual forms to communicate outcomes of care. Much of this writing has been created by coding schemes using standardized taxonomies which can be computerized for purposed of billing and quality evaluation. They have names like DRGs, ICD-9 codes, NANAD diagnoses, NIC, NOC, and ICNP. This form of "writing" is only understood by individuals within a discipline and carries with it all of the social and political implications of the ability to label, diagnose, and evaluate outcomes. Nursing professionals also write plans of care and progress—legal documents which care with them required formats and research articles—again requiring writing in the format of the discipline. In the more metaphorical sense, we talk about nurses helping patients to "write" their preferred health future (i.e. cocreate health).

Literacy within this complex context of a discipline then becomes a form of critical thinking where the nurse recognizes the constructed (socially, politically, culturally) nature of the information being "read" or "written" and is sensitive to the use of that information to communicate in ways which simultaneously promote health outcomes and uphold privacy within the health care system.

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Technology: *A Pathway to International Collaboration*

by Diane Boehm, Director of Instructional Support Programs/ University Writing Center

Globalization. Multiculturalism. International Collaboration. The Global Village. These terms and concepts underlie the goals of many institutions of higher education today. Faculty in many countries are committed to these ideals; textbooks in many subject areas discuss them. But it is one thing to teach these concepts via textbooks and lectures; it is quite another to structure the type of learning experience that will make the international workplace of the future, and the multiple literacies it will require, real for students.

I set out on my path to international collaboration via technology in spring of 2002, with a virtual chat between students in the class of my friend Lilianna Aniola-Jedrzejek at Poznan (Poland) University of Technology (PUT) and my SVSU students in English 300H, Writing in the Professions. Based on the SVSU students' enthusiasm and suggestions, Lilianna and I determined to create a collaborative online project in which the students of both universities would work together on Blackboard to experience international cooperation as they jointly created a course project and presentation at each university.

The 14 Polish students, studying at the Faculty of Computing Sciences and Management, were enrolled in a compulsory course in English with elements of Business English; 10 students were in engineering management, 4 in computing sciences. The 21 SVSU English 300 students

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But to be literate as a member of a discipline is not just about technical literacy. If to be literate is to understand meanings within the context of an individual and society, then it requires professionals to also understand non-technological information. To understand the experience of pain—not just as a score or a lab value or an X-ray result, is to explore movies (visual literacy), novels, poems, artwork and to "write" (journal/ write poetically) your responses for self-exploration so you can, as a literate member of your discipline, work toward the outcomes which are the focus of that discipline—in my case health.

International Reading Association (2002). Integrating Literacy in the Curriculum Brochure designed by Linda Steere www.reading.org/positions.html

CIA World Factbook (2002). www.Nationanmaster.com/graph-T/edu_lit_def

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were divided between majors in Education (14) and in Business & Management (7).

The goal for this collaborative assignment was stated thus: The workplace of the 21st century will increasingly demand employees who bring a global perspective as well as a multiplicity of abilities to their work, including an understanding of world cultures, an ability to work collaboratively, and the capacity to integrate technology into many facets of their work. This assignment is designed to foster these abilities.

To achieve this goal, student groups were to develop a collaborative project in English that included both countries, based on research and an interchange of ideas, on one of the following 6 topics: government, culture, education, employment, environment, banking and economic systems.

The project had the following requirements:

- A minimum of 10 -12 pages total (text, links, images, sources)
- A minimum of 5 World Wide Weblinks/resources
- A minimum of 3 relevant images
- A minimum of 1 application activity (how someone would use the material; e.g., a lesson or unit plan for teaching, a business case study)
- A class presentation.

The Blackboard support team assisted me in registering the students and setting up a timeline. Each group conducted its work on its Blackboard GROUPS site. We began by posting photos of each group at PUT and at SVSU to our site, and then arranged a Virtual Chat in which students would become acquainted with their cohorts at the other university and explore a focus for their project. Students then used their group Discussion Board and email list to continue their planning; some groups scheduled additional Virtual Chats; all exchanged materials via File Exchange or email attachments.

Each group first needed to determine the audience for its materials (the anticipated reader/user of the materials, e.g., educators, business owners, etc.), then the format that would be most appropriate for this audience and topic (e.g., a teaching module, business guidelines, etc.)

Each of the project groups focused on a specific subtopic for its identified audience, combining research on both Polish and US aspects of the subtopic:

Education
Higher education systems in both countries, including expenses and the types and extent of financial aid available to students

Employment
Employment prospects for young graduates in both countries, the job market, unemployment, types of attractive jobs, services to help find a good job

Government
The function of the Polish and US presidency

Environment
Sources of air pollution in Poland and the US and methods to reduce air pollution

Banking & Eco- nomic Systems
Banking systems, financial institutions, and investment opportunities in both countries, including strategies for safe investments

Culture
The importance of multicultural awareness in the workplace, including business etiquette in Poland

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and the US, and the value of multilingualism as an important factor of any cross-cultural communication

All 6 groups successfully completed all aspects of the project:

- They created extensive, informative materials (exceeding the minimum)
- They developed useful application activities: e.g., a brochure, a case study, a brief skit
- They shared their project in PowerPoint class presentations in the same week at both PUT and SVSU.

The reports and PPT presentations have been posted to my website, http://www.svsu.edu/~dboehm/PUT_Collaborative_Project.html, should you wish to learn more about the project.

To assess the benefits and drawbacks of this project, we gave an anonymous questionnaire to both groups of students. Both Polish and American students agreed that the project had a positive impact on their learning; they reported:

- The project provided an opportunity for them to expand their world view, to understand similarities and differences between how students from different cultures approach these topics
- It provided an opportunity to learn how to cooperate within a multinational group
- It was a unique learning experience; none of the US or Polish students had previously collaborated online with students from another country
- For Polish students, the project significantly improved language skills, enriching vocabulary and the use of language in a real context.

As the project unfolded, we also developed a list of issues to attend to in future collaborations:

1. It is essential to create a friendly online environment; photos and time dedicated to relationship-building are important to set the stage for collaboration.

2. The lack of face-to-face possibilities makes cooperation challenging, since the nonverbal communication is missing.

3. Cultural differences may result in uncertainty when verbalizing needs and tensions. For example, when US students in the Government group suggested some discussion of differences between communism and democracy, the Polish students at first only hinted that did not wish to revisit that part of their history; only when they became more assertive did the SVSU students finally understand their depth of feeling about this.

Different timetables and rhythms require careful planning. The US students were near midterm of the fall semester when the Polish semester began in October. Thus the Polish students invested the most time at the beginning of the project, just when the US students were preoccupied with midterm exams and other assignments. The US students, confident in their language skills, were less concerned about getting materials ready early in the project timeline.

Polish students, writing in their second or perhaps third language, had difficulty understanding some of the language and idioms of their American colleagues when preparing the project and oral presentations. None of the SVSU students had learned to write in another language, so they often underestimated the difficulty of this task for their Polish counterparts.

American students are taught to immediately cite all materials both in-text and in a bibli-

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ography, a concept which is just beginning to be emphasized in some European universities. SVSU students frequently had to remind their counterparts—and explain why—they could not use materials which lacked citations.

As with any challenging project, satisfaction and achievement were tempered by times of frustration and tension. Though we instructors were in continuous contact via email and chats, we intervened only when absolutely necessary, since we believe that removing all obstacles, while it might smooth out the process, is unrealistic. International collaboration is by its very nature an exercise in problem-solving. Once students come to that realization, they can apply their creativity and energy to resolving lack of understanding or miscommunication.

Online international collaboration can indeed open the world to students. To cite two examples: Poland was accepted for membership in the European Union during the course of the project. Few of the SVSU students had any knowledge of the EU, but after this event, they began paying attention to news stories about the EU and its impact on their counterparts and asking questions in their Discussions. And one SVSU student, in her interview for admission into the College of Education, even used this collaborative experience as evidence that she had begun to understand the complexities of working with students from other cultures.

Based on what my PUT colleague and I have learned, we are eager to explore other types of international student collaboration. This semester my ENGL 111H students will be interviewing their Polish counterparts online as part of their research on world cultures. To make it easier for their PUT counterparts to get to know them, the SVSU students have created personal Blackboard webpages. Our first Virtual Chat is coming up. I can feel my anticipation rising, as again my students and I, using the tools of technology, set off down the path of international collaboration.

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