

Literacy Link

Winter 2009

From the Editors' Desktops



Helen's View

I was born and raised in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. As a college freshman, I remember driving my Mazda over the Mackinaw Bridge for the first time by myself, marveling at the steel rods that spanned the bridge, lifting and rising above my head in a graceful arch. These iron rods seemed very thin, small really, viewed from 20 and 30 feet below, but the sheer number of them constructed so closely together are able to hold up the entire weight of the bridge. I am told this bridge is a modern marvel: one of the first and largest suspension bridges in the United States.



I'm no mechanical engineer, so how this really works is unclear to me. All I know is that it works, and I trust it to work. In fact, years ago I stopped thinking about the unusual construction every time I crossed; now I barely notice the rods rising in sequence about my head (unless, of course, it's a very windy day.)

My understanding of the Mackinaw Bridge's construction is exactly how I envision students' college experience; starting with English 111, then moving into general education courses, then into classes in the students' majors and minors, this series of courses a student takes grows in scope and in depth as time and experience allow. And after a series of courses and much time spent reading, writing, and thinking at our university, these students have created a bridge to a

different place: one in which their view of the world is changed. And I'll bet that our students view their college education a lot like this bridge: they see the scaffolding in the sequence of courses they are required to take, but how it really works to develop them as critical thinkers—how it works at all—is a bit of a mystery.

So it is up to us, as instructors, to engineer these experiences, to make this bridge from assignment to assignment, from class to class, from general education classes to those in their majors and minors work. Because if we don't do this

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work, the bridge of the college education (and my extended metaphor) falls apart.

Chris's View

The summer between 7th and 8th grade, my family made our first big trek to the UP; we were planning to visit Mackinaw and then move on to the road's end near Calumet. There, I'd meet relatives I knew only from Christmas cards. So I found myself in our maroon Ford station wagon with the fake wood panels on the side, boundaries continually being crossed in the back seat ("Mom, he's on my side of the car again!"), and suddenly, the Mighty Mac loomed in front of us, its image reflecting on the hood. Sure, I'd seen the photos on the phone book and in social studies class, but this was it.

No one, however, had warned me about the reality of crossing it. We started to complain about the noise we heard when my dad drove in the lane next to the center line. Grates? You've got to be kidding? But the outside lane meant we were that much closer to the edge. The window seat was no longer fought over; I gave it up to my brother willingly and forced myself to look straight ahead—not out over the water. The bridge went on and on and on. Fear and disorientation stuck in my throat. I clenched my eyes shut and swallowed hard, wishing for land, asphalt.

This memory too must be part of our students' experience: bridging the gap between high school and college, between a cloudy future and definite plans, between courses, majors, minors, this is a scary situation, full of uncertainty. Our students want to be successful, but how

many of them find themselves unmoored at this bridge we call college, this place between their final destinations?

Our Common Perspective

So, as you begin to read this latest edition of Literacy Link, we hope we have provided you with some opportunities to consider the way that college works to provide bridges for students, and how disorienting these passages can be. With that in mind, you will find Dr. Martin Arford, in "Increasing Global Literacy through Travel Abroad," discussing his recent study abroad trip with SVSU students to Costa Rica, combining lessons in geography with real-world experiences. Art Instructor Mr. Phillip Hanson and SVSU student Brittney Forsyth discuss their different experiences in an introductory Art Appreciation course in a combined essay titled "AcCLIMation: A Difficult Climb from High School- to College-Level Work." Dr. Edward Noronha presents a different model of teaching writing based on his experiences in India in "Writing Courses in India: A Differing View." Literacy Link intern Sara Kitchen reports on SVSU summer camps and the connections made there between the classroom and the real world, and between SVSU and local middle and secondary school students. And, lastly, Ms. Diane Boehm presents a book review of *The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan, a children's picture book about the immigrant experience that serves as a metaphor for many of our instructors and students' experiences here at the university.

We hope these articles broaden your view of the work we do.

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Increasing Global Literacy through Travel Abroad

Martin Arford

Assistant Professor of Geography

Literacy was formerly understood as the ability to read, write, and communicate verbally. In this era of increasing globalization, this definition is no longer appropriate. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 defined literacy as “an individual’s ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society” (as cited in National Institute for Literacy, 2008). But today’s society is much larger and more diverse than ever before, causing our modern understanding of literacy to expand. For example, in Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, he includes in the concept of literacy “reading the word and the world,” (as cited in Educational Development Center, 2006; emphasis added), and an unidentified participant in a Global Literacy workshop in Canada has similarly stated that “We are striving to ensure that our students gain a global perspective by obtaining skills and cultural understanding needed to thrive in an international environment” (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2002). Being literate today should include knowing about and being able to interact with cultures and societies beyond our home country. I can think of no better way to increase our students’ global literacy than by taking them abroad to study.

I remember vividly my first trip to Jamaica in 1983 before beginning my college studies (I tagged along with a study abroad trip as a non-credit-seeking participant). Seeing abject poverty in the presence of lavish resorts profoundly changed my worldview. Nine years later, as an undergraduate, I

enrolled in several field courses that took me to Newfoundland, Costa Rica, and the Bahamas, and I served a ten-week internship aboard an National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ship in the equatorial Pacific with visits to three Hawaiian islands. I chose a graduate program specifically so I could do my field research in Costa Rica: reconstructing environmental history from microfossils in lake sediments. I also had opportunities to conduct field research (in Bolivia and the Dominican Republic) and to take a three-week field-based ecology course in Costa Rica. These experiences were so enriching that, as a college instructor, my goal became to provide my own students with opportunities to travel abroad.

Flash forward to May 2008, when I had the pleasure of taking twenty SVSU students to Costa Rica with Dr. Evelyn Ravuri for a three-credit Geography of Costa Rica trip. Prior to our trip, only three of the students had ever traveled outside of the U.S. and



Photo by: S. Kitchen

Students on the spring 2008 faculty-led study abroad trip to Costa Rica awoke one morning to the sun rising behind the active Arenal Volcano during their stay in La Fortuna.

Canada, and two had never flown before. A few students had never been outside of Michigan. This was exactly the kind of student group I had hoped for and, based

on our student population at SVSU, also the group we were most likely to have—one with limited travel experience and the most to gain from foreign travel.

A Costa Rican guide helped SVSU students cross the crystal blue Rio Celeste during their challenging hike through Tenorio Volcano National Park.



montane wet forests, visited Colonial-era buildings as the Colonial Period was discussed, learned about river processes while rafting on the Sarapiquí River, and visited small farming towns and a coastal tourist community to learn about the Costa Rican economy. Our after-dinner exercise on adiabatic processes took place following an outing up to a cool, cloudy volcanic peak. We climbed around hot springs and sulfur fumaroles on a volcano, and then we visited the geothermal energy plant using the same steam heat to generate electricity. One highlight of the trip, as told by students, was watching Arenal Volcano erupt at night from our balconies. What better way to make the topic of plate tectonics come to life? Formal lectures were conducted while students were experiencing the topic. In my

Our twelve-day adventure included traveling around Costa Rica, visiting sites, and having mini-lectures as we went. I focused on exposing students to aspects of the natural environment, such as plate tectonics and volcanoes, tropical climates and ecology, and understanding human-environmental interactions. Dr. Ravuri, on the other hand, focused on the history, culture, economics, and demographics of the developing country in the context of globalization issues. Students learned about tropical ecology while hiking through rainforests and pre-

opinion, this is experiential learning at its best. However, one very important aspect of their growing global literacy was the unstructured, informal learning that took place.

For example, one morning we participated in a service project to paint much of the outside of a nursing home for otherwise homeless elderly citizens. Students were told how this facility depended on donations and volunteerism to stay open and how vital their contributions were. But they understood the significance

Call for Papers

The editors of Literacy Link invite members of the campus community to submit articles for review and possible inclusion in the Fall 2009 issue.

Articles may address a variety of literacy practices including such topics as teaching strategies, activities, and research; critical thinking; writing across the curriculum; or book reviews. The editors are especially interested in how literacy is defined by different disciplines, how professors use literacy in their various classes, what professors expect of student writing, what professors encounter in student writing, and how students respond to literacy expectations.

Articles for Literacy Link should run 500 to 1,500 words in length. Authors should follow either MLA or APA format.

Submit articles to

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7400 Bay Road
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Submission deadline for the Fall 2009 issue is October 1, 2009.

of their efforts and were rewarded by their interactions with the residents. Smiling faces in wheelchairs, hugs, and “thank you”s in Spanish translated into literacy that transcended the language gap. Another experience shared by several students was seeing where one of our guides lived. He was their age and connected with them socially, but Roberto’s home was a tiny, run-down cement block house with a make-shift roof. This, more than any classroom experience, helped them to understand how different our lives and lifestyles are from most of the world’s people, yet how we share our common humanity.

Near the end of the trip, our group met up with another faculty-led student group from my undergraduate alma mater, Indiana University of Pennsylvania. One of the other group’s faculty leaders, Denny Aussel, was one of the leaders on my first trip to Costa Rica in 1996. It was great hearing Dr. Aussel, or “Denny,” recall how twelve years earlier I learned about the culture and landscapes of Costa Rica. He told me, “I remember you were so excited, running around banging on rocks and checking out all the plants. I see some things have not changed!” I found it remarkable that he remembered so vividly my excitement on that expedition. We discussed how he was “passing the torch” as I led my first student trip and re-created some of that excitement for my own students. Meeting up with Denny in Costa Rica, serendipitously, brought my experience full circle. I hope that the experience gained by my students will be fruitful for them, whether by repeating another cycle of student-turned-faculty-leader, or through a greater understanding of global literacy applied to their chosen careers. Either way, the result will be positive.

The popularity of faculty-led student travel has been increasing quickly at SVSU, and our University is committed to increase faculty-led programs abroad. The SVSU President’s “Draft Strategic Plan 2008–2011” lists as a goal to “[i]ncrease the annual number of SVSU

students participating in study abroad opportunities from 1.5% in AY 2006–07 to twice the national average (currently 1.1% of total students enrolled)” and to “[c]ontinue support for a variety of faculty-led study abroad opportunities and for student placements in exchange programs” (SVSU Office..., Sections B4, B5). Recently, the International Programs Advisory Committee (which reports to the Vice President for Academic Affairs), under the direction of Dr. Clifford Dorne, developed a draft protocol I was asked to review (SVSU, 2008). Working with the Office of International Programs, they have developed streamlined procedures for the application process and administration of faculty-led study abroad trips.

I encourage you to consider increasing our students’ global literacy by taking them abroad. Please contact the Office of International Programs at 964.4473 or sms@svsu.edu to find out how you can plan your trip. You and your students will be glad you did.

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One very important aspect of students’ growing global literacy was the unstructured, informal learning that took place.

In the fall of 2008, I had assigned a literacy narrative to my English 111 students, inviting them to tell a story about their development as a writer, reader, and/or thinker. When I read Ms. Brittney Forsyth's essay, I immediately thought of Literacy Link, since this essay so thoughtfully and articulately captures the struggle so many of our incoming students face in transitioning between high school and college. She agreed to share her essay with her course instructor, Mr. Phillip Hanson, who has written a corresponding essay in response to Ms. Forsyth, discussing his teaching practices in this course. Both pieces, I think, serve as a reminder of the challenges posed by the college experience for both student and instructor.

–Helen Raica-Klotz

AcCLIMation: A Difficult Climb from High School– to College– Level Work



Brittney Forsyth
SVSU Freshman

Phillip Hanson
Instructor of Art

The Student's Perspective

It was the morning of my first college quiz, and I was feeling pretty confident. I sat close to the front to make a good impression. I wanted to show my professor I was a good student who was well prepared and ready to learn. I didn't want him to think that I was one of those students who sat in the back with her head down just blowing him off. At the same time, I also didn't want him to think that I was a "goodie goodie" by sitting right in the first row. Finally, my professor walked in and said, "If everyone would please take out a sheet of paper, put your name in the upper right-hand corner, last name first please, and clear off your desks, we will begin your first quiz." I was feeling more confident than ever. I knew I was ready for this quiz. My professor put the quiz up on the board, and I couldn't believe it. My eyes were fixated on the quiz before me.

Now let me take you back a little bit. My parents had always been strict with my school work and what kind of grades I brought home. I would either get grounded or lose something valuable until the next report card if I brought home anything lower than a B. My dad

used to give me money for every A that I brought home on my report card as incentive to do well. And let me tell you, it worked. Some people may look down on it and see it as a way of bribing, but I disagree. It gave me a very good reason to want to do well starting from a young age. By the time I was in high school, my grades were the only thing that mattered to me. Making sure that my grade point average stayed above a 3.5 was all I cared about. I graduated from high school with a 3.695 GPA and quite a few honors.

In high school, the teachers always tell you that the work they are having you do is to prepare you for college. Color this map; it will prepare you for college. Find the hidden meaning in this paper; it will prepare you for college. Fill in the answers on this worksheet; it will prepare you for college. In your head, you think you have a pretty good idea of what college is going to be like by the time you graduate. More than likely, what you think college is going to be like is wrong. It was for me at least.

At SVSU, my homework for our second class meeting of Art Appreciation was to read chapter one and understand it. My professor didn't tell you when you were



going to have a quiz. He would just spring them on you. There was no study guide for your quizzes to tell you exactly what was on it, making it a no brainer. For this reason, you had to make sure you were prepared for every class no matter what. So, the night before, I read my book and took more notes than there were pages in the chapter. Every word that was bold or italicized had a definition to go with it. Every picture had an artist's name and a date to go with it. I made sure to break down every last piece of that book. This is what I'd done in high school and what I was sure I was going to have to do in college.

On my way to class the next morning, I was practically knocking people off their feet to get around them so I could get to class on time. Even though I did leave 20 minutes early for a class that was only a football field's length away from my dorm room, I didn't want anyone to slow me down. I arrived to class at 11:13 a.m. on the dot. There were only a couple other students in there before me. Slowly, the other students filed in the classroom and began to take their seats as well. After realizing that maybe I didn't need to leave for class quite as early as I had, my professor came in and announced that we were going to be having a quiz. I was thrilled that all the studying I had done was going to pay off. However, the groans and the slamming of fists on the desks from the rest of the class led me to believe I was one of the only people in the room who felt this way. As we all took out the appropriate materials, my professor pulled up the quiz on the projector screen.

I looked up at the screen and saw that there were only five questions. "No problem," I thought to myself. I read the first question in my head. I was a little uneasy. I didn't know what the answer was. Thinking that maybe I read it wrong, I read it a couple more times. I still had no idea what the answer was. I moved on to the rest of the questions. I could feel my heart drop down into my stomach like I was on the Power Tower at Cedar Point. Why wasn't he asking what the definitions of the bolded words were?

Why didn't he want to know who painted the pictures or who built that sculpture? Those were the answers I knew. I had no idea what the picture represented or why the artist made it. That was not what my high school teachers told me I was going to need to know. I gave the questions my best guess, but my confidence was low.

After leaving class, I was feeling lousy. I knew I had just completely bombed that test. I wondered what my parents were going to think. I knew I couldn't tell them. At that moment, I realized I actually had no idea what I was doing. Everything my high school teachers told me was wrong. College and high school were nothing alike. Comparing the two was like comparing kindergarten and the real world. I was going to have to figure how to pass the class on my own, and I was going to have to do it before I bombed another test or quiz.

The Instructor's Perspective

I had a sobering conversation with my uncle just prior to starting as an adjunct faculty member here at SVSU. He told me he had taken an Art Appreciation class forty years ago and abhorred it. Everyone has had a course similar to the one he described: mass memorization of dates and facts all to be recollected at the appointed time and inevitably erased from short-term memory. He found this monotonous approach dehumanizing and resented it so much that it took him over two decades to enjoy art once again. I found the prospect of turning students away from art horrifying because it has immeasurably enriched my life. I thought students would have a greater likelihood of responding favorably if I were genuinely interested in the course content. I concluded that I could best foster a genuine enjoyment of art by exhibiting my love for the subject. I would attempt to do so by illustrating some fascinating connections between art and life.

More than likely, what you think college is going to be like is wrong. It was for me at least.

The majority of Art Appreciation (ART100)

students tend to be freshmen, so the inherent trouble with this approach is the tendency to introduce difficult concepts prematurely. And students cannot hope to apprehend concepts if they have not built a stable foundation, both by reading and ruminating over the text prior to lecture.

I've discovered convincing my students to prepare for class thoroughly is the most arduous task I encounter.

I can only rationalize the tendency to avoid serious inquiry based on my own high school experience. In almost every high school class, I could get an A or

B simply by parroting the teacher and referring to study guides. I might have skimmed the text afterward if I needed an answer to a specific question, but even that was normally not required. I was not introduced to critical thinking until my freshman year in college. I can still remember my disappointment and anger upon discovering I was not nearly as smart as I had been told. It's humbling and ironic because you think you are smarter than you actually are because of your successes, but you have not been given any challenges. When you actually discipline yourself to think critically and to learn independently, you begin to adapt, and, as you overcome the challenges, you realize you have become smarter. This was a difficult and necessary pill to swallow as a student, and perhaps it is even more difficult to administer now as an instructor. I attempt to mitigate the pain of this transition by expressing my confidence that every student has untapped abilities that can only be accessed through self-discipline. I reinforce good study habits by giving pop quizzes, prior to introducing the material in class. These quizzes are comprised of questions covering basic vocabulary and reading comprehension, critical analysis, and the application of concepts to images not seen before by the student. Students invariably experience initial setbacks but generally begin to adapt to overcome these challenges. Their confidence improves as the process

unfolds and generates a kind of inertia, a hunger for learning. Interest in art surges and an exuberant exchange of ideas establishes a base for discovery. Students demonstrate they have indeed come to possess knowledge by adeptly folding their personal insights, experiences, and observations into the discussion. They ask good questions and challenge me to think more deeply. I experience a teaching high when all the hard work pays off and everything falls into place.

Unfortunately, some students do not respond to the challenge and adapt as Brittney did. They either do not put forth the effort to read, or the internalization and application of the concepts prove too difficult. With that in mind, Fall 2008 was rather rough for me. I had a fair number of very successful students, but a large portion of my class performed far below my expectations. Despite feeling firmly rooted in the aforementioned philosophy and practice, I was surprised to find myself tempted to lower my academic standards to avoid conflict and to create the appearance of success (my own and that of my students). I recalled the conversation with my uncle and the fear of turning people away from that which I value. I questioned whether the demands I placed on my students, which allowed me to express my enthusiasm, were, in fact, the cause of their failure. Temporarily disheartened and equating the appearance of failure with its actuality, I questioned whether the effort was really worth it. I discovered I had been harboring a false belief that if I was doing an excellent job as an instructor, I would be immune from difficulty, conflict, and failure. I never imagined that these experiences could be symptoms of a job well done.

Brittney's vignette closely mirrors my own experience and epitomizes the assimilation that countless freshmen experience as they embark on their first year of college. Like Brittney, many of these students unknowingly underestimate their ability to think creatively and independently because they have not been adequately challenged. They have diligently

Many students underestimate their ability to think creatively and independently because they have not been adequately challenged.

followed directions and have satisfied the requirements of their teachers and support networks. However, many are literal thinkers and descend on campus having neither applied abstract principles to new situations nor having made a practice of connecting the seemingly disparate while in pursuit of an elusive idea. In short,

they have knowledge, but it belongs to someone else. Their hope for a decent education and a good livelihood rests upon their instructors' willingness to challenge them. Their hope rests on teachers' willingness to take a stand by becoming vulnerable to difficulty, conflict, and failure.

Writing Courses in India: A Differing View

Ed Noronha
Visiting Professor of English

During one of my earlier visits to SVSU, when someone told me that colleges in the U.S. had an introductory course exclusively devoted to writing, I was not sure I understood correctly. Later, when I found out that this course teaches students to plan, organize and structure their writing, develop their ability to assess and integrate outside sources, and use writing to demonstrate critical thinking, I was convinced I did not understand! So, when an opportunity to teach this class, English 111, opened up in the Fall of 2008, not only did I accept it, I looked forward to it—I was eager to see for myself and to learn about this course.

In India, it is uncommon for a college to have a writing program concentrated into a fourteen-week course, where the elements of good writing are analyzed and each of the components taught as separate items of instruction. Explicit teaching on writing and the acquisition of writing skills is minimal. What we have is a slower and steady osmosis of the writing process through which students absorb examples of effective presentation and good writing. As opposed to separating the writing process into components such as an introduction, a thesis statement, support, and a conclusion, the student's attention is on presenting the topic in a unified, persuasive, readable piece of writing. To be sure, mention is made of

the elements of an essay: I still remember from my high school days the classic five elements of introduction, exposition, proof, refutation, and conclusion. However, each of these elements are never taken up for separate, individual teaching or practice. The student learns to integrate these elements as he learns to write on the topic working through numerous "composition periods." Thus, writing a perfect essay is learnt more by general practice than by direct teaching about the various parts of the essay.

The teaching of writing in high schools and colleges in India goes something like this: Writing is considered a part of the language and literature course. Out of the four instructional hours devoted to this course, one "period" is assigned to "composition." During this hour, the teacher proposes a topic, sometimes from the language textbooks, sometimes from other general categories, and explains it to the class. He explains how the essay must be written, what should be included, how an argument should be presented, and how the narration should end in an appropriate conclusion. The essays are then written, in class, in a notebook set apart for the purpose, on the right hand side of the book. The teacher then corrects the essays, and the corrections are rewritten on the left-hand page during the next composition class. The corrections could be related



to spelling, grammar, clarity and focus, or conciseness versus excessive detail. These composition classes run throughout the academic year, which lasts roughly forty weeks, during all three years of high school and the first three years of college. This is where an average student in India learns all his writing skills.

In addition to classroom instruction, an important element in the learning process in India is the special relationship many students cultivate with the teacher.

In addition to classroom instruction, an important element in the learning process in India is the special relationship many students cultivate with the teacher. Although living in an ashram (a hermitage) with the teacher as his disciple is no longer done, students often relate to their teacher in a very personal context, and, thus, it is not uncommon to see students and teachers spending long hours together outside the classroom. During these extended periods of contact and interaction, the teacher speaks about his work, his writing, his research, and the student imbibes all of this steadily into his spirit—this goes on, sometimes, for several years. In the case of writing, a gifted teacher often has a sizeable “fan” following of students who look up to him, always imitating, taking in, and learning. It is particularly true that in the field of humanities, several leading writers and scholars have been nurtured in these fan groups—have made their mark in their respective fields under the benevolent eye of a teacher-mentor.

The outcomes of such instruction and interaction are varied. In general, it depends more on the student—on the degree of a student’s perception, his ability to think through and present something, rather than on the content or method of instruction. On average, roughly about a third of all students passing out of college turn out to be excellent writers both in English and in the regional Indian language; another third of all students would be writers with correct, but average abilities in writing; and the remaining third would probably be quite weak in formal, or even informal, writing. From the

first group come the absolutely brilliant academic writers, the leading journalists, and the creative and literary writers of the country; from the second, those who can handle day-to-day writing tasks with adequate command of the conventions of spelling, grammar, and composition; and the third group comprises those who will probably have difficulties with writing for a long time after college. Still it would be true to say that the system of schooling and college education in India produces students with fairly good skills in writing, despite the fact that courses devoted exclusively to writing are, generally, not listed in high school or college curricula.

This method of teaching writing has remained unchanged in India because of a few reasons: Colleges and high schools in India are rigidly controlled by an affiliating university and its boards of studies in each subject, or by a state board of secondary education (this is changing in a small way in recent years, with the advent of the “autonomous college” concept). It is not always easy to initiate a move in these boards to change something that has been done for almost more than a hundred years. In the graduate programs, importance is given solely to content, and rubrics of writing are never taken into account. Passing in a writing course is not a prerequisite for admission to any degree program, mainly because such courses do not exist, and are not listed on a transcript. Such and similar other reasons account for the fact that teaching writing as an exclusive course is not considered necessary.

A comparison of the writing programs in India and the U.S. is fraught with difficulties, and will probably not yield useful results, mainly because the way things work are very different in the two countries. For one, students in high schools and colleges in India do not have the kind of resources available to students in the U.S. Computer labs simply do not exist in most schools and colleges. While some schools in the metros may have such infrastructure, in the vast rural segment of the country, writing

assignments are still done and turned in handwritten. The large majority of students, also, cannot afford stationery and textbooks comparable in cost to those used by their counterparts in the U.S.

Another important element in this comparison has to do with the general manner of thinking that is characteristic of India. Like here in the U.S., teachers and students in India are sincerely committed to their respective calling and duties. However, they are not excessively concerned about describing, separating,

labeling, and evaluating the process of learning. Probably this has come down from the ancient guru-disciple tradition where there was no codification, rigid systematization, or monitoring of the learning process other than the guru's vast and deep knowledge, and the manner and order in which the guru thought it best to instruct his pupil. Because of this deep-rooted tradition, the teaching of writing is what it is in India today: many students in India learn to write and to write well, and, we hope, the same may be true for students in the United States.

Back to Basics: Opportunities for Growth through Student-Led Academic Camps

Sara Kitchen
Literacy Link Intern

When summer rolls around, it's not uncommon for one to spot students occupying classrooms, the Malcolm Field theatre, the Marshall Fredricks Sculpture Museum, or the campus courtyards who differ from the more commonly sighted college crowd, mostly because many of them are shorter in stature, were dropped off by a parent, and care more about kickball than college. They are the area grade school students who attend SVSU summer camps, including the Cardinals' Creativity Camp for creative writing, the Summer Youth Theatre Program, the Summer Art Camps, and the Science and Math Extravaganza for Kids (SMEK) program. College students enter the picture in an important way however—they're in charge. Undergraduates take the reins planning curricula and leading activities with the younger students, a role they assume that puts them in the ideal position to revisit their youth and make connections when they see that the "light bulbs" over young students' heads translate into the college student's mastery of a subject or skill. The following offers a glimpse at the opportunities

for growth on both sides of the lesson as told by SVSU students and faculty.

Cardinals' Creativity Camp

Noah Essenmacher, a chemistry and English major who enjoys creative writing and regularly submits to Cardinal Sins, welcomed the opportunity to take on the role as coordinator of the Cardinals' Creativity Camp (CCC). He does everything from hiring a staff of SVSU students to managing advertising to developing activities for campers. The camp invites middle and high school students to attend a week full of individual and group creative writing activities and group workshops designed to allow students the chance to critique one another's writing.

Essenmacher's vision for CCC avoids textbook explanations and centers on the lessons taught and examples set by older writers who have much to share about their style, techniques, and strategies. His goal is to facilitate these interactions by creating a relaxed



atmosphere where students don't have to be fearful of a teacher's red pen, but rather can talk about their writing with peers and learn from a variety of styles.

Essenmacher sees CCC as a great opportunity to break creative writing stereotypes as well. "Students who are really into writing will find their feelings validated by seeing the same passion in older writers, because they can see that it doesn't have to be an uncool or nerdy thing to be into writing poems or stories." The belief that creative writing holds more of a feminine quality is a misconception Essenmacher knows he can change for young male writers. With a staff composed of several male college students who have vested interests in the field of creative writing, he feels this will give young male writers reassurance that fiction, poetry, and literature indeed have a masculine following. Overall, Essenmacher plans to help all campers take something away from the camp. He says, "Creative writing has a value as a constructive means of self-expression. I think a lot of children these days need those kinds of healthy outlets for expression."

Summer Art Camps

Summer 2008 saw the premier of the summer art camps, hosted by the University's Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum. Funded through an SVSU Foundation resource grant, the camp offers paid teaching opportunities to art education majors, including senior and museum employee Tricia Bry, who was one of four students leading the camp in its pilot year. After a better than expected turnout for a week each of painting, drawing, and sculpting, Bry is returning to help with the camp this summer, where classes will be extended an additional week and will include all three subjects for children in age brackets eight to ten and eleven to thirteen. Bry and the other visual art education students design the program, creating a budget and developing lesson plans among other duties. The camp offers an exciting experience for both art students and

campers, says Andrea Ondish, the curator of education at the sculpture museum. "The children get great instruction, and the art students get experience," she said, mentioning that two of the art education students who had graduated secured teaching jobs for the following fall. Bry's next step is to begin her student teaching, and the camp, she says, has been a useful preparation tool.

As an artist can often be his or her own worst critic, Bry said a challenge working with children ages eight to twelve last summer was to reduce their stress and maintain a fun atmosphere. The camp's structure was far from a scene of minimally supervised finger painting and glitter and glue concoctions; it was Bry's job to take concepts, such as experimenting with color, monochromatics, and value studies, and weave them into a captivating lesson plan. "That's the cool thing about art," she said, "because you can follow your standards and benchmarks and still create a lesson where you're teaching them new concepts in a fun way." Camp leaders played YouTube clips of artists painting to music and of three-dimensional sidewalk chalk illusions, played music to create a comfortable atmosphere, and gave tangible examples of concepts, such as the way campus sidewalks are the same width but look narrower down the path at a distance (an exercise that helped explain perspective).

Since some concepts were complex when grouped together in a single lesson plan, some camp sessions reinforced Bry's knowledge that no lesson plan is set in stone. "Part of being a good teacher is being able to adapt quickly and modify the lesson so your students are not completely overwhelmed and stressed out, which was really good for us to experience on the teaching end," she said. One lesson on value studies proved too difficult for some younger campers to digest. Bry reacted by dropping the emphasis on accurately representing a still-life object with direct proportions and had students focus on simple geometric shapes to understand the value study. "You have to think on

your feet, but the energy you get from [the children], there's nothing like it," Bry said, explaining that to know whether a lesson is resonating with campers is usually as simple as looking at the excitement in their faces. "It's loud and clear with kids. If it's not working, they're not working, or their energy is just so low," she said. Overall, Bry enjoyed her leadership role within the camp, and campers enjoyed their experience as well, as popular demand for the second installment surely indicates.

Summer Youth Theatre Program

Theatre professor Ric Roberts has experienced the University's summer theatre camps in full circle, having helped put the event on as both an SVSU student and faculty member. In its thirteenth year, the week-long camp will host third through ninth graders this summer. The students participate in electives in the morning, including musical theatre, make up, juggling, dance, art, improvisation, theatre games, and black light theatre. In the afternoon, all students take a creative drama session in conjunction with Dr. Steve Erickson's Theatre 465: Creative Drama. The class serves as a final exam period for its theatre students, who are in charge of creating a three-to-five minute script based on a predetermined theme and teaching the campers, who will perform the skit for parents and guests at the end-of-the-week final performance. This section of the day is some campers' favorite part, as "it's really where they get to have input in acting, directing, and costumes," Roberts said.

For the theatre students, Roberts says teaching the class is "when they really know what they know." They hear it from the Theatre Department all the time and take it all in, Roberts says of the curriculum, "but the minute you have to explain it to someone else and you're taking that information and passing it on, that's when you really start to attach yourself to it. It's really when you start to put everything into perspective." As an SVSU student in the camp's second year, Roberts was asked to serve as director, an

experience that Roberts says helped him decide the direction of his professional life. "I actually found I had a knack working with students, and it's part of the reason why I became a college professor," he said.

Roberts says he's certainly not the only theatre student to have ever emerged from the summer camp experience with this motivation. He remembers the story of a former student of his who now lives in New York City. At camp one summer, the student accepted the challenge of assimilating a camper who didn't want to participate.

He was successful at persuading the camper to open up and have fun to the point that the camper ultimately said to the student, "Thank you for being nice to me."

"You wonder what facilitates that," Roberts said. "That's not a normal response from a kid. Our SVSU student was so proud of the fact that he got through to this kid, and it meant more to him than anything." Roberts said the former student, who graduated years ago, still talks about this experience and is considering becoming a teacher, finding his work in New York trying to break into theatre not as satisfying as he had hoped. "He keeps remembering back to the time he still got to do theatre, something he loved, but also got to help change someone. It was a very good connection for him."

"It's loud and clear with kids. If [the lesson isn't] working, they're not working."

Science and Math Extravaganza for Kids (SMEK)

Sponsored by the Regional Mathematics and Science Center, SMEK gives science and math enthusiasts from grades two to eight a chance to participate in a number of activities during summer camp sessions and once during the winter at a Saturday camp. For education majors like Kyle McCarty, SMEK is also the ideal opportunity to gain early experience leading a classroom. McCarty double majors in biology and chemistry

and participated with SMEK for the first time this February as a presenter. The camp recruits SVSU students to serve as mentors who assist students with various activities and presenters who develop lesson plans and conduct the activities.

“If you ‘make it live, make it pop,’ it’s so much easier [for kids] to learn.”

McCarty offered to lead a SMEK session on dairy farming, one of his passions since his youth days growing up on a dairy farm in Deckerville, Michigan.

Although he was well prepared to give his presentation to several groups of students, McCarty said SMEK offered a smooth transition into teaching, as he believed campers were generally at the top of their classes and genuinely interested in the subjects. He walked his classes through the biological systems of cows, introduced basic farming terminology, and explained how milk is processed. The lesson culminated with a hands-on activity where campers made ice cream from an evaporated milk and pudding-based recipe.

Like many teachers from grade school to college, McCarty relied on technology to hold his students’ attention and to aid their learning process. His PowerPoint presentation featured pictures that helped students connect his instruction with something tangible. Visual aids were not the end-all of McCarty’s presentation, however; they sparked

question after question from curious minds, many of whom McCarty said grew up in urban settings and were likely to have seen dairy cattle only on TV. A student in one group asked how cottage cheese was made, a process that wasn’t in McCarty’s lesson plan, but that he was prepared to describe based on prior knowledge. Another group wound up discussing the chemistry behind ice. Through these anticipated interactions, McCarty saw how versatile lessons must be and responded appropriately. A chance to get in the classroom after observing other teachers at work in TE 100 was part of what enticed McCarty to participate with SMEK. Through the experience, he saw the teaching value of hands-on activities. “I went to the [Sanilac County] Career Center as part of my [high school] education, so I think you learn more getting out there and getting your hands dirty than you do reading a textbook,” he said. “If you ‘make it live, make it pop,’ it’s so much easier [for kids] to learn.” A flood of questions stemming from his PowerPoint lecture lets McCarty know he’s doing something right.

Clearly, opportunities like these summer camps experiences help provide SVSU students, education majors and non-education majors alike, with experiences outside the classroom walls. So consider encouraging your students to explore volunteering with any of the camps listed below.

2009 Summer Camp Schedule

Summer Art Camps

- Class 1: June 1–5 and 8–12
- Class 2: July 6–10 and 13–17
- Class 3: Aug. 3–7 and 10–14
- Ages 8–10 in the AM and 11–13 in the PM
- Call the museum at 989-964-7096 for more information.

Cardinals’ Creativity Camp

- June 22–26
- Grades 7 to 12
- Call 964–7022.

Summer Youth Theatre Program

- June 22–26
- Grades 3 to 8
- Register online at www.svsu.edu/theatre/summercamps.

Summer SMEK Camps

- Junior camp: July 7–9
- Senior camp: July 13–17
- Grades 2–4 and 5–8
- Visit <http://www.svsu.edu/mathsci-center/programs/smek> for more information.

Book Review

The Arrival.
Shaun Tan.
New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007. 128 pp.

Reviewed by
Diane Boehm, Director, Instructional Support & University Writing Programs

From the earliest known drawings by our ancestors on the walls of their caves to the live video feeds of the recent presidential inauguration, the power of images to tell stories is well known. I was first introduced to the power of images in the literary genre of the graphic novel with the publication of *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Art Spiegelman's graphic memoir of his father's struggle as a Polish Jew to survive the Holocaust. The frightened features of the mice (Jews), contrasted with the menacing power of the cats (the Nazis), set the stage for a story not easily forgotten.

The same is true of Shaun Tan's graphic novel *The Arrival*, sometimes described as a "silent book." As the story unfolds, the images present the immigrant experience. These images—the story—trace the experience of a man who leaves his home country, travels by ship to a

new country, and begins to make his way in a new culture, where he must learn a new language, adapt to a new set of mores, establish new patterns for his life, and find ways to realize his dreams in an unfamiliar world. In contrast to the traditional novel, in which the reader's imagination uses words to form mental images, here the reader "reads" the images to construct a mental verbal narrative. The lack of words might even be considered metaphorical, for, like the immigrant, we too must make our way through the story without common language or cultural frame of reference.

Each page contains from one to twelve images, all in sepia tones; as the images tell the story, they remind us that we are at the same time both in the reality of the life of the main "character" as well as in that borderline place between reality and



imagination. The book has six sections, each depicting one phase of his story. The detail in the images is extraordinary; as we read the succession of images of places and persons, of fantastical landscapes and detailed facial expressions, we share the world of the immigrant—his anxieties, the details of his new life, the changes he undergoes. These details ring true.

The publishers lavished attention on the production of the book. The cover (Tan, n.d., *The Arrival*) has the look and feel of an old leather valise, the kind that might have accompanied many seekers of new worlds. The inside covers have photos of immigrants of all ages (including one of Tan as a child), from all parts of the world. Even the parchment color and smooth photographic quality of the paper set the book apart.

Shaun Tan, who spent four years creating the book, may have been telling the story of his own family, as his Chinese father emigrated in 1960 from Malaysia to Australia, where Tan now lives (Tan, n.d., *The Arrival*). But Tan could easily have been telling the story of many of our ancestors. The story begins in the old world, where the images of menace and hopelessness help us understand why so many groups left their homelands to find a new home. The images evoke empathy. Was this how my great-great-grandfather felt when, protesting the religious policies of Kaiser Wilhelm III, he, along with his wife and ten children, sailed into New York's harbor from Prussia in 1843? Did he feel the same disorientation while making his way to rural Wisconsin, to the farm where members of my family have lived for seven generations?

A new world may be full of promise, but it is also frighteningly unfamiliar, as the next "chapter" in the book demonstrates via images of reptilian shapes, of animals whose bodies we don't recognize, and of people whose eyes and hearts often turn away from the immigrant. In addition to the disorientation of language barriers

and cultural misunderstandings, the immigrant faces the many other problems common to immigrants, regardless of nationality or destination: homesickness and loneliness, poverty and a loss of social status, and the pervasive anxiety that accompanies the loss of the familiar. But human kindness and the power of hope keep us turning the pages, wanting to find out how the story ends.

This book is appropriate for many audiences, including students. The face of a first semester freshman on the first day of class reveals many of the same anxieties evident in the face of the immigrant in the story. Students too must learn how to write the next chapter of their lives in a new environment.

Educators today recognize the need for multiple literacies, for visual literacy as much as textual literacy; the astute person must not only be able to draw inferences and make meaning from alphabet letters on a page, but must also be able to decode images, charts, symbols, graphs, posture, even facial expressions. Do we perhaps feel freer to bring our own experiences to images than to words? Tan quotes novelist Milan Kundera: "We go on being children, regardless of age, because in life we are always encountering new things that challenge us to understand them, instances where a practiced imagination is actually more useful than all laboriously acquired knowledge" (as cited in Tan, n.d., *Picture*).

The Arrival will both practice your imagination and present a distinctive way to enter a universal human experience. It offers both the power and the gift of good literature.

References

- Tan, S. (N.d.). *Picture books: Who are they for?* Retrieved from <http://www.shauntan.net/essay1.html>
- Tan, S. (N.d.). *The arrival*. Retrieved from <http://www.shauntan.net/books.html>