

Literacy Link

Winter 2011

From the Editors' Desktops



In the last issue, Helen related a story about her teenage daughter and her work in the theater, how rehearsing for Gaia involved actively imagining an audience and on-stage conversation partner. Though our children range in ages, Chris's daughter, Grace, recently had to engage in a similar exercise in anticipating her audience's needs—and responding to them in the most basic and practical of ways. Chris writes:



“For one of her second grade geography assignments, Grace created a ‘Flat Stanley’ paper doll inspired by Jeff Brown’s children’s book of the same name. In Brown’s story, a bulletin board falls on Stanley, and his parents use this calamity to his advantage, sending their child through the mail to travel the world. Now Flat Stanley has his own series of books and is used in elementary classrooms for a variety of pedagogical purposes. Often, students create their own Stanleys and send them around the globe. Family and friends are asked to take pictures of Stanley “abroad,” write about Stanley’s adventures, and send Stanley back through the mail. This information is then shared in the classroom, and students track the number of miles Stanley accrues as well as what they learned about various parts of the world. In this way, students are able to learn about geography, practice addition, and perform various writing tasks.

“Grace so loved this project she created multiple Stanleys and ‘Stanlenas.’ She made one doll who was a Girl Scout, a Flat Stanley à la Sharpey from *High School Musical*, and a Flat Obama, complete with

a dark suit and power tie. When the latter was completed, she decided to send him off to the White House, which led to some interesting questions around the dining room table: ‘What if Mrs. Obama doesn’t know about Flat Stanley?’ ‘Will she know what to write in Flat Stanley’s journal?’ ‘What will Mrs. Obama think about receiving mail from a complete stranger?’ Grace had to imagine her audience and the very practical things she had to do to introduce both herself and her project. And after many drafts, she finally had a letter about Flat Stanley, one that answered some of these questions, anticipated her reader’s needs, and eventually (lo and behold!) got a response from Washington. In fact, Mrs. Obama’s response and Flat Obama now hang on Grace’s bedroom wall.”

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As Grace learned, writing is practice-based and practical. We constantly find ourselves writing (and thinking about writing) to accomplish a purpose: to communicate our ideas to others. It is this focus on the practical “nuts and bolts” of literacy work that is the theme running through this issue of *Literacy Link*. Geoffrey Carter, of the Department of Rhetoric and Professional Writing, discusses how he teaches students to enter an academic conversation in “On Writing Alongside Others & Being Practical.” From the Art Department, Mike Mosher offers a plea to support literacy initiatives in the Saginaw Correctional Facility and offers a practical solution to all the sample copies of texts that we receive in his essay, “Every Book Rehabilitates: Support the Prison Library.” Jennifer Bridges of the Kinesiology Department and the 2010 winner of SVSU’s Innovative Writing in Teaching Award talks about literacy activities in her classes in her essay, “Is There ‘Real’ Writing in a Poster Project?” Then, in their collaborative piece

“Globalization in the Classroom,” Diane Boehm, the director of SVSU’s Instructional Support Programs and the University Writing Program, and Lilianna Aniola-Jedrzejek, one of SVSU’s international guest scholars from Poznan University of Technology (PUT) in Poland, talk about the practices and the practical benefits of their cross-cultural project involving students at their home institutions. And student Noah Essenmacher rounds out the issue, reminding faculty of activities in which we can and should engage when teaching writing in his “A Literacy Wish List.”

As always, we hope this issue of *Literacy Link* offers you some of your colleagues’ best practices, and prompts you to share your own in a future issue.

Helen Raica-Klotz

Chris Giroux

Literacy Link Co-Editors

On Writing Alongside Others & Being Practical



Geoffrey V. Carter

Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Professional Writing

I believe that writing instruction means more than teaching a skill and evaluating an outcome. I believe it involves helping students navigate various transitions. Whether this transition is a move from high school to college, from another country to America, or from the workforce back to academia (or vice versa), my goal is to help students learn new cultures of writing.

One way, I’ve found, of encouraging such a transition is through the following motto: “It is important to read and write alongside others.” What this motto underscores is how the world of academic discourse demands explicit citation. Paradoxically, perhaps because of the sheer depth and breadth of published work, this transition often feels isolating. Students struggle to nail the details of MLA and APA styles of citation that will help establish their own credibility as someone confident in “reading and writing alongside others.” No doubt, the various subtleties of citation conventions present a challenge to students and writing instructors. Too often, this is regarded as a basic skill of writing, but insofar as it marks a transition into the broader, academic cultures, I believe something more is at stake.

Christopher Giroux
Helen Raica-Klotz
Co-Editors

Kirsten McIlvenna
Intern
Graphics & Layout

Tim Inman
Katie Karnes
Photography

Saginaw Valley State University
Graphics Center
Printing

The SVSU *Literacy Link* is published two times per academic year. Those interested in submitting articles may contact either Christopher Giroux at ext. 4914 or cgiroux@svsu.edu, or Helen Raica-Klotz at ext. 6062 or klotz@svsu.edu. Articles may also be mailed to SVSU Department of English, 7400 Bay Road, Brown 355, University Center, MI 48710-0001.

Special thanks to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs for funding and support of *Literacy Link*.

For me, conveying the stakes of academic culture comes down to challenging students on what they consider *practical*. Many students regard academic writing as something less practical than the hands-on work they hope to accomplish outside of school. It's no wonder these same students struggle both with the mechanics of the conventions and with incorporating outside sources into their work. Rather than focusing solely on the rules of citation, I try to convey the broader context of "writing alongside others" as academics define it. In RPW 300 (Writing in the Professions), for example, I use two short essays to help non-majors in transition: Lester Faigley's "Nonacademic Writing: The Social Perspective" (1985) and Carolyn R. Miller's "What's Practical about Technical Writing?" (1989). Without going into depth about either of these works, I want to briefly sketch out their arguments and say a word about how I use them in the classroom. I believe they provide a different basis for how our students might perceive the act of citation and, indeed, begin to redefine what it means to be "practical" in the process.

First, Faigley's effort to define a "social perspective" for writing is significant because he sees the act of writing as extending beyond "textual" and "individualistic" perspectives. Whereas these latter concepts respectively emphasize linguistic-literary study and cognitive research—and offer views by which students may already define themselves—Faigley's "social perspective" offers a different lens. For Faigley, the social perspective "moves beyond the traditional concern for audience, forcing researchers [and students] to consider issues such as social roles, group purposes, communal organization, ideology, and finally theories of culture" (61). Of course, Faigley is not saying that textual and individualistic perspectives such as grammar and audience don't matter; rather, he is arguing that our reading and writing cannot be simply defined or reduced to any single concrete tradition. For me, he offers an important step towards theorizing what it means

for students to cite others, even if they ultimately choose to focus their efforts on a somewhat narrower textual and individualistic perspective.

As bewildering as these perspectives may initially appear (even to seasoned scholars), I want to emphasize a very specific reason for starting with someone like Faigley. He provides a way to confront the idea that writing is reducible to a set of rules or a specific number of outside sources. For how many times have teachers of any discipline been asked the following questions: "Do you want a works cited page? If so, how many sources do you want?" More important, in my opinion, is what the sources say, how they interact with each other, and how they fit with the students' own work. Faigley moves the locus of citation away from the simple "audience" of a teacher to a more varied network of people, who, like the teacher, expect an accurately cited paper, but also rely upon bibliographies themselves to make further connections. To be sure, linguistic study and psychology do this in their often extensive use of citation, but Faigley's essay emphasizes that these interrelated networks extend into "nonacademic" domains as well.

There's an art to seeing how academic and nonacademic discourses mesh with each other. Indeed, it is for this reason I turn from Faigley's work to Miller's essay, which looks at the history and meaning of the word "practical." What Miller's "practical" consideration reveals is that writing—even so-called "technical writing"—is not reducible to the "how-to" of handbooks. Although Miller doesn't mention the "how-to" handbooks of the MLA and APA style guides directly, she deemphasizes such a rules orientation. Instead, she ruminates on the art (or *techné*) of writing—one that I consider our oldest tradition of "writing alongside others," Greek rhetoric. For Miller, "Greek rhetoric initiated both a handbook tradition of instruction and a

Rather than focusing solely on the rules of citation, I try to convey the broader context of "writing alongside others" as academics define it.

counterpoised theoretical appreciation for the multiplicity of relations between means and ends” (61). For my RPW 300 class, it is precisely Miller’s emphasis on the “multiplicity of relations” that connects Faigley’s “social perspective” to Miller’s re-definition of the “practical” as “art.” This view matches my own emphasis on “writing alongside others.” Put another way, “writing alongside others” is a “practical” rhetorical art, provided, of course, that one takes the time to reveal such social connections. We do so by using various citation styles, of course, but the bigger picture is one that sets the student within networks of academic and nonacademic cultures.

I realize some students are uneasy with the transition from writing in the practical terms of “how-to” to the practical-art terms of becoming involved in different social-rhetorical cultures. These same students, too, often continue to request a specific number of sources and a step-by-step review of citation conventions. At some level, I can only oblige. Academic environments often require students to demonstrate basic MLA and APA skills quickly without much basis in theory. First-year composition classes, for

example, sometimes involve a focus on “basic skills” that prepares students to perform in more advanced classes as they transition to the higher level courses of their majors. Most would agree that this is an important and practical endeavor.

And yet, if we want students to appreciate what it means to be “practical” in a more robust sense of the term, perhaps we must emphasize that “writing alongside others” is not simply a “basic skill,” but also an art (*techné*) that has value. This shift in a sense of practicality may mark a transition in how students perceive what they’re doing in their reading and writing and why they are doing it.

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Every Book Rehabilitates: Support the Prison Library



Mike Mosher
Professor of Art/Communication & Digital Media

I believe that anyone who teaches in a university—or aspires to—also owes it to themselves and their professional development to teach, at some time in their lives, three other cohorts. The first is children. The second is foreign students overseas (our international faculty exchange with Shikoku University is a great opportunity for this). The third is inmates in the correctional system. They’re not the steadiest students, for they’ll disappear from a class for work detail, or be transferred elsewhere, an occurrence out of their control. But most want to learn to change their situation upon release, or to find relief from the anxiety of imprisonment and fill its boring hours, days, weeks, and months.

And since coming to SVSU, I’ve been lucky enough to teach in this third context. In 2004 I taught a six-week workshop in comics and cartooning in the prison setting, a version of a workshop I’d taught to Silicon Valley kids and computer scientists when living in California. This workshop was part of a larger class regularly taught by Professor Phyllis Hastings of the English Department. Formerly assisted by Associate Professor Vince Samarco, she has been mentoring SVSU students to teach writing workshops to men serving time in Saginaw Correctional Facility in Freeland, just eight miles down Pierce Road from the University. Since

2000, their students have published *Inside/Out*, a journal of creative writing produced by those inmates, under the tutelage of SVSU students. My class's artwork is interspersed throughout *Inside/Out*'s Spring 2004 issue, and you can find my story of "Convicts in a Comics Workshop" online in *Bad Subjects*. The students in my comics class nearly all expressed gratitude to me for coming to teach, for "not forgetting us in here."

As for me, I will never forget my first time entering the prison setting. I will not forget walking past the prison library, the chairs filled with men intently reading—law books, textbooks, and novels—for while we know reading is good, reading in there, compared to the trouble they could be getting into or the psychological effects of boredom, is very good. Professor Hastings, however, reports the prisoners in her classes gripe that their use of books is limited by a policy that there are only a few books that they can browse. Others have to be specifically requested.

Contrast this to my experience when, not long after coming to SVSU in 2000, I learned, to my delight, that one of the perks of a full-time academic job was a stream of complimentary textbooks. I realize that the kindness of (okay, promotion by) publishers was the source of many of the 1950s and 1960s engineering books my own father left when he died a decade ago. I've seen stacks of promotional copies outside professors' or departmental offices, intended for students to pick over, and I hope students make use of this opportunity to build a library in their chosen field. But after that, what happens to the books, the 7th edition of the essential textbook on the professor's shelf that the 8th edition has now replaced? Let's put the vagrant books in prison.

Granted, this isn't as easy as it may seem. Professor Hastings has been told that chemistry books are forbidden, as well as those that have detailed maps

of Michigan. Perhaps the prison doesn't want inmates realizing how far family members have to travel to visit them.

There was also some concern when I donated old computer books to the prison library. The argument was that there aren't computers in the prison for prisoners to use. True enough, but imagine an ex-inmate applying for a



© Mike Mosher 1982, 2011

Professor Mosher says: "This is a detail from four walls I painted in the San Francisco County Jail #2 Visitors' Area, which included images I sketched on visits to the jail (inmate and visiting infant), some imagined (metaphors of bad communication), and some provided by prisoners or suggested by staff. Painted 1982 but destroyed in 1987 upon a change in jail administration" ("Community Murals in San Francisco 1981–82: County Jail #2, St. Peter's School, 16th Street").

job, being asked if he knew the program *Photoshop*, and replying, "Well, I obviously have to catch up. But I always liked the vector shapes in *Photoshop* version 6." This person, in sounding like he knows something about *Photoshop*, might be given a chance. Out-of-date knowledge can be updated, for it already has a context, and is better than mere bafflement. Perhaps out-of-date engineering books would have the potential to encourage someone to enter the field upon release, to start from scratch. Certainly basic science books could.

I have also donated novels, including Marge Piercy titles that friends gave

me for their Michigan college settings or characters who were '70s revolutionaries. Shouldn't men without women read some female authors to prepare them for more nuanced and gentle future interactions with the opposite sex?

My idea of a hellish prison is one with nothing to read, television blaring. Television in America (and I'm always amazed to learn how much our students watch, for when I was at that age, life was too exciting and hectic to bother with TV) exists to stimulate desires, tell you what to buy. Through television, the prisoner is bombarded by things he can't have: a bucket of KFC, a Swiffer mop, a Cadillac Escalade, the Kardashian sisters.

Just as we do on campus, we can, as academics, help create more temperate, literate individuals within the prison environment, even from this distance, even without setting foot inside the prison walls.

Books, though, are the anti-television. They may stimulate desire, but do so at a pace that encourages the reader to figure out how to get to his or her goal. My idea of a proper and rehabilitative prison is something like a monastic

library, its inmates occupied in reading, study, and thought. Perhaps I'm utopian, but a quiet space to oneself is one more thing I suspect a lot of the guys doing time lacked growing up. One notes important prison writings, like those of Dr. Martin Luther King, Václav Havel, Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, or Michigan's John Sinclair. It obviously took some concerted thought to create their books; I want our own discarded books to foster that intellectual environment "in the joint" nearby.

I was recently talking to a high school friend who practices law, who has done time, and who has served as clerk in the law libraries at Lakeland, Pugsley, and Riverside Correctional Facilities about this topic. He informed me how state statute requires a minimum of law materials available for the inmates, and he applauds any effort on SVSU's

part to donate to the Saginaw prison's library, even suggesting we set up a fund to purchase books for it. He personally recommends general nonfiction and fiction books, including adventures, mysteries, and other novels, for those will simply help inmates keep their minds stimulated as they pass their incarceration time.

To that end, let Michigan's prisons overflow with books. I want there to be FREE BOOKS stacked in Saginaw Correctional Facility, just as there are in SVSU faculty corridors. Just as we do on campus, we can, as academics, help create more temperate, literate individuals within the prison environment, even from this distance, even without setting foot inside the prison walls. Please give your unneeded books to the Saginaw Correctional Facility prison library.

Editors' Note: Phyllis Hastings has generously agreed to accept donations of books for the Saginaw Correctional Facility in her office, SW 319. She notes that they are particularly interested in donations of textbooks.

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The following poetry was taken from *A Kaleidoscope of Thoughts*, written in a workshop coordinated by Dr. Phyllis Hastings in August 2005 at the Saginaw Correctional Facility.

Haiku Heaven

by Darrin Arbor-Bey

Smooth Sailing

Concious decisions
made this journey an easy
attempt at this life.

Caution

A road less traveled
is a road less known. Careful
driving with no lights.

Timeless

Today, I see you
smile, but yesterday was a
waste because you frowned.

The Way

by Michael Duthler

Through an early morning mist
a rusty truck squeaks and chirps like crickets.
Barely tread tires jolt across
bone-dry potholes, casting loose gravel
onto shoulders lined with swaying weeds,
emptied beer cans, and yellow-green grass.

Poplar trees and honey bees keep
vigil over this gently winding path.
Soft morning rays cast even softer shadows
through leaves lazily caressed
by a warm, unhurried breeze.

Wild flowers bend then rebound
undaunted by the truck's windy wake.
A pussy-willow stream dances along one side
leading the way to a fish-filled bay.
A train trestle with peeling paint
awaits the truck driver and his bait,
and the rustic road shows the way.

Rite of Passage

by Dennis L. Myers

My son became a man today,
"Adult" on this occasion.
Not proven so in fifty states
yet recognized and sanctioned.

Whereas some cultures see an age
attained that meets their standard.
And certain families etch their heights
on doorways to deem their manhood.

His newfound title isn't based
on any work he's done,
anything assumed, or seemed,
inherited or won.

He didn't meet requirements
of law for drinking status,
nor driving, nor casting ballots,
nor even marriage matters.

Armpit hair and crackling voice
from which he baritones
have played no part
and neither have new sweaty pheromones.

This change was borne from innocence—
Sweet childhood's bubble burst.
He's "come of age," or ... something
Decreed, ordained him from the first.

Awards aplenty; trophies, too
but neither qualifies
The decisive factor's concluded
in a discerning father's eyes

He simply states: "Because he is"
is proof enough to say,
"Son, my son, my boy—
You've become a man today."

Is There “Real” Writing in a Poster Project?



Jennifer Bridges

Professor of Kinesiology and 2010 winner of SVSU's Innovative Writing in Teaching Award

Students might be skeptical about whether a poster project really counts as a writing project. They may think that putting together a couple of pictures and maybe a paragraph or two on some poster board doesn't require much thought, let alone much writing. But what if, just once, the fox can outsmart the hen or the faculty member can fool the student into doing multiple revisions within discipline-specific writing and actually enjoy the process of evolutionary writing? To answer this question, let's take a look at how writing, including a poster project, occurs in KINE 464 (Exercise Science Practicum III), which is designed to extend what students have already learned in their general exercise prescription course (KINE 352) and their clinical exercise prescription theory course (KINE 354).

The Need for Writing in Exercise Science

Our exercise science majors need both professional and academic writing experience. As professionals, many of our students will need to give educational poster presentations at health or wellness fairs in the community when they are in the workforce; this poster project prepares them for this eventuality. In addition, some of our students will go on to graduate school. Because a number

of these students give presentations at regional and national scientific conferences, this class helps prepare them for both the oral presentations and written papers they will deliver to academic audiences outside of their peers at SVSU. I am very proud that one of our poster presentations, “Autism: The Role of a Structured Physical Activity Program in Place of Medication in Treating Autistic Children,” attracted enough attention to result in a national presentation at the American Association for Teaching and Curriculum's annual conference in October 2010.

The Writing Process in KINE 464

In KINE 464, students must prepare a series of posters using Microsoft *PowerPoint* software. The posters are based upon topics of clinical exercise, relevant topics they studied in the prerequisite KINE 354 course. The KINE 464 students then prepare each of the slides in a suggested order, one or two at a time, throughout the semester so that the ideas from one slide begin to build into the ideas of the next.

Students must typically work in pairs for the poster assignment. This decision is based upon the fact that most graduate

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 2011 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 and can visit www.svsu.edu/literacy-link for more information regarding our stylistic preferences.

Submit articles to

SVSU Department of English
Literacy Link
7400 Bay Road
Brown 355
University Center, MI 48710-0001

Submission deadline for Fall 2011 is **Sept. 30, 2011**.

and professional work in our field is done with a colleague, and the department wants our students to have the advantage of getting valuable feedback and input during the writing and project development process from someone else invested in the final product. I also want our students to contribute to the culture of academic excellence and community service at SVSU. This poster project is an avenue for KINE 464 students to do just that.

Peer feedback is an ongoing, regular and guided feature of the class that is designed to occur during our weekly class meeting. Via oral coaching and visual materials, I help the students provide insightful comments to their peers. Students must respond to both the content and the design aspects of their peers' posters. They are to look critically for surface errors, including spelling mistakes, typographical errors, sentence structure issues, and problems with word choice. They are to compliment aspects of the posters that are outstanding and/or important to the message being portrayed. They are also to consider the overall claims of the presentation based on their knowledge of the field such as whether the pathophysiology is correct, or whether they have selected the most important aspects of the disease.

Students are then directed to incorporate the suggestions of their peers into their slides. They bring revised slides back to the next week's class for continued review by their peers. This results in a much improved final product. Additionally each pair of students must meet with me individually to discuss all aspects of the presentation as we near the scheduled presentation date.

During the course, students are introduced to tools such as *Smart Art*, Microsoft *Excel* graphing, as well as concepts like purposeful use of color and consistency of font size and style. We even discuss how the physical layout of the slides will influence the meaning of their content. For example, the visual flow of the slide

placements on the poster is discussed as being similar to the flow of how one reads a sentence. This instruction better prepares the students for the work they will be asked to do in the future.

Other Writing Opportunities: The Case Study

Another aspect of writing to which students are exposed is more technical, the exercise prescriptions for the case studies, which are written in the style suggested by the American College of Sports Medicine—the world's leading exercise science authority. The case study writing process, like the poster development process, is also very progressive throughout the semester.

To begin, the students have a limited time schedule to take five quizzes in the early part of the semester. I use the quiz format on VSpace, which creates a situation where the students must reapply and communicate their understanding of the exercise prescription in a manner similar to that which they will use with actual people with clinical conditions. I use the VSpace test center to provide an opportunity for students to select a multiple choice answer for questions that are posed in their case study textbook.

In addition, I have the students add writing to their multiple choice answer. They are required in each multiple choice question to present the rationale as to why the answer selected is correct. They typically must present a written list of criteria (e.g., standards from the American College of Sports Medicine) or show in a written essay format how they applied metabolic calculations to arrive at their decision. These essay answers mimic what we hope our students will be able to do when counseling a client. Not only do we want our students to be able to create effective exercise programs, but we also want them to be able to explain the

Not only do we want our students to be able to create effective exercise programs, but we also want them to be able to explain the science behind the exercise prescription that they have developed.

science behind the exercise prescription that they have developed.

I read over their responses using the VSpace quizzes tools (the answer justification boxes) and assess them for both content and mechanics. I give them written online feedback immediately after they complete each half of each quiz. Thus they are getting early and regular feedback directly from me. There is not time for the students to correct their responses in this early process as one quiz is immediately followed by the next. This forces them to continue their processing of the material and their writing. Typically what happens is that the students learn the process of how to present the information and begin to ask specific and detailed questions about the quizzes in class, or they schedule time to visit with me in my office. The opportunity to rewrite and revise their case studies comes after they are done preparing their posters but prior to their final exam. The final exam is a repeat of the case studies, with some new data added to ensure that their thinking—and writing—is fresh.

Conclusions

The development of an educational poster and the use of the case study process are not innovative ideas on their own. However, I would argue that the manner in which undergraduate students engage in this intensive writing, revision, and presentation process in KINE 464 is innovative. The students are in a continuous mode of writing or revising their writing in the poster, the case study, or both during the entire semester. They are engaged in the clinical exercise prescription content in both projects throughout the entire semester. The specific topic is determined by the student, so interest and motivation are high. The chance for success for each student is also high because there are multiple avenues of support and feedback occurring at all times. This approach has incorporated technical writing so meaningfully into the exercise science major that some students have not yet figured out that they are learning so much about writing! However, I know—because I see the results at the end of every semester.

Globalization in the Classroom



Diane Boehm

Director of Instructional Support Programs & University Writing Program

Lilianna Aniola-Jedrzejek

SVSU International Guest Scholar

Senior Lecturer in Physics and ESL, Poznan University of Technology

No one will dispute that globalization has changed the world into which we will send our graduates. From the T-shirts they wear to the accents they hear when calling help centers for their new PCs, students have constant reminders of this tectonic shift. How do we prepare students to participate successfully in this “flat” new world described by Thomas Friedman and many others?

For the past seven years, we have addressed this question via online intercultural collaborative projects, in which the students from our two

universities, Poznan University of Technology (PUT) in Poland and SVSU, work together online to complete assigned tasks. We have experimented with multiple models and strategies, always with the goal of giving students firsthand experience in the type of online international team project development many are likely to experience in the workplace in the future.

Our collaborations have taught us a lot. Our favorite tool has become the wiki—we use the VSpace wiki—which we found to be a particularly useful

tool in online collaboration, because it produces a joint document with both text and images visible to all members of the group, with editing possibilities at all stages. Additionally, it keeps a history of contributions, and it is easy to monitor group progress. It is also a new type of writing for most students, providing an opportunity for them to apply researching, summarizing, synthesizing, and revising skills in a new collaborative environment.**

The two of us engage in careful collaborative planning before the projects begin. We create teams with 4–6 students per team, 2–3 from each university. Because they are English language learners, the PUT students generally choose the wiki topics; both groups contribute text and images; and the SVSU students provide final editing after the wiki content has been completed. In the fall 2010 semester, our joint student groups created six wikis, each based on authoritative sources, integrating both text and images of various types (photos, charts, graphs, and the like). The final wikis generally were 6–8 screens (2,000–2500 words, with 6–10 images) and included references lists with citations in both languages.

The screen shot below shows the opening section of one of the wikis our students developed in Fall 2010.

Because our two groups of students bring very different cultural backgrounds, career goals, and English language proficiency levels to the classroom, students must learn to negotiate hurdles of many types along the way to successful wikis and the subsequent oral presentations.

PUT students who participate in the collaborative projects are undergraduate freshmen or sophomores, generally majoring in technical physics. These students take mandatory English as a second language (ESL) courses. The main focus of these courses is to learn and practice vocabulary connected with their field of study and to develop speaking skills through presentations, both necessary elements in their future careers. Due to the limited duration of the course (120 contact hours), the practicing of writing skills is limited to business letters or short reports. The collaborative project with the SVSU students is a challenge, for, in six weeks' time, they have to be able to communicate sufficiently with their American counterparts to make

An Introduction to Graphene:

Cell phones, computers, batteries, and wires. People use these objects every day. They make life easier by storing, transferring, and communicating information. In the technological age like today, scientists and engineers have been looking for material and techniques to create new technology and enhance the current systems. One particular material that has sparked the interest in many is graphene. This "wonder material" is known to be strong and complex with the ability to enhance current technology including phones, computers, etc.

A sheet of graphene is a singular layer of carbon only one atom thick (Srinivasan, 2007). It is a two-dimensional, or flat, piece of matter (2007). Each graphene sheet is held together in many compacted layers to compose the 3D material, commonly known as graphite (2007). The carbon atoms that bond in a sheet of graphene form a honeycomb-like lattice, or framework (Graphene, 2010). It can also be explained as an atomic-scale chicken wire made of carbon atoms and their bonds (2010).

Graphene is the thinnest and strongest material known to this day. Although it is the thinnest material, it can endure densities that are six times higher than copper, and it has record conductivity and stiffness (2010).

Since nature does not easily allow low-dimensional crystals to be obtained, graphene was not able to be investigated until recently. New technologies are recently and currently developing to aid in producing "graphene wafers" (2010). Once these "wafers" are acquired, significant progress will be made in learning about graphene and its properties (2010).

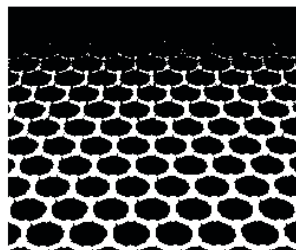


Figure 1. (2010). Photograph. LabSpaces. Retrieved November 16, 2010, from <http://www.labspace.net>

decisions regarding the management of the project, do necessary research on the subject, and write a final document, all in a non-native language. The final presentations offer another challenge, yet are usually remembered as the highlight of the project.

Whatever the specific course context in both countries, what has been most gratifying to both of us is the impact this project has on student understandings. Always in our collaborations, we ask students to reflect on both their processes and their outcomes. The feedback from students in our Fall 2010 classes affirms that we have achieved our intended project outcomes and reveals several themes.

One recurrent theme with students in both countries is increased understanding of how globalization has impacted both individuals and the world:

Working with the Polish students gave me the opportunity to see firsthand how technology can connect me to people several time zones away in a blink of an eye, and it showed me how much I can learn from people from different cultures. I grew up hearing things like “America should look out for itself” or “America is being taken over by other cultures.” Now that I have read the other side of the story, ... I realize that globalization is not a bad thing. Instead, I have come to learn that it is the inevitable, revolutionary, and improved way of living that should be embraced rather than feared and slandered. (Nancy Lackey, SVSU)

Collaboration with the SVSU students was a great experience. The foremost challenge that appeared during the project was explaining some technical, or related to physics, aspects of graphene. Translating the scientific language into the text which would be easy to understand for everybody was the task on which we spent most of the time, besides working on the entire project. Nevertheless all the time spent on working with American students was worth it. It opened our eyes on some aspects of globalism and broadened our minds regarding graphene. (Mateusz Straszewski, PUT)

Whatever the specific course context in both countries, what has been most gratifying is the impact this project has on student understandings.

The SVSU context occurs in one of two different settings: In the fall, the students are in ENGL 111 (First Year Writing), so they are new to everything: the university, collaborative assignments, VSpace, wikis, etc. In contrast to the PUT students, few intend to major in the sciences, and hardly any have taken high school

courses in physics. In the most recent collaboration, the students were in an Honors section of the course, with multiple intended majors; in previous collaborations, the students have been in regular 111 sections. Whatever their background, few are proficient in another language (and none so far in Polish). Thus they often begin the projects with some anxiety. That was especially true in Fall 2010, when the PUT students chose topics like graphene, the Large Hadron Collider, superconductivity, and the like. Six weeks later, having learned problem-solving skills of many types, the ENGL 111H students gave their final presentations with both confidence and pride.

In the winter semester, SVSU participants are RPW 300 (Writing in the Professions) students, usually a mix of upper-level students in business and management, and in education. Their biggest stressor usually is time, because many have jobs and often families as well. Most, however, recognize the value of learning how to compose collaboratively using online tools, a skill that can translate into the highly competitive workplace they know they will enter upon graduation.

A second student theme is learning how to interact successfully with colleagues from another culture:

The main advantage of this project was the possibility of working with people from different country and different field of study. Sometimes I was finding difficult to cooperate with people I really didn't know, but I think the reason of this was simple—we have less time for getting to know each other. (Krzysztof Hyżorek, PUT)

I learned firsthand how globalization worked. I learned that the world is flat and how technology makes it easy to be able to communicate on an international level.... They are literally only one click away. It also introduced me to the future. As Suarez-Orozco said, we will need to be able to be prepared to deal with other cultures, and this project was the perfect introduction for this. We had to watch our language, to make sure that everyone could understand. I really had to censor myself to make sure this project was just as easy for them. This was by far the most useful project I have ever done in any class, and I will take what I have learned about biomass and about collaboration skills with me as I develop my future skills. (Kaitlyn Rye, SVSU)

Students also gain confidence that they can meet the challenges of successful participation in this challenging new globalized environment:

Having the opportunity to work with the international students has really broadened my perspective of the world. This is all very new to me, but many projects are going on that involve team members from different countries that work together. Overall, the experience was incredible; I learned a lot more about physics in my college 111H English

class than I did my whole senior year of high school, and also how to work in groups where team members could not be present. From researching, to creating a wiki report, and to finally presenting our topic, all was successful and worth it in the end. (Ashley Shiefer, SVSU)

Before this course started, I had never heard of the term “globalization.” I loved the book Travels of a T-Shirt, but after reading it I still had trouble understanding just what globalization was. After working on our PUT project, I finally understood how important global-ization really is. With so many immigrants coming into America, and so many Americans traveling outside of the country, it is important to be able to work with people who may not speak the same language as you or come from the same background. I learned a lot working on this project and I am proud of the outcome. (Anna Ascitutto, SVSU)

Most importantly, we are confident that we have created a challenging and enriching learning experience that has given our students skills they can take with them into a globalized future.

We too have learned a lot! During the semesters we have collaborated, the positive outcomes have always far outweighed any extra demands on our time for planning the projects and mentoring. Most importantly, we are confident that we have created a challenging and enriching learning experience that has given our students skills they can take with them into a globalized future.

*****Authors' Note: We would be happy to share our assignment, guidelines, and practices with anyone who is interested. We will also write a piece for a subsequent Literacy Link edition with more specifics about our processes and suggestions for those who wish to design similar wiki assignments.***

A Literacy Wish List



Noah Essenmacher

SVSU Senior, Literature and Chemistry Major

In 2005, I was working as a welder and machine operator in a Saginaw auto parts shop, saving money with the hope of returning to college. I'd had a few years of higher education after high school, but it had been almost seven years since I had been in college.

Before long, I was taking a class or two around my hours at the shop and using the company's tuition reimbursement program to my advantage. I decided to finish the chemistry degree I started working on years ago. I also decided that as long as I was intent on seeing college through to the finish this time, I was also going to pursue a bachelor's degree in literature. In my time away from school, I found literature was what I missed about college the most.

My first English classes presented me with a genuine challenge: I had to recover critical reading and writing skills. I hadn't been in an English class since my senior year of high school. It was more complicated than the cliché we hear about riding bikes: once you learn how to do it, you always know how. In addition, there were new conventions to learn, like MLA and APA formats, which I found myself using for all the classes required for both of my majors, English and chemistry.

I found myself overwhelmed at times, but I had the support of my family and friends. I prayed often. I worked hard in my classes, and I learned to manage my time as effectively as possible as I worked through college. And I started to notice a difference in my writing over time. Call it finding my writing voice, but I felt more comfortable expressing my ideas, organizing my thoughts, and using rhetorical strategies. I realized that my vocabulary was increasing, and I could read through texts faster and in greater depth. I had a better sense of

the critical questions I should have been asking all along.

Others began to notice the work I'd been putting into my writing as well. A professor suggested that I apply to the Writing Center for a mentor position. I suppose I hadn't considered a job helping others with their writing because I was just finding some confidence in my own. But fast forward a few semesters, and you'll find I love working at the SVSU Writing Center as a mentor and serving as editor-in-chief of *The Valley Vanguard*. I've even expanded my philosophical and cultural understanding through the Roberts Fellowship Program. Off campus, I also enjoy my work at Delta College, where I help students in my role as a structured learning assistant. In fact, these opportunities enabled me to leave the factory and return to academia as a full-time student.

Now, like many seniors, I often think about the opportunities that await me after graduation. I have been working hard to build a set of skills and a body of knowledge that employers and graduate school programs demand, and I realize my literacy development has already opened many doors for me. These opportunities enrich me both personally and professionally: they help me approach life after graduation with feelings of hope and confidence. Moreover, when I meet potential employers for the first time, I have meaningful experiences to share.

Given my experience, my wish is that more students realize the possibilities open to them through literacy. Therefore, my purpose here is to explore how my literacy skills developed, identifying the most influential classroom experiences that have fostered my writing competency.

In-Class Writing

Good writing skills are not something we're born with; they're acquired over time through learning and practice. Writing in class, even for ten minutes, had a number of benefits. When I wrote about an idea, it stuck with me better than it did if I picked it up only in a lecture or in a textbook reading. I retained knowledge more readily, and my ideas became more organized when they had to be explained in writing. The prompts for these small writing sessions often included critical thinking questions, which served as models for the level of questioning I needed to apply in my coursework. In addition, the writing prompts, which were often brief and ungraded exercises, helped me become accustomed to essay exams and quizzes. Some days, it was difficult to feel motivated to write in class, but these exercises prepared me to push through writer's block when working on essay assignments outside of class.

Talking through the Writing Process

When I began college, instructors introduced me to some unfamiliar writing tasks, as well as writing assignments much more complicated than any I had encountered in high school. It was difficult to know how to approach the multiple requirements on an assignment sheet, where to begin with research, and what a finished draft should look like. I needed knowledge that I did not have, and I needed someone to make it explicit. Thus, when an instructor delivered an oral argument and walked through the steps of argumentation, I better understood the method and objective of my position paper. Likewise, when my physics lab instructor provided a sample laboratory report, I knew the format and the voice typical of such reports.

Real Purposes, Real Audiences

College students often take academic writing to mean producing a custom text

for an audience of one with the purpose of earning a passing grade. However, outside the classroom, they're writing for a variety of audiences and purposes. Fortunately, I found many writing assignments in class that incorporated (or at least simulated) real audiences and real purposes. These tasks challenged my expectations by making writing relevant as well as academic. For example, I wrote a stage design proposal for a director based on a novel I read for class. I wrote a persuasive letter to a policy maker addressing an issue that affected me personally. And I wrote lesson plans that I can include in my teaching portfolio, present at a conference, or use in a classroom. When I learned that my work was meaningful to someone in addition to the professor grading it, I approached my writing with an increased level of commitment and attention to detail.

One-on-One Conferences and Rich Feedback

The single most influential factor in my writing skill development is the face-to-face communication I have with faculty concerning my writing. Some instructors have scheduled conferences or met with me during office hours, and the feedback I get through these interactions is irreplaceable. I have found that some writing advice simply cannot be summed up in annotated comments on a graded paper, and I'd rather discuss significant issues in my writing before handing in a final draft.

Next to personally meeting with a professor, the most beneficial comments for improving writing come through written feedback.

The most meaningful feedback shows me that the professor thoughtfully and thoroughly considered the ideas I put forth, and it addresses such higher order concerns as development, organization, and clarity. My writing benefits most from comments that point out problems,

I believe every student can benefit from an instructor who can build literacy skills as well as align students with opportunities to share and further refine those skills.

provide rationale for changes, and offer suggestions or probing questions to consider.

Connecting Skill and Opportunity

These classroom practices and activities have opened many doors for me both on and off campus. However, there is a key point that I have not mentioned, and that is the role of faculty in facilitating the connections between students with writing skills and all the opportunities available to them. Instructors have introduced me to creative writing clubs, student publications, academic conferences, and tutoring jobs. Influential teachers have helped me to recognize the writing skills I have

and to build the confidence necessary to seize the opportunities that come my way. I believe every student can benefit from an instructor who can build literacy skills as well as align students with opportunities to share and further refine those skills.

Upon reflection, I understand that the process of acquiring and developing literacy skills is continuous. I've come a long way since my first college-level English class, but I still find challenges in writing. I'm discovering new educational and professional opportunities too. I feel literacy has opened the world to me, and I hope my experience can benefit other students and the professors who can move them to realize their potential.

Literacy Link Internship

Literacy Link is interviewing interns for the 2011–12 school year. If you know of qualified students, please pass this information along to them.

Requirements

Candidates should...

- Be a junior or senior at SVSU
- Have experience in desktop publishing and design, particularly Adobe *InDesign*, *Photoshop*, and Microsoft *Word*
- Possess good organizational skills, strong editorial skills, a strong work ethic, and the ability to work independently

Job Duties

Interns will...

- Lay out and design 2011–12 issues
- Edit submissions for accuracy and professionalism
- Collaborate with editors, authors, and printer
- Perform some research and write article(s) for future issues of *Literacy Link*

Benefits

Interns will...

- Gain layout, editorial, writing, and project management experience
- Produce professional samples for their portfolio
- Earn a \$500 stipend per semester

Hours

Hours are flexible and average five hours a week for Fall 2011–Winter 2012 semesters.

To Apply

Interested candidates should submit a resume, three references, and portfolio by May 13, 2011, to:

Helen Raica-Klotz
Zahnow 308
(The Writing Center)