literacy link

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Contents

From the Editors' Desktops

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First things first.

You'll notice that this issue of Literacy Link looks a bit different from the last issue. It's just one of the small changes your new editors have made, and comes compliments of our intern, Carolyn Hamilton. She's been a major force in re-designing the look of Link, and we hope you'll agree it's fantastic.

We'd like to express our appreciation to past-editors Helen Raica-Klotz and Chris Giroux, whose help has made our transition into these new roles immeasurably easier. Thanks to both of them for laying such firm groundwork with which to begin.

The call for this issue asked our campus community to consider how "Exploring New Literacies" was influencing college writing, and we love how the three pieces in this issue approach that call in such different ways.

In her contribution, Dr. Sherrin Francis describes how her students sunk their teeth into the understanding of grammar and writing conventions. It's a new take on teaching an old form of literacy, and we think her students' enthusiasm is contagious and inspirational.

Dr. Monika Dix calls for a wider understanding of what literacy means in a foreign language environment. Culture and literature, she writes, must play a role in the acquisition of new languages.

Finally, Jennifer Dean, Head of Collection Development and Acquisitions of our Zahnow Library, tells us how the rise of the ebook is influencing the way libraries do their work.

Though the essays in your hands attack new literacies in their own ways, each essay has this in common: that literacy, and what it means to be literate, is constantly being reshaped by our needs and our environment, and how we teach and present literacy must be always ready to adapt.

We think this issue of Literacy Link will spark some conversations across our campus, and we'd love to hear your feedback. Welcome, too, are suggestions, complaints, warnings, and awards (and responses to the next CFP, found later in the issue).

Happy reading!

--E & J

GRAMMAR LITERACY: HOW VAMPIRES, POTLUCKS AND DIAGRAMS CREATED AN AFFECTIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY

Many of my own friends and co-workers profess that they hate grammar. That, in fact, they loathe and despise it. And of course it's no surprise that many college students do, too. I think it's fair to say that grammar instruction is seen by many students and instructors as, at best, a necessary evil.

Grammar can be a major roadblock to successfully completing English 111 and moving into advanced courses. So the idea of an extracurricular grammar club may strike many readers as a tough sell.

By 2010, I had taught composition at a community college in Texas for six years and had worked with over 500 entry-level students. I had seen students struggle with grammar every single semester. Non-credit developmental grammar courses were offered at this Texas college, but my students had already placed into Composition 1. They had the ability to write essays, but they lacked enough knowledge of grammar to truly master the writing skills of the course.

By this point, many of them were embarrassed to ask for in-depth grammar help. They felt as if they should already understand the information. Others did seek help, but they were turned off by the dry, rote nature of learning sentence structure and parts of speech. We needed a different approach for this group of students.

After reading about the success of Lucy Ferriss's "Constructing Thought" course at Trinity University, I was inspired to create and sponsor a student club called the "Hard Core Grammar Club." Ferriss's course was an experimental, for-credit, upper level course in diagramming sentences and was a raging success with her students (Landecker). The Hard Core Grammar Club was a little different. It was based on four primary pieces of research:

- Students who have a strong social network are more likely to return the following semester and eventually complete a degree (Cox and Ebbers; Wimberly);

- When students can develop a personal connection with a faculty member, they are more likely to succeed in college (Cox);

- Food can play a role in student success (Green);

- A broader base of students can be affected by providing alternative modes of learning, for example visual, oral and text (Mayer and Massa).

Our club's learning objectives included helping students feel competent with basic

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© Sherrin Frances
Students gather for food and grammar at the Hard Core Grammar Club

grammatical concepts and instruction on how to diagram the basic sentence patterns. But even more importantly, the club would aid in the formation of a social/academic support network among other students and with the grammar club instructor.

The club was promoted as "for students with a passion for, curiosity toward, or even just a healthy fear of grammar and language." Members met bi-weekly, and together we learned how to diagram sentences using a marvelous illustrated book called *The Deluxe Transitive Vampire: The Ultimate Handbook of Grammar for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed* by Karen E. Gordon. Since it was a pot luck, I brought the main course and most students brought a side or dessert. The atmosphere was informal and students could come and go as their schedules allowed.

Generally, our format was to mingle and eat while we reviewed one new part of speech or sentence pattern, and then we diagrammed a series of sentences from *Vampire* that emphasized the given topic. We treated each sentence as a puzzle and emphasized the playful, riddle-like nature of language, and our Vampire book really underscored how entertaining writing, even writing about grammar, can be.

The sentences we diagrammed ranged from, "The werewolf had a toothache," and "Gargoyles spout nonsense," to "The debutante and the troll shot the breeze, sobbed and shuddered, and bared their souls till dawn." We also attended to the visual, aesthetic appeal of diagramming, and we utilized a variety of mechanical and colored pencils, graph papers, and other "fun" supplies. As students completed each diagram, they shared their "drawings" with the group to see if their diagrams looked similar.

During our first semester, our mailing list grew to include over 50 student names, and between eight and fifteen showed up at each meeting. Because they had never diagrammed before, the playing field was somewhat leveled, and they were empowered to ask all kinds of basic questions that they otherwise might not. Eventually, we began to look at the differences between English and Spanish diagrams, between sentences from famous writers (Hemingway and Faulkner, for example), and between sentences from the students' own papers.

The club also became a place for these students to assume leadership roles. They created a Facebook page and a Blackboard site, they designed and sold tee-shirts, and

they promoted the club at student events. Many of these students are still friends with one another and with me on Facebook, and they have gone on to achieve two-year and four-year degrees at their schools of choice.

The success of this club was difficult to measure quantitatively, and it is true that we had a relatively small number of students attend each week. But for those few students, this opportunity had a powerful impact. Their attitudes changed in a short time. Their curiosity grew. They became much more confident and adept at asking questions. These are traits that will serve them well in many fields beyond grammar. And, on top of everything, they had a really good time.

© Sherrin Frances
The Hard Core Grammar Club diagrammed sentences using a variety of papers and pens to give their diagrams visual appeal

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TO E OR NOT TO E? ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND EBOOK USE

As a glance at any online library catalog will tell you, library ebook collections are growing. While this is true in libraries generally, academic libraries have had an easier transition than our public library colleagues, cooperating with scholarly publishers and digital content vendors to develop flexible purchasing models.

While libraries may choose to purchase ebooks (also known as e-books or eBooks) in the same way they would purchase a print book, subscription and demand-driven purchasing models have developed as ebook availability increases. In a demand-driven model, also known as demand- or patron-driven acquisition (D- or PDA), libraries work with a vendor or publisher to add the vendor's ebook catalog to the library's collection. These catalog records look and act like any other library record. Library users may browse these ebooks, at no cost to the library; the library is only charged for a title when it has been used for a significant period of time, or the user has printed pages or copied text.

Rick Anderson (2011) of the University of Utah has called this "just-in-time" rather than "just-in-case" purchasing, arguing that it allows a library to better meet the needs of its users by allowing libraries to target funding to materials that are of most interest to students and faculty.

David Lewis (2013), Dean of the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) University Library, and a prominent thinker, writer, and presenter on the future of academic libraries, predicts that the next decade will be one of major change. He posits that DDA and subscriptions will replace traditional book and journal collecting, with print collections being reduced to centralized depositories focused on preservation. Print-on-demand will continue to be available for those who want or need a print format. Current ebook vendors allow users to print portions of ebooks, and the Espresso Book Machine, a high-speed, on-demand machine that can print, bind and trim a 300-page paperback book in under 10 minutes, is growing in popularity in many research libraries, including Michigan State University and the University of Michigan.

Adoption of ebooks creates changes in workflow for librarians and library staff in all areas of library specialization. A DDA model requires less librarian time in selecting individual titles, and less staff time in processing and maintaining print collections. Ideally, this change will allow reference and instruction librarians to focus more of their time teaching, assisting with research, and reaching out to students and faculty. Catalogers and other behind-the-scenes professionals will work with library paraprofessional staff to learn new and improve existing technological
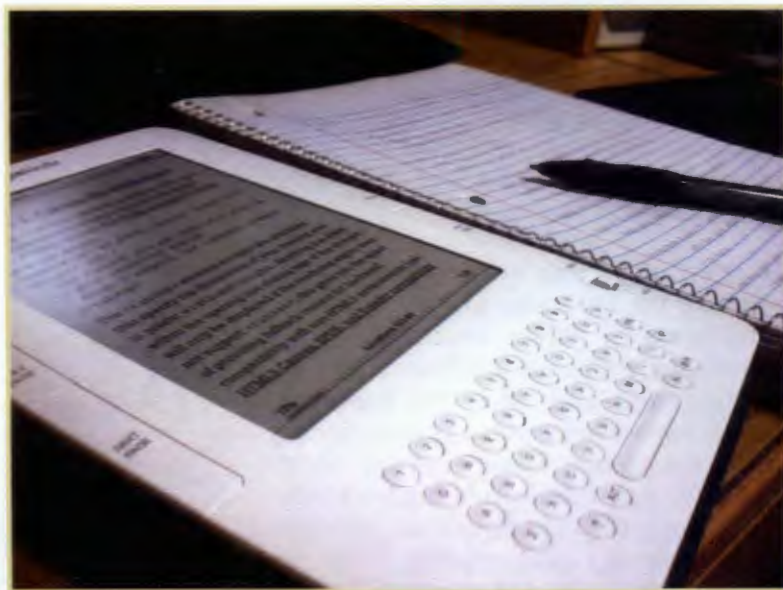
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Acquisitions

skills essential for maintaining the tools and infrastructure necessary to ensure that digital content is findable and usable. Collection development librarians will require increased skills in collaborating and negotiating with vendors and working with contracts to ensure access at reasonable prices. An outgrowth of collection development includes monitoring developments in open access models and working with faculty to explore alternative publishing and peer review options. As new models emerge and the tools improve, all librarians must hone their skills in teaching students and faculty how to find, evaluate, and use information in a broad sense, rather than focusing on the mechanics of accessing it.

However, the existence of ebooks and their integration into library collections is only

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ebooks are changing the way academic libraries meet user needs

one side of the issue. As ebook purchasing and usage rise, librarians have wondered how this shift in format is serving library users. Since 2007, librarians, scholars, publishers, and vendors have begun researching this problem. Many of these studies involve small samples at individual institutions. Two recent studies gained some notoriety in the trade press: the University of California Libraries (2011) UC Libraries Academic e-Book Usage Survey, which reported a higher than expected preference for print due in part to the distractions inherent in computer usage, and a study by librarians at Miami University (Revelle, Messner, Shrimplin, & Hurst, 2012) who used Q methodology to identify clusters of opinions about ebooks. The Miami study found that survey respondents fell into four types: Book Lovers, who held the majority and cherish print; Technophiles, who have a strong interest in the possibilities that technology offers; Pragmatists, who are interested in content over container; and Printers, who are similar to Book Lovers, but prefer print due to problems with reading from a screen.

Large-scale surveys by Primary Research Group (2009), The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) (2010), and ebrary (2007, 2008, & 2011) have provided much of the quantitative data currently available to those wishing to learn more about how library-provided ebooks are used and whether the format is meeting teaching and research needs. In general, though results are mixed, acceptance of digital materials is high, with many users appreciating them due to ease of access and use. These studies serve as benchmarks, but more research is needed; adoption may depend on personal preference, gender,

usage purpose, and field of study. Mode of access and quality is of concern; these studies indicate that discoverability, usable interfaces, complex searching capabilities, and high-quality content and images all play a role in a user's acceptance of ebooks.

In the studies above, ebook monographs provided by the library and read primarily on computer screens are the primary objects of study. Before closing, it is important to note that e Textbooks, which are primarily purchased by students on an individual basis, are also the subject of research, conducted largely by textbook publishers. According to Mark Springer (2012), formerly of Cengage Learning, initial testing of e Textbooks with students found that the more students used e Textbooks, the less they liked them, calling them "flat replicas" that were less efficient than their print counterparts. However, this didn't decrease students' desire for digital solutions. New developments focus on e Textbooks that treat content as software and allow for a personalized user experience. Small companies like Inkling and Boundless are charting new territory, but the big guys will not be far behind.

Though Book Lovers may rue it, it seems clear that ebooks are here to stay. As with all new formats, they will only continue to evolve with gains in technology, and humanity will evolve along with them. For some specialized libraries, the tipping point for moving to a majority digital collection has already arrived. However, as studies show, whether and how students and faculty adopt ebooks depends on a variety of factors, and each library will need to determine which combinations of formats will best serve their populations, with the understanding that this may change
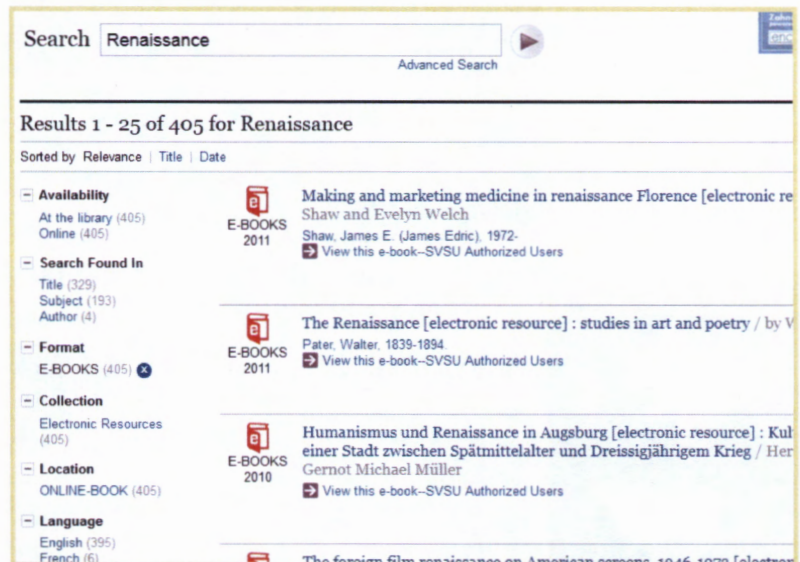
A sample of ebooks available through the Saginaw Valley State University library

rapidly as technology improves. Librarians will continue to study local usage patterns, monitor new research, and communicate with students and faculty to ensure that the library reflects the needs of the people it serves.

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New Literacies, Japanese Literature, and Culture: Exploring Communicative Competence

For scholars and laymen alike, cultural competence—namely the knowledge of the conventions, customs, and beliefs of another country—plays an important role in foreign language learning, and many teachers have made it their goal to incorporate the teaching of culture into the Japanese language curriculum. However, it seems that the notion of communicative competence, emphasizing the role of context and circumstances under which language can be used accurately and appropriately, falls short of the mark when it comes to actually equipping students with the cognitive skills they need in a foreign-culture environment. But what exactly is meant by the term "culture" and why and how should it be integrated into foreign language classes?

This paper examines the contribution of literature in enhancing communicative competence in Japanese language courses. Based on my experience with students who have had very limited or no prior exposure to foreign languages, cultures, or travel abroad, I will demonstrate that the incorporation of literary elements, which are intertwined with the language itself, is essential for equipping them with the cognitive skills they need in a foreign-culture environment to foster not only their communicative competence, but also their critical awareness of social life.

My goal is to shed light on the following questions: If Japanese language and culture are intricately intertwined, why should teachers focus primarily on culture when there are other aspects of the curriculum that require attention? How can we incorporate literature into Japanese language courses with the aim of raising cultural awareness and communicating insight into the target civilization?

Today, foreign language teachers can be classified into two camps: one basing its emphasis on communicative competence, the other on the importance of exposure to culture and, especially, literature. The reliance of the former on data from empirical studies conflicts with the feelings of the latter that non-quantitative, intuitional aspects of language learning are essential to second language acquisition, resulting in debates such as: "How can foreign language departments justify offering literature courses when students can't speak the language well enough to carry on routine business negotiations?" or "What does literature contribute to language learning when communicative competence must clearly be our goal?"

As for in-class activities focusing on non-verbal communication in my beginner's Japanese language class, I give students pictures showing gestures (bowing for

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Greetings, etc.—all words are in Japanese) and ask them to discuss the following questions (in English):

- Which gestures in Japanese culture are different from those of your own culture?

- Which of the gestures in Japanese culture would be used in different situations or even be avoided in your own culture?

Illustration of Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* by Tosa Mitsuoki (17th century)

This is followed by a discussion on the various ways in which people from different cultures express emotions as well as interpret gestures as "indices" to emotions. I find these basic exercises to be very powerful tools in order to raise students' cultural awareness based on styles of clothing, symbolic meanings of colors, gestures and facial expressions, and the physical distance people put between each other, and to show in what ways these non-verbal cues are similar to or different from those of their own culture.

Herein lies the role of literature in the foreign language classroom. Rather than being a fifth adjunct to the four skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), culture can be best expressed through the medium of literature. In her article "Integration of Language, Literature and Culture: Goals and Curricular Design," Sylvie Henning offers a functional-structural solution to this debate, asking what functional goals we have for students and what structure will allow them to reach these goals. She argues that culture must be woven into the curriculum and that literature is one feature among many in the cultural domain that provides what one might call "added value" beyond the level of language acquisition. "Through literature," she says, "students can develop a full range of linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity" (Henning, p.24), suggesting that one can offer a curriculum that satisfies the practical concerns while at the same time serving "larger" more humanistically-based purposes.

But what is it that convinces us that literature has, in and of itself, something deeply significant to contribute to the

process of Japanese language learning, whatever the ultimate goals of the learner might be, and how do we articulate that something in a way that establishes us on firm ground in the contemporary professional environment? Where do we uncover the rationale in the endless volumes that have been written on the nature of literature and, if possible, match it with what we have learned about the nature of language teaching? In pursuit of these questions, I believe that we can build at least on one thing: a gap of significant proportions in current second language acquisition research with respect to the role of "affect."

I am aware that the problems that exist in translation of literature are formidable ones and even greater for any generalization one might make about the cultural resonances that translated literature may produce (Steiner & Barnstone, 1993). However, I do not believe the fact that reading a translation diminishes the validity of the experience, especially when students read works like Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* (c.1000), which is considered the world's first psychological novel. This work teaches linguistic, literary, and cultural aspects of Heian Japan. If this translation was able to act as a potential cultural carrier despite the problems of lexical correspondences between languages, stylistic strategies, tone and pacing, it supports the idea that there is great power in the way literature encodes culture's "affective" features.

Yet, the "affective" element of language clearly has a profound ability to engage us, to motivate us, and to move us. But we need to know more about how to invoke the "affective" domain as an inducement to learning, especially with respect to the ways in which "affection" in language can be turned to the learner's advantage. I think that the following points might be a good basis of a new agenda for examining the relationship between language learning, literature, and culture:

- There is a gap in second language acquisition theory and research about the affective features of language itself and the ways in which those features might become an inducement to language learning.

- Literature is one of the forms of language that most calculatingly plays upon affects as an inducement to communication.

- The cultural features of literature represent a powerful merging of language, affect, and intercultural encounters and often provide the exposure to living language that a foreign language student lacks.

Regarding the third point, Claire Kramsch, in her book *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (1993), has masterfully laid out some of the questions surrounding the ways in which one deals with the cultural and literary interface in the teaching of foreign languages. Among her most valuable constructs is the notion of "third places"—a kind of neutral ground that foreign language learners must discover for themselves in order to arbitrate between the familiar world of the native language and the unfamiliar world of the foreign language. This notion of "third places" illustrates a pivot upon which the relationship of "affect" and culture turn.

Imagine for a moment that your Japanese language students are space travelers attempting to move from their native language and culture (planet A) to Japanese language and culture (planet B). The gravitational pull of their "familiar home planet" (A) is one of many "affective" resistances that make "escape" to the foreign Japanese planet (B) difficult. But luckily there are other planetary bodies, such as literature, that exert their gravitational influence on your student space travelers even before they embark, and that influence will draw them closer to Japanese language and culture (planet B). Therefore, Kramsch's "third places" might be seen as reflecting your students' journey when the gravitational pull of Japanese language and culture (planet B) becomes dominant, but at which time students become conscious of the different features of Japanese language and culture, such as literature and film.

Specialists in related fields might be more qualified than I to identify which particular areas of research in foreign language acquisition, discourse analysis, literary theory and criticism, cross-cultural communication and anthropology — to name a few—should play a role in this initiative. There are several areas that require further examination:

- The relationship between "affect" and language. Language has roots in the affective dimension of the human experience, and the nature of that relationship is critical to our understanding of the process of language learning, especially with the role of literature and culture and to the way in which they can contribute to what we might call "affective power," that is the power to turn affect into an inducement rather than an obstacle to learning.

- If we want to explore that nature of literature's impact on language learners, we need to develop a model that takes us from language through myth, symbolism, and metaphor to the literary work itself.

- The notion that language is instrumental in both creating and expressing a culture's "informing spirit" (Williams 1982) is well known, but what is less known is how language may reflect culture and vice versa.
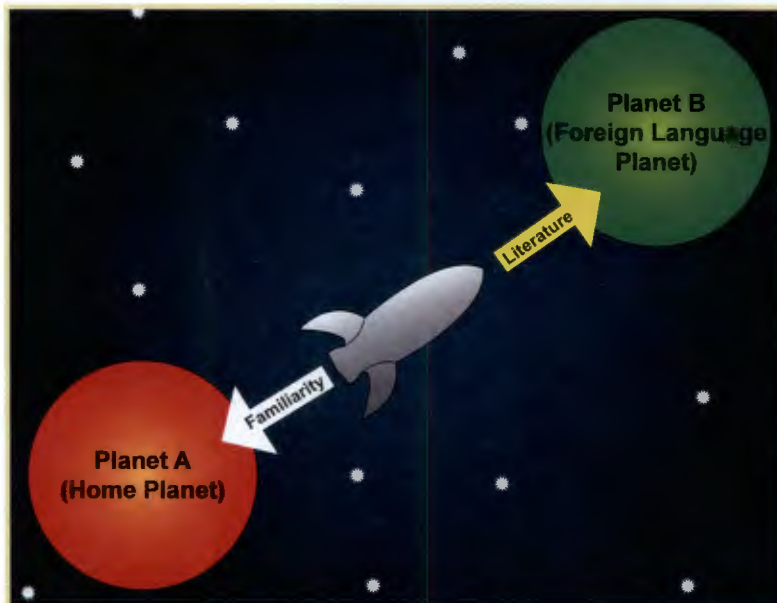
Literature can help students "escape" the gravitational forces of their native language and culture in order to reach an understanding about a foreign language and culture.

Of course the use of literature for foreign language students is a priori, limited to the

degree of proficiency that they enjoy in the target language. The questions which then remain are how much, when, and which literary works, before reaching the final goal of syllabi that maximize the potential that literature has to offer. So what is likely to come out of all this? Our goal as teachers of Japanese language and literature is to expand and to enrich the lives of our students and the global society in which they live.

In conclusion, this paper has shed light on the contribution of Japanese literature to enhancing communicative competence in Japanese language classes. By examining the incorporation of both literary and linguistic elementsto provide students with the cognitive skills they need in a foreign language environment, I have demonstrated that "affect" is what convinces us that literature makes a significant contribution not only to students' Japanese language study but also to their communicative competence and critical awareness of society.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The editors of Literacy Link invite members of the campus community to submit articles for the Winter 2012 issue. Articles should be related to the theme, "Writing Spaces." Articles may address a variety of literacy practices including such topics as issues, strategies, activities, research, critical thinking, writing across the curriculum, or book reviews.

Literacy Link is a campus publication that began in the winter of 1992 with the support of Dr. Robert Yien and the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Founding editors Sally Cannon and Jenny Senft, in the first issue of Literacy Link, focused on three key areas of literacy: writing, reading, and thinking. Over the years, individuals from departments across campus have added to the conversation.

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

Please submit articles to:

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Submission deadline for the Winter 2012 issue is February 8, 2013.

For more information about Literacy Link, visit www.svsu.edu/literacylink.