

11-2010

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Recommended Citation

Eileen Bosch and Valeria Molteni. "Building and Designing Bridges - Enabling Bilingual Academic Learning Experiences" *LOEX Conference Proceedings 2008* (2010).

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BUILDING AND DESIGNING BRIDGES – ENABLING BILINGUAL ACADEMIC LEARNING EXPERIENCES

EILEEN K. BOSCH AND VALERIA E. MOLteni

INTRODUCTION

This article describes how two academic librarians from California State University Long Beach (CSULB) and California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) developed a strong partnership and created a model for bilingual services (Spanish/English) in reference and instruction to support the curriculum of their departments: Romance, German, Russian Languages & Literatures (CSULB) and Modern Languages (CSUDH). The main goal of this model is to increase the information literacy skills of Spanish-speaking students by creating an ambiance of support where learning takes place through positive academic experiences and in a unique way.

ABOUT CSULB AND CSUDH

CSULB and CSUDH are part of the largest, the most diverse, and one of the most affordable university systems in the United States. Currently, the California State University System (CSU) has 23 campuses across the state of California. Both CSULB and CSUDH are located in the South Bay Area of Los Angeles. According to the CSU Chancellor Office (2008) report, CSU is the university of choice for Latinos. Currently, 23.0% percent of enrolled students in the CSU system are Latinos (34.2% at CSUDH and 24.9% at CSULB). In addition, both institutions are included in the *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education's* annual “Top 100.” One of the mission goals of CSU is to offer students a wide variety of curricular and extracurricular approaches that allow them to be significantly exposed to more global perspectives and to be able to develop multi-lingual abilities.

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BECOMING PARTNERS

While attending a business meeting of DIAL (Diversity in Academic Libraries), an interest group of CARL (California Academic and Research Libraries), both librarians met and learned about each other's experiences in working with bilingual students. As a result, they started to share their personal and work experiences in teaching information literacy skills in Spanish to students taking Spanish courses at the two institutions. It was very interesting to find the similarities that both librarians indicated as factors when teaching library instruction (LI) in Spanish:

- Fluency in Spanish Language
- Liaisons for Romance, German, Russian Languages & Literatures (CSULB) and Modern Languages (CSUDH)
- Outreach opportunities with department faculty
- Desire to build a strong connection with students taking Spanish courses that would continue after LI or reference services
- Creating a “Spanish Space” in the library where students could practice academic Spanish conversations while learning information literacy skills

After innumerable meetings and discussions, both librarians developed a model for bilingual services in academic libraries based on their individual teaching practices in information literacy sessions at the two institutions. Even though the model focuses on LI sessions in Spanish, it can be applied to any other languages and/or skills or talents that librarians may have.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

CSUDH

The librarian connects and provides outreach to the Modern Languages Department faculty in order to give LI classes. The format selected was a 95 minute, one-shot LI. The

librarian contacts the professor with an outline of what will be covered in the class and the librarian includes the professor's insight and opinion about the concepts that will be explained during the LI. In some cases, the librarian assigns the students a brief activity (in consultation with the professor) in order to offer them a hands-on opportunity. An LI covers library services, library databases, research process, plagiarism, and information resources for Spanish Language teaching. The entire LI is conducted in Spanish. An evaluation form is offered to all students at the end of the sessions. The form is anonymous in order to provide students a non-intimidating way to participate in the assessment of the instruction.

CSULB

The librarian contacts faculty members in Romance, German, and Russian Languages & Literature (RGRLL) to offer LI sessions. Usually, the librarian meets with each faculty in person two times for an estimated 1-1.5 hours beforehand. This gives the librarian and faculty members an idea of how the library session will be integrated into the curriculum. Sessions are usually conducted over a two day period as follows: Day one - Introduction to Library Services, Library Databases, and Research Databases; Day 2 - Plagiarism, Citations, and RefWorks. Both meetings take two and a half to three hours each and are conducted in Spanish Language. LI sessions are held in a library classroom with computers to include experiential learning activities and, just like at CSUDH, an anonymous evaluation form is offered to all students at the end.

THE LEARNING PROCESS AT BOTH CAMPUSES

After being introduced by faculty the librarians start by reading a text or poem in Spanish. This allows students the opportunity to listen to another person on campus speak in academic Spanish besides their faculty. Both librarians then introduce themselves and speak about their cultures and about the Spanish Language. By sharing these cultural values, librarians are able to establish a friendly and welcoming atmosphere where students can feel relaxed and at ease during the LI session. Once the rapport is established, both librarians begin to talk about the session. First, librarians introduce students to library services such as creating library accounts, borrowing and renewing books as well as requesting materials through ILLIAD and LINK+. The librarians constantly engage students or encourage them to participate in the session by actively asking questions. This allows students to converse in academic Spanish with the librarians. In addition, librarians also teach students how to access research databases from on and off-campus. Usually, they have a hands-on activity to teach students how to search research databases. This activity prompts students to frequently ask questions in the Spanish Language as they need directions when navigating research databases. Finally, being aware of students' cultural differences, librarians can incorporate different teaching styles to facilitate the particular or individual learning processes of each student.

COLLABORATIONS WITH FACULTY

Initially, faculty members on both campuses were surprised with this model but then became very enthusiastic with the idea of being able to offer their students LI sessions in Spanish. As a consequence, librarians focused the meetings with faculty to identify the underlying principles:

- Recognize the value of having a third person communicate with Spanish-speaking students in formal academic language
- Acknowledge the benefits of allowing students to listen to Spanish Language being spoken in a different academic setting from that of the regular classroom
- Provide students with a unique learning experience

Faculty members indicated that they were supportive of having LI sessions in Spanish, especially when they knew librarians were native speakers. Faculty decided that during LI sessions they would introduce librarians as co-instructors, giving students a sense that librarians are part of the academic experience. In addition, faculty would like to emphasize to students the importance of listening to another person speak academic Spanish outside of the regular classroom. This was very important for the librarians because this would give them an opportunity to speak about their cultures while creating a friendly and warm ambiance that would allow students to feel comfortable when speaking academic Spanish language with a stranger.

BOSCH-MOLTENI BILINGUAL LIBRARY INSTRUCTION MODEL

Both librarians developed a conceptual framework in order to improve the sense of belonging and academic persistence of bilingual students, specifically Spanish-speaking students enrolled in Spanish courses. The framework of this model addresses the following elements:

- Bilingualism as a culture value
- Capacity to find analogies among the different Spanish dialects
- Flexibility
- Fluency and ability to code-switch languages
- Openness and awareness towards cultural differences, specifically language accents

(See Figure 1)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The librarians found that it was difficult to know the Spanish language level of students. Therefore, each librarian decided to informally assess the language abilities of the students by starting LI sessions speaking at a slower pace. Once the librarians were able to identify how comprehensive the language proficiency of the students was, they were able to continue LI sessions at their native speakers' pace. This strategy helped students get used to the regional accents of both librarians (Argentinean and Peruvian). In addition, it offered a chance for shy students to ask questions in English and then in Spanish. The ability to code-switch was tremendously welcomed by students as they grew more comfortable with librarians.

CONCLUSIONS

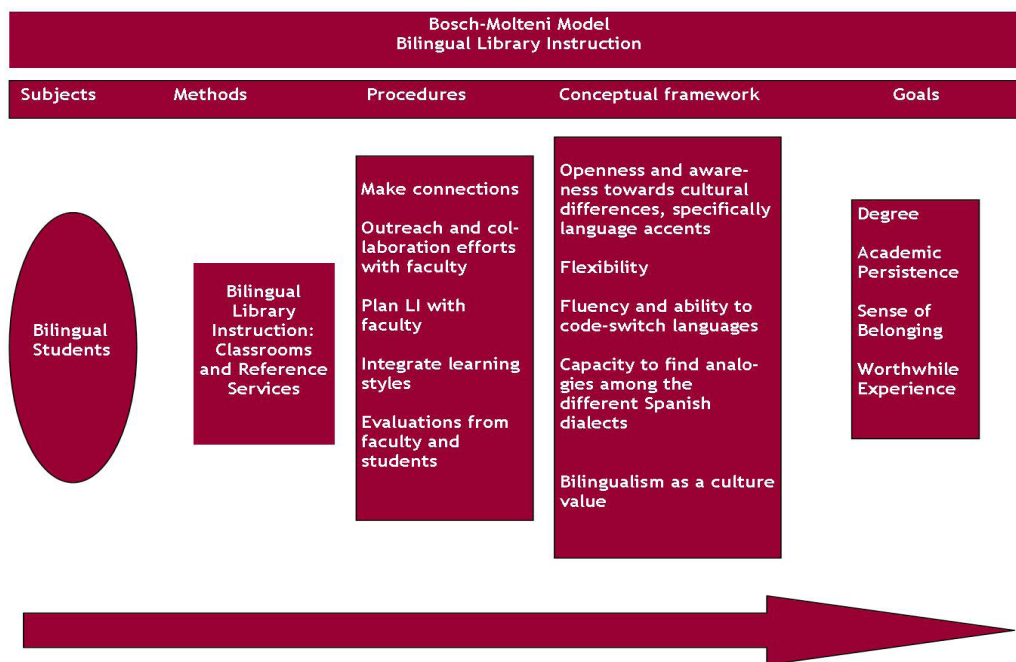
Even though students' evaluations showed positive feedback, it is difficult to quantify how these LI sessions enable the academic learning experiences of students in Spanish Language. Because of participating faculty spreading the word, both librarians noticed an increase in IL requests, in-depth consultations, and reference interactions with students in Spanish. The evaluations pointed out that students were glad to have Spanish-speaking librarians to help them with their research. They also indicated that the librarians' approachable styles allowed them to practice their Spanish with them without the fear of making mistakes.

Finally, this experience shows that academic librarians can develop unique library services by taking advantages of their skills or personal talents (languages, life experiences, educational and professional backgrounds) and use them to support student retention.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Over the past twenty years diversity and diversity-related issues have become a primary focal point for libraries. Consequently, libraries need to support the interests and needs of a rapidly changing user community by providing adequate collections, services, programs, and qualified staff. As a result, these demographic shifts are transforming not only workplace areas but also educational demographic maps. As Martinez and Aguirre (2003) indicate, "By the middle of the 21st century, Latinos are expected to comprise the majority of the students in elementary and secondary education institutions" (p. 50). Therefore, academic libraries need to be aware of their role in planning library services that will make it possible for bilingual students to succeed academically and professionally.

Figure 1



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