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Letter from the Chair

Dear EMIERT Colleagues,

With the close of the 2009 ALA Annual Conference, my two-year term as Chair of the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table ends. It has been a pleasure to work with many of you individually and with EMIERT overall! In this, my last Letter from the Chair, I want to thank Plummer Alston (Al) Jones, Jr., Past Chair, and Gail Schlachter, Treasurer, for sharing with me their time and vast experience with ALA as we look at new opportunities for EMIERT. I want also to acknowledge Rebecca Stuhr, Secretary, Roberto C. Delgadillo, Editor, of our fine EMIERT Bulletin, and Board members Carole J. McCullough, Janice Faye Rosen, Bessie Faye Gray-Knox, Sarah Smith, and Martin Goldberg, whose leadership brought to EMIERT a distinctive new logo, for your ideas, hard work, and dedication. Please join with me to welcome and congratulate our new, returning officers, and Board members: Homa Naficy, Chair, 2009–2011, Tess Tobin, Vice Chair, 2009–2011, and Members-at-Large, Roberto C. Delgadillo, Martin Goldberg, and Linda Mayo Teel. The support of Lyn Miller-Lachmann, Editor of *Multicultural Review*, and ALA OLOS members Satia Orange, Elliot Mandel, and Issac Tufvesson has been invaluable to me and to our Round Table.

This year each of us is professionally and personally experiencing the impact of budgetary cutbacks and pressures. Many of us are reassessing our membership commitments in terms of time and financial support. I encourage you to continue to support EMIERT as we look at alternative ways to meet, collaborate, and share resources using technologies now available to us. Stay tuned and stay involved in the months ahead as some of these ideas come to fruition. For those of you attending ALA Annual, please consider attending as many of these programs as your schedule allows:

- “Academic Libraries and International Librarianship,” International Relations Committee, ACRL (EMIERT is a co-sponsor), Saturday, July 11, 2009, 10:30am–12pm
- EMIERT General Meeting, Sunday, July 12, 2009, 8am–9am
- EMIERT Program, “Perspectives on Islam: Beyond the Stereotyping,” Sunday, July 12, 2009, 9am–11am
- EMIERT Executive Board/All-Committees Meeting, Sunday, July 12, 2009, 11am–12pm
- “Strengthen Your YA Collection with Small Press/Diverse Publishers,” YALSA, Sunday, July 12, 2009, 3:30pm–5:30pm,
- “Lift Every Voice and Read: Everything You Wanted to Know about the Coretta Scott King Book Award Titles, and More,” EMIERT, Monday, July 13, 2009, 1:30pm–5:30pm (Advance Registration: \$100)
- The 40th Anniversary Coretta Scott King Book Awards Breakfast, EMIERT, Tuesday, July 14, 7am–9am (Advance Tickets: \$50)

Respectfully,

Myra Appel
Chair, EMIERT

Computadoras al Alcance de Todos: Bridging the Latino Digital Divide with Computer Literacy Programs in Spanish at the Library

Introduction: The Need for Computer Literacy Programs in Spanish at the Library

By Ricardo Antoni

As the information highway evolves and becomes more sophisticated, research continues to suggest that certain segments of the population lack the basic computer skills necessary to use computers and surf the Internet. This is evidence that the "digital divide," a term developed early in the evolution of personal computers to describe the gap in access to technology between high income and low income populations, is still with us. Given the ubiquity of computers in our society, this continuing technological gap could have a significant impact on the intellectual development of large segments of the U.S. population.

Within the U.S. Spanish-speaking population, the divide is especially alarming. In 2007, a Pew Hispanic Center Report, *Latinos Online*, yielded some surprising results: only 56 percent of adults among the U.S. Latino population go online, compared with 71 percent of non-Hispanic Whites and 60 percent of non-Hispanic Blacks. Further, only 32 percent of Latinos who use Spanish as their main language of communication go online. Because the latest U.S. Census estimates that Latinos comprise 15 percent of the U.S. population, this significant problem could have repercussions across all levels of society in the years to come.

There are many factors that contribute to this Latino digital divide. Access to computers and the Internet, socioeconomic status, and lack of computer skills are important factors. However, the fact that a significant portion of the U.S. Latino population speaks little or no English is also key. This is especially true among recent immigrants.

Schools, community centers, and non-profit organizations could play an important role in narrowing this Latino digital divide by offering computer classes taught in Spanish as part of their program offerings. However, I believe that public libraries, as information hubs and providers of free access to the Internet, are the institutions best equipped to make a contribution to bridge this technological divide.

This article, based on the real life experiences of librarians teaching computer skills at public libraries in California, aims to provide tools for libraries currently serving large Latino populations to create, expand, or improve Computer Literacy Programs in Spanish (CLPS) as part of their services to the community.

Establishing a CLPS

Before creating a CLPS, library staff should identify any community organizations in the area that already offer similar programs as part of their services. There is no need to invest staff time and other library resources in a CLPS if another organization is already filling this community need. In this case, the library's role should be to stand ready to refer Spanish speakers to these organizations. Preparing a handout in Spanish with the names and contact information of the organizations offering computer classes in Spanish is a good idea. Remember, these patrons are not able to access the Internet to look up this information even if it is clearly listed in a web site.

* If there is no CLPS in the area, then it is time to determine what type of library CLPS would best serve the community. For example, the library could be located in an area where Spanish speakers already have basic computer skills but seek to expand or improve these skills. For this situation, a program that offers weekly group classes in Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, and Internet searching would be the best choice, as students would not need a lot of individual attention. However, if the Spanish-speaking patrons being served have little or no experience using computers, an ideal program would consist of weekly, one-on-one tutorial sessions given by library staff and volunteers. These patrons would need lots of individual attention in order to overcome the anxiety created by using a computer for the first time.

Justifying and Getting Support for the Program

For the program to be successful, it is critical to obtain support from library staff and supervisors early on. These library stakeholders will play an important role in implementing the program. In my experience establishing a CLPS at the Oakland, California Public Library, I had to encourage staff to learn a minimum of Spanish so they would be able to take phone calls from patrons interested in the program. Additionally, I had to convince a bilingual staff member, with approval from her supervisor, to join the program as one of the instructors.

There is plenty of evidence to support the development of a CLPS at the library. In addition to the report cited at the beginning of this article, an American Library Association report titled "Serving Non-English Speakers: 2007 Analysis of Library Demographics, Services and Programs" indicates that Spanish speakers are the largest foreign language group that U.S. libraries serve. Finally, U.S. Census figures reflecting the growth of the Latino population should be used if the community being served is also experiencing this growth.

In more general terms, one of the strongest arguments to justify a CLPS is that patrons who have no computer skills cannot use li-

brary resources. These patrons cannot locate books using a library's online catalog, nor can they find periodicals about a specific subject using the library's online databases.

Step-by-Step Preparation for the Program

Once the resources to create the program have been secured, some preliminary tasks need to be completed before the actual computer instruction can begin. These steps include: securing an appropriate space for teaching, recruiting tutors, setting an accessible schedule, writing a teaching plan or curriculum, and preparing program forms. Finally, yet importantly, the program should be marketed to potential users.

Secure Appropriate Space

For teaching computers in a one-on-one tutorial situation, the space should not feel intimidating to the student. This can be achieved by having as much privacy as possible. The teaching area should also allow the teacher and student to communicate without disturbing other patrons or staff. If a group class format is selected, instruction should be given in a computer lab with plenty of light, good ergonomics, and a projector so the instructor's desktop is projected on a screen.

Recruit Bilingual Tutors

Recruiting bilingual tutors can be one of the most challenging steps in establishing a CLPS at the library. To achieve consistency in the early steps of the program, tutors should commit to teach for at least three to six months. At the Oakland Public Library, I decided to recruit tutors from the library staff, as I could not find bilingual volunteer tutors at the start of the program. Using library staff achieves consistency in tutorial sessions and helps establish a good relationship between the tutor and the student. Later on, I was able to use volunteer tutors from the students who had achieved an advanced level in the program

When recruiting tutors, keep in mind that because of the students' fear of technology and their inability to speak English, tutors should be individuals who can be extra patient and respectful of students.

Set a Program Schedule and a Teaching Plan

It is very important to schedule computer classes at the library in such a way that facilitates the attendance of patrons who have the greatest need to learn. Therefore, as library staff identifies Spanish-speaking patrons interested in learning computers, an informal survey should be conducted asking the patrons what would be the most convenient class schedule for them.

A curriculum or teaching plan should also be developed for the program. In my experience, the plan not only helped me identify critical computer skills that needed to be taught first, but it also helped me train new incoming tutors as the program expanded. When tutoring beginning students, it is especially useful to use a teaching plan as it assists with tracking student progress and particular computer skills the student may need additional help learning.

Prepare Forms

There are forms that can be particularly useful in a CLPS. One of them is a student information sheet that can be given to the student at the beginning of the program. It should include the student's name and telephone number (in order to give reminder calls to students about scheduled classes) and ask questions about previous typewriting and computer experience, if any. If the program consists of individual tutoring sessions, another form should be created to track the date and times of tutorial appointments, type of computer help needed, and who is teaching the class.

Market the Program

When all the above is in place, the CLPS should be marketed to the Spanish-speaking community the library serves. This can be done by distributing flyers where Spanish-speakers gather, such as churches, schools, senior centers, and the local Hispanic chamber of commerce. Public service announcements should be sent to Spanish-language radio stations. In addition, it would be a good idea to contact local Latino community leaders and ask them for help creating awareness about the program. Finally, the program should be listed in Spanish in the library's calendar of events.

Teaching to Dispel the Fear of Computers

As mentioned above, a CLPS should be tailored to the specific needs of the Spanish-speaking community the library serves. If those interested in the program have little or no computer experience, a program consisting of one-on-one computer tutoring sessions is recommended. One-on-one computer teaching is the best solution for Spanish-speakers who are shy or fearful of computers. In my experience, this format requires more library resources but yields better results.

Ramona Chacon is a library assistant with the Oakland Public Library who has taught computers in Spanish to patrons in a one-on-one situation. About dispelling the fear of computers, she says, "The very first thing that I do at the beginning of a tutorial session is to tell the students that they will not damage or break the computers easily. I also encourage them to touch and feel the mouse and the keyboard." This is difficult to do in a classroom situation, as lack of time would not allow for this individual attention.

Finally, it is important for the computer tutor to develop a special "empathy" about fears that students may have. A tutor must guard against expressing disbelief when a student admits his or her complete inexperience using a computer or surfing the Internet. It is fundamental to establish a relationship of trust and respect with the student.

Teaching "Springboard" Skills

Spanish-speakers who come to the library are often interested in learning the same set of computer skills. Maynard Martinez, a librarian who has taught group computer classes in Spanish at the Mountain View (CA) Public Library for over eight years, calls these skills "springboard skills." Teaching these skills increases the effectiveness of instruction and the amount of enthusiasm that students show for learning how to use computers. The springboard skills are: using the mouse (including click and double click); using the keyboard, including the arrow keys; and setting up and using

an e-mail account.

A free, accessible, and fun tutorial, downloadable from the Internet, can teach students how to use the mouse. A version in Spanish can be found at The University of Texas's Health Sciences web site at <http://www.library.uthscsa.edu/gethelp/miraton.cfm>. The tutorial has instructions in Spanish and is specifically designed for beginners. Additionally, to teach typing using the computer keyboard, there are several online tutorials that can be useful for students who have never used a keyboard before. A free and fun web site with typing lessons can be found at <http://www.powertyping.com/>.

Another springboard skill is the ability to set up and use an e-mail account. This skill is especially important, as there are many Spanish-speaking immigrants who want to stay in touch with friends and family outside the United States. It is important to note that the most popular free e-mail providers, such as Yahoo! Mail, and Hotmail, offer setup instructions in Spanish.

Finally, word processing can be added to these springboard skills, but it should be taught only after the student is comfortable with the other skills listed above. It is useful to teach word processing by showing its practical applications, such as typing a letter for a relative or preparing a resume.

Latinos and the Internet

Once the students participating in a CLPS have learned the springboard skills, it is important to show them how the Internet can be a powerful tool to access information. According to Janice Garcia, a librarian at the Latino American branch of the San Jose (CA) Public Library, there are specific types of information that Spanish speakers tend to seek out at the library, such as information on health care, job training, child care, immigration, and English as a Second Language classes. Ideally, a CLPS should offer a class for more advanced students that teaches them how to locate this type of information on the Internet.

Among the web sites that Garcia has shown her students are the Spanish web page of MedlinePlus (<http://medlineplus.gov/spanish/>), the Official U.S. Government Information web page in Spanish (www.usa.gov/gobiernousa/index.shtml), and the web site of La Opinión, the largest Spanish-language newspaper published in the United States (www.laopinion.com). It is also critical to show students web sites that contain contact information of local community organizations offering services to Spanish speakers on child care and job training, and schools offering English as a Second Language instruction.

Teaching the Internet to Spanish speakers should also include pointing out web sites where they can find entertainment related to their cultural roots. The Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC) at <http://lanic.utexas.edu> is a great starting point on the Internet. The site is maintained by the University of Texas at Austin and functions as a hub to all web sites related to the news and cultures of Central and South America and the Caribbean. Another excellent way to facilitate connections between CLPS students and their culture is to use Google Images to find photographs of their hometowns. Latino-interest entertainment and news can be found at Terra (www.terra.com), and Yahoo en

Español (<http://espanol.yahoo.com/>). These web sites also feature free e-mail hosting, games, and instant messaging capabilities.

Conclusion

It is important to mention that when proposing this type of program for a public library, some stakeholders may argue that teaching Spanish-speaking patrons computer skills in their native language will discourage them from learning English and assimilating into American society. My experience and that of my colleagues has shown quite the opposite. When learning how to use a computer, students are forced to learn the vocabulary used in a computer interface written in English. Second, once they are able to access the Internet, a universe of free, web-based ESL resources becomes available to them. Finally, once students become aware of the practical applications of the computer and the vast resources found on the Internet, their motivation to learn English will grow.

Given the existing research, it could be argued that most information professionals interested in serving Spanish speakers are already aware of the Latino digital divide. It is hoped that this article no longer considers only the problem, but also helps public libraries be part of the solution to solve it.

Ricardo Antoni has taught computer literacy in English and Spanish at public libraries since 2002. He currently works as a part-time librarian at the César E. Chávez branch of the Oakland Public Library and at the Alameda Free Library. He can be reached at rantonie@earthlink.net.

YALSA's First-Ever Small Press Open House at the Annual Conference

For the first time ever this year, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) will be holding a program to feature small press and diverse publishers that normally do not exhibit at ALA's Annual or Midwinter conferences because of cost. The goal of this program is to provide information to YALSA members and other ALA attendees about how to purchase books for their library from small press, diverse, or independent publishers. Below is the program description with more information:

"Strengthen Your YA Collection with Small Press/Diverse Publishers"—Sunday, July 12, 2009, 3:30pm–5:30pm.

(Check the conference book for location.) Come to this open house featuring publishers that focus on publishing for diverse YA populations but that normally do not exhibit at ALA conferences. Tables will be set up around the room for publishers to display their current and backlist young adult titles, and representatives will be available to chat about their latest publications. For more information, contact Nichole Gilbert, ngilbert@ala.org. ☺