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Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table

Vol. XXIII No. 2 Spring 2006

From the Chair

So far, the 2005–06 fiscal year of EMIERT has been exciting. Hardly a day goes by that I am not in e-mail or telephone contact with EMIERT officers, chairs, and liaisons, including Vice Chair Myra Appel; past chairs Victor Schill and Toni Bissessar; Secretary and Webmaster Sarah Smith; Treasurer Tamiye Meehan; Membership Chair Homa Naficy; and Satia Orange and Tanga Morris, our liaisons in the ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS). I promise to keep you all posted through the EMIERT listserv, so please make sure that you sign up for this vital communication link.

This is our second quarterly issue of the *EMIE Bulletin* appearing as an insert in *MultiCultural Review (MCR)*. This relationship between EMIERT and *MCR* is proof of EMIERT's commitment to getting the word out to librarians and library advocates that EMIERT is here to help with solving problems involved in getting multicultural materials in our libraries and in the hand of our multicultural patrons, who need these materials to learn English, to cope with the multitude of new experiences in a new country, and to improve race relations. Also, having the *EMIE Bulletin* insert in *MCR* will be an excellent way to let readers know that the Coretta Scott King Task Force, formerly with the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT), is now an integral part of EMIERT. Our thanks to Lyn Miller-Lachmann, *MCR* editor in chief and EMIERT's liaison with *MCR*, who handles all of the details of the publishing process for the *EMIE Bulletin*.

Many of you have volunteered to serve as committee chairs and members of EMIERT's standing committees as well as representatives or liaisons with various ALA groups. Thanks so much for taking this opportunity to get involved in letting other library-based groups know what EMIERT is and what we are trying to accomplish for ethnic and multicultural populations in the United States. Please check the EMIERT pages in the *ALA Handbook of Organization, 2005–2006*, to locate officers, chairs of committees, and representatives and liaisons.

In August, EMIERT nominated our founder emeritus David Cohen for an ALA Honorary Membership. As EMIERT chair, 2005–2007, and an admirer of David's persistent and consistent advocacy of multiculturalism, I sent a nomination letter, which was accompanied by letters from Toni Bissessar, past EMIERT chair and David's student at Queens, and Vladimir Wertsman, chair of the EMIERT Publications Committee and David's longtime friend and colleague. I know very well that if we had had more time to get in letters of nomination, we could have sent hundreds! Nevertheless, letters of nomination for David arrived in time to be considered by the ALA for possible future conferral of this honor at the 2006 ALA Annual.

Sarah Smith, our secretary and webmaster and former editor of the *EMIE Bulletin*, has now stepped back into her former role until we can find one or two EMIE members who will take on the publication of the *EMIE Bulletin* quarterly insert for *MultiCultural Review*. *EMIE Bulletin* will be available quarterly to all of the subscribers to *MultiCultural Review* as well as all EMIE members, regardless of membership category. Please contact me at jonesp@mail.ecu.edu if you are interested in taking over the editorship of *EMIE Bulletin*.

Program planning for the ALA Annual Conference, to be held in New Orleans June 22-28, 2006, was the main topic on EMERT's meetings agenda at ALA Midwinter in San Antonio. Homa Naficy, chair of the Membership Committee, is planning a terrific program on Navigating the U.S. Immigration System as well as a possible program on Cajun Culture and Cuisine. Doris Gebel, chair of the Children's Services Committee, and her committee are planning a program on multicultural

children's materials and services. The Jewish Information Committee met at ALA Midwinter to plan possible programs for ALA Annual.

Carol Gulyas, reference and instruction librarian at Columbia College Chicago and member of the Alternatives in Publication (AIP) Task Force of the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT), met with the Executive Board at ALA Midwinter 2006 to discuss a joint program to be co-sponsored by EMERT and the AIP on "The Ethnic Press, Libraries, and Community Building: How They Can Strengthen Their Ties." Representatives of the ethnic press and librarians will discuss the role of the ethnic press in community building, and how libraries can help strengthen and reinforce that relationship to further the public good. This program would also be a great forum to showcase Vladimir Wertsman's *Directory of Ethnic and Multicultural Publishers, Distributors, and Resource Organizations* as well as AIP Task Force member Byron Anderson's *Alternative Publishers of Books in North America* (APBNA). This is an exciting way to pool efforts to get a larger audience for our excellent programs and greater publicity for EMERT.

I am still quite interested in working with many of you who would like to contribute articles on best practices in serving the needs of multilingual and multicultural communities. I have contacted Charles Harmon, acquisitions editor for Neal-Schuman Publishers, to discuss the idea further. He was interested in what libraries and library systems are doing for communities where languages other than English are used in the home and in the workplace. He liked the idea about focusing on best practices and suggested that it would be helpful to include examples of forms, signs, policies, borrower's cards, etc. in languages other than English. These foreign-language forms and publications could be reproduced on a CD-ROM to aid libraries in adapting them to use in their own communities. Harmon suggested that a title such as "Serving Multilingual Communities: A How-to Manual" would fit the needs of Neal-Schuman for practical handbooks on providing library services to special groups. I would like to serve as editor for this proposed handbook. I would depend on EMIE members to get the word out to librarians who are involved in programs serving multilingual and multicultural communities. I would be

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glad to write summaries of the programs or edit summaries that are provided to me. Either way I would give credit to those who are doing this good work. I am certain that there are libraries who need this information and others who would be willing to share.

I would like for all of you who have served as officers or committee chairs in EMIE throughout its history to consider sending EMIE materials to the ALA Archives housed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for the use of researchers. ALA Archives officials remind us that "it is each unit's responsibility to preserve the historical record of activities for future researchers by regularly transmitting unneeded archival materials to the ALA Archives in Urbana." Our founder emeritus, David Cohen, has collected and preserved EMIERT materials from EMIERT's beginning in 1972, when the Ethnic Materials Information Exchange Task Force of the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) was founded. He is committed to getting these invaluable historical records to the ALA Archives. For more information on the ALA Archives and how you can get EMIERT materials there, see <http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/ala/info.asp>.

—**Plummer Alston "Al" Jones, Jr.**, Chair 2005–2007
Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table

About Us

EMIERT, the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, is an organization authorized by the Council of the American Library Association (ALA). Our purpose is to provide a forum for the exchange of information on library materials in English and other languages and to promote service for all ethnolinguistic and multicultural communities in general. For further information, including contact persons, visit our web site, <http://www.ala.org/emiert>.

Membership

Any personal, institutional, or organizational member of the American Library Association may become a member of the Round Table upon payment of dues. EMIERT dues are \$20/individual, \$25/organization, and \$10/student.

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“Distance” in Distance Education: Examining Cultural Perceptions

By Elizabeth Jean Brumfield

Chair, Committee on Library & Information Studies Education (EMIERT)

Library schools are increasingly adopting distance education programs as an alternative means of instruction. An area largely neglected in distance education research is how cultural variables influence a student's perceptions of their learning experience, especially in online environments. Culture is central to learning. It plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in the perceptions of the coursework, instructors, and the university.

Library school students often take distance education classes because of family or work commitments. The study environment, whether the student studies in an office or kitchen, is an integral part of family life, where beliefs and perceptions generate. Most distance education research focuses on the instruction methods involved and not on the users' perceptions—a product of culture—of the information, or the instructor/student relationship, or the student/student relationship. In fact, the term distance has different cultural meanings as related to geographical separation, social distance, power distance, and transactional distance.

Geographically, distance education might seem to have more advantages over resident teaching because of its convenience. However, there is often the perception of distance, be it social or physical, that causes problems. Research has shown that distance education students often feel disconnected from the parent institution, because of the problems they have accessing library materials, difficulty meeting with their instructors, and the technical problems associated with the Internet (Hara 2002; Wallace 2003).

Social distance refers to a person's desire to form relationships with others. Social distance can range from accepting someone into your family or as a close friend to viewing someone as a stranger. Sociologist E. S. Bogardus developed a scale that required respondents to indicate the level of distance they apply to foreign immigrants. The meaningfulness of the scale depends on the assumption that respondents believe that the magnitude of social distance increases as one moves through the social categories of family member, friend, neighbor, coworker, etc. Bogardus showed that terms such as “stranger” and “friend” did not necessarily relate to geographical distance, rather more to a psychological perception of “closeness” or “distance” (Weinfurt 2001).

Social distance can have an effect on the degree of satisfaction a person feels in any social gathering and communication interactions, including electronic messaging. Some distance education programs provide students the ability to interact with others through short on-campus visits. The extent that relationships or friendships are formed as a result of these interactions may be determined by preexisting cultural values,

or perhaps the degree technology is used to diminish the perception of social distance. While technology improvements have allowed for faster, less expensive interactions, and thus a larger group of users, critics suggest that what is lost in these artificial settings is the true social interaction (Vrasidas & Zembylas 2003). In fact, it might be argued that the autonomy distance education offers relative to status, class, and social role may not be beneficial for some teaching environments where social interaction is critical.

Social distance also includes the concept of power distance or the extent to which society accepts the unequal distribution of power in institutions, organizations, and people (Hofstede 1986). It refers to one's perception of status difference or the amount of authority (real or perceived) one is supposed to possess over another. In some cultures the instructor is perceived as omniscient, and the asking of questions by students is seldom encouraged (Filipczech 1997).

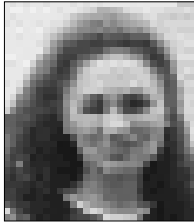
Moore and Kearsley (1996) introduced the term “transactional distance” as a function of dialogue and structure. “Transactional distance is a measure of the relationship between the teacher and learner in terms of requisite structure for the instructor or the instructional institution, and required autonomy by the learner in any instructional situation” (Moore & Kearsley 1996). Moore's theory is that a smaller transactional distance would be a sign of greater involvement by the student. The student would be demonstrating a greater self-confidence and less reliance on the instructor. This relationship between the instructor and student would go through different changes during the course of instruction. As the student becomes more knowledgeable and self-reliant, the need for autonomy might increase. More dialogue between instructor and students indicated a smaller transactional distance, while more structure provided by the instructor was taken as a proxy for a larger transactional distance. In the latter case, the idea was that more structure meant less student control and less involvement (Wallace 2003).

Distance education requires instructors to be more attuned to the needs of the students they instruct. We cannot discount the importance of the student's cultural perceptions, especially in relation to the electronic environments, their peers, and the instructors. While distance education offers an extraordinary opportunity to reach cultures worldwide, we must acknowledge that more research is needed to fully develop best practices for the diverse students taking advantage of these programs.

See references on page 114

Dr. Nara Venditti: How to Get a Job in the USA Book and Workshops for Immigrants and Foreign-Born

Educator and author N. Venditti talks to Homa Naficy,
Hartford Public Library, Manager, Multicultural Education and Outreach Services



Dr. Nara Venditti, the president and founder of Succeed in America, arrived in the United States 15 years ago with few resources and no knowledge of the American way of life. Starting with the initial visit to the public library for information about finding a job, she overcame many obstacles in order to establish both her personal life and professional career. In the process she learned much and is now dedicated to help others to avoid many of the mistakes and misconceptions that she experienced.

HN: You had a prestigious position as a college professor and had a relatively comfortable life back home. What made you leave The Soviet Union?

NV: "Why did you immigrate to the United States?" I am being asked this question over and over again by my fellow Americans. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, shifting political systems and changing social values made living conditions very unsafe and I began to have doubts about my future there. During this time of turmoil I made the decision to start a new life in America, which we had always regarded as a country of opportunity. I was unsure of how or when I would be reunited with my family. But getting back to your question, the answer is short and simple: "For safety, better life, and a happy future for my family and myself." The answer is short and simple, but it takes a lot to understand the country, which is totally different from your own.

HN: What happened when you arrived?

NV: As I was walking off of the airplane and into the airport terminal I began to feel that I had entered a new world. I was both amazed and frightened. While I felt that I had the credentials and was capable of establishing myself in this country, I realized that I had not properly prepared myself for the transition. However, with no or little resources, I was determined to start from scratch and make my way in America.

HN: Why did you write the book?

NV: My purpose in writing the book was to help immigrants and foreign-born jump-start the process of getting established in the United States by acquiring gainful employment. Every step of the way I had to learn how things are done in the United States. It was so different from what I knew from back home. There were lots of challenges. One great challenge was to learn the job search process. Job searching in this country is very different from where I came from. First, the concept of the resume and the interview were nonexistent in the Soviet Union of that time. The entire process from searching to negotiating a job offer was so different! I made many mistakes and overcame many misconceptions. In the process, I learned much and was compelled to write my book, *How to Get a Job in the USA*, and to conduct workshops

on employability for immigrants and foreign-born. I did not want others to waste valuable time and to achieve their goals more efficiently than I did.

HN: Tell me more about the book and what its target audience is.

NV: The book helps in two ways; first, by helping newcomers to shift culturally so they better understand how things are done in the American workplace; and second, to help learn the job search process and gain confidence when promoting themselves to American employers. The book is a basic primer for newcomers, explaining what to focus on by providing the reader with facts, sample dialogues, and exercises to guide them every step of the way. It is written in easy-to-understand English and therefore tailored to immigrants with English literacy skills and perhaps a professional and academic background from their own country. I plan to have the book translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Armenian, and maybe other languages.

HN: How is this book different from the other books on careers and job search?

NV: This book is written from an immigrant's perspective. Based on my own experiences, it concentrates on essential facts and primary concerns in a language and style that a newcomer needs to grasp. It explores cultural differences as applied to the workplace. It teaches to adapt to American customs. It provides glossaries, communication tools, and further resources. It tells the readers what to do and what to say every step of the way and how to leverage their bicultural and bilingual skills. The latter is very important because one of the challenges non-native speakers have is expressing and phrasing their thoughts. The great emphasis is on developing and enhancing communication skills in a business environment.

HN: How to Get a Job in the USA has a companion book, a mini-dictionary titled *Ameri\$peak*. What is the purpose of the book?

NV: *Ameri\$peak* is a glossary of most frequent words and phrases one needs to know to communicate effectively in the American workplace. It emphasizes business-related acronyms

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and idioms, which create a lot of confusion for non-native speakers. It provides additional communication tools such as accent reduction tips, create your own vocabulary template designed to facilitate acquiring of new vocabulary, and more.

HN: How did the idea of workshops come about?

NV: I have developed seminars in order to reinforce and expand on the ideas expressed in the book and have been presenting these educational programs at Western Connecticut State University and in libraries throughout Connecticut and New York. Like the book, these programs address newcomers' basic concerns and insecurities and instill the confidence to manage their own transition more effectively through education. In addition, seminars allow face-to-face interactions and role-playing, which participants enjoy most, and which further stimulate and motivate the attendees. The participants walk away with a workbook and clear action plan on how to implement their knowledge.

HN: You have made numerous presentations in the public libraries. Tell about those.

NV: I cannot say enough about the positive role the libraries play in helping the foreign-born. Libraries have always been thought of as depositories for knowledge and learning. These days libraries more and more are becoming centers of education and serve as community and family activity centers and provide resources for public and civic organizations and groups. In this role the public libraries recognize the need for providing information and services to help in the integration of the next wave of foreigners

into the established community. If I would invent a new term, I would call them People's Universities. They recognize educational needs in the community and act on them fast.

HN: What are your future plans?

NV: Because of the controversies and turmoil in communities experiencing increasing immigration, the melting pot is boiling. One way of easing tensions is to promote cultural understanding. I have begun working on a series of presentations that show how cultures of the world have become essential parts of the melting pot. I will be doing the first one in that series titled "Italians in the Melting Pot" at the Hagamon Memorial Library in East Haven, CT. I am also working on a condensed English language course for non-native speakers in the workplace. This course would benefit certain industries having the need to improve communication with their foreign-born workforce.

N. Venditti. *How to Get a Job in the USA, Succeed in America*, 2006, ISBN 0-9777054-0-4, Library of Congress Control Number 2005911312.

N. Venditti. *Ameri\$peak, Succeed in America*, 2006, ISBN 0-9777054-1-2, Library of Congress Control Number 2005911313.

Dr. Venditti may be reached at (203)791-1107 or nv@SucceedinAmerica.com. Additional information is available at www.SucceedinAmerica.com.

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