

CARL LRI Poster: Internationalization and Learner Autonomy: Connecting Across Borders and Expanding Boundaries

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Abstract: *Internationalization and learner autonomy offer rich theoretical frameworks to librarians for informing their professional practice. This poster identifies borders arising from an investigation of the phenomenon of internationalization and an examination of library and language learning intersections. In connecting these borders, librarians can expand the boundaries of their professional knowledge.*

Résumé:

This poster considers borders and boundaries in the context of academic librarians working with international library users and language learners. It arises from a new look at the results of two research projects I undertook while on sabbatical following the first Librarians' Research Institute in Windsor, Ontario in June 2012. Both research projects resulted in a book being written. The first book, *Internationalization and the North American University Library*, was published by Scarecrow Press in August 2013 (Bordonaro, 2013). The second book, *The Intersection of Library Learning and Second-Language Learning: Theory and Practice*, was published by Rowman and Littlefield in January 2014 (Bordonaro, 2014). The purpose of this poster is to take the themes that appeared in each book and to describe borders arising from them that can also serve as opportunities for librarians to expand the boundaries of their professional practice and knowledge.

Internationalization and the North American University Library asked academic librarians across the United States and Canada how they personally defined and experienced the phenomenon of internationalization. This research study was rooted in current views of internationalization as a strong theme in the discourse of contemporary higher education. It arose in part from a curiosity as to whether or not academic librarians and international users of university libraries in North America would agree with the oft cited definition of internationalization as, "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2004, 11). Answers as to how librarians personally defined internationalization came from the responses of about seventy academic librarians who answered an online survey and from follow-up phone interviews with ten of those librarians. In addition to asking these librarians what internationalization meant to them, the librarians were also asked what they felt the role of the university library was in internationalization. The patterns of responses from the librarians fell into these broad categories: Internationalization was personally defined by librarians as the broadening of knowledge on many levels from the individual to the institutional to the university level to the worldwide level. They saw the role of the library in internationalization as fostering intercultural awareness, promoting global citizenship, and disseminating information. A series of personal interviews then ensued with twenty-seven international

students and eleven international scholars from across disciplines as diverse as business, medicine, computer science, engineering, psychology, education, political science, and linguistics. The one-on-one interviews took place at a Canadian university and an American university, with my asking these library users the same questions I had asked the librarians. Responses from the international students to these questions differed from those of the international scholars. The international students generally offered personal definitions of internationalization as seeing themselves as being part of a greater whole, and they felt the role of the library included offering resources, space, assistance, office supplies, inclusivity, and serving as a culturally safe haven. The international scholars, on the other hand, personally defined internationalization as the building of international research collections, and saw the role of the library as collecting international information, purchasing group access to costly research materials, serving as a gateway to credible information, and producing information through digitization of resources.

Borders from these reported results are readily identifiable. They include differing definitions of how internationalization is personally defined and experienced, and different views of the role of the library in internationalization. The question then to be asked would be: How can librarians connect these borders in their day-to-day work with international students and international scholars in libraries across North America? Perhaps the answer lies first in awareness of these differences. Librarians could become aware of how university libraries are viewed differently by different users by considering how these different groups see our resources, services, space, and assistance. Once these understandings are perceived, then librarians could potentially try to align these understandings with our own understandings of internationalization and how we as librarians see our role within this phenomenon in higher education. If dissemination of information, for example, is the key way that libraries play a role in internationalization in higher education, then how can we as working professionals better connect international students and international scholars to information? Connections could then potentially be explored and strengthened between people (international users and librarians) and between users and information that cut across discipline area, language, and geographic borders.

The Intersection of Library Learning and Second-Language Learning: Theory and Practice is the second book that serves as a basis of information for this poster. This book resulted from an amalgamation of my efforts to date to investigate, recognize, and strengthen the intersections of library use and language learning. Its content came out of a number of research studies I have personally conducted over the last two decades that have looked at these intersections. Included in these studies were results from studies linking proficiency in information literacy to proficiency in second language writing, a consideration of the value of recreational reading collections in university libraries for language learning, a reflective self-assessment of incorporation of second language teaching strategies in library instruction classrooms, and a study looking to see if language learning occurred when non-native speakers of English engaged in library database searching. In this book, I used these studies as starting points for considering learning that takes place in libraries, not simply the use of libraries. I wanted to ascertain where, when, how, and why intersections between library learning and language learning might occur. I defined both types of learning as consisting of a skill set and a set of concepts. I then compared the processes of each being viewed as a means to an end, and I explained the goal of each as enhanced communication (either through increased language fluency or enhanced understanding and participation in the scholarly

communication process). Intersections in this book were examined through people, times, places, and materials. I then made use of the theory of learner autonomy to better enhance, understand, frame, and promote these intersections as a way of moving learning in both areas forward. I defined learner autonomy as self-directed learning accompanied by awareness and reflection, and used it to include both library learning and language learning. This personal definition came from a consideration of the classic definition of language learner autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec, 1981, 3) and from a consideration of Benson’s work on autonomy outside the classroom (Benson, 2001).

Borders can likewise be observed in this second book. Here, they can be found in differing interpretations of what can be meant by library learning and by language learning. They can also be found in how learners engage in the two different processes and in terms of what the ultimate goal for each learning experience is seen to be. And as with the first book, in order for librarians to connect the borders between language learning and library learning, they must become aware of what these borders are. They need to understand the differences between the two in terms of types of learning, processes, and goals. These borders, however, are connectable in some ways too, just as the borders from the first book can be. Connections could come about, for example, through tying the two types of learning together into one experience. In other words, learning to use library resources effectively and efficiently could potentially also involve improving one’s English language abilities along the way if one is a non-native speaker of English. And in connecting and then supporting these borders through a framework of learner autonomy, the potential for learning to grow in both areas may also arise.

The opportunity for librarians to expand the boundaries of their professional practice can come from expanding their knowledge about both internationalization and learner autonomy. The study of internationalization as a phenomenon in university libraries and the study of intersections between library learning and language learning through a framework of learner autonomy can offer rich professional dividends. Librarians can learn about these theories and apply them to their professional practice. They can help non-native speakers of English become better English speakers and better library users, and they can help both international students and international scholars connect with information around the globe. In doing so, librarians also have an excellent opportunity to expand the professional boundaries of what it might mean to be a librarian engaged in both research and practice in this global age.

References

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