

THE FORUM

The Editor
MEXTESOL Journal

Dear Editor,

I suspect that many of the excellent points made by Ruth Borgman in her short but commendably provocative letter "Teaching Language for Specific Purposes" are going to be submerged in a spate of objections to her major critical premises:

1. That some institutions/individuals in Mexico are ESP power game players.
2. That there is a lack of a true cooperative spirit among ESP practitioners in Mexico.

I do not propose to deal at length with these assertions but it would be quite wrong to ignore them since they lead on to such constructive proposals. My view is that if there is an iota of truth in Ruth's premises - and I happen to believe that there is - then even that iota should make all of us who are concerned with ESP do some constructive soul searching with the objective of contributing to a solution of the problems that confront students and institutions in ESP situations in Mexico in the most efficient manner. If I read Ruth Borgman right then she believes that unhealthy competition and duplication are inefficient and I cannot really see how anyone can disagree with that.

Two years ago at the First Latin American Regional ESP Conference a plea was made for establishing a regional ESP clearing house or resource centre which would service the whole of Latin America in ways that Ruth Borgman describes in her article. The conference decided that a necessary preliminary step would have to be for each country to set its own internal information exchange system in order before a viable pan-Latin American institution could be founded. After all, why should the UNAM write to a centre located say in Manaus, Brazil if the information is available in Guadalajara. To my knowledge there is a well established, long standing and efficient system in Chile, a relatively new but equally efficient system in Brazil and an embryonic one in Columbia. In Mexico, which is in terms of modern ESP expertise perhaps the best endowed country apart from Chile, there is nothing. Attempts have been made to establish an information exchange system but these, regrettably, foundered on the rocks of institutional introversion.

That, however, is in the past and Ruth Borgman's letter stresses an urgent present need which I wholeheartedly endorse "institutions should be able to take advantage of former experiences by consulting a register (National Resource Centre) in which all ESP programmes in Mexico are briefly described, and by contacting those places which have programmes relating in some way to the projected one, in order to observe the working models."

Since previous attempts have failed how then can we ensure that further efforts will not also be unsuccessful. Could I suggest that this is an area that MEXTESOL should look at. It is after all a national representative organization which holds no brief for particular institutions. MEXTESOL could convene a representative sub-committee to examine ways and means and might even, given the appropriate funding, be prepared to house the proposed centre.

Congratulations to Ruth Borgman for grasping so honestly a painful nettle and congratulations to MEXTESOL Journal for enabling her to do so by instituting Forum.

Yours sincerely,

D.P.L. Harper
British Council