



Celebrating Culture, Reading, & Family Literacy @ the Library with the Latino Reading and Literacy Programs
El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Día) and Noche de Cuentos

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Abstract:

Created by Latina children's author Pat Mora and hosted by public and school libraries throughout the United States, El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Día) is a cultural celebration that honors childhood and reading, promotes bilingual and multilingual literacy,

highlights multicultural and international children's literature, and fosters global understanding among children and their families. Noche de Cuentos, part of American Library Association President Dr. Camila Alire's Family Literacy Focus, is a family literacy program promoting storytelling's role in the transmission and preservation of cultural heritage while developing the reading and cultural literacy skills of new Latino immigrants. This paper describes the history and success of these REFORMA (an affiliate of the American Library Association dedicated to library services to Latinos and the Spanish-speaking) library initiatives in reaching out to Latino communities to promote literacy and celebrate cultural diversity while facilitating intercultural connections within non-Latino communities. The role of the library (public and school) in promoting reading to diverse, multilingual populations of children and their families is clearly articulated via examples of successful Día and Noche de Cuentos reading programs presented throughout libraries across the United States. The paper also explains how the Día and Noche de Cuentos literacy initiatives can assist libraries in (1) developing outreach strategies to diverse populations, (2) planning cultural programs, and (3) implementing services for Latino and immigrant populations.

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Introduction

Developing literacy is one of the key functions of school and public libraries throughout the world. The concept of literacy extends beyond traditional reading literacy to also include cultural literacy and family literacy. While reading is often the main venue for encouraging literacy, other creative approaches are also used to develop literacy, which address the interests of communities served. Library programs often include reading, art, dance, drama, storytelling, and numerous other expressions of literacy. The purpose of this paper is to provide information about two U.S. literacy programs, which have been highly successful in libraries in developing all forms of literacy through multiple venues including reading, writing, dance, drama, and storytelling. The programs, *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* and *Noche de Cuentos*¹ (hereafter Día and Noche) have universal goals for developing literacy and are particularly appropriate for the development of literacy for second language learners. These programs are extremely successful because they are developed around community interests and focus on the family.

This paper provides a conceptual framework for two literacy programs and then examines the success of Día and Noche programming in both school and public libraries. First, the theoretical framework on which these programs are grounded is discussed. Next, the history of the programs will be presented, followed by a discussion of how programs such as Día and Noche can be used to develop literacy with diverse populations and to develop cultural competence with school and public librarians. Then examples of how Día and Noche are used to plan and to implement culturally appropriate outreach services for Latino and immigrant populations will be provided as well as examples of high impact, quality Día and Noche programs.

¹ From this point forward, Spanish words are placed in italics throughout the paper with the exception of the words Día and Noche/Noche de Cuentos.

Theoretical Framework for Día and Noche

A sociocultural framework provides a broad lens for the following discussion of Día and Noche, which develop literacy by tapping into group culture, oral tradition, and community involvement to develop literacy among diverse groups. Cultural psychology and sociocultural perspectives (Cole, 1996; Sweder, 1991; Bruner, 1996) of how literacy is developed and the integral relationship between cultural contexts and mental functions provide a framework for Día and Noche. In particular is an underlying assumption that culture defines every aspect of human life including how humans think and create knowledge (Ibid.). This assumption forms an essential element Día and Noche library programming, which develop an appreciation and understanding of reading, writing, and storytelling through culturally appropriate activities and events.

A sociocultural psychology perspective proposes that knowledge is a dynamic process that is socially constructed. The works of Vygotsky (1978; 1986) inform us that language and culture play a key role in human development and activities. Cultural psychology also proposes that the way in which individuals construct knowledge varies across cultures, and that knowledge of cultural groups often includes a tacit understanding of concepts in the world in which they live. Cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, and transform the way individuals think and learn.

While many definitions of culture have been proposed (Cole, 1996; Geertz, 1973; Kluckhohn, 1962; Rosaldo, 1989; Shweder, 1990, 1991; 1999; 2000), the sociocultural definition of culture reflected in Día and Noche programs is that culture is the daily activities and events shared by families, communities, and organizations (Nieto, 2009; Moll & Whitmore, 1993; Rosaldo, 1989). Cultural activities include readily recognized events such as customs, traditions, rituals, food, dress, and language. However, other less apparent cultural activities such as how literacy is developed and how information is used to build knowledge are also essential aspects of culture (Montiel-Overall, 2007) evident in Día and Noche library programs.

Family involvement

There is no single path to literacy (Goodman, 1997) but an important aspect of successful literacy programs for children is parent involvement found in Día and Noche programs. A considerable body of research from education and other fields suggests that involvement of parents is essential to children's literacy development (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008; Englund, 2004). Research in this area provides an additional lens for discussing the Día and Noche programs, inasmuch as parent and community involvement are integral components of the programs. Delgado-Gaitan (1991) found that parents who were engaged in nonconventional activities felt that their language and culture were validated. In her study of Latino parents in Carpintería, Delgado-Gaitan's research suggests that providing culturally appropriate activities such as those used in Día and Noche programs is a successful approach for engaging parents in the lives of their children and may have a positive effect on children. Dearling and colleagues (2006) found that improved children's literacy could be predicted from involvement by parents. Día and Noche provide a model for involving parents in the lives of children, which could have important implications for children's improved literacy and later academic success.

Storytelling and Picture Books

Research on storytelling and the use of picture books also form the basis for Día and Noche literacy programming. A recent study by McKeough, Bird, Tourign, Romaine, Graham, Ottmann, and Jeary (2008) with aboriginal children highlights the importance of oral tradition in diverse cultural groups. The authors state that storytelling, “a precursor to reading and writing across cultures” (p. 148), supports early literacy development. Heath’s (1982) work with low income children in Trackton also demonstrates that storytelling is an important path for language development and socialization for some cultural groups.

Picture books are also an effective tool for developing literacy. Whitehurst and his colleagues (1988) found that when parents were provided instruction on the optimal use of picture books (e.g., talking to children about the story), children’s expressive language ability improved. Valdez-Menacha (1992) using a technique called *dialogic reading*, which encourages children to discuss pictures and stories in picture books, also found improved language development in children. In her study, Roethler (1998) acknowledges the power of picture books in developing cultural literacy. Her work describes how images of Black children in picture books can influence their ethnic identity development and inform the cultural conceptualization of non-Black children. Similarly, Naidoo (In Press) notes that the use of high-quality, culturally-authentic picture books is vital to the cultural literacy development of both Latino and non-Latino children and educators.

Incidentally, the Día and Noche initiatives draw on this body of research to develop literacy programs using culturally-relevant children’s literature and oral stories. Libraries everywhere in the United States are faced with the challenge of meeting the informational, educational, and recreational needs of culturally and linguistically heterogeneous communities that are continuously shifting, renovating, and rapidly expanding. National programs and initiatives such as Día and Noche de Cuentos provide invaluable resources, replicable models, and practical information to help library administrators, professionals, and frontline staff develop responsive and effective programs, collections, and services to meet the specific needs of their diverse communities. The following sections describe the history of each of these programs, highlighting their role in promoting reading in a multicultural, multilingual society.

The Context for *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Día)

The Early Years

During the decade of the nineties, as American society was undergoing an economic shift from a manufacturing economy to a service economy, the impact of these changes was being played out in America’s neighborhoods and barrios. Families were experiencing first-hand the loss of full-time employment. Where once a single employed adult could support his or her family, heads of households now found themselves losing their full-time jobs, which were being permanently replaced by part-time positions with lower pay and no health insurance benefits.

The impact of the rising inequality and poverty was also being felt in the achievement levels of Latino students. Reading proficiency rates for fourth grade Latino students had decreased by ten points during a three year period between 1992 and 1994 (Williams et al., 1995, p. 9). These sociological and educational effects were also being felt in the public library as Latino youth were now being termed as ‘youth at risk.’ Latino communities were experiencing what the

prolific writer and renowned sociologist Manuel Castells (1998) came to term as ‘fourth world’ communities, referring to pockets of communities in first world countries, places like the barrios and ghettos that look similar to third world communities with young people suffering from a poor education, bleak job prospects, limited opportunities, and the devastating effects of urban blight. Back then, mid-night basketball was the rave and considered a panacea for solving the problems of disengaged youth, and the internet was not wired for library branches, certainly not those in low income communities. With limited staff and budget shortfall struggles, libraries were hard-pressed to provide the much needed outreach services necessary to reach out to communities and youth in need.

It was during this period that Latina author and poet Pat Mora first approached Oralia Garza de Cortés, then chair of the Children and Young Adult Services Committee (CYASC) of REFORMA (an affiliate of the America Library Association dedicated to library services to Latinos and the Spanish-speaking), to discuss the idea of establishing a day to celebrate children’s books, culture, and language. Garza de Cortés jumped at the opportunity to explore the idea for establishing this national day of celebration, to be called *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Children’s Day/Book Day), borrowed from the traditional celebration of *El día de los niños* (The Day of the Child) established in Mexico in 1925 during Mexican President Álvaro Obregon’s administration. The idea for a Children’s Day came from the first World Conference for the Well-being of Children held in Geneva, Switzerland. That congress established the "Geneva Declaration Protecting Children" and countries around the world were urged to designate a special day to bring attention to the needs of children. Mexico was one of the first countries in the world to take the lead to establish a Children’s Day, selecting April 30th as this special day when parents honor children with gifts and toys.

When Pat Mora contacted children’s librarian Oralia Garza de Cortés from REFORMA, she posed a challenging question: What if we took the idea of *El día de los niños* but added the notion of books, culture, and language to create a literacy tradition that would serve children and families throughout the United States? This recipe for success would honor the traditional concept of Children’s Day on April 30th, but it would also focus on the important elements of reading, literacy, and learning, requisites needed if children were to be successful in this country. It was a brilliant idea and a win-win for everyone involved: for the children and their families who would be the beneficiaries of outreach efforts by libraries, as well as to the librarians who needed to find a way to reach out to the Latino community to draw them into libraries. Since 1996, REFORMA has been part of the exciting celebration linking books, libraries, and reading.

From the very beginning, the support for Día from REFORMA librarians was phenomenal. Some In Austin, Texas, Garza de Cortés sought out Elva Garza from the Austin Public Library. Together they tested out a new literacy model involving Día. They sought other youth serving organizations that were also looking for new ways to reach out to children and families, and brought these organizations together to plan what has now become an annual family literacy event. Elements of the Austin Día plan included hands-on and performance-based activities from student performances to ballet *folklórico*, drill teams, and specially designated youth stages where children and teens could perform music or conduct poetry slams. Service providers who sponsored booths or tables were thinking beyond merely providing information. Rather, they were encouraged to convert their information tables into mini creation stations, allowing

children and families to make and take creative literacy-related activities that could be easily replicated at home.

Día was rapidly embraced by the library community for several reasons: (1) it utilized a grassroots approach to literacy, (2) it was flexible and could be shaped and implemented in any form, and (3) it fit community needs and (4) it provided libraries with opportunities to work with other partners and with members of their community to build upon the strength and abilities of the community. More importantly, Día was viable because libraries were actually connecting to their community in a very emotional way by using a well-known event from childhood and celebrating it in new ways. Día spoke the people's language, inviting them into new learning spaces, and honoring and respecting their cultural traditions while introducing them to new ones.

State-wide Support for Día

Día was extremely well-received by many librarians and organizations from the local to the statewide level. In Texas, library visionaries like Pat Smith from the Texas Library Association and Jeanette Larson, then working with the Texas State Library, found ways to incorporate Día into their structures and developed ways to implement the celebration at the local level. In California, Día was supported by library administrators such as Mark Smith at the Riverside County Public Library. Smith observed Día's development from his Texas library leadership days and believed in the power of Día to make a difference in community support for libraries. With his steady and persistent influence, Smith wrote the original grants that made Día possible through LSTA (Library Services and Technology Act) funding. He was instrumental in convincing the then California state librarian Susan Flint to implement Día statewide through the project known as Día California (www.diacalifornia.org).

Día Planning Resources

In 2010 over fifty-five libraries from across California applied for \$500 awards to support their Día programming activities. The program offers eligible libraries with a small grant to bring a children's author or other literary program to the library, and offers free bilingual books for distribution during the Día program. Día California is an excellent example of what state libraries can do to promote and implement literacy and library programming for Latino children and families, particularly if they utilize Día as a way to promote family literacy.

Libraries throughout the U.S. celebrate Día on or around April 30th and have many online resources available to assist them in developing quality programs. Some of these resources include:

- **Official El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Day of the Child/Day of the Book) website** – This comprehensive website contains a plethora of resources related to planning and promoting your Día program as well as links to booklists and free publisher posters highlighting Día. Available: www.ala.org/dia
- ***Dígame un cuento/Tell Me A Story: Bilingual Library Programs for Children and Families*** – Created by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, this useful online manual suggests bilingual story hour programs for Latino children and their families. Librarians can use this resource to plan activities using Latino children's books. Available: <http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/pubs/bilingual/index.html>.

- **El día de los niños/El día de los libros: A Celebration of Childhood and Bilingual Literacy** - Created by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, this website contains a variety of information related to planning a Día celebration including: fingerplays, downloadable Spanish/English rhymes and songs, suggested activities, bookmarks, a bibliography of recommended bilingual books and a list of helpful resources. Available: <http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/projects/ninos/contents.html>
- **El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Day of the Child/Day of the Book) Toolkit** is a 100 page online document describing booktalks, author visits, storytelling, and other programming ideas that can be used to celebrate El día de los niños/El día de los libros on April 30th. These suggestions can be used for library programs throughout the entire year! The comprehensive document is available at: <http://www.texasdia.org/toolkit.html>
- **¡Colorín Colorado!’s El día de los niños/El día de los libros Webpage** –This webpage, part of ¡Colorín Colorado!’s comprehensive website celebrating children’s literature, includes Día video interviews with Latina children’s book creators Pat Mora and Lulu Delacre, activities and reproducibles, a Día e-card, and lists of recommended Latino children’s books. Available: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/calendar/celebrations/dia>
- **Pat Mora’s Día: El día de los niños/El día de los libros Website** – This comprehensive website includes information on the history of Día, the Día song, Mora’s Día picturebook, and resources and articles about the celebration. Available: <http://www.patmora.com/dia.htm>

To assist in the funding of Día programs in libraries, the Estela and Raúl Mora Award was established in 1999 by author and poet Pat Mora and her three siblings in honor of their parents and to promote Día. The Mora Award consists of a \$1,000 stipend and a plaque donated by the Mora grandchildren. The Award is presented annually to the most exemplary public or school library program celebrating Día. Libraries from states as diverse as Texas, California, Utah, Oregon, Florida, Rhode Island, Kansas, Kentucky and North Carolina have received the prestigious Mora Award.

Noche de Cuentos/A Night of Stories

Noche de Cuentos is a family literacy initiative that encourages families from Latino communities to gather in libraries across the U.S. on March 20th, World Storytelling Day, to share cultural stories, songs, and experiences from their families, communities, and native countries. The first Noche de Cuentos in the United States was celebrated at Breed Elementary School in East Los Angeles in 2003. The brainchild of Garza de Cortés, Noche de Cuentos was designed as a family literacy night that targeted the mostly Spanish speaking families residing in Boyle Heights. The featured storyteller that evening was then city councilman Antonio Villaraigosa, who would later become the first Latino Mayor of Los Angeles. Building on the enormous success of that program, Garza de Cortés proposed to the CYASC committee that it sponsor a special night of storytelling for adults for the Third National REFORMA Conference to be held in El Paso, Texas in the fall of 2008. Featured children’s librarians and storytellers Lucia González and Freda Mosquera and authors and poets Juan Felipe Herrera, Yuyi Morales, and Tatiana Delaterra told rousing stories that evening and revived the oral tradition in what proved to be one of the conference’s highlights.

In 2009, Noche became part of ALA President Camila Alire’s Family Literacy Focus Initiative “Libraries: The Heart of ALL Communities,” which encourages families in ethnically diverse

communities to read and learn together. That year ALA awarded each of its five Ethnic Affiliates \$4,000 to develop and implement innovative family literacy models in libraries serving Native American, Asian American, Pacific American, African American, Chinese American and Latino communities with the objective of bringing generations together through innovative literacy activities that emphasize oral and written traditions and explore new literacies.

During the 2009 meeting of the ALA the REFORMA Board of Directors established the REFORMA Family Literacy Focus Task Force to work on a mini-grant proposal to be submitted to Camila Alire's Presidential Family Literacy Focus Initiative. The Task Force developed and submitted *Noche de Cuentos/A Night of Stories*. REFORMA's proposal was approved by the ALA Presidential Initiative group in September 2009 and REFORMA received a one-time payment of \$4,000 from ALA for implementing the proposed project. The mission of Noche de Cuentos is to promote literacy and preserve the art of storytelling while honoring the oral traditions of our Latino communities in the U.S.

On the first night of Spring 2010, and throughout that week, families from Latino communities across the United States joined the global community in the celebration of World Storytelling Day as they gathered at their libraries to share stories, songs and experiences from their families, their communities, or their countries. With the theme "Everyone Comes from Somewhere," REFORMA invited libraries everywhere to join in bringing Latino families and communities together through the celebration of Noche de Cuentos.

Noche de Cuentos Planning Resources

In 2010, five mini-grants in the amount of \$500 were made available to help libraries celebrate their first Noche de Cuentos event. A panel of judges selected the winning mini-grant proposals according to the specified application guidelines. Programs were required to focus on the oral traditions and be storytelling based, with an emphasis on cultural literacy activities. The selection criteria were based on (1) creativity of program, (2) level of community involvement, (3) publicity, (4) project impact, and (5) sustainability.

A webpage, accessible on the REFORMA website, was initially created to disseminate the information and publish all related promotional materials and programming resources for Noche programs (<http://nochedecuentos.wordpress.com>). Each grant applicant was asked to provide a promotional action plan using the Family Literacy Focus materials available online: the Noche de Cuentos program logo, a poster with art donated by award-winning children's book illustrator Yuyi Morales, and a media toolkit. The Noche page will eventually serve as a clearinghouse of Latino and bilingual storytelling resources that will help librarians everywhere plan their Latino heritage programs (national listing of bilingual performers, program ideas, etc.).

Importance of Noche

"Our language and our stories bind us together and make us stronger," notes Latina author and REFORMA President Elect Lucía González, "Incorporating Noche de Cuentos programs in library outreach initiatives reinforces the cultural traditions of Latinos" (Personal Communication). Libraries have the opportunity to reach members of the Latino community that might not otherwise attend a library program through the intergenerational storytelling and sharing component of Noche de Cuentos. By targeting immigrant Latino communities, the

program highlights the importance of literacy in the U.S. and provides an avenue for Latino families to learn more about the programs, services, and collections offered by libraries. At the same time, the program encourages libraries to work with Latino literacy organizations in the community to promote oral and cultural literacy among Latino families.

Developing Cultural Competence with Día and Noche de Cuentos

The concept of cultural competence, according to Montiel-Overall (2009), “means becoming knowledgeable about diverse cultures and using this information in ways that lead to greater understanding of diverse populations and thereby increasing library use; it means having the ability to create and maintain a more equitable environment for library users; and it means having the ability to establish and maintain relationships among diverse cultural and ethnic groups.” (p. 199). Through the idea of cultural competence, school and public librarians are charged with creating an open-forum for facilitating understanding and acceptance of diversity based upon culture, ethnicity, linguistic ability, religion, physical ability, immigration status, and sexual orientation. Libraries are asked to become bridges between home cultures and those of the school, library, and community.

An excellent way to build these cultural bridges is to integrate culturally authentic and contemporary children's literature about diverse groups into library programs and services to promote cultural literacy, thereby introducing children to the cultures of their peers, teachers, or future acquaintances. According to Diamond and Moore (1995), cultural literacy (1) links home and school cultures to promote traditional literacy; (2) activates silenced voices while opening closed minds; (3) promotes academic achievement; and (4) empowers children's thinking and abilities to function in a culturally pluralistic society.

Over 20 years ago, Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C Task Force (1989) found that by preschool age, young children exhibit stereotypes and negative behaviors towards those that are perceived as being different or “other.” These attitudes are learned from many different sources: parents, the media, books, and peers to name a few. Fortunately, children can learn to develop favorable attitudes towards those perceived as the “other” when they are introduced to authentic, high-quality literature about diverse cultures through an anti-bias curriculum in library programs. This type of curriculum is similar to a multicultural curriculum except it avoids the “tourist approach” to learning about diverse cultures that is common in many culturally-oriented lesson plans and library programs. A tourist curriculum highlights the food, clothing, and celebrations of a culture rather than exploring the daily interactions of people within that culture. The result is library programming that is both patronizing and trivializing: “Children ‘visit’ non-White cultures [via books] and then ‘go home’” (Derman-Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force, 1989, p. 7).

These programs provide an opportunity for librarians do more than simply introduce different cultures through children's literature; rather, they promote intercultural connections by inviting children to explore topics such as social justice, equality, and cultural authenticity (Naidoo, 2009). An anti-bias curriculum promotes cultural competence by allowing for such explorations to occur and providing a forum for examining issues of ethnicity, class, and culture. Through literacy initiatives such as Día and Noche de Cuentos, libraries have natural avenues for infusing cultural competence into their programs and services. For example, the programs develop respect

for cultural differences between library users and library providers. Both of these initiatives celebrate various facets of literacy such as reading literacy, cultural literacy, oral literacy, and multilingual literacy.

Cultural Competence with Día

The main purposes of Día are to honor childhood and reading, promote bilingual and multilingual literacy, highlight culturally diverse children's literature, and foster global understanding and intercultural connections among children and their families. Día programs provide a unique opportunity to bring library patrons from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds together in an atmosphere that emphasizes connecting all children to books, language, and cultures. Children and families who attend Día celebrations can find their own cultures and languages featured as well as those of their neighbors.

Libraries that extend the principles of Día beyond a single day in April can cultivate cultural competence in both library staff and patrons that becomes infused in all the library's programs and services. Planting the Día seed creates a foundation for celebrating and learning about diverse cultures. Incorporating programming ideas from Día into daily, weekly, and monthly library services encourages everyone to learn about the cultures that are different from their own while also communicating to all members of the community that the library values their cultures and languages as well as the literary contributions of their people.

Competence with Noche de Cuentos

Noche de Cuentos is grounded in preserving oral traditions, promoting oral literacy, and conveying cultural values via the ancient storytelling art form. Storytelling that reflects the culture, traditions, and language of Latino children is a highly effective way for librarians to promote cultural competence. Storytelling can serve as an effective means of building bridges across cultural identities, helping to create a space in classrooms and libraries that is supportive, inclusive, and affirming (González, In Press).

Latin American culture is very rich in its oral traditions, sharing many of the same stories, games, songs, *dichos y refranes*, sayings and proverbs. Through *cuentos* and *dichos*, listeners learn basic lessons about social relationships and behaviors. The dominant themes of traditional *cuentos* are universal to the childhood experience. Their characters learn the power of sharing, they learn to overcome grief, and they learn the value of wit and cleverness.

Cuentos are part of the child's literary heritage. As recently-arrived Latino children embark on the journey of language acquisition and cultural adaptation, they need connecting links between their home and the host cultures of school, library, and community (Ibid). They need to feel that they and their families are active participants in the process, and that they are not just receiving but also giving and contributing. Allowing Latino children and their families to tell stories via a Noche de Cuentos program is among the least costly and most effective means of achieving this in a library setting.

Cuentos from Latin America that are passed down from generation to generation transcend language. They speak to the heart of the listener, helping to build the ethnic identity of the Latino child and increasing the cultural understanding of the non-Latino child. Libraries that provide Noche de Cuentos programming create a forum that allows everyone in the audience to connect with the rich Latino culture. Particularly impactful Noche de Cuentos extend well beyond a

single day in May to encourage children and families from all cultures to share their personal stories throughout the year. Libraries, offering Noche programs year-round, facilitate an appreciation of oral tradition as well as respect for the stories from other cultures which can lead to the development of cultural competence. Children and their families who hear stories from other cultures may be encouraged to explore additional *cuentos* via the library's collection and then draw intercultural connections between the stories of their culture and that of their neighbors' culture.

In the subsequent section, we describe the planning and implementing of culturally appropriate outreach services for Latino immigrant populations via examples of high impact, high quality Día and Noche programs. Through these examples, we demonstrate the role of the library (public and school) in promoting reading to diverse, multilingual populations of children and their families.

Noteworthy Día Programming

Through their outreach departments, libraries serve populations that cannot come to them in regular ways. For this purpose, literacy programs and collaborations are established in hospitals, nursing homes, homeless shelters, churches, refugee centers, community fairs, jails, Head Start centers, and schools among other institutions. This section describes the success of various Día outreach initiatives at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library (CML) in Charlotte, North Carolina.

For libraries in the Charlotte Mecklenburg system, Día goes far beyond a day, it becomes a strategy to reach out to new populations, to promote literacy, and to captivate international families with books and library programs. This is accomplished by aligning Día's mission with the mission of CML and planning services, programs, and collections that address both mission statements. In CML the library mission is about expanding minds, empowering individuals, and enriching the community. Día's mission is a daily commitment to link all children to books, languages and cultures. Both missions go hand in hand: Linking all children to books, languages and cultures will expand minds and empower and enrich communities.

Librarians need to show their library administrators and library managers the connection and the benefits of integrating both missions. It is crucial to make the case that Día has to be a system wide effort. In order for Día to be successful, it cannot be considered a separate program from the entire library system; it has to be adopted by all branch libraries, not by one little department called Outreach or Hispanic services, or by one "Hispanic" librarian. To make the case even broader and expand it to the whole community, Día's mission should also be connected to other educational institutions like museums, universities, recreational centers, and afterschool centers. It is a mistake to think that Día is for a particular ethnic group; Día impacts *all* children. At the CML, Día is known as DIA or Diversity in Action; it is an inclusive outreach strategy.

Día Outcomes

To "sell" Día to the library system and the local community, it is crucial to highlight the many outcomes of this literacy program. The following are some of the outcomes of incorporating Día as part of the system's outreach initiatives.

Outcome 1. Día easily bridges the gap between Latino/International populations and the library, inviting these community members to the library often for the first time. At the CML, they conducted a series of focus groups with the international community to discern what they need in terms of library services. One constant request was “We want to see ourselves represented in your collections, in your physical spaces. Yes we want English resources, but we need to feel that we are part of you.” For years the library had an internal Día committee, at one point they had a Spanish Día community committee; but never an International Advisory Committee (IAC) that helped the whole system go beyond one Día day. CML knew Día was for all children so they created an IAC to assist with program planning. In 2010, the IAC assisted in the planning of CML’s four international children festivals, entitled Global Family Series Festival or Celebrate the World!, which highlighted a particular art form as a way to connect to other cultures (African American, Native American, Asian American and Latino). The IAC helps to ensure that the principles of Día are modeled in the library year-round by:

- Assisting librarians, teachers, parents and other adults in the selection, acquisition and use of books in Spanish and other languages for children and adolescents;
- Assisting in the development of programs to encourage ESL children (English as a Second Language) to read for enjoyment, education and information;
- Providing multicultural training/workshops for librarians, teachers, parents, and other adults to increase literacy rates in the state;
- Developing an inter-agency network of family and children service providers to share literacy practices and preferences regarding the international community;
- Growing the Día program as a premiere international children’s celebration and support Día as a statewide initiative;
- Providing multilingual and multicultural artistic programs for the system and the community at large;
- Identifying best practices related to library services and literacy programs for multicultural, multilingual populations.

Outcome 2. Día builds community and provides a logical avenue for community collaborations. By creating the IAC, offering the Global Family Series which was built upon collaborations with communities agencies, and highlighting Día as DIA or Diversity in Action, CML built connections between multilingual communities and family literacy educational institutions that impact the community at large. These connections and community partnerships have also been realized in some of the oldest libraries systems in the U.S. which celebrate Día. For instance, Farmington Public Library in New Mexico collaborates with 37 organizations for its Día programming. Some of these partnerships include Big Brothers Big Sisters, Miss Indian Farmington, Coca Cola of Durango, Cold Stone Creamery, Yo- Yo Magic, Kindermusic, Presbyterian Medical Services, Sylvan Learning Center, Girls Scouts, San Juan College, Jump N Fun, Hawaiian Hoop dance, and Farmington Recreational Center among others.

Outcome 3. Día programming leads to increased circulation especially of Hispanic and international materials. New families and children attending Día programs will begin checking out more materials and requesting resources they like.

Outcome 4. Día increases understanding of the importance of serving multicultural, multilingual populations. New multilingual populations coming to the library will encourage librarians to see

the importance of multicultural services and multilingual collections. When library managers, directors and decision makers see the impact of this type of literacy programming and the great number of people coming to celebrate Día throughout the year, they will adopt the DIA culture.

Outcome 5. Día is a great way to promote Summer Reading Programs.

For many library systems in the United States, summer is a great opportunity to bring more children to the library and to increase book circulation. Día celebrations in April are a perfect way to promote Summer Reading two months ahead. In some library systems, Día is the kick off day for summer reading. New families attending Día celebrations will learn about the Summer Reading Programs being offered in branch locations.

Specific Examples of Día Programming and Planning

There are numerous examples of Día programs available online via the Día planning resources previously discussed. However, some specific examples of Día activities are as follows:

- Multicultural authors, illustrators and storytellers visiting underserved neighborhood libraries, schools and afterschool sites
- Street performances of plays in underserved communities
- Art exhibits rotating in community centers of low income neighborhoods
- Children bookmobile services providing book give-a-ways to undeserved children
- Special and customized workshops for teens and children in refugee homes
- Book give-a-ways during Día activities in libraries
- Library card sign-up during summer reading programs
- Other educational systems and children museums offering multicultural activities that expand Dia's mission
- Children with special needs organizations in the areas of autism, child development, speech development, child care resources, providing information to at risk families
- Seniors conducting storytelling hours in their senior centers or libraries
- Book sampling where restaurants provide special reading menus just for the Día celebration. For this activity librarians and volunteers come to restaurants to read books as appetizers, main courses, and desserts.

According to Meryle Leonard, Outreach Manager at CML, the most successful approach to celebrating Día is one that works within the capacity of the organization. Leonard asserts, "It is important to create a celebration that is comfortable to your organization and budget. Anyone can celebrate and honor the spirit of Día. If you have a small library or organization, create a small celebration that concentrates on literacy and culture. Collaborating with community organizations and enlisting volunteers can make a small celebration go very far. Another successful approach is engaging the community. Your planning process should include your target audience. Not only will you offer a celebration that is relevant and accurate, but you will also have a team that can help market your celebration to the target audience. Give yourself enough time to plan an event that allows you to create a planning team, involve the target audience, secure space and funding, and develop an evaluation plan"(Personal Communication).

Exemplary Noche de Cuentos Programs

Although, Noche de Cuentos is a relatively new program, several libraries have already celebrated successful Noche programs in unique ways that promote reading, intercultural

connections, and family literacy. The following five libraries, library systems, or Latino organizations received the 2010 Noche de Cuentos mini-grants and are superb examples of high impact literacy programming.

Half Moon Bay Branch of the San Mateo County Public Library System (California): Outreach Librarian Armando Ramirez worked with fifth grade students from area elementary schools to collect, write, and create family storybook albums based on the students' family stories. The students then shared their work with the community at an evening Noche de Cuentos event held at the public library.

The Mexican American Cultural Center/Corazon de Tejas Chapter of REFORMA (Austin, Texas): The unique partnership between these two organizations allowed them to offer a community-wide event for Noche de Cuentos which featured local writers including Teresa Palomo-Acosta and Belinda Acosta. Middle and high school students from the local school district and their parents also had an opportunity, many of them for the first time, to visit the impressive Mexican American Cultural Center. Audience participants also had a chance to hear Maribel Castro, the first Mexican American elected as President of the Texas Library Association, tell her father's story which described how the hard-working Mexican immigrant farm worker built a better life for his family and managed to educate every single one of his children in the process. With this program, "We wanted to show our community's very competent students the history from which they come, in order for them to embrace the legacy the past provides," says Don Bos, the Corazon de Tejas President of the Central Texas chapter of REFORMA.

Salinas Public Library (California): As part of this library's Noche program, the *abuelitas* (grandmothers) from the community shared a place of honor as they were invited to share their life stories at an evening gathering at the public library. The stories, told from the oral tradition, are to be gathered and bound. The book, also titled *Noche de Cuentos*, will be made available to the public and serve as a public record of the event and of the grandmothers' histories.

National City Public Library (California): For their Noche program, this library hosted an evening storytelling program where families made scrapbooks of their family history chronicling their journey, their hopes and their dreams. Titled *Where I Come From/De donde vengo*, these specially hand-crafted books help participants to recognize the importance of keeping family stories alive.

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library (North Carolina): This library partnered with an arts collaborative, Con A de Arte, to host a storytellers' training session of over 100 Latino artists. In keeping with the Noche de Cuentos theme "We all come from Somewhere/Todos venimos de algún lugar," each storyteller was asked to bring a 'tesoro personal' or personal object that symbolizes their home origin and to share their objects with the stories they tell at the evening celebration of stories, Noche de Cuentos.

Visions for the Future

If we look at the original intent for Children's Day, established in the 1920's by the World Conference for the Wellbeing of Children held in Geneva, Switzerland, we can see that the

concern for the well-being of children was what led to establishing Children's Day in the first place. What if librarians convened the children's advocacy networks in their communities and looked at the needs of Latino children and all children for that matter, and resolved that they would work on those issues that affect children's learning, children's literacy, and the overall well being of all children? What if we resolved to provide education programs and services for all families, working with the many agencies and organizations, teaching culturally diverse, multilingual parents to advocate for their children's needs, be it in the area of bilingual and first language storytimes or health and education and equity advocacy in public schools?

Radical ideas that require radical action? Hardly! It's what participatory democracy should be all about. It's what ordinary middle class parents utilize to get the services they need for their children and their communities. And it works! So why can't libraries serve as mediators, teaching and training low income and new Americans how to navigate the school and other government bureaucracies, going beyond making information accessible to all, and providing the public with concrete strategies for making that information work for those not familiar with the workings of American institutions. In this way, libraries can serve as laboratories for democracy teaching adults the value of participating as citizens in the public life of the community.

We would like to conclude with a thought on how to promote literacy and cultural competence and how to create a contagious spirit of Día and Noche.

- **Spread the Día seed**, make it an everyday intention for literacy across languages and cultures.
- **Personal commitment**, make your organization believe like you do, that this is an incredible way to serve the community at large.
- **Involvement**, spread the love for reading in many languages to many children in and outside your system by using volunteers, community resources, and political power.
- **Renaissance of the arts**, fight with the power of writers, storytellers, musicians, poets, actors, dancers and illustrators, against stereotypes, apathy, and lack of vision.
- **Innovation**, study the success of other Día and Noche initiatives, adapt them, and create your own new flavor.
- **Transcend any barriers** to the love of reading reaching beyond languages, colors, and cultures

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