Building a Culture of Literacy in Your Community through Día

Jeanette Larson
Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC)
El día de los niños / El día de los libros

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ALA Editions purchases fund advocacy, awareness, and accreditation programs for library professionals worldwide.
El día de los niños / El día de los libros

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Jeanette Larson
Association for Library Service to Children

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JEANETTE LARSON has more than thirty years of library experience. She currently teaches at Texas Woman's University and is an independent trainer for libraries around the country. An active member of the Association for Library Service to Children and the Texas Library Association (TLA), Larson's involvement with El día de los niños/El día de los libros, often called Día, began early in the initiative’s history, with the development of an informational booklet of program ideas. More recently, she served on a TLA committee that produced a grant-funded Día tool kit for libraries. In 2003, she served as a member of the Estela and Raúl Mora Award Committee of REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking. Larson has an MSLS from the University of Southern California and a BA in anthropology from the University of New Mexico. She is also the author of a children’s book, Hummingbirds: Facts and Folklore from the Americas.
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What Is El día de los niños / El día de los libros?

Librarians and educators have long recognized the need for children to have great books available to them. We also recognize the importance of readers’ being able to see themselves in the characters, situations, and language of the stories they read. El día de los niños/El día de los libros is a collaborative effort to reinforce a commitment to linking children to languages, reading, books, and cultures. It is a very flexible and broad-based program that can be tailored in a multitude of ways to implement local programs that encourage bilingualism, sharing of cultures, and enjoyment of the beauty of literature in all of the world’s languages. Many libraries start out small, with one short program that recognizes the major language other than English in the community. These programs and celebrations quickly grow to longer, richer programs that attract larger audiences and expand to include other languages and spread throughout the year. Although a lot of attention is paid to Spanish-language programming, El día de los niños/El día de los libros recognizes that all languages are beautiful and should be celebrated. Although the calendar marks Día as being celebrated on April 30, many communities select a different date. The celebration is meant to be a community event and can be tailored to fit local needs and calendars.

History

The roots of the Día celebration can be found in other literary celebrations and literacy programs, including Children’s Book Week and National Library Week, as well as in library-based summer-reading programs and programs like the American...
Library Association’s Every Child Ready to Read project. Typically, these and other literacy programs seek to focus attention on the joy of reading, sharing books, and encouraging literacy. They also serve to celebrate family literacy and to encourage parents and their children to read, often while teaching caregivers about the value of books, library resources, and libraries.

In March 1996, while being interviewed in Tucson, Arizona, author and poet Pat Mora learned about a holiday celebrated in Mexico and in other Latin American countries that celebrates children. She began to think about why there was no similar celebration in the United States. Although there is some debate as to whether the United States has a day to celebrate children, there is certainly nothing similar to Mother’s Day or Father’s Day. Some churches recognize a Children’s Day that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, but Mora realized that the United States had nothing like the Children’s Day that is celebrated in many other countries. That day has its roots in International Children’s Day, first celebrated in Turkey in 1920. In subsequent years, following the first World Conference for the Well-Being of Children, held in Geneva in 1925, that celebration has evolved into a series of celebrations held in different countries throughout the world on various dates. These more generalized celebrations usually focus on issues that are broadly related to child welfare. Pat Mora thought about this holiday, and the lack of a similar celebration in the United States, and decided to expand and enhance the concept of Children’s Day to promote the joy of books, especially bilingual books, by adding the link to literacy, an essential issue for the well-being of children.

With assistance from members of REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, Mora further developed the concept and began to work on planning the first celebration, held on April 30, 1997. Other organizations, including MANA del Norte, a women’s group in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and librarians, including Oralia Garza de Cortés and Veronica Myers, quickly offered their support for the celebration. Later, REFORMA voted to endorse the celebration of family literacy and was an early leader in promoting the initiative throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. On April 30, 1997, the first El día de los niños/El día de los libros celebrations were held in Santa Fe, New Mexico; Tucson, Arizona; and El Paso and Austin, Texas.

Following the first celebrations in 1997, the Texas State Library produced a booklet to help librarians plan local programs to celebrate El día de los niños/El día de los libros. That publication was shared with libraries throughout the country and is still available on the Texas State Library’s website (http://tsl.state.tx.us/ld/projects/ninos/). In 1998, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a grant to allow the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE) to develop a plan for a national campaign to disseminate information on El día de los niños/El día de los libros. By 1999, schools and libraries across the country had begun holding their own celebrations. Pat Mora and her family established the Estela and Raúl Mora Award in honor of their parents to promote El día de los niños/El día de los libros. Also in 1999, young Latinos who were present at a national summit in San Antonio,
Texas, formally and publicly requested a day to celebrate children. The National Latino Children’s Institute added its name to the list of organizations promoting programs that honor children. Although the institute’s emphasis is on broader issues, its interests include reading and education.

In 2000, the first Mora Award was presented to Austin Public Library, in Texas. The American Library Association formalized its support for El día de los niños/El día de los libros in 2001, when the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) applied for and received a W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant to promote El día de los niños/El día de los libros. As a result, ALSC produced a tip sheet for librarians who were launching their own events and a brochure that librarians could distribute to parents. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a second grant to ALSC in 2002 to produce and distribute another brochure for parents. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation continued its support in 2002 by awarding funds for El Pueblo, a North Carolina advocacy group for Latinos, to initiate a statewide celebration in North Carolina.

In 2003, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation funding enabled the University of Arizona’s School of Information Resources to host meetings of a national Día advisory committee and to produce public relations materials in support of the celebration. Also in 2003, the Texas Library Association received funds from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for a statewide program to promote El día de los niños/El día de los libros in school and public libraries. This culminated in a tool kit for librarians to use in developing their programs and in small grants to help boost the number of new programs in the state. In 2004, the Kellogg Foundation awarded a third grant to ALSC to continue the work of the University of Arizona.

By 2005, El día de los niños/El día de los libros had become a tradition and had found a permanent home with ALSC. In 2006, Kellogg awarded an unprecedented fourth grant to ALSC to strengthen national awareness and community participation in Día. As the home for Día, ALSC and its members and staff share resources, many of which I mention elsewhere in this book, that support local programs. Moreover, ALSC provides a database of local programs (www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/initiatives/diadelosninos/diacelebrations/diacelebrations.cfm) for librarians to see what their peers are doing and to discover new ways to enhance local programs.

In 2007, Target became the first official national sponsor of Día. Through the company’s support, libraries received complimentary bilingual brochures about Día. Funding also provided minigrants to help establish or enhance local programs at eight libraries: El Paso (Texas) Public Library, Hennepin County (Minnesota) Library, Public Library of Charlotte-Mecklenburg County (North Carolina), Queens (New York) Public Library, Riverside County (California) Library System, Broward County (Florida) Library System, Providence (Rhode Island) Public Library, and Phoenix (Arizona) Public Library. These libraries continue to provide exemplary programs related to bilingual literacy and El día de los niños/El día de los libros.

In 2008, Dora the Explorer, the children’s television character who shares her adventures in learning on public television, was featured on the Día poster, bookmarks, and brochures, bringing Día into the mainstream of popular culture.
Other national sponsors have included the National Council of Teachers of English; Reading Rockets; and publishers like HarperCollins, Random House, Children’s Book Press, and Cinco Puntos Press. Support from these sponsors has included distribution of posters and other promotional materials, discounts for libraries purchasing bilingual resources, and the development of guides to assist in program development. Many of these publishers are also in the forefront of publishing work by Hispanic authors and illustrators and translating English-language books into Spanish.

In 2010, the Dollar General Literacy Foundation awarded ALSC a grant to significantly expand Día to include and celebrate a wide variety of cultures. Fifteen minigrants were awarded to the following:

- Bloomington (Illinois) Public Library
- Brevard County Library System, Cocoa, Florida
- Forest Hill (Texas) Public Library
- Fremont Public Library District, Mundelein, Illinois
- Hall County Library System, Gainesville, Georgia
- Jefferson Parish Library, Metairie, Louisiana
- Longmont (Colorado) Public Library
- Nacogdoches (Texas) Public Library
- Paramus (New Jersey) Public Library
- Paul E. Griffin Library, Camden, Mississippi
- Poughkeepsie (New York) Public Library District
- Rachel Kohl Community Library, Glen Mills, Pennsylvania
- Richland County Public Library, Columbia, South Carolina
- Sachem Public Library, Holbrook, New York
- Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribal Library, Mount Pleasant, Michigan

The year 2011 marks the fifteenth anniversary of a celebration that continues to grow and reach more children and families. Although it is not possible to know with any certainty how many libraries and schools participate in Día celebrations, in the 2010 survey of ALSC and REFORMA members and libraries, called “Serving Multicultural Populations,” 34 percent of respondents indicated that their library hosted Día programs. About one-third of respondents stated that they were familiar with the celebration but were not yet sponsoring any Día programming. For the remaining librarians, El día de los niños/El día de los libros is a new and exciting idea to be explored.

**Mission**

Día’s mission is to link all children to books, languages, and cultures through a vision of family literacy. It involves a daily commitment to family literacy that culminates in an annual celebration. That celebration on or near April 30 frequently
reflects a year’s worth of activities to support and promote the diversity of communities and multicultural reading for children and families.

What sets Día apart from other literacy celebrations is the emphasis on this mission and Pat Mora’s vision for a celebration that transcends all cultures and ethnicities. It is the desire of librarians and Día supporters to promote books that reflect our national plurality and the many cultures of our communities.

As the founder of Día, Pat Mora strongly advocates that the activities in libraries, schools, and communities focus on sharing bookjoy, a word she coined. Although working for bookjoy every day may seem ambitious, the work done through Día can have the positive effect of building a community of readers and a culture of literacy that truly reflects all cultures. Several people, including Sara Howrey, formerly of Kenton County (Kentucky) Library, recognize that Día is “not about food, dancing, and music. Día is about literacy in all home languages.”

According to Freda Mosquera, Broward County (Florida) Library celebrates El día de los niños/El día de los libros “to bring home the message that we value our communities’ children and that we want their futures to be grounded in education and made possible by a firm foundation in early literacy experiences.”

El día de los niños/El día de los libros activities and celebrations can and should be more than simply multicultural programming or celebrations of diversity. The mission of Día reflects the joy that comes from being able to read in whatever language is spoken at home or with family, from being literate, from loving language, and from sharing the love of books and reading.

Goals

From the beginning, Pat Mora, REFORMA, and other founding groups have had the same goals for El día de los niños/El día de los libros. These goals include a “daily commitment” to

- honor children and childhood
- promote literacy, the importance of linking all children to books, languages, and cultures
- honor home languages and cultures, thus promoting bilingual and multilingual literacy in this multicultural nation, and global understanding through reading
- involve parents as valued members of the literacy team
- promote library collection development that reflects our plurality

Summing up these goals, Día is primarily a framework for connecting children, literature, literacy, and libraries both in the library and out in the community. This can be accomplished through a celebration of heritage and first-language literature. The second overriding goal for Día is outreach, a way to bring the community to the library and the library to the community.
Benefits of Día Programming

There are currently more than three hundred languages spoken in the United States, according to Census data. According to SIL International, a faith-based nonprofit organization that serves language communities worldwide, there are almost seven thousand languages around the world. Although English is one of the major languages spoken around the world, it is clearly not the only language that is important to children and families.

El día de los niños/El día de los libros activities and the emphasis placed on bilingual and multilingual programming supports bilingual literacy and language development. Why is bilingual literacy and language learning important? “The world faces a future of people speaking more than one language, with English no longer seen as likely to become dominant,” according to language researcher David Graddol. According to Yale linguist Stephen Anderson, speaking in the same article, multilingualism is “more or less the natural state. In most of the world multilingualism is the normal condition of people.”

Being familiar with more than one language and encouraging multilingualism is, therefore, increasingly important to U.S. society. These experts also emphasize that, while it is important for those who live in the United States to learn English, doing so should not mean abandoning one’s native language. It is clearly important to be literate in one’s first language, but it also is important to recognize that literacy occurs in every language, not just in English.

We all develop a major part of our self-image from seeing ourselves in pictures and hearing language that is familiar to us. Reading and sharing books that include positive images of one’s culture and that include words that are heard at home or

How Día Benefits Children and Families

Children who are read to regularly become better readers and achieve more in their education. Día programs support families and encourage parents to read to their children in the language they are most comfortable speaking. Día programs and activities recognize the value of learning in a family’s home language. This strengthens the role of parents and caregivers in their child’s education. Children and their families recognize the library as a welcoming environment.

How Día Benefits Libraries and Communities

The community sees the library as a friendly place that offers activities and services that are relevant to all children and families. The library is recognized as a family-oriented community location that welcomes everyone. Libraries and library services become connected to other organizations that serve families and children. Librarians build relationships with members of our community, enabling the library to better serve them and building support for library services.
from one's relatives support a positive sense of self-worth for children from that culture. Those same books help other children explore differences and similarities among cultures.

Most Americans have roots in non-English-speaking countries and cultures, even if we no longer speak the languages spoken there. A person who is literate in one language may more easily become fluent in another language. Being exposed to languages other than English is helpful for making friends in the community and abroad. Nothing ingratiates an American traveler more than trying to speak at least a few words in the language of the country being visited. Many children become interested in studying abroad after being exposed to other cultures and languages. We begin to see how languages are interrelated and how words affect understanding and commonalities, as well as differences.

In many ways, the actual programs, events, activities, and books used for El día de los niños/El día de los libros programs are not any different from what a library is already offering at other times. What sets Día apart is the emphasis it places on recognizing cultural heritage and the ways that participants work throughout the year to build a culture of literacy in the community.

Libraries are part of the education community and, as such, can be intimidating places to nonusers, new immigrants, and people who lack formal education. People often feel that libraries are not there for them, and in some other countries, libraries may in fact be primarily places for members of the formally educated, elite, or financially secure population. Libraries have an obligation to welcome all members of the community, and for some populations this takes more effort. Libraries can be, and should be, the lead agency in developing a Día program and in bringing together partners to create a culture of literacy in the community that embraces people from all ethnicities who are reading in any language spoken in local homes. A major benefit derived from Día programming can be the sense of community, especially a community of literacy, that comes from embracing the richness of other languages.

**Día's Founders**

Growing out of the World Conference for the Well-Being of Children held in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1925, International Children’s Day is celebrated throughout the world. Many countries selected June 1 for their celebration, but Mexico and many Latin American countries settled on April 30 for what they call Día del Niño. This celebration of children never caught on as an official celebration in the United States, which really had no day set aside to celebrate children, as is done for other family members through Mother’s Day, Grandparent’s Day, or Father’s Day. Even though International Children’s Day is celebrated in Mexico, it may be unknown to many Mexican American families, especially those who wanted to assimilate into American culture. Other countries, from Australia to Vietnam, also set aside a day to celebrate childhood and focus on improving the lives of children. Although most of these celebrations target one day and focus broadly on the welfare of children,
it is the goal of El día de los niños/El día de los libros to make every day a day that supports and celebrates children reading.

In 1996, author and poet Pat Mora originated the idea of combining a celebration of children with a celebration of bilingual literacy. During an interview at the University of Arizona in Tucson, someone mentioned to Mora the Mexican holiday Día del Niño. Although Mora grew up in a Spanish-speaking family with roots in Mexico, she was not familiar with the holiday. Mora quickly recognized that in the United States this celebration could focus attention on literacy, an issue that is the cornerstone of the well-being of children in many other areas of life. In part because April 30 has strong ties to International Children’s Day in Latino countries and in part because it is the last day of National Poetry Month—and Pat Mora is, among other things, a poet—she settled on this date for the celebration of El día de los niños/El día de los libros. Mora is quick to emphasize, however, that each community should pick a day that works for it. In fact, many libraries hold their culminating celebration on the weekend nearest April 30, and school libraries often select a date following mandated testing and other distracting obligations.

Pat Mora was born in El Paso, Texas, and spent much of her early life along the border between the United States and Mexico. She began her career as a teacher both in the public schools and at the university level. Considered one of the most distinguished Hispanic writers working in the United States, Mora has published her poetry since 1984, and her work is represented in many anthologies. During her successful writing career, Mora began writing for children and young adults. One of her earliest children’s books, Tomás and the Library Lady, may have helped set the stage for El día de los niños/El día de los libros, as it focuses on the life of a Mexican American boy who discovers the joy of books and literacy through his local public library. It is also fitting that Mora’s works of literature reach as broad an audience as El día de los niños/El día de los libros does. She has written books for adults, teenagers, and children of all ages.

Día’s founding partner was REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking. An affiliate of the American Library Association, REFORMA continues to support Día activities through a variety of avenues, including awarding libraries the Estela and Raúl Mora Award in recognition of outstanding programs. Local chapters of REFORMA are often key sponsors or cosponsors of Día programs and events. Other early supporters included the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) and MANA, an organization of Latina women.

Very quickly, a nationwide celebration has grown from a simple idea into one of the most successful and rewarding programs sponsored by libraries of all kinds.

**Día’s Current Reach**

Support for El día de los niños/El día de los libros continues to grow. Various organizations have endorsed Día, and local chapters of these organizations are frequent
partners with the library. These early partners include NABE, MANA, the National Latina Organization, the National Latino Children’s Institute (NLCI), the Texas State Library, and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Many state and local governments have passed resolutions in support of Día. In 2005, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) passed a resolution in support of El día de los niños/El día de los libros and agreed to work to support multilingual family literacy programs.

Camila Alire, 2010 president of the American Library Association, recognized that Día has become a “strong and effective model” of family literacy for the Latino community, and her presidential initiative worked to encourage similar and compatible activities within the Ethnic Affiliates of the American Library Association (ALA). Although her family literacy initiative, ALA Family Literacy Focus, advocates for family literacy in conjunction with ALA’s Ethnic Affiliates, it was conceived in the spirit of El día de los niños/El día de los libros, to move family literacy beyond the Latino community. This extension considers the goal of extending family and cultural literacy to all minority communities and to the cultural and linguistic heritage of the majority community.

A survey on serving multicultural populations conducted in 2009 by the Association for Library Service to Children revealed that about one-third of the libraries represented by respondents hosted events or programs for El día de los niños/El día de los libros. Although many librarians recognize that patrons represented a wide range of cultures and ethnic groups, only a few include languages other than Spanish in their programs. There is a need to enhance these programs by adding more Día-related events and programs throughout the year so that every day can be a celebration of bilingual literacy and reading. According to some sources, one in five children younger than the age of five speaks a language other than English at home, and 12 percent of the U.S. population is foreign born. Although many libraries are already providing support for bilingual reading, El día de los niños/El día de los libros has the potential to embrace an even larger community of learners!

Members of ALSC and REFORMA have been leaders in the promotion of Día. As a member of either group, consider what you are doing to support local and regional Día programs. REFORMA’s Southeast chapter is working to expand Día celebrations through its Sara Howrey minigrants, named in honor of one of the region’s most passionate advocates of bilingual literacy. A 2009 survey of ALSC members found that about one-third of the libraries that hosted Día celebrations submitted information on their activities to the ALSC database. Every librarian, but especially ALSC members, can help other libraries develop and enhance their programs by submitting information to the database. Sharing information about your successes will help other librarians develop new programs or expand on what they are already doing. Judy Rohr, of the Topeka and Shawnee County (Kansas) Public Library, said in her application for the 2009 Mora Award, “Like many public libraries, we’ve struggled to discover how best to reach out to our Latino and Spanish-speaking residents. The El día de los niños/El día de los libros program is key in connecting Hispanic and Spanish-speaking residents . . . to their library.”
Notes

2. Freda Mosquera (librarian, Broward County, FL), in conversation with the author, June 30, 2010.
4. Contemporary Authors Online, s.v. “Pat Mora.”
7. Judy Rohr, application for the 2009 Estela and Raúl Mora Award, Topeka and Shawnee County (Kansas) Public Library.
Reaching the Community

It may seem to librarians that everyone must already know about library services and should be jumping on the bandwagon to partake of all we have to offer. The reality is that, while we are passionate about our work, many people don’t have a clue about our programs and services. Keep in mind that our work is multifaceted and touches many different parts of our communities, from the education system to businesses and arts and cultural organizations. We must reach further into the community to entice people through our doors. This involves marketing and publicity. Our efforts to provide services may also involve actually taking our programs to the locations where people are already gathering. The concepts that El día de los niños/El día de los libros embraces are beautifully suited to outreach work, both for bringing services to children and their families and for building partnerships that will enhance library services.

Partnerships

No one can do it all! Partners work together, whereas sponsors or funders provide fiscal support but may not be actively involved in the planning and execution of programs. You will want, and probably need, some of both types of supporters. Create a Día team that includes representatives from various areas of your library, such as the circulation desk staff, but that also includes a wide range of community stakeholders. Include representatives from parent organizations, other community organizations, the education community, and service clubs to put together a great program. Some partnerships may be obvious—like the local schools—but look widely and smartly for others who can help the library achieve its goals.
Look for immigrant resources in your community. Agencies and organizations that are already working with immigrant populations may offer access to the populations you want to reach, space for programs, or translation services, or they may bring their services to the library as part of your celebration. Although Spanish speakers and Hispanic or Latino families may be the largest target group for your Día celebration, don’t overlook other populations of recent immigrants, including Hmong, Russian, and Somali groups.

Religion is important to many families, so look for churches as partners. The church officials are trusted by the community they serve, so their seal of approval for library activities can help alleviate any fears or concerns parents might have about library services. Churches may be willing to include information about El día de los niños/El día de los libros activities in the newsletter, distribute information during services, or participate in literacy activities at the library’s celebration.

Local businesses can provide funding and in-kind resources. They may also help promote your programs by distributing information at the checkout stands, printing library information on paper bags, or providing space for library card sign-ups. Look for businesses that have a common interest in education, children, families, or community service, but don’t overlook businesses that employ people from the community you want to reach or that employ people who need to improve their own literacy skills. Some of the biggest supporters of library literacy programs are businesses run by individuals who themselves struggled to get an education or improve their own lives.

Look for internal partners. This category includes other departments within your library but also other departments in your school district, city, or county that may be able to help. This help might include developing graphics for your program or providing giveaway items, printing materials, and website support. Utility departments within a city or county are often very supportive, for example, and law enforcement agencies frequently want to partner to reach the same segments of the community that the library is serving to foster better relationships.

Media outlets, including print news, television stations, and radio stations, are great partners. Be sure to go beyond the mainstream outlets. Visit bodegas and convenience stores in the neighborhoods you want to reach to see what free newspapers and magazines they offer to customers. Look for community radio stations that reach targeted audiences. In many communities, the public television and radio stations are strong supporters of educational projects. Don’t overlook social-networking media. Bloggers exist in virtually every niche market and interest, so search them out to spread the word about your Día activities.

**Outreach**

Many of the children who are already visiting the public library come from middle-class families and may have parents who grew up with libraries. Although we certainly want such children and their families to continue using the library, we can
be of greater service by reaching out to children who don’t have the opportunity to visit the library on a regular basis. Through outreach efforts, we bring library services and users together. In most cases, our goal is to bring those new users into the library, but in some situations, that may not happen for years. The American Library Association’s Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/olos/) offers assistance in identifying and promoting strategies for achieving equitable access to service. Check out its tool kit “Serving Non-English Speakers in U.S. Public Libraries” (www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/olos/toolkits/nonenglishspeakers.cfm) for tips for successful outreach programs and examples of programs from around the country.

Outreach entails both reaching into the community by taking library programs out of the building and creating opportunities for the library, through its staff, to interact with community members. Depending on the specifics of your community, most libraries should combine both types of outreach for a successful Día program. Although it may not be as immediately obvious for school libraries, outreach efforts can be achieved both by partnering with the school library and other organizations and internally, such as by partnering with upper or lower campuses. Remember that students’ families are part of the school community, and Día activities provide wonderful opportunities to bring parents and younger siblings into the school library.

If the library is already celebrating Día with events in the library, look for ways to reach out to even more families in the community. If the library has not started a Día program, outreach efforts may be the perfect way to get started.

**Marketing and Publicity**

You will need to market and publicize your Día program to reach as many people as possible. Marketing positions the library as a place people look to for the services and programs they want. It involves building good customer relations and strengthening relationships with the media, community organizations, and businesses. Marketing is often about the big picture—building the library as a place that welcomes speakers of other languages and that helps families preserve and celebrate their own cultures. It’s about attracting people to our locations and enticing them to use our services. Marketing is a process that includes planning and research to ensure that services and programs are reaching the target audience. The process includes working out how you will communicate the services you offer, how you know whether the services are still valid, and whether the services you provide are of the quality demanded by the community.

Publicity and media coverage play an important role in marketing the library to the community. Although you may not have the time to put together a full-blown communications plan, take time to consider how you will promote your program and how you can best reach the community you want to bring into the library. Work up a to-do list and think about where you will have the most impact for the resources you have available.
Publicity is the process of disseminating information to gain public interest. It can include a variety of techniques for getting the word out about your “product.” Some publicity efforts require funds to pay for advertising, but there are also a lot of methods that require only some printing and your time. Most libraries already do some publicity, but it may be limited to efforts inside the building.

Keep in mind that it is pretty easy to reach people who are already coming into the library. Not that you won’t want to provide flyers, postcards, bookmarks, and such for them, but you will need to put more effort into connecting with the harder to reach members of your community. Your primary target audience for Día celebrations is people who are unaware of the library or unfamiliar with the services offered and with the library’s commitment to bilingual and cultural literacy. Step out of your comfort zone to look for partners that can connect you with people who are not already library users. Look for opportunities in the targeted neighborhoods to promote the program.

Publicizing your program both is time intensive and requires a sustained effort over time. Be prepared to overcommunicate your plans. People need to hear a message several times for it to be effective, but they also need to be ready to receive the information. The most successful promotion for your programs usually comes from personal contact, but few of us have the time and resources to do a lot of one-on-one networking. Select publicity activities that will make the most of the resources you have. Think creatively and ask for help from staff and the community. Enlist partners who can help spread the word and invite participants.

One of the most successful venues for reaching families is often the local church, mosque, or synagogue. For many families, their religious leaders have a great deal of credibility, and if the priest, pastor, rabbi, or imam supports the program, people will pay attention. Ask to speak at the beginning of services or to meet and greet people at the end of the services. Many churches and synagogues have newsletters or bulletins and might be willing to advertise Día activities (often you can also purchase advertising for a small fee). Many organizations also host annual festivals of their own, so offer to host a library table or provide an outreach storytime or puppet show. You’ll reach a lot of new people!

Check with your local government to find neighborhood associations and other community organizations. Offer to speak at a meeting or ask that publicity be distributed through local newsletters and social-networking sources like Yahoo! groups.

It takes time to hang around public clinics and health-care facilities, but you will reach a lot of members of your target audience by visiting Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinics and other community gathering places. Talk about the library and its programs, emphasizing that no costs are involved and that all are welcome.

Ask your local, county, or state government to issue a proclamation in support of Día. Flo Trujillo, of Farmington Public Library, secured a proclamation from the governor of New Mexico. Other states have regularly issued proclamations, and city councils frequently are willing to do this. Proclamations provide an opportunity for
Sample Proclamation

PROCLAMATION
[Insert name of city, county, or other jurisdiction.]

Whereas, Literacy is defined as the foundation of learning and is essential to the growth and success of all children;

Whereas, Many of the nations of the world celebrate Children’s Day in recognition and celebration of children, the future of our country;

Whereas, Children represent the hopes and dreams of [insert jurisdiction];

Whereas, Children are the center of most families;

Whereas, The importance of reading and education are most often communicated through family members and supported by such public institutions as the [insert name of library] and its literacy programs;

Whereas, Children are the responsibility of all citizens, and all citizens should be encouraged to celebrate the gift that children are to our society;

Now, therefore, be it proclaimed by the [insert offices and/or names of the group issuing the proclamation] that [insert date for the celebration] shall be known as:

“El día de los niños/El día de los libros”

and we urge the people of [insert jurisdiction] to join with all children, families, organizations, businesses, and clubs to observe El día de los niños/El día de los libros with appropriate activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the official seal of [insert name of jurisdiction] to be affixed this [insert day] day of [insert month and year].

Signature of Official
you to take your message about bilingual literacy to a wider audience. Display a copy of the signed proclamation in the library to attract attention and add to the significance of your programming.

Other places to post or distribute information include the following:

- family restaurants and pizza parlors
- farmers’ markets
- Head Start centers and child-care centers
- laundromats and dry-cleaning stores
- local grocery stores, especially smaller bodegas and convenience stores that serve ethnic communities
- recreation centers
- sports facilities
- the mall
- thrift shops and neighborhood shops

The opportunities are endless, but look for places where the people you are trying to reach congregate or visit on a regular basis. This may involve a little detective work, so be sure to ask for suggestions from members of the community you are trying to reach.

Consider hosting a library Día table at the local farmers’ market. People often take a more leisurely pace at markets and view the experience as entertainment in addition to a shopping excursion. Take part in community fairs, festivals, and events, even if all you can do is put flyers in packets or hand out bookmarks. Being visible in the community is part of building essential relationships, and you may meet some potential volunteers or partners.

Postcards can be an effective direct-mail tool. As part of its promotional materials, California’s San Francisco Public Library prepared a postcard that provided basic information about the Día event and its sponsors. Partner groups and the library were able to send these out to constituents and make them available in-house. Postcards are also much less expensive to print than you might expect. If you don’t have local access to a low-cost printer, check out online printers like VistaPrint (www.vistaprint.com) or GotPrint (www.gotprint.com) to buy a thousand or more postcards for less than $100.

It’s also important that you include every member of the staff and all of your library volunteers in the promotion of Día. Provide them with talking points—the message you want them to share—so that they are prepared to promote the program when they engage with patrons or when they are out in the community.

**Using the Media**

Working with the media involves some special skills and can be a challenging part of your efforts to market the library and your Día program. Opportunities for working with the media include print resources, like local newspapers and magazines, as
well as radio and television. The media can also include online resources like blogs and electronic newsletters.

For your Día program, consider developing a logo and a tagline or slogan that can be used to identify the program. Often local advertising firms can help with pro bono services, or a local college or university marketing class may be able to help. The logo can be used in print media and on items prepared for distribution by the library. It brands your project and makes any activities immediately identifiable as a Día event. The official logo includes the April 30 date, but feel free to adapt it to remove or change the date. It is available from the Association for Library Service to Children (www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/initiatives/diadelosninios/dialogos.cfm). Other supporters have created other images, most of which libraries can use. The Texas State Library has a logo, created and donated by James W. Larson for use by any library, available online (www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/projects/ninos/) that resembles papel picado, a Mexican cut-paper craft. The California State Library offers a logo online (www.diacalifornia.org/graphics.html) that simply indicates April as the month for Día.

A tagline is an advertising tool that sums up your brand and the personality of your program in a few catchy, memorable words. The tagline should be short and to the point. It should be something that you can use over and over again, as you will hear it a lot. Taglines are very useful in print media but also for broadcast opportunities, when you may only have sixty or ninety seconds to get your message out and want something memorable to make your point. Examples of taglines include “@ your library,” “Something for everyone,” “Reading matters,” and “Read for life.”
Print Media

Publicity through print media can include press releases, paid and unpaid advertising, stories, and photographs. For Día activities, be sure that you look around your community for newspapers and magazines that reach your intended audience. This may mean that you have to go to a convenience store in the community and look for the periodicals that are sold or given away free there. You can also look for local media in online resources like Newslink (www.newslink.org) or ABYZ News Links (www.abyznewslinks.com/about.htm). Be aware, however, that these sites include only a few ethnic newspapers (and those that are may be listed as “specialty” or be difficult to locate). If your town is too small to have specialty newspapers, look in the largest city near you.

Don’t overlook smaller newspapers and specialty papers, like the Greensheet or the Nickel Saver. Especially in larger communities, these media outlets may welcome your publicity, and their readership may reach new markets for the library. Other helpful alternatives to consider are local business newspapers, college publications, and publications aimed at older adults. Often grandparents will be the ones taking grandchildren to community events.

Ads can be public service listings or paid placements. Paid placements, of course, mean that you have total control over when and where the ad runs, but the costs often take this option out of the library’s plans. Media partners can help with your planning, but you want your ads to run early and often. Depending on the extent of your program, begin advertising about a month out, and repeat the ads at least a week and a day before the start. Remember that monthly publications need material six to eight weeks before the month of publication, so if your Día event will be held at the end of April, you may need to submit publicity as early as February 1. That publicity can be very broad and direct patrons to the library’s website and telephone contact.

Press Releases

Press releases follow a standard format. For most media outlets, they do not need to be elaborate. Most community newspaper editors want “just the facts.” Press releases must, however, include enough information to attract interest and sound newsworthy. What you write may encourage the editor to assign a reporter to cover your program, in which case the reporter will call for more details. In larger communities, the newspaper may list only the basic facts. Follow these tips for successful press releases:

- Use simple sentences, straightforward language, and short paragraphs.
- Put the most important information first, and include additional information further into the press release, to be used if space permits.
Celebrate bilingual literacy at the Diverse City Library

Diverse City, April 2, 2011—The Diverse City Library is hosting a free program to celebrate El día de los niños/El día de los libros on Saturday, April 30, 2011, from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. This daylong celebration supports the library’s family literacy initiative and is the culmination of a daily commitment to link children and books.

Programs, beginning at 11:00 a.m., will feature local children’s authors, storytellers, a multilingual puppet show, music, food, and crafts. Bilingual literacy and an appreciation for all of the languages spoken in our community is “important for a child’s educational and personal achievement and enhances global awareness by linking all children to books, languages, and cultures,” according to the library’s director, Di Verse. “We want all families to enjoy the literary heritage of the world’s great cultures through the books and stories available at the library.”

Support for the program has been provided by [include names of contributors and sponsors]. The program is open to children of all ages and their families. For more information, and a specific schedule of events, check the library’s website, www.diversecitylibrary.com, or call 555-1234.
• Accuracy is important! Double-check spelling and grammar, the date and
time of the event, the address, and the phone number. Ask someone to
proofread your press release.
• Limit the release to one page or less.
• Attach a program flyer, if available, to your press release.
• Include contact information so the media will know how to reach the
program director for more information or how to cover your program in
more detail.
• The first paragraph of a press release is the lede, and it sets the stage for
the message. Make the point quickly, and grab the readers’ attention!
• Add details in the next paragraph and, if possible, include a human-interest
angle or a quote. It is appropriate to “put words” in your director’s mouth
by providing a quote.
• Provide contact information for those who want to know more about the
event.
• Add a headline at the top; date the press release; and if the information is
for immediate publication, say so. “Embargoed” press releases request that
the information not be published before a certain date, but most libraries
do not need to delay publication of information.

In some communities, the local papers welcome guest articles and will run
an article that you write. Often they will also run photographs that you take and
submit. Radio stations reach a lot of people, often when they are something of a
captive audience in their cars. Check out Newslink (www.newslink.org) and ABYZ
News Links (www.abyznewslinks.com/about.htm) for some of the cultural and
non-English-language stations in your area, but keep in mind that not all are listed.

It is absolutely essential that publicity be prepared in the languages represented
in your community. Look for community partners and volunteers who can help
with accurate and appropriate translations. Spanish has different nuances and
vocabulary among the various Spanish-speaking peoples, so if your community is
predominantly Cuban, for example, be sure the translator is conversant in that form
of Spanish. The same is true for many other spoken languages; regional dialects
may seem to separate a culture more than the language joins the people, and people
in the Chinese or Indian community may speak one or more of several languages
that are prevalent in their country of origin. Although some differences are major,
dialect differences may be more of an issue in spoken language. Still, be careful
when translating written material, because idioms and slang can greatly change
your meaning!

**Measuring Success**

As you plan your El día de los niños/El día de los libros programs and activities, it’s
also important to consider how you will know if you accomplish what you set out
to do. Begin by establishing some goals, as discussed in chapter 1 of this book. Look
at the mission statements and goals for El día de los niños/El día de los libros, and restructure them to meet the priorities of your program.

Traditionally, programs are measured on the basis of program inputs, activities, and outputs—what resources were available for the program; what you did with the resources; and what happened, including how many people attended and how many items were distributed or used by attendees. Theoretically, it is considered desirable to have more resources (money, staff, volunteers, and materials) and do more things so that more people participate by attending programs and borrowing or using materials. Often we measure success by looking at how much these factors increased over the previous program, and these measures do give us a snapshot of how things went.

Although attendance and participation are frequently considered the ultimate measure of success, and we all like to see our efforts result in high numbers, outputs are only one aspect of success. More often these days libraries and other nonprofits are evaluating how well the programs and activities served the community. We are looking at what difference the programs made to the targeted audience. To do this, we look at whether the library is doing a good job in reaching the different demographics in the community. We ask whether new communities are coming to the library’s programs and whether new families are using other library services. For example, are books being taken from displays when they include books and materials in languages other than English? The United Way developed outcomes-based evaluation, which many libraries use to evaluate their work. The Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the federal agency that oversees federal library funding, also encourages the use of outcomes-based evaluation as a tool. For more information on using outcomes-based evaluation in libraries, see the IMLS resources at the institute’s website (www.imls.gov/applicants/obe.shtm).

Simply put, outcomes-based evaluation looks at the impact of the services on our patrons. It tries to look at the difference our programs are making in people’s lives. Did our services change someone’s behavior or attitude? Did the participants do something differently because of the library’s program? We find out much of this feedback by requesting it from attendees. This can be in the form of surveys and questionnaires, but librarians can also ask for comments from participants for use in reports, grant applications, letters to sponsors, and publicity for the next year.

For multicultural programming, it can also be helpful to set cultural competency goals for the library. These can be short-term activities that build community relationships or foster ties to cultures not currently part of your Día activities, and that move library services closer to being all-inclusive and inviting to groups that may not currently feel comfortable using the library.
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