

Children's Day, Book Day

Embracing Cultures, Community, and Books through Día

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Children's Day, Book Day. *El día de los niños/El día de los libros. Día* for short. *Día* as an acronym for Diversity in Action. By either name, this commitment to and celebration of multicultural and multilingual literacy is a creative opportunity for libraries to help children build the awareness they need to get along in our increasingly global and diverse world. We will look at ways several libraries are successfully implementing this literacy initiative, which celebrates its twentieth anniversary next year.¹

In 1996, author Pat Mora was inspired by Mexico's Day of the Child to begin a celebration of children that linked to books and literacy. She partnered with REFORMA to develop and promote the concept. Today the *Día* initiative is housed with the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), which hosts a website (<http://dia.ala.org>) of resources and inspiration for celebrating *Día*.²

Día is officially celebrated April 30, although libraries host celebrations throughout the spring. Most importantly, *Día* is a year-round commitment to multicultural and multilingual family literacy.

While *Día* celebrates twenty years next year, several library systems have long incorporated *Día* into their services and programming, including Multnomah County (OR) Library (seventeen years),³ Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) Library (eighteen years),⁴ and Farmington (NM) Public Library (eighteen years).⁵

"Supporting diversity and our changing community is a priority for our library system," said Meryle A. Leonard, outreach manager at Charlotte-Mecklenburg. "We recognize 'diversity in action' through our staff, volunteers, collection, and programs."⁶

Centrally Planned and System-Wide

Día is as much a part of many libraries' program calendars as summer reading. Libraries such as King County (WA) Library System, Multnomah County, and Oakland (CA) Public Library have system-wide, centrally coordinated *Día* celebrations.

Oakland's Supervising Librarian Nina Lindsay said, "We centrally select one to three performers with high-interest programs. While we focus on cultural and language diversity in all our performers year-round, we make sure there is diversity reflected in our *Día* performers. Each library can then select the performer they feel will make the best community event for their location. We provide them with books to give away and a budget for refreshments."⁷

At Multnomah, bins are pre-packed with event supplies and delivered to branches, minimizing the amount of time staff spend preparing for their events, according to Outreach Specialist Ana Schmitt. "Last year we had two interns help coordinate the *Día* centralization and outreach as part of their final capstone project for their MLIS degree, and that was very



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The Arabina Dance Company of San Diego entertained families at San Diego County Library.

helpful as well as a great opportunity for upcoming librarians to get acquainted with this important cultural celebration.”⁸

Librarians at King County begin planning for Día as early as December. “We expand programs for an entire week of celebration, highlighting children’s programs offered in multiple languages or with a multicultural theme,” said Jo Anderson Cavinta, diversity coordinator.⁹

Affirming All Cultures

Día has been a way for libraries to reach their growing Latino communities but it’s a perfect vehicle to share and affirm cultures and communities of any stripe. The El Cajon branch of the San Diego County Library serves the largest settlement of Iraqi immigrants in the United States. Librarian Kristin Ward describes her branch’s Día celebration as “a mixture of Hispanic, Middle Eastern, and American,” complete with a belly dance performance, chips with salsa and hummus, and giveaways of books in English, Spanish, and Arabic.¹⁰

Since 2012, the Center for the Study of Multicultural Children’s Literature (CSMCL) has partnered with ALSC and Pat Mora to recognize Día celebrations with an African American focus. CSMCL grant winner Seminole County (FL) Public Library hosted Orisirisi African Folklore at its five branches for interactive performances of Dress, Drums, and Dance. Preschoolers at Rudisill Regional Library of Tulsa City-County (OK) Library made musical shakers and enjoyed stories and music with local storyteller Aneatra Hawkins.¹¹

All communities, whether homogenous or diverse, benefit from Día. “Our community is not very diverse, but they do love learning about other cultures,” said Theresa McArthur of Passaic

County (NJ) Library System. For her 2015 Día, she planned a Paddington Bear storytime with a focus on aspects of Peruvian culture.¹²

Anecdotally, librarians report positive responses to their Día celebrations, with diverse audiences enjoying programs together and new families becoming regular library users. As celebrations grow and become established, community groups and businesses are taking note. “Each year we have more community agencies contact us to participate,” said Leonard of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, which this year welcomed a local museum as a partner.¹³ Oakland’s year-round focus on children’s access to free books has attracted funders as the library looks to expand its Día.¹⁴

Be Creative and Include the Children

The beauty of celebrating cultures is that there are so many ways to do it. Music, dance, and food are traditional ways of introducing and affirming different cultures.

Elektra Greer of Longmont (CO) Public Library describes a program inspired by multicultural storytelling and the folktale *Stone Soup*; it was funded by a Dollar General Building STEAM with Día grant. “Each month we featured a different soup-themed dinner paired with stories from different areas of the world,” said Greer. Longmont’s Día celebration was the kickoff for the Souptelling series; children crafted bowls that they used to fill with soup at the programs.¹⁵

Some libraries have invited school groups to perform at events or partnered with teachers to display student artwork and writings. In 2014, Puyallup (WA) Public Library featured children’s performances on marimba and drums, and hula and Native American dances. Girl Scouts led craft tables at Multnomah County’s Día events.

Día can help reach older kids. Farmington Public Library worked with a middle school teacher and her students to present Young Author’s Day, in which bookmaking teams presented their works and discussed the illustrations. Greer of Longmont said, “Our teen librarian is a big fan of the #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign. One way our Día celebrations have been evolving is that we reach more tweens and teens.”

Partnerships Strengthen Día

Partnerships and collaborations can strengthen a Día celebration and show community-wide support for diversity. The key to the success of Sioux Center (IA) Public Library’s first ever Día was the Latina Health Coalition. The group helped publicize the event through its networks and assisted with the day’s activities. Sioux Center Arts planned and provided culturally themed art activities, and local businesses donated refreshments. As a result, Sioux Center’s Día drew more than two hundred



Children crafted soup bowls at Longmont (CO) Public Library's Día, a kickoff to their multicultural Souptelling series.

attendees on a \$14 budget and won REFORMA's 2014 Mora Award for exemplary Día celebration.¹⁶

Schools and educators make natural partners. Members of the Puyallup (WA) School District joined Puyallup Public Library's 2014 Día planning committee. Their involvement helped publicize Día in the schools and provided children's performance groups. Teachers were a part of the event, introducing families to new curricular programs in the district.¹⁷

Keeping the Commitment

Día parties are always fun and highly visible. Ideally they should stand as a testament to a library's ongoing commitment to diversity. That can include

- consciously incorporating multicultural/diverse books in booktalks, book groups, storytimes, and readers' advisory;
- including diverse presenters and multicultural themes in year-round programming;
- ensuring that the books in a collection reflect a variety of cultures, realities, and perspectives, including those of a library's specific community; and

- reaching out to cultural agencies and learning more about the needs and interests of their communities.

As a library's Día commitment becomes second nature, the community will benefit. Cindy Frelick is bilingual programmer at Greenville County (SC) Library System, which serves one of the country's fastest-growing Hispanic populations. "I taught in Mexico for over twenty years, so I know the importance of Día," she said. "I was pleased to see that ALA/REFORMA encouraged libraries to celebrate the date any way they can."¹⁸

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