

Welcoming to All

Latinx Culture and Programming: Notes from Latinx Librarians

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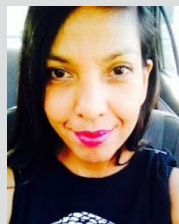
ALSC prioritizes children's services and programming to diverse communities. And while ALSC provides guidelines and tangible resources, children's librarians are still often confronted with not only actualizing library services that support our most vulnerable communities, but also ensuring that our efforts empower our communities and do not result in perpetuating recursive barriers to access.

But what do we mean by diversity exactly? What are the subtexts and intentions informing what we call "diversity"? Why must we resist "diversity" becoming an empty signifier, as Sandra Rios Balderrama's prescient 2000 essay, "This Trend Called Diversity," emphasized. Indeed, what composes the

everyday work of librarians that embraces "the risk, ambiguities, and tension [and] expenditure of their time . . . [when we] put into practice this value called diversity"?

Moreover, how can we ensure that these guidelines and resources bring about vital and meaningful community engagement? How might we attend to specific ways of thinking about diversity without losing sight of how our library service for children can also be capacious in attending to and welcoming all?

This article attempts to answer these important questions by examining what diversity looks like through the lens of



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He is part of LAPL's internal Spanish Language Translations committee. He is the current Technology Chair for REFORMA and a co-chair of California Library Association's Latino Services Interest Group. **Maria F. Estrella**, MLIS, is a Dyad Public Services Manager for the Cleveland Public Library Garden Valley and Woodland branches. She has over twenty years of library experience working in an urban library system and was a Children's Librarian and Youth Services Subject Department Librarian for eight years. Maria served on the 2016 ALSC/REFORMA Pura Belpré Book Award Committee, the ALSC 2019 Excellence in Early Learning Digital Media Committee, 2021 Coretta Scott King Book Awards Jury, and is currently the Chair of REFORMA's Children's and Young Adult Services Committee (CAYASC). **Lettycia Terrones** is a doctoral student in Information Sciences and Latina/o Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she researches picturebooks and children's literature by and about Latinx peoples. Lettycia is a student representative of the American Studies Association (ASA), a member of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS), Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC), and REFORMA's Children's & Young Adult Services Committee (CAYASC). She has served on the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award and Pura Belpré Award committees and currently reviews for *The Horn Book Magazine*. She will serve on the Coretta Scott King Awards Jury for the 2020–22 term.

children's library services that center Latinx communities. Cristina Mitra, Edwin Rodarte, and Maria Estrella, librarians in three major public library systems, describe how their libraries are responding to the wide cultural diversity found within Latinx communities by creating tangible and engaging programs for children and families.

Mitra, a member of REFORMA's Children's and Young Adult Services Committee (CAYASC), walks us through her library's empowering Latinx cultural programming. She describes a process for engaging library staff in learning about the geographic, linguistic, and ethnic diversity among Latinx peoples in the Bay Area.

Rodarte of Los Angeles Public Library outlines a new system-wide Spanish-language translation initiative that offers communication support for local branch children's programming. In addition, he reports on the wildly successful Los Angeles Libros Festival, a free, bilingual, family-friendly book festival, which featured many youth literature authors and illustrators.

Estrella, in her role as the chair of REFORMA's Children's and Young Adult Services Committee, describes culturally specific Latinx children's programming that promotes cultural awareness and participation across sectors, from library staff to patrons and the wider community.

"¡VIVA!" at SFPL

Considering the growing population of Latinx communities throughout the United States, many children's librarians might be wondering how to expand on programming that was previously targeted to certain demographics. How might we empower staff of diverse heritages to initiate and offer Latinx programs? What resources are available to support system-wide Latinx programming even if this demographic may not necessarily reflect the majority population of our communities? How do we get staff to step outside our perceived service areas?

San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) has been on a deliberate path to answer these very questions and unite our library system across Latinx cultural programming. One source of pride is ¡VIVA!—an annual celebration of Latino Hispanic heritage, cultures, and traditions. The noun *viva* not only connotes joy and celebration, it literally also means "cheer." These are the very characteristics that we hoped to emanate in our Latinx programming.

¡VIVA! first launched in 2013 with more than fifty system-wide thematic programs for youth and adults. Since then, we have seen the interest and confidence of our librarians increase to include programming in every neighborhood of San Francisco, whether or not a numerically significant Latinx or Spanish-speaking population resides there. Whereas in the past, Latinx-specific programming was conducted

primarily during Latino Heritage Month in branches with primarily Latinx and Spanish-speaking populations, ¡VIVA! now engages the entire San Francisco community. From September through early November, ¡VIVA! sustained a lively citywide extravaganza of almost 150 programs for all ages in every neighborhood in San Francisco, at each of our twenty-eight locations.

The impulse for creating ¡VIVA! emerged from the work of our Community Programs & Partnerships (CPP)—a newer unit within our system instrumental in our ability to advance our cultural programming. A committed staff that includes SFPL's youth services manager and youth services coordinators provide training and technical support to develop and deliver cultural programming at each of our branches. In addition, SFPL has committed to a dedicated budget for every one of our twenty-seven branches and our main library to host one youth ¡VIVA! program. These combined efforts have tripled our ¡VIVA! event offerings since 2013.

The CPP unit oversees the Cultural Awareness Committee, which brings together SFPL's strongest programmers from many different points of service, including those with expertise for affinity groups, which include LGBTQIA focus, service to the African American community, and more. With so many stakeholders at the table, we are able to generate enthusiasm from many angles within our large urban library system.

Additionally, the Youth Services team has taken conscious steps toward inclusion of all staff to learn about culturally authentic Latinx programming. For example, the Youth Services team hosted a training in 2017 with local Bay Area artist Anita de Lucio, whose Día de los Muertos altar programs have been part of SFPL for more than a decade.

To empower staff, she trained thirty-five youth services librarians in how to host a community altar-making workshop with cultural competence. In the past, only three branch locations would typically host Día de los Muertos programs. Anita's training empowered seventeen locations to host a program. In assessing our Latinx cultural competence training, like Anita's workshop, we found our staff eager to offer cultural programs. Empowering them with the skills to do so with confidence, has made all the difference.

As we reflect on the successes of our past, we continually look to the future. What lies ahead for SFPL is a desire to continually expand culturally specific programming, particularly in increased representation of Central American, South American, and Caribbean peoples and cultures. Generally speaking, our librarians are comfortable offering programs rooted in Mexican culture. However, we want our staff and patrons to understand the complexity and diversity within Latinx communities and its diversity in terms of history, language, culture and traditions. ¡VIVA! opens a space for us to build upon our existing strengths in culturally specific programming and make room for all patrons in our community.

Comprehensive Approaches at LAPL

The Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) serves the largest and most diverse urban population of any library in the nation. As such, its programs have to reflect the diversity in its community. With a population of more than 48 percent Latino and with a Spanish-speaking population of 42.6 percent according to the American Community Survey, services to Latinos and the Spanish-speaking is a priority.²

As such, LAPL has responded to the literacy and information needs of its Latinx communities by creating interconnecting and collaborative efforts across its departments to help promote and expand services.

The first arm of this collaborative vision involved creating an Internal Spanish Language Translations Team. Supported by a bilingual language pay differential, this internal team of librarians are responsible for producing and distributing systemwide Spanish-language translations as well as original content in Spanish. The team fulfills the need to provide high-quality, consistent, and accurate information in the Spanish language to LAPL's library users.

The team is composed of librarians who, like our patrons, identify as Latinx and who come from a variety of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. The Latinx diversity of the team enriches the often subtle and complex work involved in translation and content production. The Translations Team creates original content in Spanish as well as translates policies, flyers, forms, brochures, webpages, and more for the entire system to ensure standardization and accuracy as well as cultural relevance.

The team also reviews translations and advertisements created by contractors for the library. In this way, the Spanish Language Translations Team helps LAPL reach its Spanish-speaking patrons and fulfill its mission to enrich, educate, and empower every individual in their city's diverse communities.

Spanish-Language Social Media and Content Creation

LAPL has established a dedicated Spanish-language Twitter account to promote and normalize Spanish and bilingual language events at the library. Additionally, staff creates Spanish-language content via quirky and personal blog posts, music playlists, and booklists. This rich social media showcases and distributes new book and material titles and staff picks monthly, both internally and via published content on LAPL's website.

Bilingual Outreach Librarians

Los Angeles is known for its culturally rich and ethnically specific neighborhoods. LAPL's Bilingual Outreach Librarians (BOLs) keep the pulse of these unique and varied

neighborhoods attending to the specific needs of these diverse communities. A team of five dedicated bilingual librarians span the wide geographic service areas of Los Angeles, providing outreach to Spanish-speaking communities via events, programs, and partnerships. Each BOL is assigned to a particular region of the city and works with branch libraries in each of LAPL's regions to better understand and communicate with their local community.

Los Angeles Libros Festival

A recent addition to LAPL's bilingual programming is the LA Libros Festival, a literary festival at the Central Library that celebrates books and culture "*en dos idiomas*." Celebrating oral and written traditions, the festival featured stories and music from Latin America—including México, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cuba, Colombia—and the United States. Through a high-quality interdisciplinary program, the day-long festival created an inclusive cultural space that engaged and inspired current and future generations of bilingual Angelenos. This program was a partnership with organizations such as REFORMA and LA Librería, a local Spanish-language children's bookstore, and included staff from across the library system.

REFORMA's Children in Crisis Project

Opportunities to impact the Los Angeles community come in many ways. Most recently, members of REFORMA's Los Angeles chapter have expanded their work with the Children in Crisis project. As part of both REFORMA and LAPL, I had the privilege to volunteer as an interpreter with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), helping attorneys communicate with children and teens seeking asylum or immigration assistance, many of whom had been detained at the border. This sort of experience brings such fulfillment and tells the story of the work and impact we can have in our communities if we put our skills and resources to good use. Overall, LAPL strives to reflect and welcome the best of our community.

REFORMA's CAYACS Recommendations for Latinx Children's Programming

From its inception, REFORMA has centered the important role youth librarians play in cultivating lifelong learning opportunities for children, teens, and families. The work of its Children's and Young Adult Services Committee (CAYASC) continues to connect literacy and education to library services that promote cultural awareness and understanding of the ethnic, geographic, and cultural diversity within the Latinx community. María Estrella, chair of CAYASC, offers the following recommendations to provide youth librarians with ideas to successfully facilitate culturally competent programs while building strong alliances in the neighborhoods they serve and instill pride.

Parranda Navideña en la Biblioteca

A *parranda* is a Puerto Rican social event that features traditional holiday music and food during the holiday season. To launch a *parranda*, consider how your public library system could partner with a local traditional music group and cater traditional foods from a neighborhood Puerto Rican restaurant or bakery. Consider where Puerto Rican communities live in proximity to your library and create marketing and outreach materials to promote the *parranda* as a popular family event.

During the event, the library system could informally update families of the various services the library system provides for Spanish-speaking residents, such as a bilingual collection for all ages (book displays), English as a Second Language classes, or a language learning database. It could also provide a safe environment where new residents who fear or mistrust public institutions could connect to the public library as a place that changes people's lives and forms an important foundation for their future success.

Pintar Maravillas

Many established library programs can be made more welcoming and culturally specific. Inspired by the popular Paint Nite events, *Pintar Maravillas* has a Latinx flavor. The program allows young library patrons of any skill level to recreate beautiful paintings inspired by a famous Latinx or Spanish artist, such as Frida Kahlo, Pablo Picasso, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Diego Rivera, Francisco Goya, Salvador Dali, and Fernando Botero. A book display of the famous painters during the event can further spark interest. For the display, consider award-winning picturebooks created by Latinx and African American authors and illustrators such as Yuyi Morales's *Viva Frida* (2014), Javaka Steptoe's *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat* (2016), or Duncan Tonatiuh's *Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calaveras* (2015).

References

1. Sandra Ríos-Balderrama, "This Trend Called Diversity," *Library Trends* 49, no. 1 (2000): 194–214.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2013–17 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, "Language Spoken At Home," 2017,

Latinx Superhero Showcase

Free Comic Book Day or any day is perfect for introducing young participants to Latinx superheroes, such as White Tiger (Hector Ayala), Firebird (Bonita Juarez), Miss America (America Chavez), and Miles Morales (Spider-Man). Ricardo Padilla and Javier Hernandez, cofounders of the Latino Comics Expo, maintain a content-rich Twitter page (@LatinoComicsExpo) that draws Latinx comics creators, fans, and nonprofit arts, writing, and mentoring organizations such as @DSTLArts (Develop Skills & Transcend Limits through the Arts) around comics and zine-making. The Latino Comics Expo is organizing its 2020 events, with updates listed on their website <http://latinocomicsexpo.com>. Find more inspiration and history about Latinx contributions to comics in literary scholar Frederick Luis Aldama's book, *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics* (2017).

Bilingual Storytime

Storytime is conducted primarily in English and has bilingual (Spanish/English) nursery rhymes, songs, and books. Children ages five and younger are invited to attend with their caregivers, with sessions usually lasting approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes. Librarians interested in starting this type of program can explore these basic resources:

1. *Diez Deditos and Other Play Rhymes and Action Songs from Latin America* (Puffin, 2002) by Jose-Luis Orozco for traditional songs in Spanish to incorporate into programs.
2. ALSC's Pura Belpré Book Award homepage (www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal) for culturally authentic texts in English and Spanish.
3. Digital media such as Canticos Apps (<https://canticosworld.com/apps>), which are a fun way to introduce children to early literacy concepts like numbers and shapes in two languages.
4. *Once Upon a Cuento: Bilingual Storytimes in English and Spanish* (ALA Editions, 2016) by Jamie Campbell Naidoo and Katie Scherrer for an overview of bilingual storytime. &

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?g=1600000US0644000&tid=ACST5Y2017.S1601&q=S1601>.