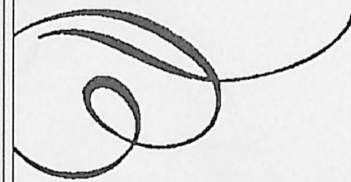# WHERE CULTURAL AND INFORMATION LITERACY MEET: SERVING SPANISH-SPEAKING LIBRARY USERS IN INDIANA

by Shelly Naylor and Susan M. Frey

INTRODUCTION

The *2000 US Census Report* shows a dramatic increase in the Latino population in the state of Indiana. From 1990 to 2000 this population grew from 1.8 to 3.5 percent (http://factfinder.census.gov). Drawing from the census report, as well as local studies, Robert Aponte, Associate Professor of Sociology from IUPUI, published an eye-opening statistical report on Latino growth trends in Indiana that makes a consequential statement for Indiana libraries: *Latinos want to stay.* The conventional image of the transitory migrant worker is being replaced by permanent residents who are becoming part of Indiana's diverse ethnic tapestry (Aponte, p.2). Because the population in Indiana is changing, libraries need to adapt to this rapidly growing group of patrons. But who are the Latinos and what are their information needs? Fundamental to serving a Latino community is understanding that they are, especially in Indiana, an at-risk community. Why Indiana libraries should strive to serve this population is best expressed in the American Library Association's *Final Report* of the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy:

> It is unfortunate that the very people who most need the empowerment inherent in being information literate are the least likely to have learning experiences which will promote these abilities. Minority and at-risk students, illiterate adults, people with English as a second language, and economically disadvantaged people are among those most likely to lack access to the information that can improve their situations. Most are not even aware of the potential help that is available to them. Libraries, which provide the best access point to information for most U.S. citizens, are left un-tapped by those who most need help to improve their quality of life. (http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepapers/presidential.htm).

These words are especially relevant to the non-English speaking, first-generation Latino immigrant who rarely ventures into the library and is thus near-invisible to the librarian.

WHO ARE THE LATINOS?

Latinos, or Hispanics, are defined by the US Census Bureau as people whose "...origins are from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central or South America, the Dominican Republic or people identifying themselves generally as Spanish [or] Spanish-American"(http://factfinder.census.gov). This definition is useful, but can mislead non-Spanish speaking peoples to view the Latinos as one, large community within the U.S. This is not the case. Instead each Latino subgroup, usually defined by country of origin, has its own distinct characteristics.

Cubans, or Cuban-Americans, account for 5 percent of all US Latinos (Estrada, p. 7). The highest concentrations of Cubans reside in Florida, the state to which many of them first fled to escape the rise of Fidel Castro (p. 7). According to U.S. Census data, Cubans are an older population with a median age of 38.7 and their educational and professional progress places them on an equal socioeconomic level as many non-Latino Americans (p. 7). Thus they are the most affluent and well-educated Latino subgroup and are considered, for US Latinos, to be the American success story ("Bad economic news for Hispanics," p. A5). Latinos of Puerto Rican origin number 12.7 percent of the total US Latino population (Estrada, p. 7). These Latinos, or *Borinqueños*, primarily reside in the northeastern states with the largest concentration in the New York City area. Puerto Rico is a US territory, so unlike other Latinos, Puerto Ricans have U.S. citizenship from birth. They are a young population who suffer from high drop-out and unemployment rates. Unfortunately, 38 percent of them live below the poverty level (*Current Population Reports*, p. 7).

Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, or Chicanos are the largest U.S. Latino subgroup, comprising almost 60 percent of the U.S. Latino population (Cuesta, p. 26). Most Chicanos live in the southwestern states: California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. However, they can also be found in the Midwest states such as Indiana. Chicanos are a young population with a median age of 23.9 (Estrada, p. 8). They are the least

educated of the subgroups. Only 44.6 percent of Chicano adults aged 25 and over have completed high school (http://factfinder.census.gov). Latinos from Central and South America are the newest Latino subgroup to immigrate into the U.S. These people make up about 12 percent of the U.S. Latino population. Immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua have settled in places like California, while refugees from Central and South American countries have tended to settle on the U.S. eastern seaboard in places like Boston and Miami (Estrada, p. 9) Although sensitivity to the wide diversity of Latino subgroups cannot be overestimated, for Indiana librarians it is important to remember that the largest Latino subgroup in this state is the Chicano (Aponte, p.3). For the uninitiated, becoming acquainted with the Chicano experience is not difficult. Resources such as, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, by Rodolfo Acuña, *Chicanas and Chicanos in Contemporary Society*, by Roberto Moreno De Anda, and the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans are good places to start.

LITERACY LEVELS OF LATINOS

The sudden influx of Latinos migrating to Indiana in the last half of the 1990's directly relates to the level of English language literacy among Latinos. Although their children and grandchildren will speak and read English fluently, first-generation immigrants have limited English proficiency (Nahirny and Fishman, 1996). Demographic statistics show that the majority of Latinos in Indiana are first-generation, suggesting low English literacy levels. The *2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy* (NAAL) indicates that literacy rates in the U.S. Latino population are falling. NAAL tested the ability of 19,714 adults, ages sixteen and older living in households or prisons, to complete three types of English literacy tasks: prose, document, and quantitative. Of the three literacy types measured, Latinos measured 44 percent below basic prose literacy level; 36 percent below document literacy level; and 50 percent below basic quantitative literacy level as compared to U.S norms (NAAL, 2003). Literacy levels since the last NAAL assessment in 1992 have increased 9 percentage points in the category of below basic prose literacy and 8 percentage points in below basic document literacy while qualitative literacy levels remained the same between 1992 and 2003 (NAAL, 2003).

For Indiana librarians with a growing Latino population, demographic and literacy statistics help identify collection development areas and library services that are specific to the needs of the first-generation Latino immigrant. Census and literacy statistics can and should be supplemented by a local community analysis. Luckily, much of the groundwork

in identifying resources to improve library services to Latinos has been tackled by informational professionals working in large metropolitan areas serving this population. Many libraries have documented their experiences in creating library services to an immigrant population. In Güereña's essay *Community Analysis and Needs Assessment*, he encourages librarians to gather data from community surveys and social agencies in order to understand local characteristics and needs (p. 18). In Jon Sundell's article on the Forsyth County Public Library's response to its growing Latino population, he adds churches as an important source to be considered in a local analysis (p. 155). Indiana librarians can save valuable time in devising methods of acquainting themselves with their Latino population by studying these examples.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

When the unique needs and cultural variations of the Latino community are identified, a relevant Spanish language collection can be developed. A good place to start is to revisit the library's existing collection development policy and delineate guidelines for acquiring, selecting, and withdrawing Spanish language materials. An important reference document to consult while writing a collection development policy and building a Spanish language collection is the *Guidelines for Library Services to Hispanics*, (1988), prepared by the Library Services to the Spanish Speaking Committee, Reference and Adult Services Division, American Library Association. Part 2.2 in the guidelines states that, "(m)aterials selected should reflect the particular linguistic characteristics of the community served. They should also include Standard Spanish language titles from Spain and other Hispanic cultures" (http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotools/referenceguide/guidelineslibrary.htm).

Since the majority of Latinos in Indiana are ethnically Mexican, consideration should be given to books that reflect their heritage, experience, and literary contributions. It is advisable to pay particular attention to contemporary Mexican-American authors publishing in the U.S. Trujillo and Chavez in *Collection Development on the Mexican American Experience* state, "...assume that both the Mexican American public and the public at large do have an interest in this particular history and creative expression as well as public issues effecting this population" (p. 78). The authors note academic libraries that have reputable Chicano studies collections. One of the cited libraries, The Chicano Studies Library at UC Berkeley, which has been incorporated into the Ethnic Studies Library, publishes the *Chicano Database* on CD-ROM. This resource is a highly recommended, comprehensive bibliographic resource on Chicano studies. Parts of the database, including *Chicano Periodical Index*, 1967-1988; the

Chicano Index; Arte Chicano: An Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Art, 1965-1981; and *Chicano Anthology Index* may be purchased in print. Browsing the virtual sites of libraries with reputable Chicano studies collections offers the opportunity to subscribe to newsletters and view publication lists that will assist with collection management of Chicano literature in the social sciences and humanities. Subscribing to selection aids and magazines such as *Criticas* is recommended in building a collection of popular titles including *fotonovelas, encanto romances,* and *bolsilibros.* Pay particular attention to the results of your user surveys and to titles and content areas that have been popular in other libraries serving large Latino populations (Reid, p. 15). In particular, acquire books and reference material that a first-generation Latino can use, such as fact, culture, health books, picture and bilingual dictionaries, and ESL materials.

In addition to these resources, it is beneficial to consult any local literacy councils and find out if they maintain reading lists of materials that meet the needs of a beginning adult reader. Networking with teachers, staff from community health, church, and social organizations and librarians who have or are just beginning to build a Spanish language collection will afford opportunities to share experiences and insights. Joining the discussion groups offered by some of the most active and reputable voices in Latino librarianship: the American Library Association (ALA) and its affiliate, REFORMA, is helpful. Links, bibliographies, discussion lists, and many other valuable resources can be accessed at both ALA's and REFORMA's national websites. REFORMA's Midwest chapter, serving Indiana, Wisconsin, and Illinois, provides access to local Listservs and workshops.

It's important to remember that creating a dynamic Spanish language collection takes commitment and time. Clearly, networking is part of this process and creating partnerships with publishers will be no exception. Publishers Weekly reported in a 2005 article that Spanish language titles have increased by a third since the 2000 census (Danford and Lopez, p. 28). According to the article, U.S. publishers are staking their claim in the market. Foreign publishers are holding their own, and wholesalers are also responding to the demand for Spanish titles. Random House's *Mandadori Imprint* is a leader amongst U.S. publishing and well known wholesalers like Baker and Taylor, who recently acquired *Libros sin Fronteras*, are responding to the Latino market (pp. 28-30). While growth in Spanish language publishing is promising, it's worth noting that Spanish language title statistics can be misleading. Many titles are translations of popular American works. Consideration should also be made as to whether titles are available in both Spanish and English. Beware of stereotypical thinking: Not all Latinos are first-genera-

tion immigrants. Latinos who are bilingual or who speak only English will benefit from English-language material focusing on the Latino experience as well.

As many librarians have discovered, finding suitable titles that are only available outside the U.S., poses obstacles such as book supply and the variation in dialect between Spain, Mexico, and Latin American countries. It is both economical and rewarding to establish relationships with distributors abroad. Many librarians meet distributors by attending large book fairs such as BookExpo America and the Guadalajara International Book Fair. Scheliga Carnesí and Fiol comment in their article concerning the Queens Library's services to immigrants that "(t)he large number of materials displayed at the [International Book] Fair give us a much bigger picture of what is being published, not only in Mexico but in other countries in Latin America, and Spain as well" (p. 139).

LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT

Creating a library environment that Latinos find welcoming and useful is a challenging and ongoing process. Staff and administration will have to make decisions about where the Spanish collection is located, including whether to separate children, young adult, and adult collections. There is no one right way to handle such decisions. Locating the entire Spanish-language collection in one area might be conducive to family browsing, but some adult material, such as many *fotonovelas*, are not appropriate for children. The importance of effective signage is easy to overlook. Evaluating library signage from the perspective of someone who does not know English can be difficult for English speakers. Upon entering, how will a Spanish speaker know where to go for reference, circulation, and the Spanish collection? Are there signs in Spanish that greet and direct Spanish speakers? Do existing Spanish-language signs address people in formal or informal Spanish? The SOL (*Spanish in Our Libraries*) website offers resources and suggestions for effective signage (http://www.sol-plus.net/plus/signs.htm). Signage is a question that can be addressed in a community survey.

REFERENCE AND OUTREACH

Accordingly, a concerted effort should be made to train staff in basic library vocabulary and to hire bilingual and culturally sensitive employees. Is the library prepared to offer instruction and reference services in Spanish? On a more basic level, can staff use Spanish vocabulary to provide simple answers to directional questions? Does the library budget money for staff training in basic Spanish? Websites like REFORMA's and SOL offer library vocabulary lists that staff can use to learn common phrases and words. Besides face-to-face

communication, how familiar is staff with community resources to the Latinos? Such questions underscore how important it is to prepare staff *before* marketing services or planning programs.

In *Library Services to Latinos*, Ben Ocón's article includes an appendix with ten steps to effective outreach to the Latino community. These steps provide an excellent starting point for librarians in accessing their current services. As Ocón suggests, every facet of library service needs to be evaluated against Latino cultural practices and information needs in order to create an accommodating environment. Marketing, programming, and using technology to reach out to Latinos will require just as much time and dedication as building a strong Spanish language collection. Scheliga Carnesí and Fiol comment about the joys of serving immigrant populations, underscoring the library's potential value to the Latino community: "Our newest Americans and their children will see public libraries as an institution that offers as much enrichment to them as to other groups in the community" (p. 141). The opportunity now exists for librarians to become community leaders, creating collections, programs, and services that accommodate the information needs of Latinos in Indiana.

RESOURCES

Following is a select list of recommended resources on serving a Latino community:

ASSOCIATIONS

American Library Association [website]. http//www.ala.org

Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans [website]. http://www.aamainc.us

Güereña, S, & Erazo, E. (2000). Latinos and librarianship. In K. McCook (Ed.) *Library trends: Ethnic diversity in library and information science.* (pp. 138-181). Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

REFORMA [website]. http://www.reforma.org/

BOOK FAIRS

BookExpo America [website]. http://www.bookexpoamerica.com

Guadalajara International Book Fair [website]. http://www.fil.com.mx/ingles/i_index.asp

Latino Book and Family Festival [website]. http://www.latinobookfestival.com/home/index.htm

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

Chicano Database. RLG [database]. http://www.rlg.org/en/page.php?Page_ID=176

Chicano Resource Center, East Los Angeles Library [website]. http://www.colapublib.org/libs/eastla/chicano.html

Chicano Studies Collection, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley [website]. http://eslibrary.berkeley.edu/csc.htm

Culture, Health, and Literacy Materials: Organizations and Agencies, Library Journal [website]. http://www.worlded.org/us/health/docs/Culture/matl_orgs.html

Directorio de productos y servicios bibliotecarios (Directory of library products & services) Servicios para bibliotecas y servicios bibliotecarios [website]. http://miserviciodebiblioteca.org/services/directoryofproducts.cfm

Garcia, J. (1996). *Mexicans in the Midwest*, 1900-1932. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Linguistic and Literature Publishers, University of Notre Dame [website]. http://www.nd.edu/~colldev/subjects/spanish/series.pdf#search=' spanish%20publishers%20alfaguara

Nordín Valdéz, D. (2000). *Barrios norteño: St. Paul and Midwestern communities in the twentieth century.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Publishers and booksellers: Latin American and Spanish publishers, Mid-Hudson Library System [website]. http://www.midhudson.org/collection/non_english/Librarian_toolkit_IMLS/publishers.htm

REFORMA, (2004). *SALSA de Topicos, Subjects in SALSA: Spanish and Latin American subject access* [2 compact discs]. La Crescenta, CA: Content Management Corp, 2004.

Romance languages & literatures (list of Spanish publishers), Harvard University [website]. http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~rll/resources/spanish/publishers.html

Spanish-language literary awards for adult and children's books, Criticas [website]. http://www.criticasmagazine.com/article/CA6333044.html

Trujillo, Roberto G. & Linda Chávez. (1990). Collection development on the Mexican American experience. In S. Güereña (Ed.), *Latino Librarianship a hand book for professionals* (pp. 78-90). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Wu, L, & Shapiro, S. (2003). *Federal services for constituents available in Spanish: Selected sources.* Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service. http://www.thememoryhole.org/crs/RL31732.pdf

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Acuña, R. (2000). *Occupied America: A history of Chicanos.* New York: Longman.

De Anda, R. (2004). *Chicanos and Chicanos in contemporary society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Julian Samora Research Institute [website]. http://www.jsri.msu.edu/

National assessment of adult literacy, National Center for Education Statistics [website]. http://nces.ed.gov/naal/

Pew Hispanic Center [website]. http://pewhispanic.org/

MANUALS

Chickering-Moller, S. (2001). *Library service to Spanish speaking patrons: A practical guide*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Güereña, S. (Ed.). (2000). *Library services to Latinos*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Güereña, S. (1990). *Latino librarianship: A handbook for professionals*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Ocón, B. (2000). Effective outreach strategies to the Latino community: A paradigm for public libraries. In S. Güereña (Ed.), *Library services to Latinos: An anthology* (pp. 183-193). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Pavon, A., & de Cortés, G. (2004). *Day of the Dead/All Soul's Day: honoring families past and present through cultural programming and genealogy* [2 compact discs]. La Crescenta, CA: Content Management Corp.

Scheliga Carnesí, M. & Fiol, M. A. (2000). Queens Library's New Americans program: 23 years of services to immigrants. In S. Güereña (Ed.), *Library services to Latinos: An anthology* (pp. 133-142). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Spanish Resources, Colorado Department of Education [website]. http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/technology/spanish.htm

Sundell, J. (2000). Library service to Hispanic immigrants of Forsyth County, North Carolina: Community collaboration. In S. Güereña, (Ed.), *Library services to latinos: An anthology* (pp. 143-168). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

VOCABULARY

Jimenez, P. (2004). *Survival Spanish for library staff* [1 compact disc]. San Mateo, CA: Infopeople.

Pilarte, A. & Rautert, T. (1995). *Quick communications in Spanish: a customer service Spanish crash course for library* [1 cassette tape]. Stockton, CA: T.I.M.E. Consultants.

White, M. (2003). *Useful Spanish phrases for librarians* [1 compact disc]. Janesville, WI: Arrowhead Library System.

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Danford, N., & Lopez, A. (2005, January 17). How do you say 'growing pains' in Spanish? *Publishers Weekly, 252*, 28-32.

Estrada, E. (1990). Changing Latino demographics and American libraries. In S. Güereña (Ed.), *Latino librarianship: A handbook for professionals* (pp. 1-15). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Güereña, S. (1990). Community analysis and needs assessment. In S. Güereña (Ed.), *Latino librarianship: A handbook for professionals* (pp. 17-23). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

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Nahirny, V., & Fishman, J. (1996). American immigrating groups: Ethnic identification and the problem of generations (pp. 266-281). In W. Sollors (Ed.), *Theories of ethnicity: A classical reader*. New York: NYU Press.

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Reid, C. (2002, May 27). Libraries growing Spanish-Language collections. *Publishers Weekly, 249*, 15.

Scheliga, Carnesi., & Fiol, A. (2000). Queens Library's new Americans programs: 23 years of services to immigrants. In S. Güereña (Ed.), *Library services to Latinos: An anthology* (pp. 133-142). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

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School is the place where our information habits are formed, yet most of us graduate ill equipped to handle the avalanche of new information that we will have to continuously acquire. We suffer from information anxiety primarily because of the way that we were, or were not, taught to learn. (p. 150).

The greatest crisis facing modern civilization is going to be how to transform information into structured knowledge (Carlos Fuentes, p. 194).

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