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Celebrating more than a decade of Día in Texas!

El día de los niños/El día de los libros seems to have been a grassroots project that has grown to a nationally recognized program. Please tell us about the journey from your inspiration for El día de los niños/El día de los libros to its implementation.

I wrote an article a while back titled, "Zapped by Día." In brief, the idea came to me from above in 1996 while I was visiting the University of Arizona in Tucson. A few minutes later, I was enjoying lunch with a group that included members of Tucson's REFORMA chapter who quickly agreed to start an annual celebration in April of 1997. Celebrations were also held in El Paso and Santa Fe that year. A longer version of Día's history is at http://www.patmora.com/Día/Día_history.htm [11]. Día, now housed at the American Library Association, would not have grown and flourished without REFORMA members nationally.

Día has had many supporters as it has grown. Are there certain individuals you see as champions for the project?

Oralia Garza de Cortés was Día's early champion within REFORMA. Other key people are also referenced in the history link above. I'm grateful to TLA and its Executive Director, Pat Smith for their early and steady support. Rose Treviño and Elva Garza have also been active Día supporters. I'm also deeply grateful to all the committed librarians and teachers not mentioned in my brief history and who I may never have met but who worked and work to promote this family literacy initiative in their community and state.

What are your proudest moments for Día?

There have been many, many happy moments listening to librarians talk about their excitement and plans for Día, and happy moments seeing all kinds of families celebrating children, enjoying books and sometimes making crafts. Often, music and food to help create a festive feeling. You know how creative librarians and teachers can be. Certainly the informal e-committee I formed early-on to advise me on developing Día and I were pleased when Malore Brown, then Executive Director of ALSC, informed us that her Board had asked her to meet with us and offer to be Día's national home.

Would you like to see more programming specifically celebrating/targeting teens?

Because research suggests that if children aren't active readers by the third grade, their chances of academic success diminish, we have emphasized Día celebrations targeted at elementary school students and their families. It's very exciting when middle and high school students become literacy advocates and help plan Día events and perhaps read their own writing as well as books to younger children, help with craft activities, etc. This week, for example, I was with Farmington librarian Flo Trujillo who's working to spread Día throughout New Mexico, both at public libraries and in after school programs. She's having a workshop for teens on planning their own poetry slam which will be presented as part of Día at the library and at a local book store café. Youth storytellers who have learned stories from their elders also do presentations for children and families.

Of course, I'm also happy when colleges and universities have Día events on their campuses, viewing Día as a service learning opportunity, etc.

I recently read an article emphasizing the role of adult males in modeling a love of reading in teen boys. How do you see the role of male caregivers, especially fathers, in developing and nurturing a sense of "bookjoy" in young readers, especially boys? Do you think that teen boys are a tougher audience to reach?

It's so important that children hear family stories, have home libraries, visit the public library, and see the family reading and valuing books. When parents themselves lack literacy skills, through Día, we can teach such parents how to support literacy with their interest and attention to their children's books. Having males participate in fostering "bookjoy" sends such a strong message to boys and girls at any age.

As a speaker, I've learned that teens, females or males, can be a tough audience because of all the insecurities and pressures they feel. One on one or in small groups, once teens know we're really listening and that we care and respect them, I think we can reach many of them.

What is your hope for the growth of bilingual and multicultural books for children and teens?

I'm a bit uncomfortable with the word "multicultural" which is usually used to mean work by non-Anglo authors. All books are cultural in that they are written by a particular person who is part of a culture, a way of seeing the world. I've been having the same problem with the word "mainstream." What does that *really* mean? Given our national plurality, the true mainstream is diverse. So what are most of the books published and reviewed and honored? A protected stream? To change metaphors, America's authentic chorus is diverse. Why all those voices are not fairly represented in the award system and published is a fascinating question.

I can feel mighty discouraged when I read the statistics that document the growth of diversity in the student population and the lack of growth in the diversity of the authors who are published for children and young adults. I've written about this topic for years and stressed the importance of diversifying the editorial and

marketing staffs, particularly at major publishing houses, and the need for teachers and librarians to be vocal and effective advocates for the books their students deserve, books that reflect the students' lives and stories. Though educators say they like and need bilingual books, publishers often say that the books don't really sell. I begin with two assumptions. Publishing is a business. If an editor publishes books that don't sell, that editor is in trouble. Since most people are people of good will, I've often suggested that conference panels with editors and librarians/teachers exploring this challenge could be helpful.

In the last year, I've become more aware that bilingual books can be intimidating to monolingual librarians and teachers. An interesting challenge for TLA, given its commitment to Día and family literacy, is how to assist librarians to develop strategies for using bilingual books with all students.

After 12 exciting years for Día, how would you like to see the project continue to grow/expand?

Thanks for asking. My dream or vision for Día's future includes:

1. Día is included on all library and school annual calendars.
2. State library associations, state libraries, and school districts across the country promote and support Día's development on an annual basis.
3. The number of Día celebrations in schools, libraries and community centers grows annually and the celebrations are truly culminating celebrations of a daily commitment to link all children to books, languages and cultures.
4. ALA secures national funders for Día.
5. ALA graphics annually offers appealing Día materials.
6. Publishers join the Día parade and create Día materials and support Día's work which can help build home libraries.
7. ALA or ALSC creates a national Día advisory committee that includes ALSC, other relevant ALA divisions, REFORMA, me, and national literacy partner organizations, media and corporate representatives, etc., to insure Día's growth and effectiveness.
8. Día serves to create community locally and nationally by strengthening all kinds of partnerships: between libraries and schools, between libraries, schools and diverse families some of whom may not speak English, between educational institutions and funders, etc.
9. Día serves to reduce the discomfort or intimidation that some teachers and librarians feel dealing with Spanish in books and with Spanish-speaking families and all non-English-speaking families.
10. Día helps grow a nation of readers.

Join us!

As an award-winning poet and author of books for children and young adults, what is your advice for new writers?

The brief answer is: read. I tell students that I'm a writer because I'm a reader, and I encourage them to read and write. If you're referring to advice for adults, I'll refer you to "Twenty Tips for Writing Children's Books" on my web site at <http://www.patmora.com/tips.htm> ^[12]. The tips generally apply to writing at all levels. I recently completed a book of letters to librarians and teachers on nurturing our talents, tentative title: *ZING! 7 Creativity Practices for Educators and Students*. It will be published spring 2010 by Corwin Press and explains my writing process.

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Día de los niños/libros

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Links:

[1] <http://www.txla.org/sites/tla/files/images/logos/CRT.jpg>

[2] <http://www.txla.org/groups/CRT>

[3] <http://www.txla.org/groups/CRT-the-round-table>

[4] <http://www.txla.org/groups/CRT-awards>

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[6] <http://www.txla.org/groups/round-tables>

[7] <http://www.txla.org/sites/tla/files/images/groups/Mora.jpg>

[8] http://www.txla.org/print/418?quicktabs_groups=tab0#quicktabs-groups

[9] <http://www.txla.org/groups/CRT-events#dia>

[10] [http://www.addtoany.com/share_save?linkurl=http://www.txla.org/groups/CRT-Mora&linkname=An Interview with Pat Mora](http://www.addtoany.com/share_save?linkurl=http://www.txla.org/groups/CRT-Mora&linkname=An%20Interview%20with%20Pat%20Mora)

[11] http://www.patmora.com/dia/dia_history.htm

[12] <http://www.patmora.com/tips.htm>