



## Children's Library Services in Latin America

MARIETTA DANIELS

THE "DANCE OF THE OLD MEN," although a charming folk spectacle to witness on the shores of Lake Pátzcuaro in central Mexico, is by no means typical of the emphasis placed even traditionally upon that particular age group in Latin America, where youth reigns supreme in numbers as well as in influence.

The casual visitor to any capital of Latin America needs little to convince him of the awesome presence of the "population explosion." Before he even leaves the airport he will be aware of the swarming youngsters who have come with their parents to bid farewell or welcome to a traveller. On the streets he is conscious of the quantities of uniformed chattering children on their way to and from school, the constant offer by numerous urchins for "shoe-shine, mister" or the shrill boyish shouts of "diario." In the markets as well as on the streets he will see babies nursing at their mothers' breasts while their somewhat older brothers and sisters sit lackadaisically by. At night he may find poorly-clad children bedded down in doorways under newspapers, awaiting a rather hopeless dawn of setting forth again to beg a few "centavitos" or to earn a few pennies guarding cars.

The importance of youth as an influential, if not a controlling, factor in the economic and social development of Latin America can be demonstrated from the fact that one-half of the total population is 21 years of age or younger. Only half of them presently have the opportunity of attending school. Half of those who are older than 21 have had not more than one year of school. Modern communications, however, have served to alert both youth and their elders to the fact that things are different in other parts of the world and that something must be done, and immediately, to give them increased opportunities for a better and more hopeful life.

A ray of hope penetrated the dark clouds of despair in Latin

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Miss Daniels is Associate Librarian and Chief, Library Development Program, Pan American Union, Washington, D.C.

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America when North American leadership proposed an "Alliance for Progress" among governments and peoples of the Americas. It became immediately evident that educational opportunities must be multiplied manifold in order to provide a basis upon which to develop skills necessary for economic progress. A ten-year plan for educational improvement, evolved as an integral part of the Alliance planning for economic and social development, sets forth as a primary goal the improvement and extension of public and school libraries as an integral factor in the educational process and in the transmission of the cultural heritage of the Americas.

The development of school and public libraries, however, depends directly upon the availability of a wide variety of books and magazines in the languages of the people, and at their reading level. As a means of encouraging the greater availability of reading materials to suit the reading needs of Latin America, the Organization of American States' "Education Task Force" further recommended for immediate action the financing of the mass production and distribution of low-cost editions of books, with the selection of titles to be made by an *ad hoc* committee to assure appropriateness for the needs of Latin America.

The development of public library services to children in Latin America, in the terms in which such services are prevalent in the United States, must be described in the future rather than in the past tense. On the other hand, most libraries in Latin America perforce devote most of their attention to service to school children for want of appropriate public library and school library services. Those instances in which there are special services for children in either public or school libraries are exceptions rather than the rule. To understand this situation, one must consider the educational picture in general.

First, although free universal compulsory primary school education has been an accepted principle in the countries of Latin America for more than a century, in fact it has not been achieved. The total educational facilities of both public and private schools have not been able to provide opportunities for more than half of the school-age population. Despite the efforts of governments to build more classrooms and train more teachers, the high population growth far exceeds the increased facilities. In Colombia alone, 49,700 primary school teachers are needed to add to the 14,200 who were teaching in 1960, but the secondary school level normal schools annually graduate no more than 1,850.

A major problem confronting educators in Latin America is the

high percentage of drop-outs and of repeaters. Not more than one-half of those who enter primary school get beyond the first grade, or 25 per cent of the school-age population. In succeeding grades the rate of desertion increases to such an extent that, of those who enter the first grade, no more than 10 per cent in the poorer countries and 20 per cent in the more advanced ones proceed as far as the sixth and last year of elementary education. Approximately one-fifth of the secondary school-age population is enrolled in school.

Various socio-economic reasons have been given for the high rate of desertion and of repeaters. A practical reason has been found in one country of Central America where the inability to read was discovered to account for the high number of repeaters as well as drop-outs in rural schools. Furthermore, it was found that the inability to read was occasioned by the almost total lack of reading material in the schools surveyed.

In terms of the reading ability of children of school age, it can be seen that not more than 10 to 20 per cent of those who begin school will continue long enough to read well enough to understand the newspaper, or not more than 5 to 10 per cent of the total school-age population. In another UNESCO-inspired survey of reading habits and access to reading materials in a test group in one country of South America,<sup>1</sup> it was found that 30 out of 100 urban pupils go on to the upper grades of primary school and probably learn to read fairly well. Of the remaining 70, only 19 may be considered functional literates, and 51 are functionally illiterate. Out of 99 in a rural test group, 79 were found to be incomplete readers and only 20 functionally literate.

Most of those tested had had little or no recourse to books or libraries. Only 38 per cent reported that there were libraries in their schools, and this figure was found to be unreliable when further investigation was made of where the collections were located and the use made of them. More than half of the children tested had never visited a library, and 35 per cent reported that they did not possess a book. It was seen from the survey, however, that greater reader proficiency was evident when more and varied reading materials were available to the students.

In process at the present time is a survey by the Pan American Union of the use made of books in schools in certain countries of Latin America. Informal reports on the use made of libraries in schools which offer both primary and secondary grades indicate that

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the heaviest use of the library is made by those in the fourth to sixth grades of primary school.

The fact of the matter is that books, even textbooks, have not been an integral part of the educational process in Latin America. The school library is virtually unknown in primary schools, and only a scattered few secondary schools can boast of a collection of books organized as a library and administered by a professional librarian. Only 210 school libraries with collections of more than 1,000 volumes each, totalling approximately 1,300,000 volumes, are reported in a current directory.<sup>2</sup> Fewer than 3,000 school libraries are otherwise<sup>3</sup> reported to exist with a total of 5 million volumes, to serve 18,000 secondary and 250,000 primary schools. In terms of per capita holdings, this represents slightly more than one book per secondary school student, or one book to each six students if both primary and secondary schools are included.

Latin American children (50 million between the ages of 5 and 14) have access to an additional 11 million volumes in approximately 3,000 public libraries, and some 7 million volumes in national libraries,<sup>4</sup> or a combined total of 22 million volumes. These libraries are concentrated in 435 cities and towns, out of 10,500 communities of more than 2,000 population. (Some 2,000 communities have a population of more than 10,000.) The rural population, comprising about one-half of the total population of Latin America, may be considered to be virtually bereft of library facilities.

The use of books as a principal ingredient of the educational process is largely passed over in favor of the pressing problems of training more teachers, building more classrooms, reforming the curriculum, and the more exotic possibilities of audio-visual materials and scientific equipment. Few of the countries of Latin America provide textbooks free of charge to even the public schools of the nation.

Most of the lists of recommended reading for children in Latin America and for school libraries are based upon materials which in accordance with U.S. standards would be inappropriate for school or children's libraries, because they are composed principally of textbooks and adult level books. The bald fact is that little has been published in Spanish, somewhat more in Portuguese, for the reading needs of the children of Latin America. Authors of books for children in Latin America have tended to think and write in terms of textbooks and primers. The body of children's literature available for the chil-

dren of Latin America consists of the children's classics and new versions of Walt Disney's prolific production.

Between 1957 and 1960 the Mexican output of children's books reached 3.5 per cent of the total of 4,332 titles.<sup>5</sup> During this four-year period some 154 titles were published, of which 123 were translations of the Golden Books, 26 were children's classics in new editions (with *Little Red Ridinghood* selling at \$6.40 U.S.), and only five were new titles by Mexican authors. By contrast, in 1960 Sweden issued 265 original works and 258 translations, and the United States in 1961 published 1,626 titles including 113 new editions of works previously published and 62 translations.

Despite the fact that some books such as the Golden Books and comic books sell more than 35,000 copies, the average trade edition of books issued in Latin America runs from 2,000 to 3,000 copies. This limited press run results in book prices out of the realm of possibility for the average family's income (\$270 average annual income for all of Latin America, \$200 for Central America, and from \$36 to \$480 for the Mexico City tenement dweller).

There is a need, therefore, to stimulate Latin American writers to write books for children. There is an even greater need to seek the means of having more books printed for both educational and recreational purposes, at a lower cost, and to develop a reading habit in children and young people which will in itself lead to wider markets for books in a broad range of readability, content, format, and price.

From the preceding facts and figures various conclusions may be derived. One is that educational authorities have devoted little attention to making books and libraries easily available in elementary schools. The second is that only after the reading skill has been achieved, roughly in the fourth grade in terms of functional literacy, is there much interest on the part of the child to use books. A third conclusion is that there is a vast need for the most elementary of reading materials, for keeping the child in school long enough for him to learn to read, and for more advanced materials to keep him reading.

Another conclusion is that the low level of reading ability of both adults and children, reviewed from the grade levels attained by them, may account for the slow development of public libraries in Latin America, including services for children. And finally, the more rapid development of public and school libraries depends upon the greater availability of books in the language of the people, at their reading

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level, in accordance with their interests, and at prices which both individuals and institutions can afford to pay.

In the light of the foregoing, it is not surprising to find that little attention has been given by communities or nations to the provision of library services to children whether in public or school libraries. On the other hand, it can be argued that the lack of attention to library services for children and to the provision of a wide variety of reading material at their present reading level is in itself a cause of the present low educational achievement of the population in general.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that the concept of the national library to serve the function of the nation's principal public library and/or to have principal responsibility for coordinating all public library services in the nation has prevailed in some countries since the creation of the national libraries themselves in the early years of the republics. Deriving from this concept is the existence of special services to children in the national library of such countries as Peru, Panama, and Guatemala. In each of these, separate entrances for children and services customary in children's libraries in the United States are provided.

The National Library of Guatemala has as one of its functions the creation and supervision of public libraries in the capitals of the various provinces. The library's one bookmobile has penetrated the jungle to take collections of new books to these libraries and to found new libraries in smaller villages. The lack of adequate means of communication has not kept the dedicated staff from pursuing their objective—to take books to readers in the most remote corners of the country—by military plane, by boat, and when necessary, by carrying boxes of books on their own backs through the swamps. Books for children form an integral part of these collections, and the Children's Section of the National Library assists in the creation of school libraries throughout the country as well as in Guatemala City.

The efforts of Horace Mann and his devoted followers to improve educational opportunities inspired the nationwide creation of popular and school libraries in Argentina and Uruguay. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in 1871 created the still-existing *Comisión Protectora de Bibliotecas Populares* in Argentina to contribute to the acquisition of books and the organization of collections in an extensive system of more than 1,600 local small libraries (principally subscription libraries). The Uruguayan educator José Pedro Varela saw the school in a sociological as well as a purely educational context, and he urged

the creation in each school of a library which older children could also use to continue their study and to acquire a reading habit and which could ultimately become a popular library for the community. This plan led to the Ley de Educación Común of 1877, modified in 1885, for the creation of school-district and popular libraries under the jurisdiction of local Commissioners of Public Instruction.

A half-century later in Peru, a campaign was carried out to collect books in order to create libraries in the schools of the nation to be supervised on a national level by the Director of School Libraries and Museums. In Mexico that same year, 1922, saw the creation by the famed educator and then Minister of Education, José Vasconcelos, of a Department of Libraries within the Secretaría de Educación Pública. Although it has established and now maintains more than 150 popular libraries throughout the country, much of its attention is directed at present toward about 50 libraries in the Federal District, including elementary, secondary, and technical school libraries, public and popular libraries, and libraries for children and young people in public parks.

Brazil's Instituto Nacional do Livro, dating in its present form from 1937, not only provides books to more than 7,000 public, school, and private libraries and aids in the creation of new libraries on a contract basis, but maintains travelling collections, provides scholarships for the study of library science, gives technical advice to small libraries, and publishes works of a reference nature. In 1961 the Government of Brazil enacted legislation leading to the organization of regional library services providing for contracts between municipalities, states, and the nation, and for night literacy classes to be held in municipal libraries.

No information is currently available on the number of public libraries which provide special collections and services for children, nor of the number of books for children in public libraries, nor of the number of separate children's libraries. Neither are figures available for the proportion of children's collections, whether in public or school libraries, which are textbooks rather than books for general complementary and recreational reading. Except in specific instances little is known about efforts made through story-hour and other devices to encourage children to come to libraries and to avail themselves of special services and collections.

Although it can be said that most of the services rendered today by public libraries and much of those performed by national libraries

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are for school children, they should be described more in terms of school services than of public library services for children. In other words, most of the readers found in both public and national libraries are children and young people engaged in using library materials primarily in connection with school assignments.

Nonetheless, some outstanding children's libraries have been created apart from libraries for adults, especially in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela. The largest and most famous of these is in reality the Municipal Public Library system of São Paulo, Brazil, the model for children's library services throughout the country. The central library, named for the beloved Brazilian children's author, Monteiro Lobato, increased its circulation from 25,000 in 1936 to 1,480,000 in 1959. Beginning in 1936 with a story-hour and the publication of a newspaper by the readers themselves, by 1960 the Municipal Children's Library had organized reading clubs, opened a braille section for both the production and use of textbooks and books for blind children, and established a children's art gallery, a record collection, puppet and movie theatres, a section of educational games, and a "milk bar."

The Municipal Children's Library of São Paulo exists apart from the Municipal Public Library of the city, equally outstanding for its facilities and services to adults, and gives service not only to the city of São Paulo but also by contract to the state of São Paulo, one of the fastest growing and developing areas of Latin America. Its more than 17 branches, as well as the central library, are located in parks where one also finds playgrounds and health services for children.

This truly children's center is the handiwork primarily of one devoted and imaginative woman, Lenyra Fraccaroli, its director from its creation until her retirement two years ago. Her achievements in working with children have been recognized by her own townsmen in official citations and honors, including the gold medal bearing the name of the Imperatriz Leopoldina (wife of the first emperor of Brazil, D. Pedro I), and the *Anchieta* medal from the Secretariat of Education and Culture of the Municipal Government of Rio de Janeiro. Her professional achievements have served to inspire the creation of similarly imaginative children's library services in other cities of Brazil, such as that of Salvador, Bahia.

In a 10-year period the Biblioteca Infantil Monteiro Lobato of Salvador, opened in 1950, assembled a collection of more than 11,000 books and served 219,000 readers. In 1960 the Governor of the State

of Bahia designated the library to serve as headquarters of a Children and Young Readers Library Service to "plan, install, orient, and maintain libraries for children and young people in the capital, suburbs, and interior" of the state. He also indicated the number of additional librarians, teacher-librarians, and other personnel required for these services and provided one million cruzeiros (\$54,050 U.S.) for the purpose. Special services were to include art collections, record collections, movies, puppet theatre and regular theatrical presentations, a newspaper, excursions, contests and prizes, conferences and courses, and commemorative events.

Professional librarians and library associations in Brazil have taken the lead in experimenting with and pursuing the objective of introducing the teaching of school and children's library services into the curriculum of the nation's normal schools. Similarly in other countries, such as Costa Rica, Panama, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela, the professional associations have held conferences and workshops and carried out campaigns to draw the attention of educational authorities and of the public in general to the need for creating and expanding school and children's library services.

Four different programs are currently being sponsored in Venezuela by government forces and private initiative to provide reading materials for children and youth. Professional librarians called upon the Ministries of Education and Justice to provide reading materials for youth not only for educational purposes but also as a means of preventing juvenile delinquency. As a result, with the advisory services of a public-spirited Committee for the Promotion of Libraries, with the technical processing done by the National Library, and with financial support from civic organizations, the Director of Culture of the Ministry of Education has been able to embark upon a program of creating new popular libraries in populous housing developments. During the past two years, several popular libraries with services for children have been opened in Caracas itself.

The National Child's Council, created in the mid-1930's to sponsor legislation primarily for the protection of childhood, now has found its problems to be educational and social—especially revolving around what to do about the children who leave school and who have no well adjusted homes to go to. In recent years the Council has maintained 10 children's libraries in public parks in Caracas as well as 14 in the interior, a central children's library, and bookmobile service.

In 1961 a group of alarmed citizens in Venezuela organized a "Book

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Bank" for the provision of reading materials of a popular nature especially for the poorer areas of Caracas. Their program has since been emulated in Nicaragua. In its first two years the organization founded four libraries for children and adolescents, collected more than 50,000 books, loaned 11,500 to some 73 schools, exchanged more than 8,000 books among poor children, and carried out a program to raise funds with which to open new school libraries and libraries for children and adolescents.

The Venezuelan Ministry of Education, USAID, and the Institute of International Education of New York are collaborating in giving grassroots preparation for rural library development through the rural teachers' training center "El Mácaro" in Maracay. Here rural school teachers study school library organization, practice in the center's library, and study children's literature in a plan to make of the rural school a real educational center for the rural community.

In Panama the library association has collaborated with the Ministry of Education in experimenting with the creation of school libraries to serve the local community. The library of the Centro Escolar "Manuel Amador Guerrero" in Panama City serves both the children and adults of the school district.

Service to children through the libraries themselves and through their bookmobiles is an important aspect of the activities of both the Pilot Public Library, initiated by UNESCO in Medellín, Colombia, and the Municipal Public Library of Callao, Peru, whose bookmobile also was provided by UNESCO. The success of the special children's collection of the National Library of Peru has been influential in the creation of smaller collections in kiosks in public parks near housing developments in Lima.

Among the most impressive of recently created children's libraries is that of the "Luis Angel Arango" Library maintained for the public by the Banco de la República in Bogotá, Colombia. The Bank has also financed the creation of small public libraries, including children's services in smaller towns such as Bello, Antioquia. Also in Bello one of the leading manufacturers, the Fabricato, recently opened a public library with children's books for its employees and others of the community.

Children's library services in municipal public libraries as well as excellent school libraries were prevalent in pre-Castro Cuba. Model children's libraries were maintained also by such private organizations

as the Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club and the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País.

A children's library has been an integral part of the services offered by the Benjamin Franklin Library in Mexico City, whose conversion in latter years to the functions of a U.S. Information Library has not significantly modified its role as a model American public library. Early in its history a program was launched to paste interlinear translations in American children's books in an effort to stimulate Mexican children to read. Other American libraries of an informational nature and those of the binational cultural institutes have maintained collections and services for children.

These and other children's library services, although worthy examples of what can be done in Latin America, are obscured by the dimensions of the need for services for all the children and young people in Latin America. Traditional methods of getting reading material into the hands of children, young people, and adults are not sufficient for the challenge. New types of reading programs must be developed in which the library plays a key role.

In 1961 a significant step was taken toward providing the essential ingredient of good public library service for children and of reading programs—children's books. The Books for the People Fund, Inc., was created as a nonprofit corporation through the stimulation of the Pan American Union for the express purpose of assuring the availability to the largest number of citizens of the Americas of books especially for children, young people, and new adult literates, in their languages, at their reading level, and at a price they can afford to pay.<sup>6</sup>

The Fund was formed in response to an awareness on the part of citizens of both the United States and Latin America of the present dearth of easy-to-read materials for new literates, young and old, in the languages of Latin America. Its specific aims are (1) to advance the campaign against illiteracy by providing post-literacy materials for children and adults, (2) to make it possible for children of Latin America to take advantage of higher educational opportunities with a better intellectual basis through books and to encourage lifelong reading habits, (3) to contribute to the intellectual, economic, scientific, and social development of Latin American countries by extending the educational base and horizons of their citizens, (4) to encourage the development of school and public library services, (5) to promote the creation of a body of children's literature by Latin

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American authors, and (6) to aid in the development of the Latin American economy by increasing the potential of the book trade.

The Books for the People Fund seeks the collaboration and cooperation of educators, writers, librarians, and other intellectual leaders of the hemisphere through its international board of directors, honorary board of sponsors, and advisory council. This counsel is especially necessary for the determination of appropriate content for books, for the selection of titles for translation and reprinting, and for finding potential new authors of the kinds of educational and recreational books it hopes to have published. As required, the Fund will stimulate the creation of national advisory committees or cooperating agencies for the purposes of selection, production, wide distribution, and use of the materials produced.

It is anticipated that philanthropic foundations, private individuals, and organizations, as well as government and intergovernmental organizations will give financial support to the Fund to help it to put the largest number of copies of books into the hands of the largest number of people at the least cost.

With the increased availability of books at modest prices, it can be anticipated that plans for adequate public and school library services can be drawn up by the nations of the Americas and put into effect at a cost substantially lower than at present and that the needs of the present and potential readers can be more adequately served. With the adequate provision of this basic element of education—the book—the goals of the Alliance for Progress to give a fuller life to the citizens of the Americas by raising the intellectual level of the population of Latin America can be more certainly achieved.

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