

---

# The School Library Media Center and the Promotion of Literature for Hispanic Children

ADELA ARTOLA ALLEN

---

## ABSTRACT

IN THIS ARTICLE, the author presents a survey designed to ascertain the degree of access to children's literature in eight urban areas in the United States known to have a high population of Hispanic residents. The instrument surveyed the responses of media specialists in a sample of schools serving students in kindergarten through eighth grade in San Diego, California; Phoenix, Arizona; Tucson, Arizona; Albuquerque, New Mexico; El Paso, Texas; Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; and Denver, Colorado. Among the findings significant to the acquisition of literature in Spanish for young people were a high percentage (62 percent) of media specialists and associated personnel who have little or no knowledge of the Spanish language. Many collections (more than 50 percent of those surveyed) had relatively few Spanish books available for students. The author points out the strong need for increased attention to allocations, Spanish language fluency for professional and nonprofessional staff members (particularly those influencing the acquisition of Spanish language materials), and the need for additional activities which would help encourage the initial motivation to read and promote the reading experience itself.

## INTRODUCTION

By the year 2000, one out of every four American public schoolchildren will come from a minority ethnic group. This

Adela Artola Allen, Graduate College, University of Arizona, Administrative Building  
302, Tucson, AZ 85721

LIBRARY TRENDS, Vol. 41, No. 3, Winter 1993, pp. 437-61

© 1993 The Board of Trustees, University of Illinois

multicultural student body, reflecting the country's pluralistic society, dictates immediate attention in terms of available resources.

As stated in *Information Power* (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1988), one of the missions and challenges of today's school library media programs is to: "Provide resources and learning activities that represent a diversity of experiences, opinions, social and cultural perspectives, supporting the concept that intellectual freedom and access to information are prerequisite to effective and responsible citizenship in a democracy" (p. 2). School library media centers, in order to respond to these demographic changes, must re-examine their standards and decisions regarding information access in order to fulfill the needs of the current and future user population.

This article reports the findings of a survey of school library media centers with large enrollments of Hispanic children in eight large urban centers. The principal goal was to develop an understanding of the availability of Spanish language literature in schools with large populations of Spanish-dominant students.

A questionnaire was developed and evaluated by a panel for content validity, reliability, wording, and time needed to complete the form. This four-person panel consisted of one university professor of children's literature, one state certified librarian with a Ph.D. in reading, one librarian with an M.L.S., and one graduate research assistant finishing an M.L.S. degree. Both librarians were highly experienced in working with bilingual students. Following the panelists' review and evaluation of the first draft, recommendations were incorporated, including the unanimous decision to reduce significantly the number of questions on the survey. Three hundred and five survey questionnaires were mailed to public schools in San Diego, California; Phoenix, Arizona; Tucson, Arizona; Albuquerque, New Mexico; El Paso, Texas; Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; and Denver, Colorado. These cities were selected because of the large populations of Hispanic families.

The schools, serving students from kindergarten through eighth grade, were identified as having a large number of Hispanic children enrolled. The surveys were addressed to the school library media specialist, librarian, or person in charge of the library. The cover letter enclosed with the survey assured respondents' anonymity unless they volunteered to be interviewed by phone or wished to be quoted in the article (see Appendix A for a copy of the survey).

Sixty-two schools completed questionnaires, which represents about 20 percent of the questionnaires distributed. Usable

questionnaires were received from all eight areas canvassed. School library media specialists or librarians were the only respondents. No follow-up was made.

## METHODOLOGY

The instrument used to conduct this study consisted of twenty-nine questions and a final note. Four questions requested demographic data concerning the respondent; five questions addressed the school's demographics; one question requested information regarding the number of personnel in the library and their Spanish language fluency; one question asked respondents to rate their knowledge of the subgroups that comprise the Hispanic ethnic group; five questions addressed the media centers' collections of Spanish and English materials and budget allocations for each; and six questions inquired as to the review, selection, and purchase of Spanish materials and cooperation with other institutions. In two questions, respondents were asked to indicate whether or not their media centers provided each of twenty selected activities and services, and in which language(s) they were performed. One question asked participants to list the most successful books used with Hispanic children. Finally, three open-ended questions, requiring narrative responses, were designed to reveal school library media specialists' viewpoints regarding specific positive and negative trends in serving Spanish-dominant children. The last narrative question asked respondents to describe their "greatest needs and concerns regarding Hispanic children's literature." A final note asked respondents to list "the exciting and unique activities being held in their libraries."

Data analysis of the multiple-choice questions was made by converting the responses into frequencies and percentages. Analysis of the open-ended questions was done by clustering responses that were similar and converting them into frequencies.

A second analysis was made to ensure that respondents did not represent a single biased group. Interestingly, the returned surveys ranged from very limited responses to highly detailed ones and spanned from enthusiasm for linguistic and cultural diversity to rejection of special services for any given group of students.

The findings of the survey are reported in the following major categories: (1) The demographics and linguistic profile of the students and the community in this study; (2) the school library media specialists and their personnel; (3) the media center's holdings and budgetary allocations; (4) review, selection, and acquisition of Spanish materials; (5) the book selection process; (6) the activities and events held in or sponsored by the library; (7) the positive trends in Hispanic children's literature; (8) the negative trends, concerns, and needs

regarding access to Spanish children's literature by Hispanic children; (9) a list of successful media center activities; and (10) the author's recommendations to school administrators and library media specialists as suggested by the survey results.

#### **THE SCHOOLS, THE STUDENT BODY, THEIR LANGUAGE, AND THE COMMUNITY**

The breakdown of Hispanic students in the sixty-two schools surveyed is as follows: Eight schools had less than a 30 percent Hispanic student body; fourteen schools had a 31 to 60 percent Hispanic student population; sixteen schools had a 61 to 80 percent Hispanic enrollment; twenty-one schools had an 81 to 100 percent Hispanic population; and three schools did not respond to this question. The communities in which the schoolchildren lived, in terms of their Hispanic populations, are as follows: five schools were located in communities that had less than a 30 percent Hispanic population; twelve schools were found in communities with 31 to 50 percent Hispanics; thirteen schools were in Hispanic communities of 51 to 70 percent; sixteen had a Hispanic population of 71 to 90 percent; and ten schools were in predominantly Hispanic communities that ranged from 91 to 100 percent Hispanics. Six schools did not respond to this item.

A subsequent question regarding the children's primary language revealed that, although some of the schools had large numbers of Hispanic students, many of those students no longer had Spanish as their primary language. Forty-four of the schools reported that less than 30 percent of their students had Spanish as their primary language; eleven schools reported that 31 to 50 percent of their students had Spanish as their primary language; and seven schools had students with 51 to 80 percent Spanish as their primary language.

#### **SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS AND THEIR SUPPORT STAFF**

The survey explored the ethnicity of the media specialists and the Spanish proficiency of the library support staff. Forty-eight of the respondents identified themselves as Anglo, five as Hispanic, and one as Native American. There were eight instances of no response to this item. The lack of Hispanic school library media specialists holding an M.L.S. or state certification has been documented in the literature on numerous occasions and was confirmed by the small Hispanic sample in this study. This demographic information was considered important when analyzing the concerns regarding access to children's literature in Spanish. The Spanish fluency of the personnel responding to the survey is significant when viewed in

the light of the large numbers of primary Spanish-speaking students who are served in many of these centers.

One question asked participants to check all items that referred to the type and number of library staff and if their Spanish fluency was high, moderate, low, or none. The results are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1.  
SPANISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY PROFILE OF LIBRARY PERSONNEL

<i>Personnel</i>	<i>Self-reported Spanish Fluency</i>				
	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>No Response</i>
Librarians (n=62)	5	15	20	12	10
Parents (n=21)	6	4	2	7	2
Part Time (n=8)	1	2	-	5	-
Clerks (n=26)	8	4	4	10	-
Aides (n=6)	-	-	6	-	-

Interestingly, 62 percent of the school library media specialists who answered this question had either low or no proficiency in Spanish, 28 percent had medium, and only 10 percent considered themselves as being highly fluent in Spanish. These figures are significant: more than half of the personnel are unable to adequately communicate with Spanish primary students, thereby impeding equal access to services and library holdings, and impairing their ability to engage in the process of Spanish book selection and in bilingual activities performed in the library.

Further analysis was made to see if librarians were employing other personnel with Spanish language skills to accommodate the needs of non-English-dominant children. Table 2 shows the relationship between the Spanish fluency of media specialists and their support personnel.

In summary, note first that thirty-eight of the fifty-six respondents to this question had no additional support in their libraries. Second, the lack of Spanish fluency in support personnel for librarians with little or no knowledge of Spanish is dramatic. This state of affairs could severely limit access for Spanish-dominant students. The non-Spanish-speaking librarians in this study do not have high Spanish-fluent parent volunteers, employees, clerks, or aides. Four of the twelve librarians with no Spanish used support from parents or employees, yet none of those people was highly fluent in Spanish. Low fluency librarians may have special appreciation for the need for Spanish fluency; four highly fluent Spanish-speaking parents were recruited and two highly fluent clerks

were employed by these librarians. The librarians who reported themselves as being of medium fluency in Spanish tended to work with highly fluent clerks. The highly fluent librarians were too few to demonstrate any kind of a pattern.

TABLE 2.  
SPANISH FLUENCY OF SUPPORT PERSONNEL IN LIBRARY MEDIA CENTERS

<i>Media Specialists'</i> <i>Spanish Fluency</i>	<i>Available Support in Library</i>		<i>Parent Volunteers</i>				<i>Part-time Employees</i>				<i>Clerk</i>				<i>Aide</i>				
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>N</i>	
None (n=12)	4	8	2				2				2 2				2				
Low (n=20)	8	12	4	1	2	1	2				2	2	1	4	2				
Medium (n=15)	3	12	2	2	1	2	1					5	2	2	3				
High (n=5)	3	2					1	1	1					1					

Personal and telephone interviews revealed that the reasons that Spanish-fluent media specialists are not found in many school library media centers may be because, as the literature reports, there is no pool of Hispanic librarians to hire. In terms of the support staff, telephone interviews explained that school library media specialists do not hire their clerks and/or aides. Tests for these positions are administered at the district level and hiring is done at the central office or by the site administrator. Spanish-fluent aides are most often placed in classrooms which is where administrators feel the more crucial points for language assistance are needed. In addition, some support staff in library media centers were employed before the school's demographics changed.

One survey question asked school library media specialists to rate their own knowledge of the different Hispanic subgroups as high, average, or low. The purpose of this question was to provide some insight into the breadth of knowledge of the library media specialists regarding the various subgroups which comprise the Hispanic population of this country. Analysis of this item reveals that respondents tend to have higher knowledge about the ethnic groups which populate their own communities. For example, most respondents (n=30) indicated low knowledge of Puerto Ricans. Since this study was conducted mostly in states bordering Mexico, the Puerto Rican population is considerably less than it would be had the study been conducted in New York City.

Table 3 shows the self-reported knowledge about the different ethnic groups that comprise the Hispanic population in this country. It should be noted that each of these groups has produced significant

contributions to literature, art, music, dance, and folklore which have influenced and enriched "American" culture. One might speculate that lack of knowledge of Hispanic subgroups could be a factor influencing the library media specialist's competence to make library acquisitions or assess library holdings. The information obtained through this item suggests the need for further in-service training for librarians and school personnel. A lack of knowledge about Hispanic subgroups results in the tendency to lump them into one stereotypic ethnic group without recognizing their individual characteristics.

TABLE 3.  
LIBRARIANS' SELF REPORTED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HISPANIC SUBGROUPS

<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>No Response</i>
Mexican American	29	27	4	2
Chicanos	20	32	8	2
Latinos	7	19	27	8
Cubans	8	16	30	8
Central Americans	10	16	30	6
South Americans	6	16	31	9
Puerto Ricans	4	17	38	8
Afro-Hispanics	2	20	31	9
Spanish Americans	7	12	28	10

### SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTERS' HOLDINGS AND BUDGET

In the survey of school library media centers included in Appendix A of *Information Power* (AASL & AECT, 1988), the results of a survey (1985-1986) conducted by the Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education showed a range of twenty-three to thirty-eight book titles per student in high service elementary school programs with fewer than 500 students (p. 117) and a range of twenty-five to thirty-five book titles per pupil in high service programs at the middle/junior high school level with fewer than 500 students (p. 119). High service elementary schools with over 500 students report a range of fifteen to twenty-seven books per student, while high service middle/junior high schools with over 500 students report from sixteen to twenty-three book titles per student.

Library holdings of the participating schools in this study ranged from fewer than 500 books (one school) to more than 20,000 books (two schools). The breakdown of book holdings for the other schools is: 5,000 to 8,000 (eleven schools), 8,001 to 11,000 (thirty-one schools); 11,001 to 14,000 (eleven schools); and 14,001 to 20,000 (two schools). Four respondents did not provide this information.

A subsequent question in the survey requested the approximate percentage of library books in Spanish. Nine schools had less than one percent of their book collection in Spanish; twenty-three schools ranged between 1 to 5 percent; six fell in the range of 6 to 10 percent; nineteen schools ranged between 11 to 29 percent; one school reported having between 21 and 30 percent; and one school boasted holding between 31 and 40 percent. Three schools did not respond to this item.

Summarizing, thirty-eight schools (more than half) of the heavily Hispanic populated schools in this study had less than 10 percent of their book holdings in Spanish. Clearly, the Spanish-dominant children in this study are not receiving school library services at the same level as their English-dominant peers.

For example, one elementary school in this study, with an enrollment of 605 students, reported 272 English-dominant and 333 Spanish-dominant students. The library holdings for this school were approximately 12,600 volumes. The Spanish language collection consisted of 630 volumes or 5 percent of their holdings. These figures translate to 11,974 volumes in English, or forty-four English language books per English-dominant student. The books in Spanish for use by the 333 Spanish-dominant students are less than two per student. Another school with 4,000 volumes (10 percent in Spanish) had a student body of 560 students of which 168 had Spanish as their primary language. The number of volumes available for English primary students in this school was at a ratio of 20.6 per user while the books in Spanish for the Spanish-primary child were 5.4 per user.

It is generally accepted that the responsibility of the school library is to provide books for all children—for information and for pleasure reading. If libraries are not providing students with books they can read for information and pleasure, we need to reconsider the mission statement of the school library media center. Children who have rewarding experiences with the books they read will continue to turn to them to acquire knowledge and to seek enjoyment. If children cannot read in the dominant language of the school, does it mean that they should be denied their right to read in their own language?

The annual 1990-1991 budget for materials ranged from \$500 to more than \$7,000. Four schools' budgets were between \$500 and \$1,000; twelve schools spent between \$1,001 and \$2,000; nine schools spent between \$2,001 and \$3,000; eight schools had a budget between \$3,001 and \$4,000; twelve schools were allocated between \$4,001 and 5,000; four schools spent between \$5,001 and \$6,000; four had \$6,001 and \$7,000 budgets; seven had more than \$7,001; and two schools did not respond. The budgeted allowance for Spanish language books, on the average, was substantially below the amount appropriate to



the size of the Spanish-dominant population. Thirty-four of the schools surveyed reported a current budget of less than 10 percent for Spanish language books; ten schools budgeted between 11 and 20 percent; three schools budgeted between 21 and 30 percent; two schools reported 31 and 40 percent; three schools reported 41 to 50 percent; and one school reported 55 percent for Spanish-language books. One school reported that all of its Spanish books purchased in 1990-1991 were purchased by bilingual programs. In other schools, Spanish language materials budgets were augmented by centrally run bilingual departments. Two schools did not respond.

A similar pattern prevailed as to the purchase of Spanish nonprint materials: no purchases (five schools), 1 to 10 percent (thirty-nine schools), 11 to 20 percent (four schools), 75 percent (one school), and no response (eight schools). Once again, one school reported that the bilingual program purchased the nonprint materials. A review of the narrative responses in the survey revealed considerable concern for the lack of Spanish nonprint materials available for students, particularly at the elementary school level.

A comparison was made of the budgetary allocations for books and materials made in terms of the number of Hispanic students in the school. Five schools demonstrated equity in their purchasing of materials in English and Spanish. For example, one school spent \$5 for each student in the school whether the child was Spanish-dominant (requiring Spanish materials) or English-dominant. Thirty-one schools spent more on English-language books for English-dominant students than for Spanish language books for Spanish-dominant students. There were wide variations in these numbers. Examples of the extreme ranges were zero for Spanish versus \$4.90 for English; \$.12 for Spanish versus \$1.55 for English; \$.05 for Spanish versus \$5.71 for English; and \$.03 for Spanish versus \$9.69 for English.

In contrast, other examples show preference for purchasing Spanish-language over English-language materials. Five schools in the study spent more on books in Spanish for primary Spanish children than for English-language books for English-dominant children. Examples of the ranges spent on books in Spanish versus books in English are: \$14.36 for Spanish versus \$5.86 for English; \$11.60 for Spanish versus \$8.84 for English; and \$17.50 for Spanish versus \$6.06 for English. A comparison in some cases was not legitimate due to the limited number of primary Spanish students at the particular site. A needed comment here is that the above comparisons were made using the percentage of primary Spanish speakers in the school and not the percentage of Hispanic children.

Miller and Shontz (1991) report that less local money was spent for books in 1989-90 than the previous year (p. 34). They reported that the median expenditure per pupil in 1988 was \$5.55 while the

median expenditure per pupil in 1990 was \$5.48. The effect of lowering the expenditure per student resulted in the ability of library media specialists to purchase slightly over one-half book per student in the average elementary school and one novel per student at the secondary school level. Clearly, if expenditures per pupil are declining, and book prices rising, holdings of Spanish language materials are unlikely to improve.

### THE BOOK SELECTION PROCESS

In further pursuit of determining what access Spanish primary students have to children's literature in Spanish, school library media specialists were asked if their school had conducted a needs assessment to determine the primary language of their users and their reading interests. Nineteen schools responded that they had conducted a needs assessment and forty-one responded "no" to this item. Of the schools who responded "yes", only thirteen described what they were doing. In terms of language preference, all respondents stated that information regarding primary language was handled at the school or district level when students registered for school. Nine respondents stated that their needs assessments were made in an informal fashion in cooperation with bilingual teachers through interviews or questionnaires. Other strategies used to identify the needs of the Spanish-dominant students included collaboration with ESL teachers (two schools); input from students (two schools); and input from the principal and the school's reading specialist (two schools). Identification of needs was additionally made by attending school departmental meetings (one school) and involving parents, students, and teachers in a survey (one school).

In the next question, respondents were asked whether book selection was centralized or at the school level, and to describe the process they followed for the purchase of new titles. Book selection was accomplished at the school level in forty-six of the schools surveyed and centralized in fifteen schools with one school not responding. This survey question did not limit the acquisition process to materials in Spanish but rather included the process of acquiring library holdings in general. The majority of the respondents stated that they acquired their materials by a variety of means, such as teacher recommendations (n=25); student recommendations (n=21); to fulfill curriculum needs (n=10); through reviews in professional journals such as *The School Library Journal* (n=16); *Booklist* (n=12); and other professional journals (n=10). Fifteen respondents mentioned that an important source for identifying books for consideration was the monthly district meeting where librarians reviewed new titles.

The subsequent three questions sought to determine how Spanish materials were selected. Respondents were asked if their school or district had a Spanish materials review committee, what criteria they had for evaluating Spanish-language materials, and how the review committee was selected.

Fifty respondents said "no" to the question asking them if they had a Spanish materials review committee, eleven answered "yes", and one did not respond to this item. In terms of how the review committee was selected, only nine responses were received. The review committee consisted of bilingual teachers (three schools), the library clerk and bilingual teachers (one school), the school's reading specialist (one school), and those who expressed an interest in making book selection (one school). In two instances, the selection committee for Spanish book selection was at the district level, and, in one case, the principal and the advisory board of the school appointed the Spanish-language materials review committee. Finally, the third question asked if the school had guidelines by which Spanish materials were selected. Forty-eight respondents answered "no", thirteen answered "yes", and one respondent did not answer the question. Three schools reported having no formally written criteria, and three schools stated that they used the same selection criteria that they use for English-language materials. In two schools, the bilingual teachers established the criteria, and in one, it was established by the bilingual chairperson. Four different schools reported that their criteria for selection were: (1) relevancy to thematic and individual needs; (2) quality of literature; (3) attractiveness, accuracy, and quality of binding; and (4) that the material not be stereotypic.

Another survey question addressed the cooperative agreements of the school media center with other schools and with the public library and if the agreements included services for Hispanic children. Twenty-three schools reported that they had cooperative agreements with other schools, and eighteen schools stated that they had agreements with local libraries; twenty-two schools did not respond. Additionally, thirty-three schools declared that their agreements, both with other schools and public libraries, included services for Hispanic children.

### **MEDIA CENTER EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES**

Survey respondents were asked to check items regarding students' visits to the media center and activities held there. Table 4 lists the activities and events that are held in the schools surveyed.

TABLE 4  
MEDIA CENTER EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

<i>Activities</i>	<i>Schools responding "yes"</i>
a. Children visit the media center on a fixed schedule each week	45
b. Spanish is available for Spanish dominant students during lesson and book check out	41
c. In-service is provided by media specialist to school staff on Hispanic literature/history/culture	6
d. In-service is provided to teaching staff by others than the media specialist	17
e. Hispanic cultural events are periodically conducted in the media center	36
f. The media specialist provides assistance to teachers in organizing classroom projects dealing with Hispanic literature/history/culture	38
g. Special exhibits featuring Hispanic books or artifacts are organized by the library throughout the school year	29
h. Presentations by bilingual resource speakers	19
i. Presentations by local Hispanic leaders	21
j. Readings by local Hispanic writers	12
k. Storytelling by local Hispanic tellers	22
l. Hispanic folk art exhibits	14
m. Performances by local mariachis	18
n. Performances of Hispanic dances	32
o. Films about Hispanics or Hispanic topics	26
p. Videos about Hispanics or Hispanic topics	28
q. Performances by Hispanic theater groups	12
r. Puppet shows in Spanish or Spanish/English	8
s. Video production activities about Hispanics or Hispanic culture	9
t. Hispanic arts and crafts demonstrations and classes	16

Library programs realized by library media specialists or their assistant(s) were further investigated regarding the language(s) used for these activities. Respondents were asked to check those activities that they performed and whether they were carrying them out using English only, Spanish only, or combining both English and Spanish. Table 5 describes the results of this question on the survey.

Other activities that were mentioned by respondents were district library skills (English only), instructional lab exercises (English only), cassette recordings (Spanish only), and combining both English and Spanish workshops, videos, signs, and directions.

One question asked respondents, What books have you used most successfully with Hispanic children? The responses showed significant variance and reflected different interpretations of the question. First, some librarians thought the question referred to books in any language that were popular with Hispanic students; others interpreted the question as meaning books in Spanish only. Time

and time again, media specialists responded that "children like to read the same books in Spanish that their classmates are reading in English." The overwhelming response of the librarians surveyed favored Joe Hayes's books and the Clifford series by Norman Bredwell. More than 75 percent of the respondents stated that they used Spanish translations of popular books in English. The most often quoted authors were Jose Aruego, Judy Blume, Betsy Byars, Tomie dePaola, Dr. Seuss, Mercer Mayer, Maurice Sendak, Shel Silverstein, and Tomi Ungerer. Spanish titles or authors infrequently were mentioned.

TABLE 5  
LANGUAGES IN WHICH ACTIVITIES ARE PERFORMED

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Language(s) Used</i>		
	<i>English Only</i>	<i>Spanish Only</i>	<i>Combining Both Languages</i>
Storytelling	31	3	17
Booktalks	42	1	10
Use of patterned language materials	18	1	10
Poetry readings or recitations	26	2	14
Readalouds	38	4	15
Dramatizations	20	2	7
Singing	17	3	13
Choral readings	17	2	9
Puppet shows	18	1	8

Further research is needed to address this question. Does the fact that the library media specialists in this study are generally not highly fluent speakers of Spanish influence the choice of books in translation over books written originally in Spanish? One might speculate that, if the reviews for the English version of books that have been translated into Spanish are favorable, that the no, low, or medium Spanish-proficiency media specialists would assume the translation is of the same calibre and would be of high interest for the Spanish primary child. "The pros and cons need to be weighed," said some of the librarians that were interviewed by phone; they felt that there were several issues to be considered. On the one hand, the translations are: (1) printed in the United States and are easily obtained, (2) they cost less, (3) they have appropriate cataloging material, and (4) reviews are found in professional publications in English. On the other hand, Spanish translations of books written in English usually depict: (1) the life experiences of Anglo children, (2) lack a Hispanic cultural background, and (3) do not allow Hispanic children to become acquainted with their Hispanic literary heritage.

### POSITIVE TRENDS IN HISPANIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The first narrative question in the survey was devised to identify what positive trends in Hispanic children's literature were apparent to library media specialists. Three major areas of improvement were reported by the respondents: (1) the quality of books printed outside of the United States, including better illustrations, binding, quality of paper and appropriate linguistic level; (2) the increased number of titles available suitable for target groups with themes more appropriate for each grade level; and (3) more positive Hispanic role models. Other positive trends included the increased availability of books that reflect the Hispanic heritage to which children can relate, an increased number of nonfiction books that tie into thematic units across the curriculum and are written with sensitivity to the needs of Hispanic children, the preservation of Hispanic traditional values, and, finally, the tendency for Hispanic authors to write stories that interest children rather than "preach" at them with didactic messages.

### NEGATIVE TRENDS, NEEDS, AND CONCERNS REGARDING ACCESS TO SPANISH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The last two narrative questions in the survey asked respondents to report what they viewed as negative trends in Hispanic children's literature and to elaborate on their needs and concerns in relation to their library media center. Table 6 synthesizes the responses of the participants for the last two questions in three columns: negative trends, needs, and concerns, but it must be noted that there was a significant number of respondents who did not answer the narrative questions. Twenty-eight participants did not answer the question relating to what they perceived as negative trends in Hispanic children's literature, and sixteen did not respond to the last question which related to the needs and concerns of individual libraries in terms of Hispanic children's literature. Eleven respondents in one case and seven in the other stated that they were not qualified to respond to these questions. Once again, it could be conjectured that the lack of Spanish language fluency of the library media specialists affects their ability to respond to these questions. The four major categories reported by the school library media specialists are: (1) acquisition/selection/collection development; (2) quality; (3) funding; and (4) personnel and education issues which decrease school media centers' access to children's literature in Spanish by Hispanic children.

### SUCCESSFUL EVENTS

The cover letter for the survey also asked respondents to share experiences of highly successful events in their library. There were

very few responses to the request, possibly due to the time it took to respond to the rest of the survey.

Among the successful activities held in the school library media center that were submitted, the following appear most noteworthy:

1. *Hispanic Heritage Month*—an all school program which recognized the contributions of Hispanics in art, music, dance, sports, politics, government, and science.
2. *Piñata-Making Workshop*—held in the school library media center on May 5. Students learned how to make and break a *Piñata*.
3. *Christmas Celebration Honoring the Teachers*—PTA prepared Mexican food for a luncheon for the faculty.
4. *Young Author's Writing Festival*—included Hispanic speakers and topics.
5. *Career Day*—Hispanic speakers from various career paths were invited.
6. *Artist-in-Residence Program*—paid by the school district, the artist extended awareness of other cultures and art forms linking to students' own culture.
7. *Bilingual Book Fairs*.
8. *Readers Theater in Spanish*—for elementary children.
9. *Reading Buddies Program*—upper grade elementary students in grades 2-5 were paired with, and read to, children in grades K-1.
10. *Drama Department Presentations*—students presented their plays in the media center.
11. *Parent and Student Evening at the Media Center*—children, their parents, and grandparents shared an evening of traditional stories and songs.
12. *Story-Writing Workshops*—children were taught the basic principles of storytelling, wrote their stories, and the librarian submitted them for publication. The intent of this effort was to develop young Hispanic authors.
13. *Biographies of Famous Hispanics*—were read to the entire school through the school's loudspeaker during Hispanic Recognition Week.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were developed from the findings of the survey:

1. Public school administrators in schools with a considerable number of Hispanic children, many of whom are primarily Spanish speakers, should diligently promote reading in both English and Spanish and champion diversity in their school. They should seek funds to increase the library media center's Spanish language

holdings that ensure that primary Spanish students have equal access to books they can read for pleasure or information. They can nurture their school library media center's access by the Spanish-dominant students by encouraging and providing funds to their library staff to travel and attend local and national conferences dealing with Hispanic children and increase their knowledge of the population they serve. They are encouraged to arrange for in-service training provided by the school district in cultural literacy regarding Hispanics to further access and services for Hispanic children. In addition, they are urged, whenever possible, to hire bilingual library staff and actively recruit Spanish-speaking volunteers to help in the media center. School administrators need to be actively involved in organizing a community task force which brings neighborhood parents and leaders together to advocate diversity and to increase the media center's activities. Finally, they should avoid scheduling Spanish-speaking teacher's planning periods at the same time that students visit the library.

2. School library media specialists, particularly those who have little or no Spanish fluency, need fluent support staff to ensure that primary-Spanish children have equal access to the media center. They should review their holdings in Spanish in relation to their primary-Spanish enrollment and ensure that there are sufficient titles to meet the needs of primary-Spanish students. Whenever possible, they should enroll in Spanish classes to increase their fluency and ability to communicate in Spanish. They would benefit by attending local, state, and national conferences that would expand their knowledge of Hispanic culture and the information needs of Hispanic children. They would benefit by meeting with Spanish-speaking librarians in their district to discuss and review any new publications which would facilitate their selection of books in Spanish. They would profit considerably if they organize a local parent advisory board that would become involved in finding ways of increasing services for Hispanic children and would recruit them as resources for media center programs. Media specialists could develop a newsletter that reports successful events for Hispanic children and invite their parents to participate. Important resources for media specialists are bilingual teachers who can help expand the media center's programs and the sharing of their bilingual program's resources in such ways as: books bought with their funds, and publication of catalogs addressed to bilingual personnel, and reviews and book lists of materials in Spanish. Teachers could supply vendors' catalogs that they gather at bilingual conferences such as NABE (National Association for Bilingual Education).



Bilingual students could be asked to do booktalks for special groups, to be library resource people, and to be leaders in book discussions.

TABLE 6  
NEGATIVE TRENDS, NEEDS AND CONCERNS REGARDING HISPANIC CHILDREN'S  
LITERATURE AS PERCEIVED BY SCHOOL MEDIA SPECIALISTS

<i>Negative Trends</i>	<i>Needs</i>	<i>Concerns</i>
<b>I. Acquisition/Selection/Collection Development</b>		
	To increase Spanish language materials collection—particularly non-fiction titles (n=16)	The limited size of the Spanish language materials collection (n=2)
	Increased holdings that address the Hispanic children's experience in the U.S. and encourage positive Hispanic role models (n=6)	The materials have no relevancy to urban, Hispanic children (n=3) Lack of Hispanic authors as Hispanic role models (n=2)
	More Spanish language reference materials (n=4)	Lack of good elementary-level Spanish language reference materials (n=4)
Levels of Spanish language reading materials are too high for intended grade levels (n=1)	More elementary large print Spanish language materials (n=5) More Spanish language materials at lower levels for nonliterate, recent immigrants (n=1) More Spanish language materials to supplement curricular themes (n=4)	Not enough variety of Spanish language materials at different reading levels (n=2) Lack of Spanish language materials to supplement curricular themes (n=2)
	More library skills materials and signage in Spanish language (n=1)	Lack of standardization of cataloging for Spanish materials (n=6)
Materials in English/Spanish format are confusing (n=1)	More materials in English/Spanish format (n=2)	Not enough materials in English/Spanish format (n=2) Insufficient reviews and recommendations from reliable sources to facilitate Spanish language materials selection at various grades and performance levels (n=5)

Too many translations of English/Spanish, not enough original Spanish language materials (n=3)

More translations of popular English language titles into Spanish language (n=5)

More non-print Spanish language materials (n=5)

II. Quality

	Improved physical quality of Spanish language materials (binding, paper, illustrations) (n=2)	Low physical quality of Spanish language materials (binding, paper, illustrations) (n=11)
Poor Spanish language translations of books in English (n=4)		Dialect differences in Spanish language materials (n=3)
Poor literary quality of Spanish language materials (n=2)	More quality award-winning Spanish language materials (n=1)	Not enough quality award-winning Spanish language materials (n=2)

III. Funding

	More funding for Spanish language materials (n=8)	Lack of funding for Spanish language materials (n=2)
		High cost of Spanish language materials (n=8)

IV. Personnel and Education Issues Which Decrease School Media Center Access to Children's Literature in Spanish by Hispanic Children

Many school media specialists and library staff that are not Spanish-fluent are being hired to work in schools that have primary Spanish students (n=3)	Improved staff development for school media specialists that serve Spanish-dominant students (n=2)	A significant number of respondents failed to answer questions #28 (n=28) and #29 (n=16) and claimed they were inadequately qualified to answer any questions regarding children's literature in Spanish
	Spanish language and culture classes to increase cultural awareness (n=2)	Bilingual education programs: (a) Purchase materials only for use by their students in their classrooms—thus denying access to these materials to bilingual, English-dominant children, and (b) act as a barrier against the children learning to read in English (n=4)
		Perceived homogenization of various cultures into the term "Hispanic" (n=1)

---

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I wish to express my gratitude to Sarah Barchas for her guidance and support and to Judi Moreillon for her help in the preparation of this article.

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL LIBRARY CHILDREN'S LIBRARIANS' SURVEY

For purposes of this survey the term *Hispanic* will be used to refer to the large mass of people who are or descend from a Spanish-speaking country.

QUESTIONS 1-4 ARE OPTIONAL

1. Your name \_\_\_\_\_
  2. The name and address of your school \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  3. Would you allow me to follow up on this questionnaire by phone? If yes, what is the phone number and time I can reach you? \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Are you Hispanic? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 

IN WHAT CITY AND STATE IS YOUR SCHOOL LOCATED? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How would you rate your knowledge of the following sub-groups of the Hispanic population. Please indicate with a letter value:  
    **H = High    A = Average    L = Low**  
    \_\_\_\_ a. Mexican Americans      \_\_\_\_ f. South Americans  
    \_\_\_\_ b. Chicanos                      \_\_\_\_ g. Puerto Ricans  
    \_\_\_\_ c. Latinos                        \_\_\_\_ h. Afro Hispanics  
    \_\_\_\_ d. Cuban Americans            \_\_\_\_ i. Spanish Americans  
    \_\_\_\_ e. Central Americans
6. Number of students in your school \_\_\_\_
7. What grades does your school serve? \_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_
8. What is the approximate percentage of Hispanic students in your school?  
    \_\_\_\_
9. What is the approximate percentage of Hispanics in your community?  
    \_\_\_\_
10. What is the approximate percentage of students in your school whose primary language is Spanish? \_\_\_\_
11. Description of the personnel in your library (check all items that apply to your library, please)  
    \_\_\_\_ a. School library media specialist with M.L.S. degree  
        Spanish fluency High \_\_ Moderate \_\_ Low \_\_ None \_\_  
    \_\_\_\_ b. School librarian with state certification  
        Spanish fluency High \_\_ Moderate \_\_ Low \_\_ None \_\_

- c. Library parent volunteers, hours per week \_\_\_  
Spanish fluency High \_\_\_ Moderate \_\_\_ Low \_\_\_ None \_\_\_
- d. Part time librarian M.L.S., hours per week \_\_\_  
Spanish fluency High \_\_\_ Moderate \_\_\_ Low \_\_\_ None \_\_\_
- e. Library clerk, hours per week \_\_\_  
Spanish fluency High \_\_\_ Moderate \_\_\_ Low \_\_\_ None \_\_\_
- f. Library aide, hours per week \_\_\_  
Spanish fluency High \_\_\_ Moderate \_\_\_ Low \_\_\_ None \_\_\_
- g. Other—Please describe including hours per week they assist you  
and their Spanish fluency \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 12. What is the approximate number of books in the collection of your library? \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. What approximate percentage of your collection does the Spanish language juvenile material represent? \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. What is your annual book budget? \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- 15. What approximate percentage of your annual overall budget is currently devoted to the purchase of Spanish language books? \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- 16. What approximate percentage of your annual budget is devoted to non-print materials in Spanish? \_\_\_\_\_
- 17. Has your library/school conducted a needs assessment to determine the language(s) of your users and their reading interests? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
If "yes" please describe what you did. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 18. What is the process of book selection for purchase of new titles in your school?
  - a. centralized
  - b. school level

If your answer is "b", please describe the book selection process \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 19. Do you have a Spanish-language review committee that evaluates materials to determine their appropriateness for inclusion in your collection? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

20. Does your library have specific criteria for evaluating Spanish-language materials? Yes  No . If yes, would you briefly describe or send me a copy of your criteria, please? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

21. If the answer to 20 is yes, how is the committee selected and what contingencies are represented? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

22. Do you have any type of cooperative agreements with

- a. another school?
- b. the local public library or a branch?

If you checked either item above, does the cooperation include services for Hispanic children? Yes  No

### *LIBRARY ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES*

23. Please check the items that apply to your program.

- a. Children visit the library on a fixed schedule each week
- b. Spanish is available for Spanish-dominant students during lessons and book check out
- c. Inservice is provided by librarian to school staff on Hispanic literature/history/culture
- d. Inservice on Hispanic literature/history/culture is provided to teaching staff by others than the librarian
- e. Hispanic cultural events are periodically conducted in the library
- f. The librarian provides assistance to teachers in organizing classroom projects dealing with Hispanic literature/history/culture
- g. Special exhibits featuring Hispanic books or artifacts are organized by the library throughout the school year
- h. Presentations by bilingual resource speakers
- i. Presentations by local Hispanic leaders
- j. Readings by local Hispanic writers
- k. Storytelling by local Hispanic tellers
- l. Hispanic folk art exhibits
- m. Performances by local mariachis
- n. Performances of Hispanic dances
- o. Films about Hispanics or Hispanic topics
- p. Videos about Hispanics or Hispanic topics
- q. Performances by Hispanic theater groups
- r. Puppet shows in Spanish or Spanish/English
- s. Video production activities about Hispanics or Hispanic culture
- t. Hispanic arts and crafts demonstrations and classes
- u. Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

24. Do you print flyers announcing programs? Yes  No  Are they in English and Spanish? Yes  No

**LIBRARY PROGRAMS**

25. Below are some activities that are performed in school libraries by the librarian or the children in the school. Please check those that are performed in your library.

	English Only	Spanish Only	Combining both languages
Storytelling			
Booktalks			
Use of patterned language materials			
Poetry readings or recitations			
Readalouds			
Dramatizations			
Singing			
Choral readings			
Puppet shows			
Other			

26. What books have you used most successfully with Hispanic children? Please list (Use the opposite blank page if necessary). \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



---



---



---

27. What trends in Hispanic children's literature do you view as positive?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

28. What trends in Hispanic children's literature do you view as negative?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

29. What do you feel are your greatest needs and concerns in Hispanic children's literature for your school library? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## REFERENCES

- American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology. (1988). *Information power: Guidelines for school library media programs*. Washington, DC: Association for Educational Communications and Technology; Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Miller, M. L., & Shontz, M. (1991). Expenditures for resources in school library media centers FY 1989-1990. *School Library Journal*, 37(8), 32-42.