

THE BARAHONA CENTER

<http://www.csusm.edu/csb/>

The Barahona Center for the Study of Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents, at Cal State San Marcos, CA, is an academic center that promotes literacy in English and Spanish and the study of Spanish-language children's books and books centered around Latino people and culture. It was founded 1989 by Isabel Schon (native of Mexico)

The Center collects and studies:

- Books in Spanish for youth published worldwide
- Also books in English about Latinos, especially those published since 1989
- Also classics and controversial books

Tries to collect everything in these categories, good and bad, so collection can be used for learning selection criteria, etc.

Every summer they offer workshops:

- Current Issues: Books in Spanish for Young Readers.
- Books and Reading Strategies for Bilingual Students in Grades K-8
- Books in Spanish for children and adolescents/Los libros en español para niños y adolescentes

OVERVIEW OF "CURRENT ISSUES" WORKSHOP

In 2005 I attended the 3-day workshop "Current Issues: Books in Spanish for Young Readers," mostly taught by Adalín Torres-Zayas of the Inglewood Public Library, CA. I found it very enlightening regarding the availability, quality, and origins of Spanish-language youth materials. We learned a *lot* about the Spanish-language children's publishing industries of Latin America (especially Argentina and Mexico), Spain, and the U.S., and discussed complications of acquisition. We also explored the extensive Spanish-language youth materials library of the Center for research, evaluation and selection experience. We talked about many of the complications in publishing and distributing books in Spanish, including:

- infrastructure problems (such as the collapse of the Argentinean economy, and the propensity of Spain's publishers to do short runs of thousands of titles but keep no backlist);
- an array of issues in publishing bilingual books, including altered texts, poor translations and compromised layout of text and art;
- translation issues (including a shallow pool of known, skilled translators for youth materials, and overall weak editing and painfully poor quality of translations from English to Spanish);
- differences in spoken and written Spanish among various countries and populations, and how/if that affects publishing and/or selection; and
- geographical barriers to distribution.

ACQUIRING BOOKS:

1. **Free books:** In Mexico, the SEP (Secretaria de Educación Pública, or Public Education Department) is a government agency that publishes all school books (and won't let private publishers print for schools). You can get **free copies of Mexican textbooks from the consulate**—ask for the “free textbook package” and let them know how big a population you serve. (The quality is excellent and they make good reference and giveaway books.) You can also apparently ask for donations for events such as Día de los Niños.
2. **A Few Good Publishers You Can Generally Rely On** (according to Adalín)

PanAmericana – great quality

Shinseken – Japanese publisher in Argentina and Chile. High quality. Lots of folklore.

Atlántida (Argentina) – good

Colíhue (Argentina)

Conaculta (Mexico) – school readers; some are good

Ediciones Curacán (Puerto Rico)

Rueda (Spain; distributed in Mexico) – good bilingual text (rare!); fairy tales are good; illustrations can be “dorky”

LaGalera (Spain?) Good book example: Perro y Gato

Juventud (Spain)

Universidad de Puerto Rico press does a good “Serie Dos Lenguas” – decent bilingual editions in which complete Spanish text with illus. comes first, followed by English text (eg. *Sopa de Hortalizas*)

Ekaré – does excellent translations.

Paramón – good readers, sometimes translated into English.

Kalandraka (Spain - Barcelona) – newish publishing company—good, but distinctive (lots of weird illustrations)

Corimbo (Spain – Barcelona)

Groundwood Press (Canadian)

Children's Press (US – San Francisco).

INFO RE: THE SPANISH-LANGUAGE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY WORLDWIDE

Biggest publishers:

1) Barcelona

2) Madrid

3) Mexico

4) Argentina (now lots of publishers still listed but no longer able to publish)

Politics affecting language and publishing: The Spanish Civil War drove many intellectuals out of Spain to Latin American countries. Now the most powerful publishing houses are in Spain, Argentina, and Mexico (and Colombia, somewhat).

The Latin American “troubles” of the 80's affected countries' infrastructures and, therefore, publishing. You won't see books from Panamá and Honduras, eg. Two giant publishing houses now (ultimately) own most large Hispanic presses. This could affect diversity of publishing.

With the Internet and other media, while print may not disappear, the range of books published may diminish.

Publishing in Spain (Barcelona & Madrid)

- Publishing is big business (with a big history).
- Influences include: wars and censorship (esp. pre-1980)
- Barcelona – tends to have more variety, be more interesting or experimental
- Spanish publishers are spending money to make sure the US knows them.
- DeLibros is the magazine of Spain's publishing world.

Most publishers in Spain publish **literature**. Only about .5% of titles are in the sciences, math, etc. This means that culture is represented, but (cf. Adalín) "*knowledge* is not being captured."

Lots of titles, short runs: Spanish publishers tend to publish far more titles than the market can absorb—more than 60,000 annually (of which about half are new titles). They do short runs: about 3,000 copies. The average life span of a title is 3 years. Meanwhile, there aren't many readers buying books in Spain. Booksellers send excess books back to publishers. So, there are lots of books—but in the wrong place! **Leftovers** get "cremated" after a brief (1-2 years) storage in warehouses. This means there's no backlist. **Distribution** is also a big problem. It's actually cheaper for them to destroy the leftovers than to ship them, which is frustrating, because there is big demand in other countries, such as the US and Mexico. (As Adalín says, There are too many books but in the wrong place.)

Spanish books are **expensive** for us. (It's our dollar in the Euro economy.) Also, they don't do discounts on list price, and then there's the price of shipping.

ICEX is in charge of distribution to other countries, including US.

Some local publishers buy the rights to certain titles and do print-on-demand instead of a complete run. (1 copy? \$50. 200 copies? \$1.50 each.)

4000+ bookstores & kiosks.

700+ publishers in Spain (which breaks up the market).

About 25 of those publishers put out more than 75% of the books. Only the top 5 publishers actually make any money:

- Planeta
- Planeta Agostini
- Circulo de Lectores
- Grupo Anaya
- Group Santillana

The average price of a book is more than 13 Euros right now.

There are about 260,000 titles in print at a time (remember, with 30,000 new titles a year).

When Argentina's economy crashed, Spain lost 80% of its market.

Catalán books: appealingly weird, surreal sensibility. Kids seem to like.

Publishing in Mexico

350 bookstores in the whole country! (As of 2003)

Fondo de Cultura Económica—premiere publishing house in Mexico

SEP (Secretaria de Educación Pública)-- Government publishes all school books (and won't let private publishers print for schools).

- You can get free copies of Mexican textbooks from the consulate—ask for the “free textbook package” and let them know how big a population you serve. (The quality is excellent and they make good reference and giveaway books.) You can also apparently ask for donations for events such as Día de los Niños.

There is no tax in Mexico on imported books. Imports 60% of books sold (most from Spain).

Mexico wants to crack the US market (hence the Feria Internacional del Libro, or International Book Fair, in Guadalajara).

Argentina

Very high literacy level: 93%.

No state involvement in publishing.

20% of the market is textbooks.

Books in Argentina currently produced with the US market in mind. (B/c there's no money in Argentina; no market.)

1669 *listed* publishers (most family-owned), but only 200 are actually producing at this time.

Book piracy is a big problem: how to keep profits?

Quality is high, including in children's publishing.

Lots of nonfiction published (it's popular).

Colombia

Now the cheapest place to print. But a bit hard to get books out of the country because of strict borders.

Govt. sponsors kiosks of bring 'em backs in Colombian metro and bus stops!

- Norma – big Colombian publisher (has satellites in Mexico, Spain, etc.). Produces lots of textbooks. Distributes through Puerto Rico (it's cheaper).
- Fundalectura – reading group of teachers and librarians; generates booklists by topic; actividades de promoción de lectura. Colombian. (Check out web site.)
- Libros de Colombia (distributor)
- Latino Health Alliance (parenting resources)

A Tiny Bit About Other Countries

Puerto Rico: publishes maybe 5 new children's titles a year. (The rest of Latin America is similar.) Get most of their titles from Spain.

Geography and economy are barriers.

Many moving toward buying electronic versions of titles and producing locally. But still have the problem of shipping somehow to US.

Books in Spanish in the U.S.

- US Publishing of Spanish-language kids' books is weak.
- "You must familiarize yourself with the stuff produced in Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia (the big houses) and elsewhere to give yourself the framework so you can evaluate the Spanish language material produced in the US." - Adalín
- Not much available in mass market (Wal-Mart etc.)
- Lots of translations of English favorites, celebrity stuff, Disney and TV shows, school market stuff—nothing very daring.
- Sometimes sold at school book fairs—eg. Scholastic En Español.
- Too few sales outlets in U.S. (like Spanish-language bookstores).
- Often US sellers don't know how to sell to the Spanish-language audience.
- Few trade publications.
- No real trade shows – in part because publishing behemoths like Argentina can't afford to come, and the U.S. itself has few producers.

Adalín's conclusion: buy books wherever you can find them! (And don't get hung up on bindings. Set them aside for mending and replacing, or rebind before putting out.)

Adalín feels most Spanish-language books published in the US & Canada are not very good. Exceptions: Groundwood Press (Canadian) and Children's Press (SF).

Also, apparently May is going to be Latino Book Month.

Challenges to selecting and buying books in Spanish

Remember, it's very different from selecting and buying books in English.

Audience: some points and statistics (presented by Isabel Schon):

People in many Hispanic countries still need to have their basic needs of food, shelter, etc. met before they can care about books.

Remember: lots of Spanish *speakers*; fewer Spanish *readers*.

US/UK: 90% of families have at least one book in the home (the dictionary)

Spain: 60% don't read anything at all
90% watch TV every day

Mexico: 66% don't read anything at all
85-90% watch TV every day

UNESCO survey of 108 countries:
Mexico is #107 in quality and quantity of reading matter

National University of Mexico study of books read by adults:
Of 200 countries, Mexico is 199

Drop-out rate of Latinos in the US: 46%

Issues of Quality:

Money isn't there; therefore, physical quality of books is not up to US standards, but content is still unique and valuable. In selecting Spanish-language books, bear in mind that we apply quality standards based in the US economy. Lots of countries are publishing books of poorer physical quality, but the content may still be good. Consider buying these for library collections. Poor physical quality may be offset by rich or unique content as well as the opportunity to offer members of our communities authentic representations of self from their countries of origin.

Isabel Schon's opinion is that sometimes we may need to select for content over artistic appeal, because not all publishers have the wherewithal to make lovely books but the content may still be terrific. And then teachers and librarians need to do what we can to promote the books and connect them with their readers.

Lots of good stuff can't be found in the US. Barriers to distribution include geography and money. US selectors need to be traveling, buying from local fairs.

Bilingual Books

Bilingual children's books seem to be in vogue now. One large market is highly-educated Anglo parents who want their kids to be bilingual and seek out resources.

Schon estimates 80% of bilingual (Eng/Sp) books are poorly translated! One example: a book called David about a little boy's summer activities. The original was in Spanish, and the first page said, "¿Quieres jugar? Es el ultimo día de la escuela." The bilingual edition crammed the illustrations over on the page to make room for the doubled text, and for unknown reasons simplified/dumbed down everything, so the first page now reads (in English and in Spanish), "David learns many things in school." Ay!

New trend: Mexican presses printing bilingual books for schools teaching English.

In Schon's opinion, it makes sense to do translations into *Mexican* Spanish, because:

- In US 65% of Latinos are Mexican
- Mexican Spanish is becoming ubiquitous, in part because of world-wide distribution of telenovelas and Mexican films.

Issues include:

- Where to put the additional text?
- How not to wreck the illustrations or the relationship of text to illustrations?
- Translation: not just translating languages but also from one culture to another.
- Most publishers prefer translator who is native speaker of original text, but they are often in short supply.
- Translators need not just language but *writing* skills.
- Translators often not acknowledged, cited, catalogued, or paid royalties!
- What flavor Spanish (peninsular, Mexican, etc.) and what English (American, British, etc.) to use? What vocabulary?

Translations:

For adult materials, many European countries have good systems of translation already in place, especially for translations into English. But solid teams of editors and translators for *children's* books are not in place, especially in the US. Publishers don't know where to find them (and, not speaking Spanish themselves, may not realize their translators aren't that good).

Adalín trusts Spanish publishers' translations (German, French, etc. into Spanish) more than translations of English into Spanish in the US.

Isabel Schon started "Caveat Emptor," a column in *Booklist*, wherein she calls attention to inferior translations of children's materials (monolingual and bilingual editions).

Provide feedback: we need to write to editors and publishers re: quality of translations.

Awards:

PurabelPré award (English and bilingual)

Américas Book Award for Children's and YA Literature—bilingual and Spanish

IBBY: International Board on Books for Young People—has chapters in Spain, Argentina, etc.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION: What is Spanish?

Summary of discussion: Spoken Spanish varies somewhat depending on country and region, reflecting political fractures and incorporating contributions from at least 256 indigenous languages. Written Spanish, on the other hand, is fairly well standardized, nowadays with more of a Latin American than a Castilian flavor.

The popularity of telenovelas (Spanish-language soap operas) has contributed to the standardization of Spanish.

- There are 22 Spanish Language Academies working on defining the Spanish language (& producing dictionaries) in various countries. When deciding rules of standardization, everyone used to look to Madrid, but now, the *español americano* predominates.
- Adalín: "Telenovelas are the best thing that ever happened to Spanish" – language standardization. They used to be filmed in Puerto Rico (supposed to be the most "standard" accent), but now lots are filmed in Mexico, leading to the Mexican accent being more normative.
- There are many spoken varieties of Spanish but only *one standard written Spanish* (cf. Adalín). Not, for example, like the varieties of printed Chinese. Printed Spanish may be good or bad quality (grammar, translation, etc.) but not "Mexican" or "Chilean."