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Introduction

The big research question that I asked myself when thinking about how to go about this project was, "How can public libraries effectively tailor their services and resources to provide equitable access and support for Hispanic communities, considering cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors?" I did some research to see what public libraries were doing to provide equitable access and I also wanted to know *how* they're providing the access. I focused on a specific article by LaTesha Velez et al. titled, "*It Starts by Asking the Right Questions - Meeting the Needs of the Hispanic Community in Public Libraries*." The research team focused on the rapidly growing Hispanic community in Mecklenburg, NC. According to Velez et al., public libraries had the resources necessary for Hispanic communities, but there was a lack of information distribution. Therefore my following question was, how can public libraries find ways to distribute their resources to different communities? What can they do to ensure that different communities are informed about the services/resources that they offer?

I think the best way to find out what the community needs is by asking them directly. In this action research proposal, I will explore methods that could potentially work when wanting to gather the Hispanic community's input. In the meantime, we will focus on the literary works that I collected for this project.

Literature Review

Listening to Our Communities

According to Tyckoson (2001) "To be successful, librarians must know the needs of their community and reflect those needs in the library's collection." In general, one could say that in order for librarians to be successful, they must know the needs of their communities and that goes way beyond just the library's collection but it also extends over to the services that are provided such as programming and partnerships that libraries create. In Tyckoson's article, he also focuses on the importance of gathering the community's input to know what services and resources to provide. So how can this translate over to how services are being advertised to the Hispanic community? The biggest thing that I thought about was exactly what Tyckoson was saying. To distribute the information on what libraries have to offer, we must ensure that we are also listening to our communities.

Serving Hispanic Communities

The growth of Hispanic populations in the U.S. is indicative of the diverse needs of this growing community (Velez, L. et al, 2022). With the diverse needs of the Hispanic community, this would mean that libraries would have to learn how to cater to and understand that the Hispanic community has different needs such as immigration status, backgrounds, and cultures. This is important to keep in mind when creating library programs because identifying these differences is essential when creating programs, services, and outreach. (Velez, L. et al, 2022). According to the U.S. Census, North Carolina's Latinx/Hispanic population is growing at a faster rate than the national average. Why does this matter? As the Hispanic population continues to grow in North Carolina, this means that libraries would need to listen to their communities in order to provide adequate services equitably.

Trust in Libraries

  How people view public libraries can determine how they interact with them. Trust is a big part of how communities interact with public libraries. "In the literature, public libraries have been described as producers of trust and social capital as they offer universal access to information services, treat all patrons equally, and provide a meeting place available to everyone" (Vårheim 2007). Now does this remain true for all communities? Historically libraries haven't been known to have been always equitable or welcoming. However, in recent years, we have seen public libraries working towards changing their past practices to provide equitable access and welcoming environments for all. It's important to note that it can be difficult for marginalized communities to trust public libraries if there are no obvious signs of creating equitable access and welcoming spaces for all.

Seeing Yourself Reflected in the Public Library

  One thing that we can say for sure is that it is important to see your identity represented in different areas of your life. This especially holds for marginalized communities. It is important that although anyone can speak Spanish, Latinx/Hispanic patrons can also see their identity reflected in the library professionals. (Velez, L. et al, 2022). "Alire and Ayala (2007) explain that successful outreach efforts designed to bring more Latinx community members into the library necessitate fluency in Spanish" (Velez, L. et al, 2022). This is extremely important because sometimes within the Hispanic/Latinx community, you might encounter patrons who experience language barriers and it is extremely important that bilingual staff are implemented within the public library to ensure that patrons feel comfortable and also can receive the same information as everybody else.

Methods

Returning to my research question: "How can public libraries effectively tailor their services and resources to provide equitable access and support for Hispanic communities, considering cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors?" When I think about this question, I want to go back to the beginning of this proposal where I mentioned that it is important to receive input from your community. To understand the needs of the Hispanic patrons, I would do both a survey and interviews. By using survey research I would be able to uncover how Hispanic patrons feel about public libraries and if they feel that their needs are being met despite there being resources already available. Conducting interviews would allow me to get more of an idea about how individuals feel about the resources that public libraries have to offer and it would allow me to gather information on more of a personal level. Both of the methods though may work in very similar ways and would provide me with different perspectives one of individual people and the other one who an entire collective.

When it comes to who exactly I would interview and survey, I would ensure to get different age groups within the Hispanic/Latinx community. I would perhaps like to focus more on individuals who are 18 and up, as well as families. The interview would consist of 10-15 questions and these are the following questions that I would potentially ask:

1. How often do you utilize library services in your community?

2. On a scale from 1 to 10, how accessible do you find the library services for the Hispanic community in your area?

3. Are there any specific challenges or barriers you face when trying to access library services as a member of the Hispanic community?

4. Do you feel that the library adequately caters to the cultural and linguistic needs of the Hispanic population?

5. Have you ever encountered language barriers while using library services? If so, how were they addressed?

6. What improvements do you think could be made to make library services more accessible and inclusive for Hispanic individuals and families?

7. Are there any specific programs or resources you would like to see offered by the library to better serve the Hispanic community?

8. How aware are you of the various services and resources offered by the library, such as bilingual storytime, language learning materials, or cultural events?

9. Do you feel that library staff members are culturally sensitive and understanding of the needs of the Hispanic community?

10. In what ways do you think the library could better engage with and involve the Hispanic community in its programs and initiatives?

  When thinking of these questions, I wanted to ensure that I would get a clear understanding of how Hispanic community members felt about public libraries. This understanding would allow me to potentially collaborate with public libraries to let them know what my findings were and hopefully, this would cause public libraries to analyze how they're distributing their resources to marginalized communities.

  The issue that I would run into when attempting to collect this information is being able to gain the trust of Hispanic/Latinx communities. I would perhaps look into partnering with a local organization that is trusted among the local Hispanic community. I would look at organizations such as Casa Azul, who have established themselves within the local Hispanic community in

Greensboro. Overall my methods would again include a survey and an interview for adult individuals and family units.

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