



## — On Hispanic Education: —

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### Concepts to teach about Hispanics in the U.S.

Hispanic education is education for and about Hispanics. Teachers should have a broad base of learnings about Hispanics, therefore, in their efforts to impart accurate knowledge and to help develop positive attitudes in their students about Hispanics. Such teacher learnings can occur through self-initiated research, experience, and/or coursework in teacher preparation colleges. Unfortunately, colleges too often neglect to teach future teachers enough and/or well enough about Hispanics in the U.S.

Well-prepared teachers should know, for example, that curriculum about Hispanics in the U.S. must be integrated throughout the educational experience of students, at all grade levels, in all subjects, and throughout the school year. In addition, well-prepared teachers should know that there are important concepts to teach about Hispanics in the U.S. Let us consider for now, five of these concepts; they include the following: a) Hispanics are individuals first, b) Hispanics are multiethnic, c) Hispanics are multiracial, d) Hispanics are multilingual, and e) Hispanics are multidimensional demographically.

We would do more justice to a Hispanic individual and his or her ethnic subgroup if we make an effort to know that person first as an individual Hispanic and secondly as a member of a Hispanic ethnic subgroup. By doing so, we will be less likely to falsely stereotype one or many Hispanic individuals from that ethnic subgroup. Although two members of a Hispanic subgroup may have considerable similarity in their characteristics, closer examination will reveal that no two Hispanics from any Hispanic ethnic subgroup are exactly alike. Only when we have come to know these two individuals very well, then might it be possible to know how different or alike they may be from their subgroup.

Here is why: it is not likely in any one Hispanic's lifetime that he or she will come to represent to the fullest either their Hispanic culture or their Hispanic ethnic subgroup. Not even the most "Hispanic" Hispanic will embody to the fullest his or her culture or ethnicity. Yet, if we get to know a Hispanic individual or a number of Hispanic individuals very well, we can learn about them as individuals or as members of a group. We should keep in mind, that these few individuals will give us only clues as to the characteristics of their group, and that they cannot not, however, reveal **everything** about their cultural or ethnic group.

Although Spain conquered many countries and implanted the Spanish language and Spanish institutions, not all the conquered countries and their peoples identified with the exact same historical past, common ancestry, or consciousness of kind, i.e., sense of peoplehood. As such, Hispanic peoples in the U.S. today have a varied historical past and slightly different ancestry, resulting in the existence of a number of Hispanic ethnic subgroups; among them are persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, and European Spanish ancestry. Among these groups there are important differences.

Among these differences are the racial make-up of these peoples. Some Hispanics in the U.S., for example, have retained what can be described a very white European appearance, even to the point of possible being blond and blue-eyed, such as with some U.S. Hispanics with more recent European ancestry. Among Hispanics with an ancestry from countries where African peoples intermarried with the indigenous population, we have Black Hispanics, such as among some Spanish-origin Caribbeans like some Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and others. The majority of Hispanics in the U.S., however, appear to be mestizo, i.e., of European Spanish ancestry and Western Hemisphere Indian ancestry. Such is the case with the majority of Mexican Americans, as well as other Hispanics with ancestors from Central and South America.

Interestingly enough, some Native American tribes in the U.S. Southwest speak Spanish and/or have Hispanic surnames, although the U.S. federal government counts them in the census as American Indian. In addition, among U.S. Hispanics of Philippine ancestry we have Pacific Islander Hispanics, and among U.S. Hispanics of South American ancestry there are even some with Chinese ancestry. As such, Hispanics in the U.S. contain a racial diversity in their makeup, i.e., mestizo, white, Black, American Indian, Asian, and Pacific Islander races.

Hispanics in the U.S. are also multilingual in terms of speaking a number of dialects of Spanish. To know a Hispanic ethnic subgroup is to know that they speak Spanish differently, if only slightly, from other Hispanics. Such differences, for example, can be in pronunciation, intonation, usage, meaning, and sometimes even in the spelling of the same "Spanish" word. Among Mexican Americans and Nuyorican Puerto Ricans, for example, the dialect of Spanish spoken by these Hispanics can almost be described as being "Spanglish," a form between Spanish and English. Some U.S. Hispanics are monolingual English-speaking so that their Hispanicness comes mainly from their Hispanic ancestry, heritage, name, associations, and/or appearances, not from speaking Spanish. Among most Spanish-speaking Hispanic ethnic subgroups in the U.S., however, standard Spanish is accepted as the language for inter- or intraethnic communication.

Finally, teachers should keep in mind that Hispanics in the U.S. are multidimensional, demographically speaking. When teaching about Hispanics, it is necessary, therefore, to take into consideration such things as heredity and ancestry, age, race, sex, socioeconomic status or class, state of health, place of birth or upbringing, occupation, political or organizational affiliation, employment status, religious preference, military service status, population size, education statistics, birthrates, fertility and mortality rates, handicap status, migration patterns, income, marriage status or rates, divorce rates, morbidity (illness) rates, and other characteristics. One should not generalize about any Hispanic characteristics or vital statistics, however, without being well-grounded in solid research and knowledge. Well-prepared teachers will know this and will be better educators for it.