



On Hispanic Education:

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Curriculum about Hispanics

Curriculum about Hispanics in grades K-12 is in great demand. Teachers, curriculum coordinators, and concerned Hispanics are very interested in instructional materials, activities, and information about Hispanics that can be used in our classrooms. There do not always exist, however, suitable materials that serve the purpose of teaching effectively about Hispanics. Many school districts will therefore need to develop, implement, and evaluate curriculum about Hispanics. As school districts prepare to develop curriculum or curriculum guides for teaching about Hispanics in grades K-12, they will want to take into consideration the manner in which they develop and organize their curriculum.

It is my contention, and that of other educators, that curriculum about Hispanics should be an integral part of the entire K-12 curriculum integrated throughout grade levels, subjects, and the school year. Additionally, it should be kept in mind that Hispanic education, i.e., education for and about Hispanics, is a subcategory of multicultural education; curriculum about Hispanics, therefore, should also be part of an overall multicultural curriculum that integrates education about other cultural and ethnic groups. Whatever the content about Hispanics that teachers may want to include in their instruction, consideration needs to be given to developing and organizing such curriculum according to the following factors: a) grade or ability level of the students, b) the subject matter being taught, c) the skill or learning objective being taught, and d) the instructional media being used.

I have always assumed that content about Hispanics to be used in the classroom would always be tailored to the grade or ability level of the student. It does no good to try and teach somebody something for which they are not ready to learn or understand. Good teachers will always, for example, consider whether any content is suitable for a certain grade level or for a certain reading ability of their students. Curriculum materials about Hispanics should therefore be carefully examined by instructors for whether or not their students will be able to comprehend the concepts and/or the language being used in the curriculum. If possible the content already should be labeled for its grade level applicability. Grade level considerations are especially important in the elementary grades of K-6, when children can form negative attitudes toward Hispanics if they were taught curriculum in their early years which they found difficult to understand or comprehend. On the other hand we do not want to bore older students or insult their intelligence because what is being taught about Hispanics is too elementary. Too hard or too easy instruction has the same effect—little or no learning.

Another consideration in teaching about Hispanics is the subject matter being taught. Subject matter specialists are usually very good at determining whether or not content is relevant to the subject area being taught. It is not always clear, however, whether curriculum about

Hispanics is relevant or applicable to a subject area. A good measure of the applicability of content about Hispanics in any given subject area is whether or not such content enriches the subject matter or increases student interest in the subject matter. In teaching science and math, for example, it may not seem that using examples or information about Hispanics is applicable, yet it could very well provide a very good opportunity to learn the subject matter more effectively than if such examples or information were left out. The social studies and the language arts are usually pointed out as the most suited to incorporate content about Hispanics, but it would be inexcusable if these two subject matter areas were the only ones incorporating curriculum about Hispanics. Subject matter specialists need also to avoid purist, but perhaps racist, approaches to teaching about their subject area. It is important to keep in mind that most subject matter specialists were trained in their subject matter at the college level without inclusion of content in that subject area about Hispanics. This must not be perpetuated in grades K-12!

Once curriculum about Hispanics has been examined for its grade level and subject matter applicability, consideration needs to be given to the skill or learning objective being taught. In this regard teachers must always keep in mind that students do not learn in a cultural vacuum. Regardless of what the curriculum is, there is always the curriculum behind the curriculum which involves values, attitudes, and cultural biases. Math teachers, for example, don't just teach that two plus two are four, they also teach about what they value when they teach this math concept. Given that the skill or learning objective to be taught is clear, teachers then need to give consideration to using content about Hispanics that can help the student arrive at the skill or learning objective desired. Over a period of time, information about Hispanics can therefore permeate various subject matter areas and be used to achieve numerous learning objectives within those subject areas.

The instructional mode or medium can sometimes influence the content, just as the content can sometimes influence the instructional mode or medium. Various approaches to teaching concepts, skills, or knowledge should characterize the curriculum, especially curriculum about Hispanics. Students learn through many ways, seeing or visually, hearing or audibly, touching or tactually, or through a combination of all their senses including smelling and tasting. Additionally, the whole gamut of audiovisual possibilities for teaching K-12 curriculum can provide ample opportunities to teach about Hispanics. Music and art are two very good examples. Pictorial or auditory approaches utilized to teach a math, science, social studies, or language arts concept or skill can be carefully selected to see or hear something Hispanic or something about Hispanics.

In conclusion, curriculum about Hispanics can be incorporated into the overall K-12 curriculum in various ways, at various times, and for various learning objectives. Good teachers know this and will teach accordingly.