



On Hispanic Education:

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Teachers of Hispanics

One of the most important things that Hispanic parents can do to improve the education of their children is to insist on teachers who are best for Hispanic students. Whether our Hispanic children are enrolled in preschool or in post graduate college educational programs, their performance and achievement in those programs will be affected by the kinds of teachers they have. Before Hispanic parents send their children to school they will therefore want to give serious consideration to the kind of teacher their child will be getting. Hispanic parents will want to request teachers with characteristics and qualities helpful to their children; this must be done before their child is assigned permanently to a teacher at the beginning of a school year.

It is important to keep in mind that even the most ideal teacher will be ineffective if other important variables for learning are not in place. Even though the performance and achievement of students is affected by other variables, Hispanic parents will nevertheless want to focus on the characteristics of the teacher as one of the most important of those variables. The education of our Hispanic children requires characteristics in teachers which will enhance the positive variables and minimize any negative variables which exist in an educational setting. Although the qualities which a teacher of Hispanics should have are manifold, five of the most important qualities, in my opinion, are the following: Teachers of Hispanics should be a) hispanophiles, b) bilingual, c) multicultural, d) parent-oriented, and e) competent.

I define hispanophile as a lover of persons, things, and places that are Hispanic. Teachers of Hispanic students should therefore be hispanophiles. This characteristic will enable the teacher to: a) relate positively to our Hispanic students, and b) build positive self-esteem in our Hispanic children. The development of a strong self-image and positive self-esteem in our children will contribute greatly in motivating them to achieve in school. A teacher who is a hispanophile will also know things about our children's culture, and this will help our children become more informed about their Hispanic heritage.

Hispanophiles don't have to speak Spanish to be lovers of things Hispanic, but those who speak Spanish are better hispanophiles than those who don't. Teachers of Hispanics in the U.S. should therefore be bilingual. Being bilingual will enable a teacher of our children to a) communicate in Spanish when necessary with Hispanic children who are limited English proficient, b) teach Spanish to our children who are not limited English proficient, and c) increase the understanding by the teacher of things Hispanic which can only be understood through a knowledge of Spanish. In other words, a teacher can be more effective linguistically and culturally with our children if that teacher is proficient in Spanish (as well as English). But bilingualism by a teacher, even in some other language besides Spanish, will give that teacher an ability to understand and appreciate bilingualism in others—Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike! This

appreciation is something we want to instill in our children and those who teach them.

Teachers of Hispanics should additionally be multicultural. Although we want teachers of Hispanics to create pride and appreciation in our children about their Hispanic culture, we don't want our Hispanic children growing up ethnocentric. Hispanic students need, therefore, to learn to be multicultural. Teachers who work with Hispanic students need to personify and practice the basic philosophical tenets of multicultural education; these tenets are: a) accepting and fostering cultural pluralism, b) developing greater understanding, respect, and acceptance of cultural differences in individuals and groups; c) developing positive and productive interaction among and with people of diverse cultural groups; d) gaining positive self-identity and self-acceptance for oneself and one's cultural and e) promoting equity among the culturally different groups that compose our community, state, and nation (Garcia, 1984).

Because the involvement of parents plays such an important role in the education of Hispanic children, teachers of Hispanic students should also be parent-oriented. By this, I mean that the teachers of our children should know the role that parents play and the potential they have to influence the education of their children. By being parent-oriented, teachers of Hispanics should also be skilled in helping parents help their children in school. Such a teacher will make frequent efforts to communicate and work with Hispanic parents regarding the education of their children. Teachers of Hispanics would do well to be parents themselves, but if they are not parents, they should nevertheless know what parents go through in raising children. Such awareness about parents and parenting will contribute greatly toward enabling teachers of Hispanics to relate to, help, and work with Hispanic parents.

Finally, teachers of Hispanics should be competent. Teacher competency includes such things as subject matter expertise, instructional and motivational know-how, classroom management skills, learning theory knowledge, human interaction skills, grade-level and age-level child ability awareness, sound physical and mental health, student evaluation skills, and other state-required and profession-recognized competencies. Parents of Hispanic children should know as much as possible about the competence of the teachers of their children and should even ask the teacher for a copy of their resume (good teachers will be proud to provide a resume). This will reveal years of experience, educational attainment, and any special honors or awards that a teacher might have. Parents need not only to know how competent teachers are, they also need to make sure schools recognize and reward such competence when it is exhibited. Parents whose children are taught by outstanding teachers, should make efforts to nominate such teachers for special awards and honors.

Hispanic parents will contribute greatly to the education of their children if they insist on the above qualities for the teachers of their sons and daughters.