



On Hispanic Education:

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Tenets to Follow in Educating Hispanics

For the past five years, the Office of Hispanic Education, with the approval of the State Board of Education and co-sponsorship with a number of organizations, have carried out an annual statewide conference on Hispanic Education here in Michigan. Within a few days following the publication of this article it will once again be time on May 9-10, 1986, to hold the annual Michigan Hispanic Education Conference. It is fitting, therefore, as that occasion draws around one more time that we review, re-examine, and recommit ourselves to the basic philosophical tenets of Hispanic Education. Doing this may be useful as we pursue, through this annual conference and other educational efforts, strategies and interventions to benefit Hispanics educationally at all levels.

Hispanic education includes the following basic philosophical tenets: a) Gaining positive self-identity and self-acceptance for oneself and one's culture; b) Accepting and fostering cultural pluralism; c) Developing greater understanding, respect, and acceptance of cultural differences in individuals and groups; d) Developing positive and productive interaction among and with people of diverse cultural groups; and e) Promoting equity among the culturally different groups that compose our community, state, and nation (Garcia, 1984, 1986). Let's examine these tenets as they apply to Hispanics and education for and about them.

Hispanic education should help Hispanics gain self-acceptance by helping them become more aware of themselves, their culture, language, and ethnicity. Doing this will help Hispanics develop a better sense of self and thereby come to grips with their own identities. The curriculum and instruction should help students develop a clarification of and a high regard for their home culture, language, and ethnicity. While Hispanic education should help Hispanics be proud of their ethnic identities, it should not, however, encourage ethnocentrism. A healthy self-image and self-esteem should develop, and continued life-long self-understanding should result. A positive self-image and feeling of self-worth will help students deal more effectively with future situations in school or out of school in which their culture, ethnicity, and language may be factors.

Having gained a solid sense of self-identity and self-acceptance, Hispanics should also be taught to accept and foster cultural pluralism. Students should be taught to reject the view that America is a melting pot in which everyone is supposed to be melted into one model American. Students should be oriented, rather, toward a view of cultural enrichment through cultural pluralism. Children and youth should experience school programs rooted in the preservation and extension of cultural diversity as a fact of life in American society. Students should be taught that cultural diversity is a valuable resource for the United States and that we should strive to preserve and enhance our diversity of cultural, ethnic, and

language resources. Hispanic students should be taught, in particular, the richness of diversity of their Hispanic culture with its many ethnicities, races, nationalities and origins, i.e., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, and European.

Acceptance and fostering of cultural pluralism by Hispanic students will be more easily achieved if they develop a greater understanding, respect, and acceptance of cultural differences in individuals and groups. Hispanic students of all ages should understand that accepting of cultural differences in others is part of the universal need of all individuals to be accepted. Just like they themselves want to be accepted and respected, Hispanic students must likewise recognize and respect ethnic diversity at the individual, group, and societal levels. Students should go beyond merely admitting the existence of ethnic diversity, they should internalize the belief that ethnic differences can improve the quality of life for individuals, for ethnic groups, and for society as a whole (NCSS 1976). Hispanic students should understand that there is no one model American, and that being "American" includes the right to be different in race, ethnicity, sex, language, ancestry, socioeconomic status, and/or physical/mental exceptionality, without discrimination under the law.

Hispanic education should also provide Hispanic students of all ages with skills and abilities so that they can develop positive and productive interactions among and with people of diverse cultural groups. Curriculum and instruction to develop the skills necessary for effective interpersonal and interethnic group interactions must be implemented. Teachers must therefore possess skills at operationalizing such curriculum and instruction. One of the most important things that schools should do for Hispanic students is prepare them to live and work productively and harmoniously with others. Hispanic students must realize that healthy interaction among our nation's culturally pluralistic citizenry is one of our country's greatest resources if we are to prosper nationally and internationally. Positive relationships and interactions among our culturally different citizenry will strengthen and help actualize the human resource potential of our country.

Hispanic students must also learn about their rights and the rights of others. Such education will help them promote equity among the culturally different groups that compose their community, state, and nation. Disparities between minority and majority school populations in terms of educational attainment and achievement must not be tolerated. Lack of equal educational opportunity for culturally different minorities must be identified and rectified. Lower educational achievement levels by Hispanic students in particular must not be allowed to exist or continue. If Hispanic education does nothing else, it should help achieve educational and social equity for Hispanics. This year's annual Michigan Hispanic Education Conference will hopefully bring us closer to this end.