



Utilizing Hispanic Cultural Values to Enhance Educational Effectiveness

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La Familia

The integrating factor of the Latino culture is the family and group closeness. Latinos look to the family to provide material assistance and emotional support. This includes checking with family members about how they see various behaviors and attitudes, and being influenced by other's perceptions and feelings. It is a collective culture where mutual dependency is expected.

- ▶ Get to know your students' family make-up. Include family members when possible; inquire about how the family is doing.
- ▶ Promote a friendly 'family' and casual atmosphere in the school environment and when meeting with parents or family member.
- ▶ Expect Latinos to 'check in' or have to discuss issues with family members first.
- ▶ Invite extended family to participate in school activities - provide babysitting and food
- ▶ Provide flexibility to deal with family issues and needs.
- ▶ Remember that immigrant families may not understand how educational institutions operate and may be intimidated to engage because of language barriers and feeling inadequate.
- ▶ Utilize groups and work teams, and cooperative learning practices.

Application, Notes, Other Ideas:

Personalismo -

Latinos tend to relate on a people and personal level. Instead of talking in generalities, they focus on the individual, the family, where people are from and personal preferences. This includes valuing individualism, a person's 'inner self' and uniqueness. Conversation, story telling, and sharing personal experience are valued. Latinos will only self-disclose when they feel they have a personal relationship. In traditional Latino culture, this protected one's honor or pride. This was especially important to Latino males.

- ▶ Take a personal interest in Latino families and co-workers: develop relationships first on the personal and then on the professional level.
- ▶ Provide outreach services utilizing people to connect to the Hispanic community - acting as bridges between the school and Hispanic families.
- ▶ Accentuate people & relationships with warm, friendly & encouraging behavior.
- ▶ Spend more time building rapport before discussing the issue at hand.
- ▶ Emphasize personal dignity, honor and 'good name' in feedback, evaluations or comments: be sensitive to a person's pride.
- ▶ Allow students and families to share personal stories and to talk about their family histories, where they are from, and their traditions.

Application, Notes, Other Ideas:

Being Simpatico

Getting along with people is extremely important to Latinos who place a high value on smooth, pleasant social relationships. They tend to acquiesce to the wishes of others and agree with them in order to be seen as *simpatico* (easy to get along with/congenial). This includes politeness, being respectful and courtesy. Small talk and taking a personal interest in people are ways to show respect and regard. In surveys, for example, Latinos respond

that they tend to carry out socially desirable actions and attitudes and avoid reporting less desirable ones. Being 'bien educado' (well-educated) in the Latino culture means knowing how to act towards others and taking their feelings into consideration.

- ▶ Be polite and courteous: respond in a cooperative, pleasant and friendly manner.
- ▶ Indicate how certain behaviors and actions are expected and valued by others.
- ▶ Provide training in conflict management, assertiveness and open communication to Latino staff.
- ▶ Emphasize being *simpatico* as a value that promotes positive relationships.
- ▶ Initiate contact with parents and families in a warm manner before dealing with student problems or making requests. Engage in 'small talk' or conversation to build rapport.
- ▶ Recognize that Hispanic students may not ask for directions if they do not understand and think it is rude to question a teacher or share ideas that are different than other students.

Application, Notes, Other Ideas:

Respecto

Showing respect especially for someone who is old, has knowledge or a position of authority is a key value. For traditional Latinos, the emphasis on hierarchy and status means showing a greater deference and respect toward certain powerful groups of people, such as doctors, priests and teachers. Because of *personalismo*, respect for the individual runs even deeper. This includes the way a person lives, how they act, contributions made or past history.

Latinos indicate respect through their body language, voice tone, deference and manners. They tend to offer profuse thanks, praise and apologies. They may communicate indirectly which may seem evasive, but is intended to be courteous and respectful.

- ▶ Look for areas where mutual respect can be emphasized.
- ▶ Realize that a higher education and position might inhibit honest interaction and promote deference.
- ▶ Link respect to *personalismo*: being a good mother, an 'elder,' strength to overcome obstacles. Recognize skills learned through immigration, working class jobs, and the "Universidad de la vida!"
- ▶ Always give constructive feedback and criticism in private and in an empathetic manner.

Application, Notes, Other Ideas:

Confianza - Trust

Being a person of 'confianza' is a high compliment in the Latino culture. Relationships and communication, which are built on loyalty and trust, are central. This includes being able to 'count' on someone. The saying '*mi palabra es la ley*' (my word is my law) emphasizes the importance of doing what you say you are going to do. In the Latino culture people rely on one another.

- ▶ Indicate you are a person who can be trusted and stress confidentiality. Keep appointments and follow through on commitments.
- ▶ Build trust by offering continuity and consistency in services: *confianza takes time*.
- ▶ Introduce students and new co-workers personally and spend time ensuring that the school transition is a smooth and courteous.

- ▶ Realize that 'checking up,' and supervising activities maybe seen as a lack of trust to Hispanic Employees. Let Hispanic students know you value their personal integrity and trust them to do the best they can.
- ▶ Utilize Latino loyalty and relationship orientation to build a supportive culture and to inspire and energize other employees.

Application, Notes, Other Ideas:

Destino - Así Es La Vida

The idea of *destino* (destiny) or that outside forces govern one's life is a key belief of many Latinos. Two traditional sayings that reflect this belief are: *Si dios quiere* (if God wills it) and *esta en las manos de dios* (It's in God's hands.) Anthropologists have described as fatalistic and interpreted this tendency as resignation, passivity, procrastination or a lack of initiative. This is in sharp contrast to the Euro-American belief that "God helps those who help themselves," and that individual effort can chart one's course.

In reality, *así es la vida* (that's the way life is) connotes an acceptance 'life's way' and a deep faith that a force greater than oneself is guiding one's efforts. Try as one may, it is impossible to control chance, serendipity, or unplanned events. Latinos see life as a dance - a balance between individual effort and lessons that life brings.

- ▶ Recognize that acceptance may not be passivity.
- ▶ Be clear on expectations that support initiative and reward pro-activity.
- ▶ Provide support and information on the importance of goal achievement, planning and taking initiative.
- ▶ Define assertiveness as a trait than can help students achieve on behalf of their group, family and to advance culture.
- ▶ Utilize Latino acceptance to reduce stress and 'go with the flow.'

Application, Notes, Other Ideas:

Cooperation and Generosidad

The emphasis on relationships, trust, respect and courtesy are central to the Latino value of cooperation and looking out for the well being of the group. Unlike cultures that emphasize individualism, Latinos emphasize 'we,' belonging and group benefit. 'Mutualism and reciprocity' typify the preferred interaction.

In traditional families, it is embarrassing to 'have more' or to advance ahead of the group. Sharing resources, cooperation, and helping one another is expected. This is also evident in the high value placed on generosity. The saying *Mi Casa es su Casa* (my house is your house) reflects this value.

- ▶ Support mutuality and helping one another: accept offers to volunteer, set up opportunities to contribute and share. Ask students to bring food, cultural objects, and pictures to share
- ▶ Point out the value of cooperation particularly in a team setting.
- ▶ Note the positive role of healthy and appropriate competition and the importance of individual competency in building a high performing team or in student achievement (we all succeed when each one does their best.)
- ▶ Emphasize serving the common good, the Latino community, client needs.
- ▶ Utilize the Latino preference for cooperation to build a team culture and reinforce collaborative leadership principles and cooperative learning.

Application, Notes, Other Ideas:

Tradition - Time Orientation

Coming from a traditional culture, Latinos place a higher value on conformity and obedience. Respect for age and tradition might inhibit the tendency to 'try new things,' change quickly and support untried innovations -- or even questions their elders. Latinos are connected to their 'roots' or their past and tend to see change as needing to be more continuous. Time orientation is also a factor. Latinos typically focus more on the present, spend less time thinking about the future and planning for it. This is partly due to *fatalismo* and the belief that the future is uncertain. Tomorrow is up to God's will. The typical Euro-American approach is to start with *now* and project into the future. The past is past and doesn't need to get in the way.

Latinos have a more flexible orientation towards time. Meeting deadlines, being on time for appointments and work may present a conflict. The focus is on relating to people in the moment, so the passage of time is not in immediate awareness. Highly efficient or 'clock minded' people may be seen as impolite or insulting.

- ▶ Recognize that teachers in Spanish are 'maestros' or 'masters' and are respected as having knowledge and 'knowing what is best.' Latino parents might hesitate to criticize or to give honest feedback about their child's progress. This may also affect their participation - as they hesitate to 'tell the teacher' or school how to do things.
- ▶ Whenever possible link a new idea or action to something that worked in the past. Take a conservative - step-by-step approach - 'paso a paso!' Emphasize the 'tried and true.'
- ▶ Provide support, mentoring and information to assist with 'promotion anxiety,' fear of taking risks and learning new areas.
- ▶ Structure in time for social conversation in the classroom, in meetings or appointments. This builds on the 'oral tradition' of the culture and on respect and *personalismo*.
- ▶ Make expectations around time clear.
- ▶ Utilize Latinos 'present orientation' to effectively stay focused current issues.
- ▶ Honor Hispanic History and pride in past achievements.

Application, Notes, Other Ideas:

Sentimientos - Emotionality and Closeness

Latinos value their feelings, are encouraged to fully express them and have fewer restrictions about showing deep emotions. Several studies seem to confirm this tendency. For example, Latinos who respond to surveys are more likely to choose the extreme response categories (strongly agree, strongly disagree) than the middle categories, to a greater degree than Euro-Americans. This emotional nature may make cultures that are more intellectually oriented and self-contained uncomfortable or generate a feeling that Latinos are volatile or overreacting. Ideas and opinions expressed may appear 'emotionally charged' and can lead to misunderstandings.

Latinos are a contact culture and feel comfortable when physically close to others. They stand closer when they converse, use a louder tone of voice, talk with their hands and are more likely to touch each other during a conversation. This preference is related to their close, mutually dependent relationships, and their frequent expression of warm feelings.

- ▶ Allow Latinos space to fully express their feelings and energize your interactions with them.
- ▶ Recognize that Hispanics are kinetic learners and need to fully engage in the learning process. This includes sharing and talking with others.
- ▶ Realize that 'professionalism' may seem cold and distant and be interpreted as not caring.
- ▶ Explain the need for safety practices, rules, and procedures in a personal way.
- ▶ Understand the need for touch and physically reassurance in a non-sexual way.

- ▶ Validate the role that expressing emotions plays in health and well being.
- ▶ Utilize Latino's emotional expressiveness to build an organization culture where feelings can be validated and shared openly.

Application, Notes, Other Ideas:

Fiesta/Gozar La Vida

When people think of the Latino culture, they often picture bright flowers, music, spicy food, people talking and having fun. Latinos celebrate life. They love having *Fiestas* where people gather together to enjoy one another, *conversar*, dance and sing. Latinos celebrate many occasions with parties and enjoy groups of family and friends. Unlike Euro-Americans who tend to focus on production and 'getting things done,' Latinos focus on the process and the people. Enjoying the journey is as important as getting there. "Gozando la vida," literally means enjoying life. In a stress filled world, where people feel stretched and overwhelmed, this Latino value can bring balance and fulfillment to communities and organizations. Southwest Airlines has tapped into this concept and is leading the field for customer and employee satisfaction.

- ▶ Recognize and celebrate special occasions on a personal and organization level.
- ▶ Utilize the Latino value of enjoying life and 'the process or journey' to emphasis greater student and employee satisfaction and involvement.
- ▶ Create a work/school environment that is fun and energizes people. Utilize music, movement, dance, story telling and art.
- ▶ Remember that 'happy' people and students who feel recognized and valued are more productive.
- ▶ Plan 'time out's' -- coffee breaks, staff luncheons, social time before meetings etc.
- ▶ Make enjoying work a priority; create a committee to see how this can be done and continue to happen.
- ▶ Remember to ask yourself, "Am I having fun, yet?"

Application, Notes, Other Ideas: