Design Unit Curriculum: Puerto Rican and Mexican Dance and Creativity Project for 6th Grade Students

Introduction:

The multicultural curriculum unit is designed for 6th grade students in a local Hartford middle school. Through the transformative approach, students will learn of and compare and contrast the histories of Puerto Rican and Mexican culture which are two dominant populations in the Hartford community. They will learn the salsa dance from Puerto Rico and the Mexican Hat Dance from Mexico to incorporate bodily kinesthetic comprehension, and to engage student participation. A large component of the unit is group work, which promotes student learning based on participation through meaningful activities. Parental involvement is also urged and expected to connect both families and students to the school community. By the end of the unit, students will work collaboratively in groups to present collages or posters reflecting on the unit and what they learned. Students will also be assigned individual papers to practice writing skills, which will be graded based on a rubric. This design unit will help students develop their literacy, interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic and oral skills and give them some historical background knowledge about Puerto Rican and Mexican identity. Our main goal in this unit is to help students to recognize that their own personal identities and culture as well as the identities and cultures of others are important enough to be inserted in their curriculum and are relevant in American society.
**Objective 1:** Students will be able to compare and contrast the two different cultures and explain the similarities and differences

This objective allows students to analyze the material they learned from both cultures and make meaningful connections between their similarities and differences. Based on Bloom’s Taxonomy, a hierarchical representation of different levels of knowledge, analyzing falls in the fourth tier of cognitive domain. This skill is crucial for students to develop because they can distinguish the two components and understand the overarching idea. This also allows them to make connections that are not explicitly stated, which furthers their knowledge and content of the subject. This method goes against the banking method, which Paulo Freire states “minimize[s] or annul[s] the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interest of the oppressors” (Freire 60). Instead, students become more conscious of the world they live in and are able to think critically.

**Objective 2:** Students will be able to learn basic dance moves from Salsa and Mexican Hat Dance

This objective will allow students to be exposed to two different dances from Puerto Rico and Mexico. We chose these two countries specifically because of the large representation of Puerto Rican and Mexican students in Hartford Public schools. These dances with engage many students because they can explore their identity and learn about the historical background of traditional dances. Many curriculums today focus on the Anglo-Saxon perspective of history, which is “one major way in which racism and ethnocentrism are reinforced and perpetuated in
the schools, in colleges and universities and in society at large” (Banks 242). By introducing a new unit on the culture of different Spanish speaking countries and highlighting specific dances, students will be more engaged and play a participatory role in the classroom based on their cultural similarities.

**Objective 3:** Students will be able to develop communication skills working collaboratively in groups and presenting what they learned.

This objective allows students to advocate their personal opinions and communicate them in a public space. Presenting projects in front of an audience allows students’ work to be validated as important and relevant. The aspect of working in groups allows students to work collaboratively. It is important to work collaboratively because it offers students the ability to productively communicate with one another, and to hear others’ opinions of the same course material. The education theorist John Dewey would approve this aspect of the curriculum because it promotes both collaborative work and teaches students about subjects that are interesting and purposeful. “Dewey stressed that the school was a *community*, but [that] too often educators overlooked this by keeping students isolated at desks. This stifled both pupil activity and communication” (56). In this curriculum students often work in groups where they interact with each other. Students will never sit in individual desks so as not to promote individual development or lack of communication. Instead they will sit in semi circles facing the front of the room. Because students are learning about either their own culture, or the culture of at least one of their classmates, the material and activities are meaningful. “The best way to learn a new idea, according to Dewey, was by means of “normal communication with others” - the process of communication in which the learner was interacting with others in purposeful activities or
investigations of common interest” (56). Because students will be working in groups and learning about cultures that are in some way meaningful to them, it is assumed that they will be engaged in all activities and that they will retain most of what is learned years after the curriculum is taught.

**Objective 4:** Students will be able to understand the differences in cultures from an ethnographic perspective

This objective allows students to engage in multicultural learning. Students are able to learn about different cultures that have previously not been taught in schools. This curriculum provides an in-depth history of both Puerto Rican, and Mexican culture. This is so that students will not gain a superficial understanding of these cultures. This objective will be most accepted by James A. Banks, an educational reform theorist who believes in incorporating multicultural learning in American classrooms. He argues, “Multicultural history enables students and teachers to understand America’s complexity and the ways in which various groups within the United States are interconnected” (Banks 250). Banks realizes that in a diverse country such as America, it is important for school curriculum to reflect such intersectional identities. Our curriculum fills this void by representing cultures of students within the classroom and validates their contributions to American society. Students who understand that there are different cultures represented in America are more likely to accept and tolerate differences. For the betterment of society, Banks would agree that this curriculum is necessary for sixth graders in order to promote tolerance of diversity.
Objective 5: Students will be able to articulate their understanding of different cultures through writing and rhetoric

This objective will be fulfilled once students complete their final projects. For the final project of the curriculum, students will express their retention of the curriculum through creating a poster-board/collage depicting the different cultures learned. They will then write a two/three page paper that compares and contrasts Mexican culture and Puerto Rican culture based on the curriculum taught. This project incorporates linguistic intelligence. As described by Project Sumit’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, “Linguistic intelligence allows people to communicate and make sense of the world through language” (2). Students use the English language to both present their projects and write their papers. This project will serve as a form of evaluation for the teacher. It eliminates ineffective testing as a means of determining student growth and comprehension of material. Students will exercise their writing skills, and communication skills. This project will allow students the ability to articulate themselves in a comprehensible way and will help a teacher know how much a student has progressed.

Activities By Day

Monday:

On the first day of the unit, students will take an all day field trip to Real Art Ways Gallery located on 56 Arbor St #1, Hartford, CT 06106. It is 1.7 miles from Trinity campus and only takes ten minutes to get to. Students will visit the Sabrina Marques Exhibition, which focuses on her conservations with local Cuban artists in Miami. This will expose students to different mediums of art and what an actual art gallery looks like. It is assumed that many
students come from economically deprived neighborhoods and have never been to an art gallery before. This will give students the opportunity to look at Marques’ paintings and visually see Marques’ narratives on her experience as a Cuban artist. We will assess students based on their journal entries. They will keep journals and write a reflection of what they liked about gallery, disliked, noticed, questions and curiosities they had. This trip will intrigue students because they “learn best and are more highly motivated when the school curriculum reflects their cultures, experiences and perspectives” (Phillips and Soltis 56). Many students take pride in their heritage and want their education to reflect that. Thus, this multicultural curriculum falls under the transformative approach, which states that, “the structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts from the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups” (Banks 246). Students gain new perspectives by looking at art and analyzing it to their stories of struggle and triumphs. Once they return to the classroom, they will share their journal entries in a class discussion. The teacher will record what each student says on the board.

**Tuesday:**

Students will listen to a PowerPoint presentation about Puerto Rican history and salsa dancing. This PowerPoint will cover basic facts about the country and important historical events. After the presentation, the Trinity Dance Club will do a salsa dance performance. Next, students will learn the basic steps and work with college students on technique. This will incorporate bodily-kinesthetic and musical intelligence. Musical intelligence “allows individuals to create, communicate and understand meanings made out of sound,” while body movements “allow individuals to use all or part of the body to create products or solve problems” (Theory of Multiple Intelligence 1). Students’ homework assignment will be to write a journal entry about
their own family’s festivities. Do you dance? Why or why not? Do you know how to dance? Is dancing important? This prompt will allow students to reflect on their own experiences and identity to determine if dancing is a fundamental part of their own culture. This will also give students the opportunity to practice expressing their ideas through journal entries.

**Wednesday:**

Students will listen to a PowerPoint presentation about Mexican history and learn the background of the Mexican Hat Dance, which is the traditional dance of the country. We hope that a Trinity College faculty member, professor, student or a parent from the school will present the dance to the students. We ideally hope to get a student parent involved. Afterwards, students will get in pairs and learn the dance. After the dance, we will show a short twelve-minute movie called “Immersion,” which is about a ten-year old boy named Moses, who recently immigrated to the United States from Mexico. He does not speak English fluently, but is a great math student. However, he struggles to take the math exam because of his poor English skills. While students are watching the movie, they will fill out a worksheet and have a Socratic seminar discussing their answers. This will allow students to think critically about issues surrounding English Language Learners and Hispanic immigrants today. Students will understand that Students’ capability or intelligence level does not correlate with their comprehension of a new language. It will also validate the Spanish language as a valuable asset in American education. In most schools, Spanish is banned from the classroom because students are taught to speak only in English. The hidden curriculum implicitly states that Spanish is not an important social capital. However, this movie will expose students to an alternative, less ethnocentric perspective.
Thursday:

Students will begin with a brief overview of the final project and will get a rubric showing necessary criteria. They will then split up into groups of three or four and begin working on their poster-boards and collages as a team. Halfway through the class students will transition into individual work where they will begin their papers. The final paper is geared toward allowing students the opportunity to compare and contrast Mexican and Puerto Rican cultures. Students will understand that there are different variations of cultural expression within Hispanic culture, and will understand how to articulate the differences through writing and verbal communication.

Friday:

The last day of the class is dedicated to presenting final projects and celebrating the cultures of both Mexican and Puerto Rican people. Students will begin the first half of class finishing their final projects. Parents of students are invited to class to assist with final projects. Parents are also encouraged to bring in samples of Mexican and Puerto Rican food if they are familiar with the culture. (They will inform the school what they will bring in advance). While students are presenting their projects at the end of class they are also enjoying the traditional food of both cultures. Presenting their projects in front of an audience enables students to work on their linguistic communication skills and display their knowledge of both cultures. The food will be a fun experience and reward for all the hard work done during the course.
**Evaluation:**

Each day student will be evaluated on what they have learned for that day. On Monday students will write in journals about their experience after visiting the Real Art Ways Gallery. Their journals should consist of a brief explanation of what they did, how it made them feel, and what their favorite art piece was and why. Students will also be asked to record and at least three facts that they did not know of before.

On Tuesday students will be assigned a brief homework assignment in which they will write one paragraph about their cultural festivities at home. The prompted questions will allow students to analyze their own culture and connect it with the salsa dance culture learned in school that way. One question will ask students to compare their own dance culture with that of Puerto Rican salsa dance.

On Wednesday students will fill out a worksheet after they watch the immersion day film. These questions will allow students to recognize the discrimination placed on, and struggle that English language learners go through. After watching the film, filling out the worksheet and having a group discussion about the film, students will have a better understanding of how it feels to an English language learner and will better respect and understand the struggles of those who are from a different culture.

On Thursday students will begin their final projects. Students will choose between creating a poster board or collage in groups of three to four and will be provided with a rubric that dispels what is necessary to show comprehension of the material, and how to get a good grade. They will also begin their individual papers that will compare the cultures of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans. Students will be encouraged to work on their comparative papers at home for homework.
On Friday students will finish their group and individual projects. They will then present their poster board or collage at the end of class. Students will be evaluated based on the rubrics handed out, and on their effort and participation in class and on their articulation of and comparisons of the Puerto Rican and Mexican cultures.

On all days teachers will assess each student on their participation in all activities. They will check over worksheets and homework to make sure students comprehend key ideas and concepts from both cultures and the curriculum material. The more in depth, planned out, and thoughtful a student’s response, the better evaluation grade given.

Because of the demographic of students in Hartford public schools it is assumed that majority of the students in 6th grade classes will identify in one way or another with either the Puerto Rican or Mexican culture. This identification will help students see their identity and cultures validated in school curriculum and accept it as important. Our multicultural curriculum is geared toward helping students both recognize their own identity as important, and understand and respect the differences in cultures other than their own.
Worksheet 1:

“Immersion” Movie
Directions: Students will watch “Immersion,” a movie about a ten-year-old boy, Moises, who struggles to communicate in his new school with limited access to his native language.

Please watch the movie carefully and fill out the following worksheet.

Responses should be thorough and include evidence from the movie. Please answer each question with 3-5 sentences.

1. How did you feel while watching this short film? Do you know anyone who has had an experience like Moises’?

2. What do you think was Moises’ biggest challenge in the film? Why was this an obstacle?

3. Why do you think Moises takes the test when his friend explains how he could get out of it?

4. Do you think it would have been fair to give Moses the test in Spanish rather than English? Why or why not?”

5. What policies are in place in your area for students who come to school knowing little English? How successful do they seem to be in teaching students? Why? (This may also be too much to ask kids who have no background on policy in schools, maybe a better question can be “What type of policies do you think should be set in place to assist immigrant, or English language learning students?)

Why is this film and analysis relevant?

Students can better understand the differences in Hispanic culture and American culture by analyzing how language plays a role in student success in American schools. One has to be able to understand the language in order to understand the material.

Students will understand that differences in language and/or culture do not correlate with one’s intelligence or understanding capabilities of material. Just because one does not understand the language, does not mean they do not understand the material.
At the end of the unit, students’ final papers will be evaluated by the following rubric:

Based on CT standards, students should
1. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.
2. Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
3. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

End of Unit Assessment:
In groups of 3, students will compare and contrast Puerto Rican and Mexican culture by creating a collage coupled with a 2-3 page explaining the similarities and differences in history, culture and dances. The collage can include anything you want from pictures, cutouts from magazines, objects you glue on, etc. Use your imagination to compare the two cultures. Additionally, students will individually write a 2-3 paper comparing and contrasting the history, dances and cultures of the two countries. The essay will be graded on a rubric.

Grades 6: Rubric for Collage Projects and Individual Papers:

Score Point 6: A well-developed response
Typical elements:
- Paper is fully elaborated with specific details and evidence
- Shows strong organization and paragraphs with a central idea
- Is fluent and may use effective transitional language
- Incorporates material learned from both in and out of class discussions and presentations

Score Point 5: A developed response
Typical elements:
- Is well elaborated with mostly specific details and some evidence
- Shows generally strong organization and paragraphs with a central idea
- May be generally fluent and may show proficient use of transitional language
- Incorporates material learned from class discussions and presentations

Score Point 4: A somewhat-developed response with adequate details
Typical elements:
- Is adequately elaborated with a mix of general and specific details
- Shows satisfactory organization
- May be somewhat fluent with some transitional language

Score Point 3: A minimally-developed response with inadequate detail
Typical elements:
- Has minimal elaboration with more general ideas than specific details
● Shows some organization
● May be awkward in parts and may lack most transitions

**Score Point 2: An underdeveloped response**
Typical elements:
● Contains general, elaborated and/or list-like detail
● Shows little evidence of organization
● May be awkward and confusing
● Shows minimal effort
● Shows minimal comprehension of material

**Score Point 1: A minimal response**
Typical elements:
● Contains few or vague details
● Does not show any type of organization
● Difficult to read and understand
● Does not include any information learned in class
Works Cited


Course Booklet: Analyzing Schools Spring 2013 “Theory of Multiple Intelligences” Harvard Project Zero and President and Fellows Harvard College


