

## PRECOLLEGE TEACHING MATERIALS FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

*TEACHER'S RESOURCE HANDBOOK FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CURRICULUM MATERIALS PRESCHOOL THROUGH GRADE TWELVE.* Edited by JOHN N. HAWKINS. (Los Angeles, Calif: UCLA Latin American Center, 1975. Pp. 220. \$2.50.)

*PLANNING CROSS-CULTURAL LESSONS: SPECIFICATIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF THIRTY-THREE LEARNING ACTIVITIES.* By J. DOYLE CASTEEL and MIRIAM WILLIFORD. (Gainesville, Fla.: Latin American Studies Association, 1976.)

*IT'S THE IMAGE THAT COUNTS: CARTOON MASTERS FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES.* Edited by MIRIAM WILLIFORD. (Gainesville, Fla.: Latin American Studies Association, 1976.)

Sustained and mutually rewarding interaction between college instructors and public school teachers long has been inhibited by divergent role concepts and status distinctions, expressed in such dichotomies as scholar/teacher, specialist/generalist, and doctorate/masters. Recently, however, academicians have begun to grant new legitimacy to their teaching function. Scholarly conferences now include sessions on teaching, and discussions of course design and teaching effectiveness have gained a degree of respectability on many college campuses. Increasingly comfortable with the teacher model and concerned with pedagogy as a process, university professors have become more willing to collaborate with public school teachers on projects related to precollegiate instruction.

The field of Latin American studies already boasts of a considerable number of such activities. University Latin American centers sponsor workshops in school program development, regional associations actively solicit the participation of public school teachers, and the Latin American Studies Association's Committee on Teaching embraces all levels of instruction. That such efforts can produce tangible and worthwhile results is evidenced by the three volumes considered here, each focusing on public school instruction, and each the product of an ongoing dialogue between academic Latin Americanists and precollege instructors.

The *Teacher's Resource Handbook* issues from a long-term project on curriculum development housed at UCLA's Center for Latin America. *Planning Cross-Cultural Lessons* and *It's the Image that Counts* represent the initial publications to emerge from the National Seminar on the Teaching of Latin American Studies, an intensive workshop organized by LASA and held during summer 1975 at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. These books, then, are pioneer works whose importance rests less on their content than on the implications they have for future works.

A survey of currently available materials for precollegiate Latin American instruction formed the initial step in the UCLA curriculum development project,

resulting in the publication of the *Handbook*. In its pages, teachers will find descriptive annotations of some 1,400 items—books, films, slides, filmstrips, records, and multi-media kits—arranged according to grade level and geographic area, some standard bibliographies, and lists of publishers and distributors. The *Handbook* also provides two selection aids, a “Materials Assessment Sheet,” and a “Cross-Cultural Evaluation Sheet.” In large measure, then, the *Handbook* speaks to the needs of its intended audience, and teachers should welcome its comprehensiveness and currency. Save for omitting cross references to commonly taught themes, the bibliography’s organization seems highly practical, permitting ready identification of a particular type of material, e.g., film, slide, or tape, for any grade level and country.

Despite these several virtues, the absence of evaluative annotations greatly diminishes the *Handbook*’s usefulness to teachers. The editor justifiably notes that evaluating so large a number of items constitutes an enormous task, yet he also observes that many of the materials exhibit “stereotypical approaches and/or ethnocentric attitudes” (p. x.). The assessment forms attempt to respond to this problem, but their effectiveness in ferreting out biased materials depends considerably on the knowledge of the individual instructor. Consider, for example, two crucial questions posed in these forms: “Does the material provide an accurate and balanced representation of the historical development of the cultures or population being studied? Does the material succeed in avoiding stereotype or overgeneralization about the cultures or population being studied?” These are exemplary guiding questions, but without considerable background in Latin American civilization they cannot readily be answered. Ironically, the assessment forms will provide the least help to those who most need it.

Teachers cannot engage in extensive reviews of materials or background research for every topic discussed in their classrooms; precollege instruction typically displays an eclectic orientation. Within a single school year, for example, a social studies teacher may be responsible for units on all the social sciences; a Latin American unit might last only a few weeks, or form but one module in a broader thematic topic like urbanization or international relations. Heavy teaching loads and a wide range of nonpedagogical duties further compound preparation problems. An appreciation for these pragmatic problems forms a necessary starting point for all instructional improvement programs. In fairness, it must be noted that the *Handbook* constitutes only a preamble to the actual curriculum development project, and that a needs assessment survey was one of the UCLA Center’s initial activities. Undoubtedly future publications will more closely reflect the collaborative interaction of precollege and college instructors.

The importance of such a dialogue is underscored by the two national seminar publications. *Planning Cross-Cultural Lessons* presents guidelines for designing lessons that will develop skills needed to recognize and understand the patterns and processes of pluralistic interactions. Through activities dealing with such specific subskills as contrasting, classifying, and stereotyping, students also will acquire such broad skills as concept acquisition, valuing, and decision making. Rather than speaking to a particular content area, the activities pre-

sented constitute general prescriptions adaptable to diverse teaching/learning situations. This orientation promotes the infusion of cross-cultural perspectives into a wide range of curricula and encourages teachers to use existing resources creatively.

All too often, educational innovations take the form of multi-media kits or multi-volume sets of materials whose adoption entails high costs and a wholesale revision of existing curricula. In the public school setting, purchasing new materials or altering curricula typically becomes a complex process that may involve state departments of public instruction, local school boards, parent-teacher associations, and ad hoc citizens groups. District or state laws regarding uniformity of instruction as well as budgetary considerations serve as additional constraints. Given this reality, a flexible and low-cost volume such as *Planning Cross-Cultural Lessons*, which speaks to teachers' needs and builds upon their strengths, is both philosophically and pragmatically sound.

*It's the Image that Counts* also exemplifies a "small is beautiful" approach. Essentially an exercise in values clarification, it uses cartoons and associated activities to spark student awareness of cultural stereotypes. Under the general rubric "Images that Distort," the series of cartoon masters explores the reciprocal cultural-societal misconceptions of North Americans and Latin Americans. At once funny, sad, and provocative, the cartoons hit at such sensitive issues as political instability, the impact of foreign investment, and attitudes towards women, education, and the family. Since preconceptions selectively filter information, the communication of facts alone often fails to eradicate biases. By combining cognitive with affective approaches, however, and presenting stereotypical attitudes about the United States as well as Latin America, *It's the Image that Counts* mounts a powerful assault that ought to prove at least challenging, if not persuasive, to public school and even college students. Bearing in mind the egregious Latin American imagery that abounds in U.S. popular culture, identifying and discussing attitudinal as well as informational sets could prove a useful experience for the initial meeting of introductory Latin American courses.

Individually, each of these volumes merits the attention of precollege instructors. As a group, they deserve wider attention, for they indicate the value—both actual and potential—of a dialogue among Latin Americanists teaching at all levels. The maintenance and elaboration of that dialogue is a responsibility that rests on all who are concerned with the future of Latin American studies, especially those who function in college settings. If public school study of Latin America remains inadequate and neglected, college instructors will continue to confront uninformed, disinterested, or missing students.

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