I. Rationale:

“The purpose of education is to prepare future citizens to reconstruct society so that it better serves the interests of all groups” (Hunkins & Ornstein, pg. 380). These groups include minority and ethnic groups, as well as the disabled, poor, and weak. Exposing students to a wide range of “groups” and culture, promotes tolerance and acceptance, which in turn makes the world a better place. Without diversity understanding, there is no foundation for unbiased decision or influence. Without diversity knowledge, there is no better tomorrow. Diversity impacts the way we think, act, and react. Therefore, diversity is a must in curriculum and its application!

Today’s society is not the homogenous world as in years past. It is a smaller place, yet filled with students from many cultures. It is a melting pot; an interconnected highway of flavor. With this societal mixture, there must be understanding and appreciation for differences among its people. The classroom is the perfect opportunity for true impact and discovery learning.

From my personal experience in the classroom, students are unfamiliar with most cultures other than their own. There is little exposure and therefore, understanding. Students must be exposed to differences in order to start acceptance. We as teachers must expose, support, and implement these differences into our classrooms. Too many students today are unaware of others living in their world. My project provides a stepping stone toward the goal of mutual respect among students of different
backgrounds. My project offers an integrated curriculum with whole group, cooperative group, and individual learning. Diversity is essential for educational success!

II. Summary:

I completed my final project on diversity and its application. My project is entitled, “Across the Miles.” It is a one-week social studies unit on Mexico, targeted for first grade. It could however, be adapted to fit other elementary grades. It also incorporates the Ohio Academic Content Standards.

I chose Mexico because I want students to become educated about the fastest growing culture in the United States. I chose to integrate Christmas because elementary students easily relate to holidays and their celebration. Christmas is an important holiday in most parts of the world and is celebrated in many different ways. Students should be aware of how others celebrate and contribute to this holiday. I would also like to complete units on other countries for future implementation. This entire diversity project could consist of 6-7 different countries and span over a two-month period.

I also utilized Howard Gardener’s Multiple Intelligence Theory in my unit. Using this theory approach, students learn through various intelligences and styles of teachings. I chose materials that were age-appropriate, interesting, and fun for the students. These materials include Mexican community members, the Mexican flag, sombreros, maracas, Mexican music, authentic Mexican food, traditional Mexican clothing, poinsettias, suitcases for props, books and videos on Mexico, various art materials, and much more.

Day one entails a video introducing Mexico and completing a KWL chart for student learning. Students will learn about the people and population of Mexico using
the World Wide Web. Students utilize map skills by locating Mexico and the United States on the map. They also identify the continent on which both countries are located. Map skills are also reviewed at this time. Students create an individual map of Mexico using clay materials. Shoebox suitcases are decorated at home to serve as storage for individual learning activities.

Day two consists of the traditions and symbols of Mexico. These traditions and symbols target the Christmas holiday known as Feliz Navidad. They include poinsettias, piñatas, flags, and maracas. Students will create their own piñatas using various art materials. Legend of the Poinsettia is then read as a closure.

Day three explores Mexican food. Mexican food is unique and specific to its people and their way of life. Students learn that corn is one of the basic foods of Mexico and is used for many things. They also learn that many foods in the United States originate from Mexico. Students graph their favorite Mexican food after sampling and complete a review worksheet.

Day four explores Mexican clothing. Traditional Mexican clothing is unique and specific to its people and their climate. Students learn about the traditional clothing of Mexico and understand that it is not exclusively for daily wear, but is often used in festivals and celebrations. There is also a Mexican dance presented by community members wearing their traditional clothing. Students complete the day with a colorful worksheet review on traditional clothing.

Day five is the wrap-up and evaluation. Students complete the KWL chart and prepare a final presentation of their learning in a fold-over. The fold-over is a fun way to present information and allows students the opportunity to express their creativity. After
individual presentations, students board the imaginary plane with suitcases packed accordingly, and journey to Mexico. The Feliz Navidad celebration is an exciting way for students to “experience” Mexico and its culture. The students have their passports stamped as they enter Mexico. (The classroom will be decorated as Mexico.) They are surrounded by Mexican symbols, wear their homemade clothing, participate in the Mexican Hat Dance, play Mexican games, and eat authentic Mexican food. There are also Mexican community members helping with the celebration. It is a great way to tie everything together in a fun and meaningful celebration. The grand finale will be the exciting Mexican tradition of breaking a piñata.
References


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Teacher resource Web site (http://www.fga.freac.fsu.edu/academy/k1mexico.htm).

Chat with a child from Mexico (http://www.ks-connexion.org/connect/kc_result.cfm).

Journey through Mexico (http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dmjacobs/edts325/mexico/MEXICOACTIVITIES.HTML).


