

## Developing Authentic Curriculum on Native American Life

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The Nebraska Curriculum Institute on Native American Life at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has provided a model for future adventures in cooperative curriculum development. The excitement of the endeavor was due in large measure to the multi-dimensional nature of a cooperative workshop approach.

Workshops that met in 1978 and 1979 produced approximately 40 teaching units dealing with the religion, history, reservations, art, customs, and folk stories of Nebraska's Indian tribes. The units range from pre-school through senior high levels and address both Native American and non-Native American students. Materials created by the workshops include six books, 13 slide presentations, and videotapes to complement the teaching units.

Three professors, one each from the departments of anthropology, education, and English, served as co-directors of the project, which was financed by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Ethnic Heritage Division of the U.S. Office of Education. Input for the grant proposals was secured from a broad spectrum of interested individuals including university professors from several relevant disciplines, public school teachers, representatives of the State Department of Education, State Education Association staff members, members of the State Indian Commission, and members of the Junior League of Lincoln, which had previously financed substantial videotaping of Native American elders and



storytellers. The workshop staff included lecturers and evaluators, both Anglo and Native American. Among them were scholars in academic disciplines and religious or political leaders from Nebraska Indian reservations and urban centers.

Selection of participants was also a cooperative process. The staff made an aggressive search for excellent teachers who were known to have curriculum writing skills. Nominations for participation were solicited from the State Department of Education, the State Education Association, the State History and Social Studies Teachers Association, and superintendents of school systems known to enroll substantial numbers of Native American students. Out of a total of 66 teachers participating in the 1978 and 1979 workshops, 12 were themselves Native Americans.

Participation in the project by a variety of groups and individuals has resulted in an eclectic curriculum model that can be adapted to the varying needs of school systems. The preparation of the materials by classroom teachers has enhanced their teachability; participation by Native Americans has provided authenticity; and involvement of state department personnel has provided assurance that the materials are compatible with curriculum theory and guidelines that have the force of state law and regulation.

Finally, the dissemination of the materials is also a cooperative venture. Workshops to present and illustrate the materials and their use are being conducted by both project staff and participants. Such workshops and presentations have already been sponsored by the Nebraska State Education Association, educational service units at several locations in the State, individual school districts, the Lincoln Indian Center, and the Teacher Corps of the University of Nebraska at Omaha. ■

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