

LEVEL: MIDDLE SCHOOL

SOURCE: "Teaching About Latin America:
Curriculum Projects for Grades 6-12," Roger
Thayer Stone Center for Latin American Studies,
Tulane University, 1984

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES FOR CHILDREN AGED 12-14
THE BREAKING DOWN OF STEREOTYPES
WITH THE SPIRAL/CONCEPT METHOD

by
Virginia Gibbs
Center for Latin America
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Upon returning from South and Central America in November of 1982, President Reagan was impressed. "You would be surprised," he said, "they're all individual countries down there." Unfortunately, Reagan was expressing an idea which typifies North American attitudes toward Latin America. The remarkable nature of such a statement can be appreciated if we look at our views of another world region such as Europe. Would anyone in the U.S. be surprised to discover that England, Germany, France, Spain and Poland had their own individual characteristics? Yet, after generations of social studies in our schools, the United States' closest neighbors remain a mystery and, worse yet, our ideas about them are based on long-lived stereotypes.

Misconceptions about our southern neighbors are too complex to discuss in this short exposee, rooted as they are in centuries of economic, political, and social North/South relations. The elimination of stereotypes must be based on an understanding of their multiple causes. Clearly, the school system has been one of the culprits in disseminating misinformation on Latin America. Although improvements in the teaching of Latin American studies will not solve all of the problems, educators can assume an important role in dispelling various negative images of Latin America.

First, perhaps the greatest single shaper of young minds today is not our school system but the media, specifically television and films. Through emotionally charged images and repeated plots and characters, children are fed a daily dose of ideas concerning the world and their role in it. Television tends to portray Latin Americans as either bloody, but bumbling, dictators or as colorful, but passive, peasants. One television show with its thrills and beloved, familiar characters can undermine a whole week's teaching. Cumulatively, years of television totally erase the occasional Latin American units in our classrooms. It is the television and film image of Latin America that is carried into adult life and further reinforced through the same media.

Second, most textbooks used in classrooms are still relatively dry recitations of products, geographical zones, capital cities, and the history of famous men and events. Dull textbooks are unable to awaken the interest of students, particularly when compared with media images. Audio-visual materials are abundant on the Aztecs, the Incas, folktales, arts and crafts, pretty scenery, and festivals.

Yet, few are available on industry, current political events, urbanization, underdevelopment and similar topics. At our Center, we find that the former topics receive heavier usage than the latter, perhaps because folklore and anthropology are perceived as being more interesting and exotic by students and teachers alike. Furthermore, excessive reliance on filmstrips which deal with ancient cultures, rural villages, folk crafts, and the like may stimulate the child's imagination; however, they tend to project an image of a Latin America frozen in a picturesque, but rather miserable, past.

Third, any other access to Latin American culture is nonexistent outside of a few large cities. In Latin America, United States pop music, television programs, magazines and films inundate the market. Yet, in the United States there are virtually no Latin American programs, films, or songs. Generally, then, the classroom and the United States media are the only two sources of information on Latin American nations available to our students.

While this may be a pessimistic view of the current situation of Latin American studies in our schools, it need not lead to inaction. One way to combat misinformation and to improve our future adults' knowledge of Latin America is by recognizing the difficulties to be faced. From this perspective, it would seem that one of the major tasks is to create and distribute new and challenging curriculum materials based on the following guidelines:

1. The materials should focus on broad concepts of current importance, for example: underdevelopment, dependency, ethnic and racial questions, revolution and political systems. History should be related to these concepts. Moreover, broad concepts, when discussed in depth, will be remembered long after lists of products are forgotten.
2. The use of materials which deal with what I call "folksy-exotic" images should not form the major part of the units, although, sparingly, and in the right context, they can be valuable. Skyscrapers, traffic jams, tractors, soldiers, foreign debts are realities lived by many Latin Americans and should be presented in class.
3. All concepts should be tied in with the students' own realities and the United States situation. If we ask, "where are the Mayas now?" we should also ask

"Where are the Chippewas?" When studying Aztec symbol-ogy, current United States symbols should be taken into account (the Valentine heart, the eagle, the flag!). What kind of city is Buenos Aires compared with the students' own city or town? A shifting back and forth will discourage the assumption, implicit in the unilat-eral study of another culture, that the student is a member of a self-evident, "normal" community and is examining Latin America precisely because it departs from the norm, meaning it is "abnormal."

4. Materials should solicit the active participation of students as well as provide enjoyment. In other words, learning about Latin America should be creative and aesthetic. Recent research in art, literature and film has shown that the greatest pleasure is achieved through exploration which leads to self-recognition. Translated into curriculum development this means that the students will learn and retain more by participating directly in the lesson so that they can see themselves reflected back in the concepts studied. Too complex? Not at all. This is the basis for activities such as drama, simula-tion games, art projects, and music. Active aesthetic experiences can compete with television which is, after all, a passive experience.

5. Activities should aid in developing skills such as reading, math, composition and communication, thus serving more than one purpose.

6. Materials should be prepared so they can immediately be used in the classroom. The sad truth is that teachers are overworked, must cover large amounts of material in a short time, and simply cannot be experts in every world area. Activity plans should include some background information, concrete directions, and should not assume that the teacher has time for independent investigation.

At the Center for Latin America at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee we have been working on a curriculum development project for three years. The first two years were dedicated primarily to planning, resulting in the collection of specific types of materials. Briefly, the mechanics of the project have been, first, to hire experi-enced teachers to act as consultants. In a series of meetings, the teachers identified the middle grades as the level at which materials are most urgently needed. The

basic problems and guidelines mentioned above were set forward. We decided to concentrate on hands-on materials such as minidramas, simulation games, art projects, graph and map work, and exploration projects. It was stressed that no activities should be isolated; they should relate back to each other and reemphasize important concepts.

A series of "key concepts" were identified that need to be grasped in order to approach an understanding of Latin America. The concepts are:

-social class	-interdependence	-poverty
-migration	-government	-family
-race/ethnicity	-revolution	-human rights
-urban/rural	-colonization	-land reform
-geography	-religion	-work
-education	-agriculture	-leisure
-economics	-fine arts	-natural resources
-flora & fauna	-holidays	-exploration/ conquest
-U.S./Latin American relations	-transportation	

This is not a final, complete list but is constantly being revised as the project progresses. Six nations and one region were chosen to represent important historical processes and current situations:

1. Mexico was selected because of: a) a well-documented process of conquest and colonization which can offer insights into its historical development and current situation; b) an early revolution whose causes and results can be explored; c) a current situation in which large numbers of Mexicans are entering the United States labor force.

2. Cuba was chosen to portray: a) a process of conquest and colonization different from that normally studied; b) an economic system based on slavery and plantation agriculture that evolved into a monocultural economy; c) a current revolution with alternative economic and political structures.

3. Central America was selected in order to emphasize the current situation in this crisis-wracked area.

4. Venezuela was selected as a nation which is undergoing economic changes and changes in its relationships with other nations because of its petroleum resources.

5. Brazil, a Portuguese-speaking nation, can be explored as: a) a society in which race and ethnicity are viewed in different terms; b) a nation in which economic development and poverty seem to contrast; c) a nation expanding both territorially and in regional influence.

6. Peru can be explored as a society with a so-called "Indian problem."

7. Argentina, a Southern Cone nation, can be studied as a colonial backwater which became a major twentieth century power characterized by: a) a Western expansion similar to that in the United States; b) an ethnic structure highly influenced by waves of European immigrants; c) and a military government replaced in democratic elections.

This list does not exhaust matters and is intended to give examples. We felt that by concentrating on a limited number of nations we would provide a wider view of each nation, stressing individual issues but also combining them into a coherent view of joint issues.

In discussions we decided to adopt the spiral technique which is used in the teaching of math. This technique involves the teaching of one skill, moving forward to another series of skills, and then doubling back to restress the skill learned earlier. In the social studies of Latin America this involves the introduction of a concept, the building of other concepts, and a return to the original concept for reemphasis and enrichment. For example:

Unit I Mexico: -Spanish conquest and colonization
-economic structure/racial structure
-extraterritorial migration

Unit II Brazil: -Portuguese conquest and colonization
-economic structure/racial structure
-rural/urban migration

We have, therefore, opted to call the methodology of our project the spiral/concept method. It is not difficult to see that what we are doing involves certain complexities. Every single activity will have to be planned to fit into the totality of the project. No one group, in any reason-

able period of time, can cover all concepts and nations adequately. We do hope that the lessons we will soon provide teachers in our area are stimulus to further curriculum development.

The final product will be a loose-leaf notebook in which 2-3 page background descriptions of each concept will be followed by the hands-on activities presented in recipe format. The "recipes" will include a detailed description of how to accomplish the activity, what the results should be, the concepts stressed and references to related activities for the spiral system.

Getting down to brass tacks, I will describe several of the activities we have included in the project. Since the major theme is interdependence, a series of introductory exercises based on this theme will be presented. The following simulation game of the world's resources is a good way to begin. It was developed by Les Stanwood ("The World in 37.4 Candy Bars," Media and Methods, September, 1979, pp. 44-45), and has been adapted many times for use by different age groups.

Exercise #1

Activity: Simulation: The World's Resources

Concepts: Interdependence, economics, poverty, U.S./Latin American relations

Vocabulary: Resources, LDC=Less Developed Country, GNP=Gross National Product, Foreign Aid

Objectives: The students will be able to participate in a simulation of world resource distribution and discuss the outcome in terms of United States-Latin American relations.

Materials: 150 jellybeans or 37.4 candy bars, masking tape to divide the floor into "continents," and cards to divide the students into groups

Procedure: Preparation:

- 1) Divide the classroom floor into areas corresponding to Figure 1: Classroom Design. This is especially easy to do in classrooms with square tiles.

- 2) Make up the cards which will tell your students which area they have been assigned. An exact simulation of current population requires 40 students; an approximation for 25 is also included here:

	POPULATION	
	(1=100,000,000)	(1=160,000,000)
ASIA	24	15
AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST	3	2
SOVIET COUNTRIES	3	2
SOUTH AMERICA	3	2
EUROPE	5	3
NORTH AMERICA	2	1
TOTAL	40 students	25 students

Print enough cards for your class, and when you want to begin the simulation, have them draw a card and go to that part of the classroom.

- 3) Divide the jellybeans into piles to simulate the GNP of the land areas (but don't label the piles -- students should not be able to tell which is which). Mr. Stanwood uses 37.4 candy bars, and those figures are also included here:

	GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT	
	(1=\$25,000,000,000)	(1=100,000,000,000)
ASIA	20	5.0
AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST	4	1.0
SOVIET COUNTRIES	20	5.0
SOUTH AMERICA	6	1.4
EUROPE	56	4.0
NORTH AMERICA	44	11.0
TOTAL	150 jellybeans	37.4 candy bars

Mr. Stanwood starts the simulation as soon as students enter the classroom, and you may prefer to begin this way. With younger students, it is helpful to set the stage by having the class order the "continents" from least to most land area and choose where they would rather live. Then, when they draw cards and start filling up some of the areas,

the factor of population per land area becomes more vivid. At this time the class can reorder the continents from least to most comfortable.

When the students are all in their areas, you may want to give out chairs, either to North America alone; to North American, European, and Soviet countries (to separate developed from less developed areas); or, as Mr. Stanwood suggests, a few to Asia "since this intensifies the sense of inequality." From this time on students must stay within their assigned areas.

The most dramatic moment of the simulation is when you unveil the world's resources--piles of jellybeans. By this time, students may be able to tell which part of the world they are in and be able to guess which pile will go to their group. Nevertheless, it will be a shock to the Asians that so many people (already suffering from lack of space) will now have to divide up so few resources. It is important to stress that the jellybeans represent all resources, not just food.

Mr. Stanwood recommends that no one be allowed to give away resources either during the simulation or after class. There will be resentment toward the North Americans, and, whether or not you allow "foreign aid," your students can discuss how LDC's feel toward the more developed countries--in particular, how South America might feel toward North America, how the North Americans are feeling (guilty? threatened?), how they would like to respond, and the whole question of equalizing global distribution of resources. Finally, the class can reorder the continents from least to most resources per person.

This is a very powerful simulation; as Mr. Stanwood says, students leave with "a very strong sense of how interrelated all of us are, and some idea of what must be done if our planet is to survive."

Related Resources: UNICEF (331 East 38th St. N.Y., N.Y. 10016) has a set of color slides on Nutrition/World Hunger (#5726) for \$3.00; information and poster (#1032) are free. Isaac Asimov, Earth Our Crowded Spaceship (NY: John Day, 1974)

Stories, folktales, poems, testimonials, etc. can provide for vital class discussions. It is important not to offer students pat answers, but rather to teach them to ask appropriate questions, which is half the battle in the learning process. As an example, we have developed an exercise based on the journals of the Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca, which will simultaneously teach something of the dynamics of the Spanish conquest, and cross-cultural encounters both historically and currently.

Exercise #2

Activity: Reading and discussing excerpts from the journals of a Spanish explorer.

Concept: Conquest

Objectives: A student will be able to write about and/or discuss the conditions of early Spanish exploration of the Americas, relating this phenomenon to the meeting of Hispanic and indigenous cultures within the framework of cross-cultural encounters in the broad sense.

Materials: None

Procedure: Have the class read the following short excerpts from the writings of Cabeza de Vaca and then discuss them, based on these questions:

1. Do you notice any differences in the way in which Cabeza de Vaca views the Indians in the three readings? What could account for any change in his ideas?
2. What can you discover about the conditions of early Spanish exploration of the Americas through these readings? Why were Spaniards exploring? What kinds of difficulties did they meet? What kind of people were the explorers?
3. Cabeza de Vaca has been called one of the first anthropologists. What does "anthropologist" mean? Why do you think he is called an anthropologist? Other than satisfying curiosity, how can the information

given by an anthropologist be used by people (government officials, merchants, the army, other groups)?

4. Cabeza de Vaca was the treasurer of the expedition that was shipwrecked in Florida. He wrote his book in Spain after returning from America and sent it to the King. He was then sent to South America again, as governor of Buenos Aires, a very well-paying job. What does this tell you about why he may have written the book? Do you see anything in the readings that may be exaggerated? Self-glorifying? Untrue?
5. These readings are about a "cross-cultural encounter." What does this term mean? What problems might you find in a cross-cultural encounter? Language? Customs? Food? Lifestyle? Ideas? How do you think Cabeza de Vaca solved these problems?
6. Have you ever had a cross-cultural encounter? What was it like?
7. Nowadays, it isn't necessary to be shipwrecked to find yourself "stranded" in a different culture. Any jetflight can put you in the middle of a different continent in just a few hours. Choose a place and/or culture (a large city like Buenos Aires, a tribe in the Amazon) and write about how you would try to deal with the differences you found if you were suddenly sent there for several years. Also describe how this would be a good or bad experience, and tell how you might change because of the long visit.

Reading

(From: The Journey of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and his Companions from Florida to the Pacific 1528-1536, translated by Fanny Bandelier, Allerton Book Co., 1922.)

Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca was an officer aboard a ship that set sail from Cuba on June 27, 1527 to conquer the area

we now call Florida. In the Gulf of Mexico they ran into a terrible storm and the ship sank. Only a few survivors managed to reach the shore, probably somewhere in Louisiana. Thus began a journey of 8 years in which Cabeza de Vaca and two companions walked across the southern United States until they reached New Mexico and met another group of Spanish explorers who led them to Mexico. Cabeza de Vaca spent most of these years living and traveling with many Indian tribes that occupied the region. He and his companions were the first Europeans to meet these different groups which he describes in detail.

One of his first meetings with the Indians is quite a surprise to him. The shipwrecked survivors had attempted to build a small boat but when they launched it, with all their food and clothing inside, it immediately sank. Several Spaniards drowned and the rest were left "naked as we had been born." A group of Indians whom they had met the day before found them in this condition and this is how Cabeza describes the meeting:

At sunset the Indians, thinking we had not left, came to bring us food, but they saw us in such a different attire from before and so strange-looking, they were so frightened as to turn back. I went to call them, and in great fear they came. I then gave them to understand by signs how we had lost a barge and three of our men had been drowned, while before them there lay two of our men dead, with the others about to go the same way.

Upon seeing the disaster we had suffered, our misery and distress, the Indians sat down with us and all began to weep out of compassion for our misfortune, and for more than half an hour they wept so loud and so sincerely that it could be heard far away.

Verily, to see beings so devoid of reason, untutored, so like brutes, yet so deeply moved by pity for us, it increased my feelings and those of others in my company for our own misfortune. When the lament was over, I spoke to the Christians [Spaniards] and asked them if they would like me to beg the Indians to take us to their homes. Some of the men, who had been in New Spain, answered that it would be

unwise, as, once at their abode, they might sacrifice us to their idols.

Still, seeing there was no remedy and that in any other way death was surer and nearer, I did not mind what they said, but begged the Indians to take us to their dwellings, at which they showed great pleasure, telling us to tarry yet a little, but that they would do what we wished.

After several years of travel Cabeza de Vaca spent time with a tribe in Texas. Here he describes life with them.

They are so accustomed to running that, without resting or getting tired, they run from the morning till night in pursuit of a deer, and kill a great many, because they follow until the game is worn out, sometimes catching it alive. Their huts are of matting placed over four arches. They carry them on their back and move every two or three days in quest of food; they plant nothing that would be of any use.

They are a merry people, and even when famished do not cease to dance and celebrate their feasts and ceremonials. Their best times are when "tunas" (prickly pears) are ripe, because they have plenty to eat and spend their time in dancing and eating day and night.

As long as these tunas last they squeeze and open them and set them to dry. When dried they are put in baskets like figs and kept to be eaten on the way. The peelings they grind and pulverize.

While with them it happened many times that we were three or four days without food. Then in order to cheer us, they would tell us not to despair, since we would have tunas very soon and eat much and drink their juice and get big stomachs and be merry, contented and without hunger. But from the day they said it to the

season of the tunas there would elapse five or six months, and we had to wait that long.

In New Mexico, Cabeza de Vaca finally met other Spaniards, part of a large military expedition that had been marching north from Mexico to conquer more territory. By this time he had lived with Indians for many years. He tells us that these Spaniards consider him and his friends strange renegades. The Indians, on the other hand, are confused by the different actions and attitudes displayed by the two groups of Spaniards. Cabeza de Vaca had been using his slight knowledge of medicine to help cure sick and wounded Indians. The military expedition, on the other hand, was on a conquering mission and made war in Indian territory.

At all this the Christians [Spaniards] were greatly vexed, and told their interpreter to say to the Indians how we were of their own race, but had gone astray for a long while, and were people of no luck and little heart, whereas they were the lords of the land; whom [the Indians] should obey and serve.

The Indians gave all that talk of theirs little attention. They parlayed among themselves, saying that the Christians lied, for we had come from sunrise, while the others came from where the sun sets; that we cured the sick, while the others killed those who were healthy; that we went naked and shoeless, whereas the others wore clothes and went on horseback and with lances. Also, that we asked for nothing, but gave away all we were presented with, meanwhile the others seemed to have no other aim than to steal what they could, and never gave anything to anybody. In short, they recalled all our deeds, and praised them highly, contrasting them with the conduct of the others.

Cabeza de Vaca left the Indians, returned to Mexico with the expeditionary force, and was sent to Spain, where he wrote his book, the first to describe the geography and people of the southern United States.

Art projects are often carried out totally removed from a meaningful context and thus serve simply to stress the "quaintness" of Latin America. The same project viewed from different angles can produce quite different results. The following "Instant Bark Painting" project is an example of art used to approach important new concepts.

Exercise #3

Activity: Instant "bark" painting from Oaxaca, Mexico.

Concepts: Fine arts, flora and fauna, natural resources

Objectives: A student will create his/her own painting and will be able to: a) analyze the technique used in relation to Latin American art and universal art forms; b) identify some of the flora and fauna of Mexico; c) discuss the raw materials of art and the artists' environment.

Materials: Brown grocery bag, India ink, paint brushes (small and large), bright florescent paint, pencil, iron, newspaper.

Procedure: Open a grocery bag at the seams, tear or cut sheets at least 12" x 14" from the bag. Wet the sheets and squeeze each piece into a wad. Smooth the wad out on several layers of newspaper. Before it dries, brush on a wash of 1/8 India ink and 7/8 water - let dry. If it is too light, repeat. The ink will collect in the wrinkles and folds. Iron the sheet to make it smooth and so that it dries faster. Use a pencil to outline a design using parallel lines, dotted lines



and dots. Paint over the design with a fine brush and bright paint, being sure the colors do not touch and mix.

Enrichment activities:

1. The Indians in the Oaxaca ("Wahaca") region of Mexico use as designs for their bark paintings, luxurious flowers and birds with elaborate tails and wings. Using an encyclopedia, a textbook or other sources, the students should identify and make a list of the flora and fauna of Mexico and decide which elements to include in their paintings. Students can also discuss what flora and fauna of their own region they should choose for the paintings and why.
2. Through a slide presentation and/or with a book on the history of art, you can trace this technique through many historical periods and geographical locations, including cave art, bushman art of Australia, ancient pottery of Greece, cathedral art of the Middle Ages, Baroque architecture, Picasso, Matisse, as well as Latin American folk art such as masks and embroidery. While the parallel, rhythmic use of curved lines and dots is usually identified with "folk" or "decorative" art (rosemaling is another example), it can easily be seen to enter into the "fine arts" of different artists and epochs. Finally, students can explore magazines, newspapers, commercially packaged goods and the like for graphic art (the most common use of art in twentieth century United States) which uses the same basic technique. Throughout this exercise students should gain an understanding of the universal dimension of art and be able to view their own creation within this framework. Their creativity makes them part of an international timeless sharing of pleasing forms.
3. Few people stop to think about the relation of art to the raw materials available to the artists. The following questions will stimulate thought on this matter. They are not intended to bring forth set answers in most cases, but only to awaken awareness of this tie:
 - a) Why do you think the Indians of Oaxaca use bark as a background for their art work? What role do the following play in this



- choice: a) availability; b) adaptability; c) cost?
- b) What other types of art can you mention in which the material used tells us about the life, environment and/or resources of a people? Examples: Navajo sandpainting, wood carvings from Germany, painted Easter eggs from Poland, llama blankets from Peru, etc.
- c) What examples of art can you think of that use materials not readily available to people in the culture that created the art? Examples: jewelry made with precious stones, gold statues of the Aztecs, oriental jade carvings and silk weavings in Europe during the Renaissance, etc.
- d) What might be the differences between art forms in b) and c) in terms of number of artists, number of consumers, purpose, and value assigned to the works of art by society?
- e) Where do we in the United States get our raw materials for art? Could we paint on bark? Why do you think that we don't? How is the bark used in the Oaxacan paintings and the paper bags we used similar? How are they different? Does this say anything about the similarities and differences of the two cultures?

Bibliography:

Toor, Frances, Mexican Popular Arts, Detroit, Blaine Ethridge, 1973.

Dorner, Gerd, Folk Art of Mexico, New York, A.S. Barnes & Co., 1962.

Rubin de la Borbolla, Daniel F., Arte popular en Mexico, Mexico, Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1963.

NOTE: The Center for Latin America curriculum materials project is currently undergoing completion. The published product will be a loose-leaf handbook containing over 100 activities. For further information, or to obtain copies of the handbook, please contact the Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201.