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Celebrating Diversity 365 Days a Year: An Educational Calendar for Planning Programs

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Celebrating Diversity 365 Days a Year: An Educational Calendar for Planning Programs

Abstract

This article describes the Celebrating Diversity calendar and its uses in planning community-based Extension programs. The Celebrating Diversity calendar covers an 18-month period from July 2003 through December 2004. It serves as a source of information on ethnic celebrations, holidays, and other significant events. Knowledge of those ethnic observances aid Extension professionals in planning their educational programs in several key ways. This article provides a description of the utility of the calendar as an Extension program-planning tool. Information on how to obtain the calendar is provided as well.

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Introduction

The Celebrating Diversity calendar is an educational resource developed to support the efforts of the Designing and Implementing Programs to Effectively Reach Diverse Audiences Project (Diversity Project) in the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences at the University of Florida. The Diversity Project is funded by the CYFERNet Program of the Children, Youth and Families at Risk Initiative (CYFAR).

The primary objective of the Diversity Project is to develop a curriculum that focuses on knowledge and skills needed to work more effectively with ethnically diverse audiences. The diversity calendar complements the newly developed Strengthening Programs to Reach Diverse Audiences curriculum that will be posted on the CYFERNet Web site <<http://www.cyfernet.org/>> beginning September 2003.

The Celebrating Diversity calendar covers an 18-month period from July 2003 through December 2004. It serves as a source of information on ethnic celebrations, holidays, and other significant events. Knowledge of those ethnic observances aid Extension professionals in planning their educational programs in several key ways. This article provides a description of the utility of the calendar as an Extension program-planning tool.

Using the Calendar as Program Planning Tool

As an educational tool, the calendar provides a plethora of information that can assist Extension educators in celebrating diversity within their programs, organization, and communities.

First, significant ethnic and cultural dates are noted in each month of the calendar. Educators can refer to these dates when scheduling programs and events to avoid conflicting with cultural, religious, and social holidays and observances that are important to a given ethnic or cultural group. Educators can show their appreciation and respect for diversity by including information on the observances in their newsletters, on bulletin boards in the office, in local newspaper columns, and in other forms of communication. The dates can also serve as a reference point for educators whose staff may be requesting time off to observe an occasion that is significant to their culture.

Second, there is information on the federally recognized history and heritage months, as well. Educators can celebrate these observances with special programs in the community. Educators could arrange presentations by members of the ethnic group to afford them opportunities to share important information about their culture. Exhibits and/or cultural fairs could be organized to celebrate the observance. Also, the educators could seek out and participate in events that are already scheduled in the communities.

Third, there are descriptions of some of the key holidays and other observances. This can serve to increase educators' knowledge and understanding of culturally relevant traditions, holidays, and events.

Fourth, there are ethnic quotes and proverbs from different cultural groups included for each month. These quotes and proverbs can increase educators' awareness of the values and beliefs that are held by those ethnic groups.

Equally important, the calendar can be used to stimulate conversations between educators and the ethnically diverse audiences they serve. This might occur when the educator learns how or if the specific individual client and his/her family celebrate an observance. Ethnic holidays and special occasions are recognized and celebrated in many different ways, and not everyone in an ethnic group will celebrate the occasion in the same way. Families, and in some cases communities, may have added unique rituals and traditions to the celebrations. Additionally, not everyone in an ethnic group will celebrate a given observance.

Celebrating Diversity is based on the lunar calendar, so some of the dates are subject to change in subsequent years (2005 and beyond). However, some information will not change such as history/heritage months, ethnic quotes/proverbs, birthdates of significant figures in a particular ethnic group, etc.

Availability of the Calendar

The calendar can be ordered from the CYFERNet Web site (<http://www.cyfernet.org/>).

Summary

While there is a lot of information included in this calendar, there are many other relevant ethnic observances that occur in diverse communities throughout the nation. Therefore, this calendar should be used as a starting point to initiate dialogue about the important events that help shape family and community life with the specific diverse audience that an educator is targeting for his or her programs.

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