

Interview With Ms. Cochran

Eva: I'm Eva Kosmas, I'm in the teacher's lounge, and it's 2:45 in the afternoon. I'm interviewing Ms. Cochran the art teacher on May 18th, 2004. How long have you worked for the Hillsboro school district and in which schools?

Ms. Cochran: I have been here since the fall of 1991, started out at Hill High and taught there until 1997 when Century opened and then I've been here ever since.

Eva: What has been your involvement with our Hispanic population?

Ms. Cochran: Well, mostly as a teacher. First in teaching English, because at Hill High I was a sophomore and junior English teacher. And then at Century in all the different levels of art, art 1 through art 4. I don't think anything really past being a teacher.

Eva: What challenges do you face as a teacher working with them?

Ms. Cochran: Well, obviously the language barriers sometimes, but I think that with art so much of it is done by demonstration that it's a really good class, where barriers come down because they can watch what's being done and they're hearing it and even if they don't completely understand it they can still see. So it's a good place to learn language because you're hearing it while your seeing something rather than...

Eva: -Just hearing some one talk and talk and talk

Ms. Cochran: Exactly, (laughs). 'And then World War II started in 1901...'

Eva: What challenges do they face as students in the art program?

Ms. Cochran: Um, Mrs. Abrahams actually did-is doing her master's thesis based on this, it's that they learn a certain level of English, and I know a little bit of Spanish, so you can talk some of the basics to them, which works fine for Art 1 or Art 2 which is like, 'this needs to be larger, this needs to be smaller, more shadows are needed here, more water is needed here', and you know, you can say those basic things. But, when you get to Art 3 when you're talking about 'you need a more peaceful line, you need-you want to work with a more exaggerated texture' and you're starting to deal with more abstract concepts. If kids are coming in and they don't have that level of language mastery and then they start missing out on those higher level thinking skills that are brought in at the higher levels of art. That doesn't always happen because a lot of times, well, you have to be at least a junior to be in Art 3, so by then usually their English speaking skills have gotten better too, but that's some of the drawbacks that I see that they're having to overcome.

Eva: How well do you think we do in meeting their needs as a school?

Ms. Cochran: Um, I think we're getting better. I think that we could be doing more. I don't know if I really think as a school, I think as a district we could be doing more, as a school I think we're doing a pretty good job. I really think this school is pretty accepting. You know, you walk down the hall and you see Hispanic kids with Asian kids with white kids...friendships seem to not be particularly determined by race, that's probably one of the best things about Century High School.

Eva: And what more do you think the district could be doing to help the Hispanic population?

Ms. Cochran: Well, it seems that some of the research shows that if some of those kids have an intro kind of class where they're not just thrust right into the mainstream of education, that at first there's like an 'intro-center', there's a name for it but I just can't remember, it's in the ESL talk, but it means that you get to kind of get your feet wet in education in the United States first and when you have a certain level of learning then you get to be put into those basic classes. And I think if that happens, then those kids, not necessarily Hispanic kids, but that's the majority of our ESL speakers, but I think any non-English speaker...I think we'd see less effects of gangs I think we'd see more cross over between kids, because let's face it, if you only speak one language and it's not English, you're going to team up with the people that you know that can understand you, otherwise you'd never get to talk to anybody.

Eva: In the course of your career, to what extent do you see improvement in our efforts to improve Hispanic students' achievement?

Ms. Cochran: Well, at first, we just have gotten so many more Hispanic, or Latino kids into...you know, they're a huge part of the culture. It used to be that there was sort of the hidden thing, they worked in the fields but you didn't see them, they kept to themselves in town, they had little Mexico. And now it's much more-they're everywhere, and they're just like 'deal with us' and 'we're part of who you are, we're part of Hillsboro'. And it wasn't like 'oh there's Jose, he's the Mexican kid in my class' it's like 'there's Jose and Alfredo...' and you know a lot of times more than half of my classes will be minority kids. You know, they're just mainstream; it's not something out of the ordinary to have them there.

Eva: If you could make any changes, what would you do?

Ms. Cochran: I'd get myself to learn Spanish., I think I need to learn Spanish. It's really frustrating, I'm trying to find classes, but after school there's usually like 5 credit classes, and going to school 3 nights a week after you've taught all day just is really really difficult. It'd be nice if we could have a college level Spanish class that you could get district credit for that...you know, I don't want to have Spanish for tourists, you know conversational Spanish, I'm not looking for that. There are some classes called 'Spanish for educators'. I think they could make it easier for teachers to get Spanish by bringing them into a building and saying 'ok all teachers-' you know. And maybe even beyond

just getting district credit maybe you could get reimbursement or extended contract times. We need to be able to speak to these kids in Spanish and its really frustrating to try to get a 5 hour class where I go three days a week for a couple hours a night after I've taught all day. I just think that the district could make it easier for us to become at least somewhat fluent in Spanish.

Eva: To what extent do you feel prepared as a mainstream teacher to meet the needs of ESL students? Does the-well, this kind of was already answered-does the district provide the training resources that you need?

Ms. Cochran: No, not really. We've had a couple ESL little workshops, about twenty minutes long-

Eva: -But that's not going to make a huge difference.

Ms. Cochran: -Yeah, that's not going to make a huge difference. You know, I think, I'm pretty good for as much as I know, quite frankly. I've learned a lot of things about techniques that I do with kids that make them real comfortable, I have a lot of Hispanic kids in my classes. I get asked by other people in the district 'how do you keep so many Hispanic kids in your classes? Like, you have senior Hispanic boys in your classes, nobody else is getting those Hispanic boys to go for four years of art, and yet you are.' And I'm going 'I don't know.' But I think that I really value their culture. We use Frieda Callow, we've studied Diego Rivera. I try to talk to them in Spanish, I mangle their language terribly, but instead of saying to this girl 'would you please say to her that I want her to do this?' Instead I go, I start drawing and I'll say 'Como se dice en Espanol the line needs to be bigger or darker?' -Well, actually I can say that- but she'll say 'oh you know, es necesita por le ninya es muy ascurro es-' And then I'll say ok and then I'll try to say it and I'll say 'Now what, the line needs to be darker.' And then I'll try it again and the non-speaker hears me speaking not very good Spanish but she's hears me asking for it in Spanish and then in English you know 'how do you say in Spanish the line needs to be darker?' Then I say it in Spanish, and then I say it in Ingles as 'the line needs to be darker.' But I do the trying, not her, and so then soon I can say to her in Spanish 'how do you say in Spanish', 'Como se dice en Espanol...' and then they'll tell me, you know I'll say 'pen', and she'll say, oh you know, 'lelelelele.' So then they become the teacher to me rather than me saying 'you know kid, you don't know anything and I'm going to have to get this interpreter here to talk to you because I can't.' But I think by being willing to speak poor Spanish, then they're not afraid. You know, then they'll go 'Oh, I don't know...' and I'd say, 'well, try, c'mon, my Spanish is bad' and they'll say 'ok. Missus, I want, I want another, I want more paper.' I say 'oh, bueno!' You know, so, those sorts of things, even though I'm not a Spanish speaking, I know just a smattering, but I think then its making me look like the one who doesn't know, and that's just incidental like 'oh, I have this teacher. Poor teacher, she can't speak Spanish to me so I have to help her along all the time' rather than 'poor me I don't understand the teacher who only speaks English.' You know, it's a different mind set, and I think that that's really the best thing that we've done. That and because I really think art is such a basic part of their culture. My Hispanic kids are wonderful, they're not afraid to just pick up a red and put it in

there. They're used to vibrant colors and making art and they make it with much less...they just don't think about it, they just pick it up and do it. Whereas a lot of my other kids that are Caucasian born, you know, U.S.A. citizens are-

Eva: -A lot more hesitant.

Ms. Cochran: -Yeah like 'oh, I'm afraid to do it really dark' and I think it's a different culture thing. I'm not sure about that but that's what it just seems like in watching.

Eva: To what extent are you involved with the parents of the Hispanic students?

Ms. Cochran: Not too much. You know, I meet them at parent/teacher conferences. Sometimes I call home, but even then I have to get Maria Hernandez to help me because, like I called home about a boy who wasn't coming to school and his mom got all worked up because she found out her son wasn't at school, and started peppering me like really really fast in Spanish and I'm like 'Lo siento pero no hables Espanol', 'my Spanish is bad, just a minute' and I go get Maria and then Maria talks to her. That's a hindrance; again, to go back to the earlier thing, I need to learn more Spanish.

Eva: Based on your experiences, what is your evaluation of how we are doing as a district in meeting the needs of Hispanic students?

Ms. Cochran: We're getting better; we're providing interpreters at parent/teacher conferences. I think we've been doing a better job of contacting those people to get them to feel part of the community. I still think that the welcoming center would be nice, I think there's more that could be done. I'm not very well-versed in what other people have done, I know we have our ESL programs. I don't really know enough to know that.

Eva: Is there anything else you want to tell me?

Ms. Cochran: Um, probably just that as we've gotten more Hispanic kids it's wonderful to look around the room and see people who don't all look alike. When we do portraits we can talk about Asian cheeks and Chinese lips and Hispanic Aztec noses. I just think it's so enriching for all of us to just be able to have that sort of deep interaction with different peoples and I think the fact that we don't have any more fights than we do - I mean people get along pretty well. That makes me really hopeful for the world in general and our society that some good things I see happening here, friendships that will go out beyond these walls and make our society a lot better place for what the Hispanics have brought to the table, what the Asians have brought, we're getting a lot more black students, and our Caucasian students who, you know, sort of get 'oh, your white' kind of a 'huh' kind of thing. So, anyway, I think it's good.

Eva: Alright well, thank-you so much I really appreciate it.

Ms. Cochran: Yeah, I'm glad you took the time to do this.