



CIVICS LESSON

Jaime Escalante/Sal Castro

Educational Excellence

Sal Castro, a contemporary of Escalante, was also committed to educational excellence. Born in Los Angeles in 1933, Castro had a rough upbringing. His father was deported through the Mexican Repatriation Movement, the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Mexican-Americans — some of them birthright citizens — from the U.S. to Mexico in the 1930s. This and other early experiences made Castro aware of the injustices that Latinos suffered. Once he became a teacher in the Los Angeles School District, he brought a commitment to fight for better conditions and opportunities for Latino kids. In 1963 Castro founded Chicano Youth Leadership Conferences, which became a training ground for students and educators to organize for systemic reforms to provide bilingual and culturally relevant education to put students on a track for higher education. The big challenge came in 1968, when Castro courageously led students on a school walkout in support of their demands. Castro was fired from his job and even arrested on charges of conspiracy against the schools. The school strike was a success, with many of the demands accepted; the charges against Castro were eventually dropped and he was rehired. To honor his legacy of struggle, a school district has been named in his honor. Castro's principle-driven words below reveal key steps in his successful fight for educational excellence and justice. Meditate on these truths; let them inform your own battles as you:

LOVE THE KIDS

You start with the love of the kids, not the love of your subject matter. You start loving the kids, and know that you're going to go to the wall for them to make sure that they're successful.

Castro succeeded because his motivation was in the right place. Make sure your fight for excellence is rooted in love. People served are more important than sub-

jects taught; individuals more important than issues. Your heart and soul for helping those in need will guide your compassion; tell your story of success; encourage others to share about their victories and

LET TESTIMONIES INSPIRE

Sunday morning, there's a mass and then testimony of what they've gotten out of the conference. Two or three kids from each of the tribes get up and speak about their experiences. Interacting with college folks and seeing all those PhDs really juices them. A lot of the comments when they leave are, "We didn't know that there were that many PhDs, and we didn't know that our people have done so much." They walk out of there feeling 10 feet tall, and they're very emotional. Boys and girls cry when they leave. They're born again Latinos.

In Castro's pursuit of educational excellence, he know he had fight against institutional barriers and for greater opportunities through Chicano Youth Conferences. Like him, seek transformative moments. Expose yourself and others, especially young people, to new experiences and to role models; opportunities will emerge that will

LIGHT THE WAY

I liked the fact that I was able to deal with kids from all around and exchange ideas about what could be done. But the main thing was that these kids had to graduate and go on to college . . . The changes will come by you getting a BA, an MA, a PhD. I want to see a room full of PhDs here . . . Any change that was going to happen, that's the way it was going to be.

For lasting change to happen, it must be holistic: institutional and personal. Work for excellence by casting a vision for both educators and students of a brighter, more just future. Seeing the way of change will make it a lot easier for people to walk in it.