



LIBERATED ETHNIC STUDIES

MODEL CURRICULUM COALITION

Chapter 1 Introduction

The power of Ethnic Studies as an academic discipline is in its commitment to grapple with societal problems that still impact Black, [Chicanx/Latinx](#), Asian American, Pacific Islanders, Arab American, and American Indian/Native American communities. The COVID-19 pandemic reveals how vulnerable each of these communities are to racism, health injustice, poverty, exposure to toxic environments, and housing and food insecurity.

The evidence of continued [systematic and institutional racism](#) is also apparent as we mourn the loss of several community members Breonna Taylor, Amhaud Arbery, Steven Taylor, Erik Salgado, Sean Monterrosa, Andres Guardado, and George Floyd at the hands of the police and white people with impunity. Young people from a variety of backgrounds mobilize in the streets shouting “Black Lives Matter” in unsanctioned marches, rallies, and demonstrations. In some cases, protesters direct their anger at buildings that represent a political system that continues to [dehumanize](#) Black bodies by placing more interest in buildings and corporations than in equity and social justice. Martin Luther King Jr. coined this manifestation of anger as “the language of the unheard” uprisings of Black and Brown people and communities who are in pain, enraged, and frustrated with the persistent injustices they face despite glaring evidence of inequities and social barriers afflicting them.

It is time for educators to focus institutional reform efforts on the interests of Black Indigenous People of Color ([BIPOC](#)) youth disenfranchised by [racist](#) policies and suffering from unresponsive educational systems. For over 50 years, communities of color have struggled to institutionalize Ethnic Studies in California and across the U.S. Students and faculty advocated for the inclusion of Ethnic Studies as a legitimate academic discipline, even holding hunger strikes, rallies and sit-ins. This struggle stems from



the glaring lack of culturally relevant, responsive, sustaining, revitalizing/regenerating, and liberatory materials in K-20 education that honor the immense and innumerable societal contributions from BIPOC communities. The youth of BIPOC communities today have been ignored, and pushed to the edge, just as they were 50 years ago. The time for action is now!

As Ethnic Studies faculty, teachers, and activists, we understand that Ethnic Studies would not exist without the courageous and sometimes perilous struggles of Black, Brown, and Asian American students, such as those at California State University Northridge, San Francisco State University, and University of California, Berkeley. Faced down by the police, these student activists were often among the first to be jailed. Ethnic Studies rose from the ashes of civil unrest and Students of Color throughout the nation were inspired and demanded that their **pre-colonial** ancestral, familial, historical, cultural, and linguistic knowledges and narratives become a viable part of the higher education and K-12 curriculum. Recent battles in Arizona, California, and Texas are stark reminders that despite the long push we are still engaged in the struggle to adopt Ethnic Studies as foundational and necessary learning.

To this end, more than 40 Ethnic Studies educators and activists from throughout the state of California have convened to develop, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. This is our gift to California's educators who rise up to be among the first to teach an **authentic comprehensive Ethnic Studies curriculum with critical fidelity to the field of Ethnic Studies**. We invite you to reflect, dialogue, teach, and build upon our work. This work does not belong to us, it belongs to the youth, educators, activists, practitioners, and protectors who dare to resist and strive to embody the values of Ethnic Studies. [In Lak' Ech](#): You are my other me.

What is Ethnic Studies?

Ethnic Studies is the interdisciplinary field that encompasses Africana/Black/African American Studies, American Indian/Alaskan Native/Native American Studies, Asian American/Pacific Islander Studies, Arab American Studies, and Chicanx/Latinx Studies. These disciplines contend with racism, white supremacy, and nation within nation relationships. By centering the stories, experiences, and perspectives of the aforementioned groups, intertribal, and mixed race people, Ethnic Studies uses community-based **epistemology**, content, and pedagogy to educate students to be socially, politically, environmentally and economically conscious of their personal connections to local and **(trans)national** histories and herstories.

Students in these courses study indigeneity, imperialism, **coloniality**, oppression, hegemony, **privilege**, power and liberation--through the intersectional lenses of [race](#), [ethnicity](#), culture, gender, sexuality, ability, language, immigrant status, and class. We analyze systems of power through engagement with anti-racist and social justice activism. We engage in acts of resistance hoping that one day we will achieve sovereignty, self-determination, and/or community actualization. Reflection, naming, dialogue, and



community responsive action drive learning, and support the belief that each person has important narratives, stories, and voices to share. Students will have the opportunity to cultivate intersectional, transformative solidarity with groups of people, locally and (trans)nationally, to foster active community responsiveness, social engagement, radical healing, critical hope and love, and a reimagined future.

Moreover, each core discipline addresses the specific legacies, and social, cultural, economic, and political experiences of people from said group. The four disciplines often overlap in their approach, methods and theories, and in their discussion of shared/collective struggles. For example, when teaching a lesson on **mutual aid and community responsiveness**, teachers might teach a lesson on the history of mutual aid societies that many communities of color used to survive economic hardship, housing discrimination or aid to new arrivals from distant lands. The teacher might add a lesson on Black and Brown solidarity by teaching about how the Black Panthers, Brown Berets and Young Lords responded to lack of access to health care and hunger in their communities during the 1970's, when all three offered breakfast programs, free clinics and legal aid to impoverished communities. It has been documented that the breakfast program in our schools is the direct result of the Black Panthers free breakfast program in Oakland.

WHY?

Why aren't white folk's histories a part of Ethnic Studies? For example, the reason Irish American studies is not a part of Ethnic Studies is mostly because of two things: my white skin and white supremacy. Because I look 'white' I don't experience racism. The potato famine and indentured servitude did not have lingering effects on my family. My grandparents, parents, and I 'became white' (Ignatiev, 1995) protecting us from racism and giving us a clear path to social and economic power. My Irish ancestors in the United States escaped their initial oppression among other white ethnic groups by being more brutal towards African Americans than everyone else. This is white supremacy. White supremacy is the idea that everything white people do is deemed normal and better, in other words, supreme, at the top of the list. Because white people have been in positions of power in the United States they have designed all of our institutions, schools, courts, government etc., and made sure that only white people would benefit from white supremacy. Conversely, African/Black/African Americans, American Indian/Alaskan Native/Native Americans, Asian American/Pacific Islanders, Arab Americans, and Chicana/Latina people have not only been the target of racism and white supremacy, they have been systematically denied social and economic power through ignoring and erasing their expertise, labor, knowledge, experiences and ways of understanding the world. Through Ethnic Studies, schools center the perspectives of the key disciplinary groups and the connections that white people have to these groups.

Why Ethnic Studies stands alone?

Ethnic Studies centers on the racialized experiences, intellectual traditions, cultural knowledge, and liberation struggles of Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x, African American, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Arab American, American Indian, or other People of Color in the United States. Each of the disciplines that comprise the field of Ethnic Studies holds its own historical and contemporary narrative. In offering stand alone Ethnic Studies courses, school districts and universities honor the vitality, viability and breadth of the discipline while honoring the untold, forgotten and misrepresented counternarratives of racialized communities of color.

Students of Ethnic Studies as a stand alone course are given an opportunity to



concentrate and focus on the study of racialized groups, such as Chicana Studies, African Studies, or American Indian Studies. However, Ethnic Studies courses can also incorporate the experiences of more than one racialized community of color in a Comparative Ethnic Studies Course. When these disciplines are infused into a broader traditional content area like United States History, the transformative centering of racialized experiences is lost. For example, in a U.S. History course one might incorporate a lesson on the construction of the intercontinental railroad mentioning the contributions of the Chinese railroad workers. In contrast, an Ethnic Studies or Asian American Studies course would examine the patterns of immigration law, economic exploitation, racism, and colonialism from the perspective of Asian Americans. Overall, the stand alone course is the preferred option since it affords students a more focused concentration on a specific group historically excluded from the curriculum, while providing a broader context for students to examine racism, historical context and create actionable changes in their own world. Simply infusing tenets of Ethnic Studies into traditional academic fields, while helpful, doesn't allow for the in-depth exploration of the oppressive histories and realities that BIPOC communities face(d).

Multicultural Education	Ethnic Studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All marginalized communities.• Inclusivity and Diversity: May incorporate BIPOC perspective into a broader curriculum• Multiple perspectives, diversity, Inclusion and sometimes equity• Concepts: Tolerance, Acceptance, Affirmation, Allyship• Global Connections• Allyship• Anti Bias <p>Frameworks and Pedagogies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Centers Racialized Communities (Dynamic Disciplines, Race as a Social Construct)◦ Self-determination, Deconstruction and Voice: Epistemology, Content and Experiences of Native and People of Color.◦ Race and Intersectional Counter Narratives: Community Cultural Wealth, Resistance, Healing and Hope, Solidarity◦ Concepts: Community Responsive, Decolonial and Liberatory, Co-conspirators◦ Internationalist & Solidarity◦ Co-conspirators◦ Anti Racist

THE ETHNIC STUDIES MOVEMENT “Milestones from 1968 to present”



Gregorian Years	Significance of Key Events in the Last 50 Years of the Ethnic Studies Movement
Multimillenia	BIPOC Knowledge Traditions...
1965-1968 BIPOC embrace/reclaim the racialized colors	BIPOC embrace/reclaim the racialized colors that whiteness assigned us on a larger scale of movement building. Movements explicitly called Black-Red-Brown-Yellow Power emerge, led by BIPOC community organizations and students -- and these are the movements from which Ethnic Studies is born. The Black Panthers and Black Student Union were born in 1966, and the birth of the Brown Berets, American Indian Movement, Asian American Political Alliance, followed over the next two years.
1968 East LA High School Blowouts.	East LA High School Blowouts. Primarily Mexican Students walk out of five East Los Angeles high schools, demanding a dignified education, and one of their demands is to see themselves reflected in the curriculum (input verbatim demand).
1968-1969	<p>The Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) and the official birth of Ethnic Studies. The Black Student Union, together in solidarity with active Chicana/Latina and Asian American, student of color groups, form the TWLF at San Francisco State University in 1968, and soon after, with Native American representation, at the University of California, Berkeley. They demand Ethnic Studies and go on the two longest strikes in United States history, to develop Ethnic Studies departments and programs at both institutions in March of 1969.</p> <p>1969</p> <p>United Front was formed at UC Santa Barbara in <u>February of 1969</u> after negotiations over the Black Student Union (BSU) demands for a Black Studies department stalled. The multiracial coalition consisted of the United Mexican-American Students (UMAS), BSU, and the mostly White Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).</p> <p>Between April 22 and May 5th, 1969 at the City College of New York the ONYX Society (the Black student organization) and PRISA (the mostly Puerto Rican students) occupied the South Campus. As a result of their demands, departments were established for the following: African Studies,</p>



	<p>Afro-American Studies, Community Studies, Caribbean Studies, Puerto Rican Studies, and Studies of other New world areas (Ryan 429).</p> <p>“El Plan de Santa Barbara: A Chicano Plan for Higher Education” is drafted, which includes a blueprint for Chicano Studies programs and organizations at colleges across the nation.</p> <p>Chicano Studies and Pan African Studies programs are established at California State University, Northridge.</p> <p>The Institute of American Cultures (IAC) was founded at UC Los Angeles, establishing Ethnic Studies research centers.</p>
<p>1970s Discipline organizations are founded.</p>	<p>1970</p> <p>The Native American Materials Development Center (NAMDC) creates a K–6 culturally relevant curriculum for Navajo schools.</p> <p>1972</p> <p>The National Association for Ethnic Studies was founded.</p> <p>The National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) was founded.</p> <p>The Inter-Ethnic Studies Association in Detroit develops <i>Ethnic Studies Projects: Training Teacher Trainers</i>.</p> <p>The American Indian Curriculum Development Program in North Dakota was established.</p> <p>Gloria Anzaldúa, Chicana-Feminist-Queer scholar includes Mexican history in her curriculum when she taught pre-school and special education to Chicana/Latina students in Texas. She wrote the infamous <i>Borderlands</i> and co-authored <i>This Bridge Called my Back</i> where she and other Women of Color pioneers created new theories and examined the intersectional experience of queer women of color with indigenous roots through prose and poetry.</p> <p>1973</p> <p>Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College in New York City was founded.</p>



	<p>1979 The Association for Asian American Studies was founded.</p> <p>The Ethnic Studies Department at Bowling Green University in Ohio is founded.</p>
<p>1980s</p>	<p>1986 Escuela Aztlán, a grassroots school with culturally relevant social activism, is founded by Unión del Barrio in San Diego.</p> <p>1987 The Center for Studies of Ethnicity and Race in America was founded at the University of Colorado, Boulder.</p>
<p>1990s</p>	<p>1993 Berkeley High School makes Ethnic Studies a graduation requirement</p> <p>Between May 25th and June 6th 1993, students involved in MEChA held a hunger strike at UCLA demanding a Chicano Studies Department. The hunger strike resulted in the funding and hiring of professors that can teach Chicano Studies as well as an increase in funding for UCLA's Cesar Chavez Center for Interdisciplinary Instruction, and secure funding for Gender and Ethnic studies programs (Armbruster-Sandoval 96).</p> <p>1994</p> <p>From April 27th to May 5th UCSB students held a hunger strike that resulted in the increase of full time faculty in the Chicana/o Studies Department as well as the formation of the first PhD Program in Chicana/o Studies (Armbruster-Sandoval 144).</p> <p>Students at Stanford started their hunger strike on May 4th 1994 demanding a Chicano Studies department among other things (Armbruster-Sandoval 158). This hunger strike ended on May 7th, 1994 with a promise to consider establishing a Chicano Studies program (Armbruster-Sandoval 194).</p> <p>1998 The Mexican American/Raza Studies (MARS) program was founded in Tucson, Arizona.</p> <p>The Betty Shabazz International Charter School, a free Afrocentric school, was founded in Chicago.</p>



<p>2000s</p>	<p>2001</p> <p>Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP) was founded to address culturally relevant curriculum, teacher preparation, and institutionalization of Filipina/o curriculum in local San Francisco schools.</p> <p>Asian American/Asian Research Institute (AAARI) was established by the City University of New York, serving as a hub for research on policies impacting Asian Americans.</p> <p>Academia Semillas del Pueblo, a language revitalization academy, is founded as part of the Los Angeles Unified School District.</p> <p>The Ethnic Studies Department was established and the graduation requirement adopted at James Logan High School in Union City, California.</p> <p>2010</p> <p>HB 2281 was passed, banning Tucson Unified School District’s Mexican American/Raza Studies; with 48 course offerings, MARS is the largest Ethnic Studies program for any school district nationwide.</p> <p>Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice (ITOC) was formed.</p>
<p>2010’s</p>	<p>Many districts in CA, state-level legislation across several states, begin the development of the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.</p> <p>2010 The San Francisco Unified School District develops a pilot 9th-grade Ethnic Studies course.</p> <p>2014 Movement ignited when ERUSD passed their Ethnic Studies Requirement. Ethnic Studies Now Coalition started statewide. LA and SF pass an ethnic studies graduation requirement</p> <p>A 2016 Stanford Study Found Academic benefits to students who took the Ethnic Studies Pilot Program in the San Francisco Unified School District</p> <p>In 2016 SFSU was planning on cutting funding for its College of Ethnic Studies even though it had a 14 million dollar surplus. In may of 2016 4 students went on a 10 day hunger strike that resulted in the a \$700,000 commitment from the school(Source).</p> <p>AB 2016 allows for the creation of a Statewide Ethnic Studies Model</p>



	<p>Curriculum.</p> <p>On August 22nd, 2017 the decision to ban the MAS program in TUSD was overruled. The judge gave the following opinion: "The passage and enforcement of the law against the MAS program were motivated by anti-Mexican-American attitudes."</p> <p>In October 2017, CSUN students boycotted the university on Tuesday by urging the campus community not to purchase anything on campus, and instead provided drinks and food for students. This comes in the wake of CSU Chancellor Timothy White proposing a change in the general education requirements with Executive Order 1100. The change would end the section in the GE that requires students to take six units in comparative cultural studies.</p> <p>2018: AB 2772 was Vetoed by Governor Brown</p> <p>2019: AB 331 was introduced then later vetoed by Governor Newsom in</p>
<p>2020s</p>	<p>2020: CA AB 1460 was signed by Governor Newsom</p> <p>2021: Governor Gavin Newsom signs CA AB 101, making an ethnic studies course a graduation requirement for all public high schools but with cumbersome guardrails that threaten the integrity of the scholarly fields of ethnic studies.</p> <p>Our Ethnic Studies related movements of 2019-2020-2021</p>

Several events cited from RES ES-Movement Timeline:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vJyX-Q8oux31wYL4WVKOfH20YqzPkqgB/view?usp=sharing>

Guiding Values and Principles of Ethnic Studies Teaching

[Guiding Values and Principles of Ethnic Studies](#) aid in guiding and developing Ethnic Studies courses, units, and lesson plans. They are not global abstractions, but rather are foundational and alive in the lessons. The Guiding Values and Principles can be conceptualized as the [double helix](#) of Ethnic Studies, with each strand signifying the interdependence between [holistic humanization and critical consciousness](#). Humanization includes the values of love, respect, hope, solidarity, and is based on the celebration of [community cultural wealth](#). Holistic humanization posits that learners are aware of their own selves. The strands of the double helix guide the transformational change process. Much like DNA



guides the physical transformation of biological matter, the Ethnic Studies Guiding Values and Principles guide the manifestations of a more just, equitable, anti-racist, and transformatively affirming society through education. The purpose of these values and principles is no less than to address inequities and achieve racial justice for a truer democracy. The guiding values and principles of Ethnic Studies must be brought to life in authentic Ethnic Studies units/lessons. **These guiding values and principles are signified by the double helix, and the seven's C.** They are, as follows:

Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Black, Indigenous, People of Color. *Students study and connect to the Ethnic Studies Community Unity Chant (in lak ech = you are my other me), as well as collect stories about the cultural knowledge and wisdom of BIPOC elders and promote/publish these stories on a website highlighting the physical and mental well-being of BIPOC.*

Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and Communities of Color by providing a space to share their stories of struggle and resistance, along with their intellectual, historical and linguistic knowledge. *A pre-colonial lesson focused on the occupied land where a school is situated or a unit on environmental justice highlighting the contributions of indigenous resistance movements honor the historical and contemporary struggles of Native People/s to gain sovereignty over their land and protect the environment.*

Center and place high value on pre-colonial, ancestral, indigenous, **diasporic**, familial, and marginalized knowledge. *A lesson that examines and compares traditional medicine, such as the family use of healing plants, to contemporary western medicines and how this gives primacy to scientific knowledge and healing expertise of ancestral and indigenous peoples. A unit of study on the "three sisters" (maize, beans and squash crops) exemplifies the deep agricultural and scientific knowledge of Native People/s whose resulting food surplus sustained indigenous groups.*

Critique empire, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, racism, patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, anthropocentrism, and other forms of power and oppression at the intersections of our society. *Units focus on analyzing contemporary art pieces that critique **neocolonial ideologies**. For example images in historical and contemporary travel brochures that stereotype BIPOC could facilitate powerful dialogues how the tourism industry exploits and stereotypes BIPOC communities for profit.*

Challenge imperialist/colonial hegemonic beliefs and practices on ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized levels. *Youth can discuss a bar graph of the ethnicity and social status of characters in children's picture books to identify how authors, artists, and publishing companies use children's*



literature to normalize the silencing of Asian Americans. Students then co-write letters to publishing companies of these books expressing their concerns and/or appreciation for portrayals of BIPOC.

Connect ourselves to past and contemporary [resistance](#) movements that struggle for social justice on global and local levels to ensure a truer [democracy](#). *Researching the homeowners of color in a red-lined neighborhood where the school is located and co-writing a children's book about the families experiences shows how ordinary BIPOC fought and still fight for access to home ownership and struggle for economic power. Students can engage in an oral history project narrating the experiences of family or community members in the education system as part of the [hxstorical](#) context of the struggle for Ethnic Studies.*

Conceptualize, imagine, and build new possibilities for [post-imperial](#) life that promote collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing. *After researching current examples of school segregation, students write and make public comments at their school board meetings with recommendations for racial integration policies to build new possibilities for resisting white supremacist schooling structures.*

The Discipline of Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies rose from the ashes of civil unrest, when students of color demanded that their historical, cultural and linguistic historical knowledge become a viable part of the academy. Calling for self-determination, these students demanded the full inclusion of courses and departments foregrounding the disciplines of Black Studies, Chicana/o Studies, Asian American Studies and Native American Studies. As a dynamic, ever-changing, community based discipline, Ethnic Studies is still rooted in the subfields but has evolved and broadened to study and address the changes and diversity of groups. In this model curriculum, we do our best to model [self-determination](#) by facilitating the development of curriculum from the lens of educators in their respective disciplines.

Ethnic Studies is the explicit counter narrative to the colonial historical narrative that has dominated United States textbooks for centuries. For years, young students of color have been subjected to a narrative of “history” written by white people about or without BIPOC groups. The history taught and learned in our classrooms continues to be a one-sided and narrow version of [hxstorical](#) events. The history presented often ignores and dismisses centuries of colonialization, racism, discrimination, and exclusion. It is a history of lies and tall tales that idolizes occupiers and scoundrels as heroes and People of Color as the vanquished, saved, and subordinate. Historical, and yes, [hxstorical](#) and [herstorical](#) knowledge from an Ethnic Studies perspective reflects the views, experiences, questions and aspirations of the people who comprise the four sub-disciplines of Ethnic Studies, and documents the diverse legacies



and contributions that these groups have made, while also reframing what a discipline is and can be, from our own ancestral, contemporary, and future oriented worldviews.

As a discipline, Ethnic Studies originated from communities of color-led movement and not from within the American educational institution that has consistently claimed “objectivity” while negating and oppressing students of color. As such, Ethnic Studies does not feign neutrality and it is often presented in the first person. Ethnic Studies reserves the right to do so as an explicit [counter narrative](#) to traditional western disciplines, and in these ways, distinguishes itself from the majority of other academic areas. The reality is, that as a discipline, Ethnic Studies does not have the luxury of being embraced in traditional Western educational settings for decades, or even for centuries as many other disciplines do. We argue that the dominant narrative found throughout mainstream education and curriculum is biased, presenting a false or selective account of our his/her/hxstories and realities.

Ethnic Studies continues to struggle to exist with adequate funding in many institutions, and as an academic field, continues to engage in various relationships with disciplinarity, or the quality of being an academic discipline. Practitioners and scholars have referred to Ethnic Studies work as [interdisciplinary](#) (the most common), multidisciplinary, [transdisciplinary](#), undisciplinarity, and [intradisciplinarity](#) — meaning a discipline unto itself, providing the necessary epistemic decolonizing framework to transcend Western thought and [epistemology](#). In this sense, Ethnic Studies is xdisciplinary, which can signify any or all of these aforementioned relationships.

Ethnic Studies is undisciplinarity in the sense that it strongly diverges from the western educational approach which is based on students as tabula rasa or blank slates to be filled with disciplinary knowledge. On the contrary, in Ethnic Studies—operating outside the traditional academic disciplinary bounds—students bring volumes of disciplinary knowledge into the classroom with them. This is an undoing and unraveling of the notion of disciplinarity itself, so that the ancestral and home funds of knowledge devalued within other disciplines, are strongly embraced within the discipline of Ethnic Studies. For example, a student with knowledge of working on a ranch and the essential connection between people, plants, insects, and animals on the farm is sought and valued in an Ethnic Studies classroom as rigorous disciplinary knowledge. Or a student of color who daily negotiates travel, interactions, and meals from their home in Uptown New York City through a variety of de facto segregated neighborhoods to their school in Battery Park City has powerful knowledge to activate in their 5th grade classroom.

As with other disciplines, it is imperative that Ethnic Studies be regarded with disciplinary deference and curricular integrity decided upon by the scholars and practitioners of the field, and that efforts to cater to the status quo of white supremacy culture, do not prevent authentic Ethnic Studies from being brought to fruition at district levels of implementation. Ethnic Studies has a 50 year history of disciplinary



development that must continue to stem from scholars, practitioners, and communities of Ethnic Studies—to maintain its rigor and vitality.

Ethnic Studies Epistemology

Epistemology is the relationship between the would-be knower and what can be known. Western epistemology, the long term investment and advancement of Western civilization, was founded upon the privileging of the knower rather than the known, and therefore validating the knower as a “neutral seeker of truth and objectivity who also controls the disciplinary rules to evaluate and dictate” (Mignolo 2011). Rooted in the colonizing logic of Eurocentrism, Western epistemology enacts epistemic violence against non-Western epistemologies, [ontologies](#), and [cosmologies](#). Some of the ways that Western epistemology can colonize are: ignoring or excluding local/Indigenous knowledges, naming, defining, and blaming the “Other” using traditional Western ways of knowing (Smith, 2001). By Western ways of knowing, we refer to ways of seeing and defining people, places, and ideas that overemphasize decontextualization, rigidity, formality, reductive methods, and one dimensional processes and interpretations through colonizing logic. As **decolonial** epistemology, the discipline of Ethnic Studies is decolonial intervention of Western epistemology, and a regeneration of BIPOC epistemologies. Decolonial epistemology requires the knower to be aware of and push against a long history of knowing wherein Western ideas about what can be known and how to know have colonized and brutalized the people being researched (Smith, 2001). For example, instead of seeing various ‘riots’ by BIPOC groups as criminal behavior, a decolonial epistemology sees this rioting within the historical context of marginalized communities reacting to the centuries of murders of Black people throughout our society and educational structure that values profits over people.

Ethnic Studies epistemology is decolonial and community-based. Rooted in the multi-generational intellectual traditions of people of color, Ethnic Studies emerged in the 1960’s as a response and intervention to Western male epistemology and Eurocentric fundamentalism of the Westernized university (Grosfoguel, 2016). Ethnic Studies emphasizes that decolonization is not a metaphor and ultimately relates to the sovereignty of the Indigenous nations of the land where a course takes place (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Simultaneously, Ethnic Studies employs epistemic decolonization or decolonizing knowledge of marginalized thinkers and perspectives that challenge the colonality of knowledge; knowledge that underlines a colonizing logic (Maldonado-Torres 2019, Mignolo 2011). Ethnic Studies goes beyond the simplistic additives that characterize the multicultural curriculum by exposing systems of oppression that reproduce racial/social difference (Bautista and O’Brien 2016, 99). As decolonial epistemic praxis, Ethnic Studies centers and humanizes the viewpoints and epistemologies of historically marginalized groups (Grosfoguel 2016), specifically third world communities of color in the United States and beyond, and regenerating our pre-colonial ancestral knowledge in transformative creation for past, present, and future generations (Cuauhtin, 2019).



For instance, **Xicana/o Indigenous** Epistemologies provides liberatory and decolonizing pedagogy in Tucson's K–12 public education programs that helps students gain critical self-reflection, collective memory, and knowledge of their lived realities (Arce, 2016). However, the true measure of our pedagogy and epistemologies is the effectiveness they have in the community and the ability to empower those communities to address the issues facing them (Sanchez, 2016, p. 159). This reflects the original intent of Ethnic Studies that focused on serving the community through research and community engagement (Bautista and O'Brien, 2016, p. 99). With its decolonizing activist origins, Ethnic Studies goes beyond the academy to achieve broader social change. Ethnic Studies is community-based epistemology, which consists of applying knowledge, connecting action and awareness, building community, giving back to our communities, regenerating our pre-colonial ancestral BIPOC worldviews, and transforming ourselves. As Glenn Omatsu explains, these are key elements in the epistemology of Ethnic Studies that roots the history of grassroots struggles in our communities, opposes Western epistemology and domination, and provides the vision and tools for activism and community empowerment (Omatsu 2016, 170–172). The decolonizing and transformative activist foundation of Ethnic Studies makes social change inseparable from the discipline and its epistemology.

Ethnic Studies Pedagogy - “A Call to Action”

“No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption” (Freire, 1970, p. 54).

Ethnic Studies educators create the **pedagogical** conditions for students to engage in a critical study of racialized people in the United States. When teaching Ethnic Studies, an educator should also ask, what am I doing to “eliminate racism and intersectional forms of oppression?” Central to Ethnic Studies pedagogy is the teaching and learning of:

1. pre-colonial ancestral roots, traditions and stories.
2. Historical and contemporary exposure to intersectional racism, white supremacy, and settler coloniality faced by BIPOC.
3. The normalization of colonialism through **hegemonic** practices and policies.
4. The transformative resistance leading to radical healing and **liberation**.

These encompass the four macrothemes of Ethnic Studies (Cuauhtin, Zavala, Sleeter, Au, 2019). These macrothemes or pedagogical practices must directly relate and be responsive to students' understanding of their communities and the world, as well as knowledge and consciousness of their own identities.



While these concepts may seem difficult for a majority of our students, they are much more easily internalized when using a regenerative, decolonial, and transformative pedagogy. Providing student access to historical accounts of BIPOC communities, students might research and undo “explorer” tales so prominent in our history. Students may shift the portrayal of the “age of exploration” to the “age of exploitation.” An examination of [neoliberal](#) economic and political policies that have displaced Indigenous peoples from their lands, and contributed to forced migration globally, is an example of modern settler colonialism and imperialism. It is also important to teach decolonization as a liberatory process by connecting stories of exploitation to healing processes, highlighting tales of resistance, and teaching students to develop powerful counter narratives. Educators might also employ holistic literacy approaches where students describe their personal experiences with racism, or provide opportunities for student engagement in community struggle against racist policies or practices. As a result, Ethnic Studies pedagogy becomes a dynamic and engaging process of working with students’ lived experiences and cultural/ancestral knowledge and having them complete course work that will directly impact social justice issues affecting their communities.

It is imperative that Ethnic Studies centralize the histories, cultures, and intellectual traditions of Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color in the U.S. In doing so, sound pedagogical practices facilitate critical discussions about identity formation using the first person narrative of BIPOC. The following are few practices that one might use to facilitate the creative development of historical ancestral narratives: student research projects, oral history projects, auto-ethnographies, story/plot development, rewriting a false historical narrative, interviews and personal narratives.

Part of the pedagogical plan is to help regenerate and heal students’ ancestral memories and identities. Deep ancestor trees, ancestor cartographies, ancestor dialogue poems, connecting with a range of ancestors from before colonization and [imperialism](#) through to the present day help serve this purpose.

A strategy educators might use for revealing the complex concept of [hegemony](#) is engaging [BIPOC](#) in critical dialogue about normativity. Students question: who or what determines what is normal? Students then discuss commonsensical (Eurocentric) understandings of “normalcy” and how these ideas contrast their communities’ cultural/ancestral/familial knowledge. This “revealing” or “uncovering” work demonstrates how pervasive hegemonic knowledge is in our society while also showing that BIPOC groups existed in diverse ways that would be considered “abnormal” to the hegemonic status quo.

This work then leads students to new sets of questions: why is it normal that BIPOC students are unaware of their pre-colonial ancestral roots? Who benefits and who suffers when “normal” represents a lack of ancestral knowledge? Engaging students in projects to “un-do” hegemonic practices can also be empowering.



Ethnic Studies' pedagogy also serves as a bridge from formal educational spaces to *community* involvement, advocacy, organizing, and activism. It is important to utilize pedagogical practices that connect students to their families and community, since that community is most likely impacted by issues of injustice, inequality and marginalization. Ethnic Studies should provide students with opportunities to engage in critical projects to improve the social conditions of their respective communities. For example, engaging students in civic activities, community organizing, participatory action research and service learning that can lead to social change in their communities. When engaging students in community action projects, educators could also introduce students to examples of social movements and resistance activities directed at changing oppressive systems that impact the lives of People of Color. Since Ethnic Studies encourages students to make links across racial and ethnic lines, recognizes the importance of allyship, and moves beyond it to foreground accompliceship, co-conspiring, and solidarity-building, critical solidarities are necessary in Ethnic Studies spaces. It was the solidarity of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) that led to the formation of Ethnic Studies, and it is these solidarities that have emboldened the Ethnic Studies movement.

Ethnic Studies curricular designs need to be responsive to: a) the students in the curricular program with considerations of the **demographic imperative** as well as of each student present; b) the community where the curricular program takes place; c) the academic discourses of Ethnic Studies respecting students as intellectuals; and d) our world—past, present, future (Cuauhtin, 2019).

Final Thoughts on Ethnic Studies

Tintiangco-Cubales, et. al (2014) have said that the purpose or “ARC” of Ethnic Studies revolves around three major concepts: **Access**, **Relevance**, and **Community**. **Access** means for educational institutions to open their doors to more students of color and provide them with a quality education. A quality education is one that is **relevant** and includes the marginalized experiences of BIPOC students.. To connect these experiences, Ethnic Studies serves as a bridge from formal educational spaces to **community** involvement, advocacy, organizing, and activism. The goal is for students in Ethnic Studies to leverage their education towards the betterment of their communities. (Beckham & Concordia, 2019; Gomez & Ochoa, 2019; Collier & Gonzales, 2009; Gonzales, Tintiangco-Cubales, Salunga, Schroeder, & Daus-Magbual, 2009; Tintiangco-Cubales, Daus-Magbual, Desai, Sabac, & Torres, 2016).

The growing body of research on Ethnic Studies shows that it increases academic achievement, improves cross-racial understanding, engages students more deeply in their school careers, and decreases push-out rates. Additionally, both students of color and white students have been found to benefit socially from Ethnic Studies with increased acceptance and understanding of one another (Sleeter, 2011). Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, and Marx (2012) studied how Ethnic Studies impacted academic achievement and found that students who took these courses had a higher probability of passing the state standardized tests and graduated at higher rates. Dee and Penner (2016) found that Ethnic Studies participation increased student attendance by 21 percentage points, cumulative ninth-grade GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23 credits. Other researchers have uncovered similar academic results in which students of color in



Ethnic Studies courses achieve at higher rates than comparable students who do not take Ethnic Studies courses (Altschul, Oyserman, and Bybee, 2008; Cammarota, 2007; Cammarota and Romero, 2009; Gay, 2010; Sellers, Chavous, and Cooke 1997; Lipka and Adams, 2004).

The Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (LESMC)

This curriculum is divided into six chapters:

- Introduction to Ethnic Studies (History, Definition and Pedagogy).
- African American Studies
- Chicana/Latina Studies
- Asian American Studies (including Pacific Islander and Arab American Studies)
- American Indian and Native American Studies
- Intersectionalities and Comparative Ethnic Studies

Each chapter contains five units called the Five S's (Tintiango-Cubales, Montaña, Carrasco-Cardona, & Gallagher-Geurtsen, 2020) with lessons for Grades K-2, 3-6, and 7-12. The Five S's are:

- *Self: The story of my racialized intersectional identity.*
- *Stories: The collective narratives of my people.*
- *Systems: The experiences of my people with systems of power and oppression.*
- *Social Movements: The resistance and resilience of my people in organizing against injustice.*
- *Solidarity: The transformative solidarity between my people and other communities of color in reimagining a better world.*

Self: A “respect and regeneration of holistic humanity, Indigeneity, cultural memory, ancestral roots, and sustenance today” (Cuauhtin, 2019), are important elements of Ethnic Studies pedagogy. And as Camangian (2010) reminds us, students are “recovering themselves and their identities.” This journey of self-discovering should include the development of a critical consciousness, radical hope, and self-love that can lead to personal and collective agency so that students can change oppressive structures in school and in the community, now and into the future.

Stories: To quote James Balwin, “the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations.” Because of colonial/imperial hegemony, historical lessons of racialized communities of color are either invisible or misrepresented in traditional texts. Thus, colonized students often have little knowledge of their own historical legacy (Acosta, 2007). The little knowledge they may have of their culture, language, and past is often passed down from ancestors, parents, or older siblings.



In highlighting stories, we honor historical and contemporary BIPOC voices by centering historical incidents, key historical figures, or contemporary ancestral knowledge.

Systems: Anti racist and decolonial pedagogy requires that students study the positionality of their people in the social hierarchy of the United States. Students study the historical and contemporary effects of imperialism, racism, **linguicism**, sexism, heteropatriarchy, heterosexism and more. John Bell said in the Four I's of Oppression, "oppression is a system, not a prejudice." The four I's are Ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression. In the systems section, we not only engage students in understanding the various forms of oppression, but in developing critical consciousness, reclaiming hope, and healing.

Social Movements: System changes occur when people unite, mobilize, and organize in coordinated resistance to disrupt and dismantle inequitable systems. Situating the curriculum in social movements (local, national, and global) reflects the Freirean concepts of education as liberation. More recently, Bettina Love has proposed the idea of abolitionist teaching, recognizing the importance of agency, as well as taking political stances against oppression in education.

Solidarity: Fred Hampton, once said "We say you don't fight racism with racism. We're gonna fight racism with solidarity." Ethnic Studies facilitates cross-ethnic approaches to appreciating the culture, history, and contemporary experiences of racialized communities, while simultaneously asking white students to learn about their own histories of resisting white supremacy or racism. Ethnic Studies requires students to create transformative projects where they work across ethnic/racial lines to reimagine a better world.

Ethnic Studies Enduring Understandings

Unit 1 - Self: *The story of my racialized intersectional identity.*

- We understand our racialized selves, the complexities, the intersectionality and beauty associated with it.
- We embrace and understand our cultural and pre colonial historical roots and diasporic indigeneity.
- We understand that we are on a journey to decolonize ourselves as holistic human beings, through critical consciousness, radical hope and self-love.
- We understand that the stories of our people have shaped who we are.

Unit 2 - Stories: *The collective narratives of my people.*

- We understand that our roots and diasporic indigeneity were established prior to colonization and that they are a source of knowledge, connection and healing.
- We understand and embrace the historical contributions, intellectual knowledge and cultural wealth of our people.



- We understand and place a high value on the stories of resilience, survival and resistance of our people.

Unit 3 - Systems: *The experiences of my people with systems of power and oppression.*

- We understand the impact settler colonialism, imperialism, genocide, and hegemony have on the historical and contemporary experiences of our people.
- We understand and critique the relationship between white supremacy, racism, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, xenophobia, patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, ageism, anthropocentrism, and other forms of power and oppression.
- We understand and challenge all forms of oppression and their manifestations by conceptualizing and enacting transformative projects of agency and resistance.
- We understand that while studying forms of oppression, it is also critical to engage ourselves in developing critical consciousness, reclaiming hope and healing.

Unit 4 - Social Movements: *The resistance and resilience of my people in organizing against injustice.*

- We understand that change can only occur when marginalized people unite, organize, and mobilize social movements that fight racism and injustice.
- We understand that it is essential to analyze and study significant social movements and their impact on inequitable and oppressive systems.
- We understand that white supremacy and related power structures, concede nothing without demand.
- We recognize the importance of agency and taking political stances on behalf against oppression and the impact it has on BIPOC.

Unit 5 - Solidarity: *The transformative solidarity between my people and other communities of color in reimagining a better world.*

- We critique systems of oppression *and* actively do something about it, *together*.
- We understand that cross-ethnic unity is required to make links across racial and ethnic lines engaging in transformative projects to reimagine and build a better world.
- We understand and can articulate historical and contemporary projects among BIPOC that promote solidarity between our groups.
- We understand that only through solidarity, is deep and real liberation possible.

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