



WASHINGTON ETHNIC STUDIES

Ethnic Studies History and Pedagogy

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The information referenced here will assist districts seeking to implement a robust Ethnic Studies program. The history and pedagogy provide a foundation for continued learning for districts, educators, and students.

WHAT IS ETHNIC STUDIES?

Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and comparative study of the social, cultural, political, and economic expression and experiences of ethnic groups. Ethnic Studies recovers and reconstructs the counternarratives, perspectives, epistemologies, and cultures of those who have been historically neglected and denied citizenship or full participation within traditional discourse and institutions. In doing so, Ethnic Studies highlights the contributions people of color have made in shaping US

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culture and society. (Butler 2001; Hu-Dehart 1993; Yang 2000). Further, by engaging students deeply with multiple perspectives, including those that resonate with their own experiences, Ethnic Studies taught well is academically rigorous.

History of Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies emerged from social movements in the 1960s as students, educators, and scholars of color pressed schools, school districts, and textbook companies to produce and offer curricula that reflected the diversity and complexity of the United States population (Sleeter 2011). The push for an anti-racist, multi-cultural curricular reform was guided by a strong sense of decolonization and self-determination. In the context of Ethnic Studies, decolonization refers to the process by which the study of history, lived experiences, and identities are liberated from the popular (or colonial) narrative. Self-determination refers to individuals and communities having the right to make their own choices and control their own resources.

“Decolonization as a liberatory process is central to Ethnic Studies pedagogy because it allows for a systemic critique of the traumatic history of colonialism on Native and Third World peoples and, subsequently, healing from colonial trauma, which includes having learned to see oneself as academically incapable. Decolonization, however, should not be mistaken as only an academic exercise; the aim of decolonization is to move toward self-determination, the claiming of an intellectually, and active participation in the transformation of material conditions” (Tintiango-Cubales, Kohli, Sacramento, Henning, Agarqwal-Rangnath & Sleeter, 2019, p. 21). Students and community members demanded the inclusion of histories and paradigms focused on issues of race, culture, power, and identity (Acuña 1996; Umemoto 1989; Woo 1989).

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Self-determination refers to individuals and communities having the right to make their own choices and control their own resources.

Purpose of Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies defined quality education as one that is relevant and directly connected to the lived experiences of students of color. To connect these experiences, Ethnic Studies’ purpose was to serve as a bridge from formal educational spaces to community involvement, advocacy, organizing, and

activism. Ultimately, students in Ethnic Studies leveraged their education towards the betterment of their communities. To this purpose Ethnic Studies provided students with a critical hope that shaped their engagement with their own education (Gonzales et al. 2009; Tintiango-Cubales 2012).

Ethnic Studies Applied: The Myth of the Achievement Gap

Many researchers have challenged the notion of the achievement gap and reframed it as an “opportunity gap” (Carter and Welner 2013). Both curriculum and pedagogy play a role in this opportunity gap, as students of color are not receiving an education that reflects their realities (Noguera and Akom 2000). It has also been consistently demonstrated that Ethnic Studies, a curriculum that does reflect the experiences of students of color, has a positive impact on student academic engagement, achievement, and empowerment, especially when linked with culturally responsive teaching grounded in high expectations (Sleeter 2011).

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Further Learning

To support further learning on the history of Ethnic Studies, the works cited in this section are listed below. You are also encouraged to utilize the recommended resources and materials found on the [OSPI Ethnic Studies webpage](#), which includes books, websites, museums, and professional development opportunities.

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ETHNIC STUDIES CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND PEDAGOGY

Ethnic Studies Content Knowledge

Washington state's content standards contain limited reference to the shared struggles of Black, Latina/o, Asian American or Native American peoples, or the contributions or women of color in historical movements. Thus, teachers with a Social Science endorsement who teach Ethnic Studies are not required to have content knowledge or a perspective aligned with Ethnic Studies. If Ethnic Studies educators are to develop students' critical understanding of the world and their place in it, and ultimately prepare them to transform their world for the better, then the purpose of Ethnic Studies needs to be embedded in its pedagogy.

"If Ethnic Studies is to develop students' critical understanding of the world and their place in it, and ultimately prepare them to transform their world for the better by using academic tools, its purpose needs to be embedded in its pedagogy."

What is Pedagogy?

Pedagogy is a philosophy of education informed by positionalities, ideologies, and standpoints (of both teacher and learner). It takes into account the critical relationships between the **purpose** of education, the **context** of education, the **content** of what is being taught, and the **methods** of how it is taught. It also includes (the **identity** of) who is being taught, who is teaching, their relationship to each

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other, and their relationship to structure and power (as cited in Tintiango-Cubales et al. 2010, p. viii).

Components of Ethnic Studies Pedagogy

Ethnic Studies pedagogy, defined by its purpose, context, content, methods, and the identity of both students and teachers, includes:

1. An engagement with the purpose of Ethnic Studies, which is to eliminate racism by critiquing, resisting, and transforming systems of oppression on institutional, interpersonal, and internal levels.
2. Knowledge about personal, cultural, and community contexts that impact students' epistemologies and positionalities while creating strong relationships with families and community organizations in local areas.
3. Development of rigorous curriculum that is responsive to students' cultural, historical, and contemporary experiences.
4. Practices and methods that are responsive to the community needs and problems.
5. Self-reflection on teacher identity and making explicit how identity impacts power relations in the classroom and in the community.

Ultimately, Ethnic studies needs to be developed and implemented in localized ways to provide all students with a meaningful, responsive, and rigorous curriculum where multiple perspectives are respected, affirmed, and honored.

Decolonization, Self-Determination, and Anti-racism

Early Ethnic Studies activists were inspired by the work of Fanon on decolonization, defining it as both the physical act of freeing a territory from external control of a colonizer and as the freeing of the consciousness of the native from alienation caused by colonization (Fanon 1963). In modern Ethnic Studies applications, decolonization refers to the process by which the study of history, lived experiences, and identities are liberated from the popular (or colonial) narrative.

Decolonization refers to the process by which the study of history, lived experiences, and identities are liberated from the popular (or colonial) narrative.

Decolonization as a liberatory process is central to Ethnic Studies pedagogy because it allows for a systematic critique of the traumatic history of colonialism on Native and Third World peoples and, subsequently, healing from colonial trauma, including the trauma of having learned to see oneself as academically incapable. The process of decolonization should not be mistaken as only an academic exercise; the aim of decolonization is to move toward self-determination, claiming an intellectual identity, and active participation in the transformation of material conditions.

Self-determination refers to individuals and communities having the right to make their own choices and control their own resources.

In conjunction with decolonization, the purpose of Ethnic Studies is to eliminate racism. Specifically, anti-racism is a dismantling of white supremacy, both ideologically and in practice. Ethnic Studies pedagogy, as an anti-racist project, encourages both teachers and students to critique racial oppression at the institutional, interpersonal, and internalized levels while also showing how each level influences the other.

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Pedagogy and Content Knowledge: An Essential Pair

To engage in the complex Ethnic Studies pedagogy outlined above, teachers must have more than content knowledge. To embody a sense of purpose, and a culturally- and community-responsive pedagogy, they must be reflective and be able to critically interrogate their own identities and experiences. It is not enough to adopt an Ethnic Studies curriculum without attending to pedagogy.

"[Ethnic Studies teachers] must be reflective and be able to critically interrogate their own identities and experiences."

Content Without Pedagogy Case Study: African American History in Philadelphia

Sanders' (2009) study shows that content-based professional development for Ethnic Studies, while helpful, is not sufficient. Sanders studied Philadelphia social studies teachers' implementation of an African American history course, which the district had adopted as a graduation requirement. The voluntary professional development teachers were offered consisted of content-oriented presentations by university professors and community/cultural excursions; it did not include Ethnic Studies pedagogy.

Only nine of the 20 teachers participated in it, and some were not aware it was available. These experienced teachers were used to teaching what Freire would call the banking model of education or teaching as content transmission. As a result, they struggled with disruptive student behavior, some using rigid, teacher-centered teaching to manage it. IN none of the three classes was there much student interaction about African American history, and the teachers demonstrated low academic expectations. The researcher concluded that even those teachers who had experienced content-based professional development did not know how to teach African American history to their students, a problem the administrator seemed unaware of.

"[A 2009 study showed] that content-based professional development for Ethnic Studies, while helpful, is not sufficient."

Further Learning

To support further learning on Ethnic studies content knowledge and pedagogy, the works cited in this section are listed below. You are also encouraged to utilize the recommended resources and materials found on the [OSPI Ethnic Studies webpage](#), which includes books, websites, museums, and professional development opportunities.

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COMMUNITY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY AND ETHNIC STUDIES

What is Community Responsive Pedagogy?

Community Responsive Pedagogy is a willingness to modify your approach to be responsive to the particular needs of your community. It includes cultural responsiveness while also recognizing that the culture of the youth and the families and the history where you do the work is unique to the space you are working in. If you are community responsive you are willing to modify your approach to be responsive to the particular needs of your community as you develop curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. (Andrade, 2016)

Community Responsive Pedagogy is a willingness to modify your approach to be responsive to the particular needs of your community.

Why Should Ethnic Studies be Community-Responsive?

Ethnic Studies pedagogy is directly connected to the purpose, context, and content of what is being taught where the goal of community responsiveness is central. In the pursuit of this, academic rigor is not compromised but rather heightened through applied critical consciousness, direct and reflective action, and the growing of transformative leaders. Ethnic Studies that is community responsive builds upon students' cultures and seeks to provide opportunities for students to create culture and communities amongst themselves, and also use their education to respond to needs in their communities outside of classrooms.

"Ethnic Studies that is community responsive builds upon students' cultures and seeks to provide opportunities for students to create culture and communities amongst themselves..."

Community Responsive Ethnic Studies Case Study: The Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP)

Through community responsiveness, Ethnic Studies grows leaders that aim to transform their communities. For example, The Pin@y (Pinay/Pinoy) Educational Partnerships (PEP) created an Ethnic Studies pipeline that promotes the development of students' "critical leadership" praxis, which focuses on practicing leadership skills that directly engage a purpose that is rooted in equity and social justice.

Pin@y Educational Partnership addresses the need to train leaders who focus on improving social conditions for themselves and their community. PEP began in 2001 to serve the academic and personal needs of Filipina/o American youth through a mentorship program between college and high school students. Expanding to elective courses at the high school and middle school levels, an after-school program at the elementary school level and various courses at the community college level, PEP's pedagogy became rooted in a "partnership triangle" between the public schools, university, and community. PEP's critical leaders have a foot in each of these three spaces.

Pin@y Educational Partnership utilized Ethnic Studies as a vehicle to confront educational inequities while also growing their own leaders. PEP was part of a coalition made up of the Chinatown Community Development Center, People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER), Coleman Advocates: Youth Making a Change, Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower Youth (HOMEY), San Francisco Freedom School, and the Japanese Americans Citizens League (JAACL). The coalition came together with San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) Ethnic Studies teachers and students to develop a campaign to establish Ethnic Studies in San Francisco high schools (Tintiangco-Cubales et al. 2010, pp. x–xi), one that was ultimately successful.

According to Tintiangco-Cubales, critical leadership builds on two major relationships:

1. one’s relationship to oneself, and
2. one’s relationships to one’s communities (e.g., neighborhood, racial/ethnic, cultural, global, etc.)

Students and youth involved in this mobilization gained lessons in agency and self-determination from an Ethnic Studies community responsive pedagogy that shaped the organization of the campaign and encouraged students’ engagement in shaping their own educational futures.

Key Components of a Community Responsive Ethnic Studies Pedagogy

The key components to a community responsive Ethnic Studies pedagogy include:

1. developing critical consciousness;
2. developing agency through direct community experience; and
3. growing transformative leaders.

Using community responsive pedagogy, effective Ethnic Studies teachers develop critical consciousness by connecting classroom learning with students’ home and community life, and helping students learn to analyze and act on community needs.

“...effective Ethnic Studies teachers develop critical consciousness by connecting classroom learning with students’ home and community life...”

Community Responsive Ethnic Studies Case Study: Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

One method of community responsive pedagogy that has been embedded in K–12 Ethnic Studies classrooms is Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), where youth become critical action researchers. YPAR nurtures a positive youth identity, develops critical consciousness and empathy for the struggles of others, and engages youth in social justice activities informed by students’ lived experiences (Akom 2011; Cammarota and Romero 2009, 2011; Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008; Ginwright and Cammarota 2007; Morrell 2004; Romero et al. 2008).

Akom (2011) developed a model of YPAR in a high school Africana Studies class which he called Black Emancipatory Action Research (BEAR) to focus on the implications of “racing research and researching race.” His framework, rooted in Ethnic Studies, develops students’ critical consciousness through questioning objectivity and reexamining the researched–researcher relationship, while emphasizing principles such as self-determination, social justice, equity, healing, and love. With its commitment to community capacity building, local knowledge, asset-based research, community generated information, and action as part of the inquiry process, BEAR represents a possibility for youth to use their research to develop liberatory action plans toward the elimination of racism, which is central to the mission of Ethnic Studies. By learning self-advocacy through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), critically conscious students can see themselves as knowledgeable, intellectual, capable, and empowered (Ginwright and Cammarota 2007).

Developing Student Agency through Community Responsive Ethnic Studies

Building on community consciousness, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) implement the steps of Freire’s cyclical praxis model:

1. Identify a problem;
2. Analyze a problem;
3. Create a plan of action to address the problem;
4. Implement the plan of action; and
5. Reflect on the plan of action, when teaching students how to do research.

These steps demonstrate how community responsive Ethnic Studies pedagogy develops students’ agency by engaging them directly in action that responds to their research on their community.

Through this social justice youth education model, teachers and students connected the classroom with the community and engaged in practices that led to positive youth identities. In essence, students teach and learn about their own agency through their engagement with their communities and ultimately become transformative leaders.

“...students teach and learn about their own agency through their engagement with their communities and ultimately become transformational leaders.”

Community Responsive Ethnic Studies Case Study: Social Justice Education Project in Tucson

The Social Justice Education Project (SJEP) in Tucson’s Mexican-American Studies program took a “funds of knowledge” approach to engage students in the teaching and learning of YPAR, where students developed critical consciousness and agency through community-based research that directly addressed social injustices in their lives, schools, and communities (Cammarota and Romero 2009, 2011; Romero et al. 2008). Students’ research-based findings, produced in conjunction with their intellectual development, led Tucson schools to make changes such as replacing missing urinals in the boys’ bathrooms, repairing falling tiles in the gym ceiling, repairing water fountains, updating books in the library, and ensuring classroom safety.

Further Learning

To support further learning on community responsive pedagogy's role in Ethnic Studies, the works cited in this section are listed below. You are also encouraged to utilize the recommended resources and materials found on the [OSPI Ethnic Studies webpage](#), which includes books, websites, museums, and professional development opportunities.

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY AND ETHNIC STUDIES

What is Culturally Responsive Pedagogy?

Culturally responsive pedagogy is teaching that responds to students' cultures and needs, assists in the development of their agency as producers of culture, and places great value on de-essentializing ethnic identities and subjectivities by acknowledging the heterogeneity and multiplicity in people of color's epistemologies (Barnes 2006; Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 1990, 1995; Sleeter 2005; Zeichner 2003). Ethnic Studies pedagogy that is culturally responsive allows students to see themselves, their families, their communities, and their histories in the curriculum and practices of the classroom. In this way, multiple sources of knowledge and cultural experiences are validated and celebrated.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is teaching that responds to students' cultures and needs, assists in the development of their agency as producers of culture.

Essential Aspects of a Culturally Responsive Ethnic Studies Pedagogy

There are three aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy that are essential to Ethnic Studies pedagogy:

1. Building upon students' experiences and perspectives;
2. Developing students' critical consciousness; and
3. Creating caring academic environments.

Developing Critical Consciousness through Culturally Responsive Ethnic Studies

The cultural responsiveness of Ethnic Studies pedagogy should build upon the historical and current experiences of students and their communities; however, it must also go deeper to also interrogate and foster students' critical consciousness. Many students who are newly exposed to Ethnic Studies have to unlearn hegemonic Eurocentric culture they have been taught throughout their whole academic and social lives; thus, it is important within Ethnic Studies pedagogy to use a decolonizing approach to culturally responsive curriculum.

As Camangian (2010) argues, marginalized youth of color must go through a process of recovering themselves and their identities. This can help students to value cultural knowledge while also developing a critical lens to question and understand their realities. This lends itself to the second component of culturally responsive pedagogy: developing a critical consciousness—an understanding of structural forms of domination and subordination.

"...marginalized youth of color must go through a process of recovering themselves and their identities."

Creating Caring Learning Environments through Culturally Responsive Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies' teachers are also deeply invested in students' academic success by creating caring environments where student knowledge and skills serve as the primary point of departure. Students identify teacher caring as crucial. Valenzuela (1999) calls this authentic caring, a type of care that emphasizes reciprocal relationships, unconditional love, and connection, where both students and teachers realize their humanity.

Because learning to reframe essentialist and hierarchical representations of race, class and gender can involve challenging discourse in an Ethnic Studies classroom, it is fundamental that students feel safe and cared for. Using models of culturally responsive pedagogy in an Ethnic Studies context that build on students' histories and experiences to develop critical consciousness in an authentically caring way, teachers are able to ensure an environment that values students as whole beings, encouraging success within and beyond the scope of their classrooms.

"Students identify teacher caring as crucial."

Culturally Responsive Ethnic Studies Case Study: 2001 Interviews with African American Elementary Students

Howard (2001) interviewed African American elementary students about their teachers within urban school contexts. Students said that teachers' willingness to care and bond with them created optimal learning environments. Teachers expressed caring through nurturing behavior, the expression of high expectations, and a respect for the students. Students mentioned the teacher's ability to structure the classroom in a way that valued the students' home and community, and specifically creating a home-like atmosphere or feeling.

Culturally Responsive Ethnic Studies Case Study: 2004 Study of a Colorado High School

Franquiz and del Carmen Salazar (2004) investigated how school structures and teachers' confidence in students can encourage students' academic success, based on a 5-year study in a Colorado high school. Their ethnography highlights critical elements of a humanizing pedagogy that Chicano/a students identified as key to their success: respeto (respect), confianza (mutual trust), consejos (verbal teachings) and buen ejemplos (exemplary models).

Further Learning

To support further learning on culturally responsive pedagogy's role in Ethnic Studies, the works cited in this section are listed below. You are also encouraged to utilize the recommended resources and materials found on the [OSPI Ethnic Studies webpage](#), which includes books, websites, museums, and professional development opportunities.

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Attribution

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