

Lessons From the 1st Ethnic Studies Educators in O.C.

Jose Paolo Magcalas, California State University, Los Angeles

Abstract

This article provides a critical analysis of 7-12th grade Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy used by teachers throughout Orange County, California. Findings from this study will provide school districts throughout California direction and guidance on what to include, and how to implement Ethnic Studies in their schools. This study was guided by culturally responsive methodologies—an approach to research that validates and brings in the very participants that are being studied. Participants for this study included seven secondary Ethnic Studies teachers who developed and taught the first Ethnic Studies course for their middle or high school. Findings from this study revealed a multitude of lessons, activities, projects, and teaching methods that any educator could engage in. It's my hope that these examples be a living archive for future educators to use, adapt, and add to the growing field of Ethnic Studies. With the new law requiring all high school students to take Ethnic Studies by 2029 (AB101), it's important to share best practices and continue research on Ethnic Studies classes, pedagogy, curriculum development, and implementation in school districts throughout California.

Lessons From the 1st Ethnic Studies Educators in O.C.

This article is about seven brave high school educators in Orange County (O.C.) who embarked on an arduous yet empowering journey to develop and teach a transformative course called Ethnic Studies. This incredible task of developing a curriculum, in a county that former president Reagan touted as being the place "...where the good Republicans go to die" (Arellano, 2008), in and of itself deserves praise. These educators knew that it wasn't going to be easy. They chose to develop and teach Ethnic Studies knowing that their classes would have huge push-back by conservative politicians, administrators, counselors, colleagues, and community members. But they were willing to put in the extra hours. They were willing to unlearn and challenge oppressive histories and teaching practices that had become normalized in U.S. schooling.

On the contrary, they also knew that the fight was worth the battle as Ethnic Studies has been proven to increase high school attendance and graduation rates (Dreilinger, 2021). In addition, they knew that this course saved lives, is healing, transformative, and responsive to the needs of their students and communities. Amidst its many tourist attractions, O.C. is "... a place where people have resisted segregation, struggled for public spaces, created vibrant youth cultures, and launched long-lasting movements for environmental justice and against police brutality." (Lewinnek et al., 2022). Oftentimes, these histories are not taught in traditional secondary education, nor is the inclusion of various racial and ethnic groups who have contributed and even lead major historical events throughout the U.S. (Sleeter, 2011).

According to the California Department of Education (CDE), racial and ethnic minorities represent most of the student K-12 population in Orange County (O.C.), California. They reported that 448,729 students were enrolled in an O.C. public school in the 2021-2022 academic year. Of that population, almost half (49.75%) were Hispanic or Latino; 104,151 were White; 88,304 Asian and Pacific Islander; 6,038 African American; and 820 American Indian or Alaska Native (CDE, 2022). As the ethnic makeup of students in U.S. public schools continue to change, the opportunity gap between students of color and Whites also persists (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2015). This is due, in part, to the fact that since the beginning of public schooling, institutionalized systems of domination (e.g., sexism, racism, imperialism) have used education to reinforce dominator values (hooks, 2003). In addition, schools are more segregated today than they were prior to the Brown vs. Board of Education decision (Duncan-Andrade, 2017).

Schools today need an engaging antiracist curriculum, critical approaches to teach against sexism and homophobia, and a decolonizing pedagogical approach that validates indigenous epistemologies (McLaren, 2015). Ethnic Studies—a curriculum that reflects the experiences of students of color—can provide schools with such a vision. It has been consistently demonstrated that Ethnic Studies has a positive impact on student academic engagement, achievement, and empowerment (Sleeter, 2011). It's defined as the study of specific or comparative groups viewed as minorities in American society (Hu-DeHart, 1993). It has also been defined as the study of race and power with roots in and connections to social movements and the quest for social justice (Ramirez, 2014).

On October 8, 2021, Governor Newsom signed Assembly Bill 101. This bill will require all high school students in California to take one semester of Ethnic Studies by the 2029-30 school year. Two districts in O.C. had already decided on requiring Ethnic Studies for their student body population. Santa Ana Unified, the county's second largest district made history on June 9, 2020, by becoming the first school district in the county to pass an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement (Elattar, 2020). The Anaheim Union High School District followed suit on May 6, 2021. Both districts will require students to complete a course in Ethnic Studies by the 2025-26 academic year. Even Los Alamitos Unified, one of the most conservative school districts in O.C. approved coursework for a high school Ethnic Studies elective (Andruss, 2021).

Although these victories have set a precedent in public education, the new fight in the movement is not whether the courses will be taught in O.C. or throughout California's 1,297 high schools. It lies within the curriculum itself. In 2016, California passed Assembly Bill 2016, ordering the creation of a model Ethnic Studies curriculum. It ordered the Instructional Quality Commission to define what Ethnic Studies is and required college faculty from Ethnic Studies departments and high school Ethnic Studies teachers to write the draft. The initial group consisted of 20 experts in Ethnic Studies pedagogy and curriculum (Fensterwald, 2021). The expert developers, represented every region of California and met four times, laboring to develop a curriculum that captured the "... often forgotten voices of Californians of color." (Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, n.d.). Upon creation of the first draft, right-wing opposition groups denounced the curriculum. They called it harsh towards Whites and capitalism, indoctrination, and ideologically left-wing. In 2019, the State Board of Education sent the draft back for revisions, disbanded the group, and shut them out of the process. The model curriculum that the State Board of Education approved in March 2021 bared so little relation to the original curriculum that every member of the group demanded

that their name be removed (Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, n.d.) because the integrity of the model curriculum had been compromised by the media and political pressures. Some of the 300-plus alterations to the curriculum included: 1) The deletion of Angela Davis and Mumia Abu-Jamal and 2) Changes to the 1960's Black Power, anti-war, Chicano, Women's, and American Indian movements (Fensterwald, 2021). Over 50 Ethnic Studies activists and educators, from all over California, committed to "... contesting white supremacist notions of academic knowledge", and convened in April 2020 to develop and implement a Liberated Model Curriculum that can be used by teachers throughout California and the U.S. (Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum n.d.).

As school districts throughout California prepare their teachers to teach Ethnic Studies, districts are faced with the task of using either the California adopted Ethnic Studies model curriculum, the Liberated Ethnic Studies model curriculum, a combination of the two, or could opt to not include any of the aforementioned guides in developing their districts Ethnic Studies requirement. Like Assembly Bill 2016, I sought advice from actual educators who've taught Ethnic Studies in secondary schools as their voices and experiences are pertinent and indispensable to this statewide mandate. Specifically, I chose to include the first Ethnic Studies educators who developed and taught Ethnic Studies in their schools. These districts include Santa Ana Unified (SAUSD), Anaheim Union (AUHSD), and Los Alamitos Unified (LAUSD). Educators from these districts will be the focal participants and co-editors of this study. The purpose of this study is to provide a critical analysis of 7-12th grade Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy used by teachers throughout O.C. Since there is "... very little research on what Ethnic Studies teachers actually do in classrooms" (Sleeter et al., 2020, p. 95), findings from this study could provide school districts throughout California direction and guidance on what to include, and how to implement their Ethnic Studies graduation requirement.

Culturally Responsive Methodologies

This study is guided by culturally responsive methodologies (CRM). I define this as an approach to research that validates and brings in the very participants that are being studied. I chose this approach because it allows the researcher to work and be in community with their focal participants throughout the entire project. I also chose to use CRM as the framework because of the intimate and trusting relationships that I've built with most of the participants. Since I was also one of the first educators in O.C. to develop and teach Ethnic Studies in my high school (Roman, 2015), I turned to some of these educators for allyship, collaboration, and friendship. Being the only Ethnic Studies educator in your district can be a lonely and oftentimes dangerous place to navigate, especially if you are a person of color. At the time, we were our own professional learning community. However, we did seek advice and guidance from educators who taught outside of O.C. Some of these educators included: Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, Sean Arce, Ron Espiritu, Jose Gonzalez, Roxana Dueñas, and Kitaro Webb. They are some of the true pioneers of Ethnic Studies. We also sought advice and guidance from organizations such as the *The People's Education Movement*, *Association of Raza Educators*, and *The Xicanx Institute for Teaching and Organizing*.

I also chose to use CRM to conduct my study because traditional research methods have been proven to be oppressive and colonial (Smith, 2012). Historically, White Eurocentric, Western frameworks have dominated research methods in academia. These traditional methods rarely include the very participants that are studied. The inclusion of participant rights to evaluate research, critique, contribute, initiate and most importantly their rights to be or not to be studied,

continue to be issues researchers debate about (Berryman et al., 2013). The power to research and produce knowledge has been sustained by outside intellectuals with ideological goals. According to Smith (2012), traditional Western researchers believe that their research projects serve the greater good for mankind and that such research, could emancipate oppressed communities. This assumption is a reflection of colonial ideology and to assume such goals would be culturally inappropriate. Researchers today are countering this methodological tradition by creating new culturally appropriate methods in scholarship that deny “. . . research conventions where the researcher unilaterally dominates and exerts power over the participants” (Berryman et al., 2013, p. 4). Such ill-researched methods are then applied to the greater society in the form of policy or law. Even worse is the fact that such discoveries become socialized as truth in both the developed world and the developing world.

CRM positions its framework in Critical Pedagogy, Decolonizing Methodologies, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Civic Education, and Kaupapa Māori Theory. One element key in understanding CRM is acknowledging insider knowledge. Traditional research methods look to bias as negative influences in research. Researchers who use CRM look to bias as a gift. In other words, bias allows “researchers [to] bring their own ‘unique subjectivities’ to any project” (Berryman et al., 2013, p. 18). Grounded in my personal experiences as a community member who taught Ethnic Studies in my local high school and who collaborated and built relationships with other Ethnic Studies teachers in O.C., this study utilizes archival data, local newspapers, conference presentations, social media, district websites, district curricula, and interviews.

Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select participants based on two criteria: 1) They developed the first Ethnic Studies course for their school site, and/or 2) They taught the first Ethnic Studies course for their school site. Participants for this study included seven secondary Ethnic Studies teachers who taught in O.C. I chose to focus on these participants because they were not mandated to teach this course, nor were they mandated to follow a particular model curriculum. For this study, the educators wanted to use their real names instead of pseudonyms. They felt that by participating in this study, they would be able to contribute to their commitments of sharing an authentic Ethnic Studies experience that future educators could use in their classrooms.

O.C. Ethnic Studies Educators as a Living Archive

The first educator is Benjamin Vazquez. I heard about Benjamin through a digital newspaper called the *Voice of O.C.* I read an article about the development of the first Ethnic Studies class in SAUSD and I had to meet him. When we first met, we instantly became friends. We exchanged curriculum, collaborated on many events, and even traveled to Cuba and Colombia together. Of the seven participants, Benjamin is one of my closest friends. He has been a history teacher in SAUSD for 19 years and in 2015, he developed and taught the first Ethnic Studies course at Valley High. He resides in Santa Ana and was a board member of El Centro Cultural de Mexico, and organized Santa Ana’s annual Día de Muertos Festival and Children’s March. He was recently elected to the Santa Ana City Council in 2022.

Benjamin introduced me to Mike Rodriguez, our second educator in this study. Since our first meeting in 2016, we also became friends and allies. We’ve collaborated on curriculum and have even fought alongside one another during many local protests. We also serve as committee members for the Democratic Party of O.C. Mike is in his 18th year of teaching history in SAUSD

and considers himself a community activist in the unceded Aycachemen and Tongva territories. In 2015, Mike developed and taught the first Ethnic Studies middle school course at Spurgeon Intermediate. Mike, alongside his colleague Linn Lee, have also co-constructed *The People's History of O.C.* This summer course has been co-facilitated with various university professors, teachers, and students over the last five years.

Linn Lee is the third educator in this study. I first met Linn in 2017, at an Ethnic Studies conference. She has been a history teacher in SAUSD for 20 years. Linn is now the district's Curriculum Specialist for Social Science and Ethnic Studies. Prior to that role, Linn taught Ethnic Studies at Century High in 2015-2017 and Santa Ana High in 2017-2019. She has been committed to strengthening and creating an authentic Ethnic Studies curriculum at the state level and served on the original California Department of Education Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Committee in 2018. Carah Reed is another educator in this study.

I also met Carah in 2017 during an Ethnic Studies conference. During her undergraduate career, Carah studied abroad in Kenya researching the Kenyan Revolution. After graduation, Carah became a community organizer and activist in Atlanta, Philadelphia, and San Diego. Carah has been an educator in SAUSD for 23 years and in 2016, she developed and taught the first Ethnic Studies course at Santa Ana High. Carah also advises Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), and is host to MEChA de UCI's Escuelita program. She is a non-driver and resident of Santa Ana.

The fifth educator is Joey Liu. I first met Joey in 2016 during *Anaheim's Best Dance Crew*, a hip-hop annual dance competition that I organized with Anaheim Achieves. That was the first year I taught Ethnic Studies, and at the time, I never knew that there was a course similar to mine in our district. However, her course centered on English and Oral Expressions. Since then, we became really close. She began her teaching career at Western High in Anaheim where she developed the first Ethnic Studies English class in 2015. Joey is also an educational researcher. Her focus is on teaching and learning as communion—an authentic, collective, spiritual, and humanizing return to rituals of belonging and community. Her research focuses on community-grown schools, with an emphasis on place-based and decolonizing ways of learning and being. She acknowledges her scholarship is immensely indebted to the Indigenous and Black Teachers who have granted her knowledge and experience. Joey resides in Anaheim but now teaches in Corona-Norco Unified.

Ramiro Carbajal is another teacher that taught Ethnic Studies in my former school district. He reached out to me in 2016, as he was interested in bringing Ethnic Studies to Anaheim High. He grew up in different cities throughout O.C. and now resides in Santa Ana. He has been teaching history at Anaheim High for 17 years now. In the 2016-2017 school year, Ramiro brought Ethnic Studies to Anaheim High. During his undergraduate years, Ramiro loved Chicano Studies. He even dedicated an entire unit of study on Mexican-American history in his U.S. history classes. Ramiro no longer teaches Ethnic Studies, however we did attend professional development trainings and collaborated on curriculum together.

The last educator in this study is Cyntia Aviña. Cyntia is one of my closest friends. We first met in 2013 during an Ethnic Studies conference at California State University, Long Beach. Cyntia has been teaching high school Spanish in Los Alamitos, one of O.C.'s most affluent and conservative cities, for over 12 years. In 2021, Cyntia brought Ethnic Studies to Los Alamitos High. She began her journey when she started reconnecting with her indigenous roots through Danza Mexika as

well as other traditional ways of healing. She attended the Xicano Institute for Teaching and Organizing (XITO) and this opened her eyes and heart to the transformative and healing power of a critical Ethnic Studies program. Cyntia is a member of the Association of Raza Educators where she continues to learn from Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum scholars and practitioners. She recently earned an Ethnic Studies Post-Baccalaureate Certificate from San Francisco State University.

Data Collection

Data collection took place from March 2020 to October 2022 and included interviews, classroom observations, and collection of documents and artifacts pertaining to the participating teachers. Initial interviews were semi-structured and open-ended to garner information and stories about each participants' experiences teaching Ethnic Studies. During our semi-structured interviews, three questions were asked: 1) *Can you tell me about the development of your Ethnic Studies course?*, 2) *What was your favorite lesson or assignment and why?*, and 3) *What was your favorite project and why?* Interviews were then professionally transcribed and checked by each participant for validity. Upon final edits and follow-up meetings, transcriptions were then coded. After all the sources of data were analyzed, I invited the focal participants to collectively theme my findings using Zoom. The themes that arose from our meeting included the following: 1) *Exploring Identity*, 2) *Empowering Poetry*, 3) *Ethnic Studies Murals and Street Art*, 4) *Systems of Oppression*, 5) *Action Research*, and 6) *Engaging in Dialogue Circles*. Dissemination of the findings were also validated prior to the final submission of this manuscript.

First Lessons from Our Teaching and Struggle

The first lesson favored among the educators centered on exploring identity. Cyntia had her students engage in a powerful activity called *Identity Corners*. Benjamin had his students draw self-portraits, while Joey and Ramiro had their students engage in a project where they researched their ethnic background. Although our educators content areas were in Spanish, Social Studies, and English, they still incorporated the visual and performing arts within their curriculum. Joey and Carah used spoken word poetry. Benjamin used a street art method called wheatpaste while Mike collaborated with Linn to do a summer art project called *The People's Hxstory of O.C.* Teaching about systems of oppression was another favorite among the educators. Ramiro had his students research institutional oppression, while Cyntia taught lessons around interpersonal and internalized oppression. To culminate the school year, the participants engaged their students in a variety of ways. Carah and Ramiro engaged their students in a project called *Youth-led Participatory Action Research* while Linn and Cyntia had their students create and perform *Soapbox Speeches*. All of the educators in this study engaged in some form of dialogue circle with their students.

Each of these activities, lessons, and projects provide educators a variety of examples on how to engage with their students in Ethnic Studies. As we delve deeper into each lesson and description, we encourage our readers to see the endless possibilities Ethnic Studies can provide, and how they can apply and adapt these examples into their future classrooms. Be prepared to learn and unlearn what you've been taught in traditional history and credential courses. We encourage our readers to also write and share how they've applied and adapted these lessons, so that we may continue to share best practices and build on this growing field of study.

Exploring Identity

The most common lesson favored by all the educators centered around exploring identity with their students. Sleeter and Zavala (2020) assert the importance of curriculum centered on students' sense of self, particularly their ability to claim their ethnic identity. They also point to "... research in social psychology that having a strong sense of ethnic identity and high racial awareness is linked with young people's mental health and achievement." (p. 46). Benjamin uses the visual arts as a tool to teach about identity. His lessons start at the beginning of the school year and was used to get to know his students and as an icebreaker for the entire class. It's common for teachers to ask their students questions at the beginning of the school year, but for Benjamin, he goes beyond this by engaging his students in an entire unit focused on identity. According to Benjamin:

I do a whole unit on getting to know your students. I give them a little comic and they write about themselves. Like a bunch of things about them, who they are and then they reflect on who they want to be? Then they draw pictures and they talk about where they are from. Tell me about your parents. Who your mentors are. It's about getting to know them with different arts. I give them self-drawing clay and they'll make a little object that reflects their family and that's going to be an offering to the class. That we put in the altar. We go in a circle, and they say what this is and what it means to my family. You offer it to the class as an offering. The kids really enjoy sharing and making their own little objects. That's me getting to know them and them reflecting upon themselves.

The significance of students learning about themselves first, was something important for Benjamin. This is probably why he chose to dedicate an entire unit on this topic. He uses the comic as a method for students to brainstorm ideas and as an informal assessment to see what students know about themselves and their families. Benjamin also sought to learn about their aspirations and dreams. He also sought to learn about who their possible mentors were. All this information is vital for teachers to learn, especially during the first weeks of school.

After Benjamin had his students brainstorm ideas onto a comic strip, he then had them create an art piece using self-drawing clay. Traditionally, self-drawing clay is a ceramics method where students learn how to draw a self-portrait using proportion. Their drawings are then transferred onto a clay slab. For Benjamin, he allows his students to also include drawings that reflect their families or any of the objects they chose to write about in the comic strip. Students then paint their slabs and then it's fired in a kiln. Once students were finished with their final products, he then had his students get into a circle and share what they included in their ceramics piece. As, each student shared, they then put their objects into the class altar as an offering to the class. Altars are typically used during Día de los Muertos, a national holiday in Mexico that is observed in many Chicax communities throughout the U.S. This sacred space is something that the entire class owns as they bring themselves and their hxstories into the classroom. This first interaction with each other is a beautiful ritual in itself, as it marks the first collective dialogue and community building activity that the class will continue to engage in.

When exploring identity, Joey starts the academic year with a project called *Our Origin Story*. During our interview, Joey describes the organic process and difficult journey she took with her students as they engaged in learning and writing about themselves, their hxstories, and their communities through oral expressions. According to Joey:

One of the first projects that we really dug into was *Our Origin Story* project. For a lot of our students, it was their first time to examine and speak their story. From a lens that was more authentic than the history that was given to them in textbooks. What I didn't anticipate the first time I taught that was how painful it was going to be for a lot of my kids. I probably had three white students and the other students were students of color. So, when you ask Black students to talk about their origin story, and they don't know. Right? Like where I'm from other than slavery. Or you know other students of other cultures may know their culture on one hand, but realize there's so much more to their culture that they take for granted or isn't represented around them.

That was something that we had to navigate through together. One thing that I learned too was that as we learned to tell our stories. It was always a multi-leveled experience of telling your stories. First, you are giving yourself permission to tell the story to yourself. There are so many stories you hide from yourself that you don't even know how to put pen to paper. We don't even listen or honor ourselves. So, the first level is just like can you sit with yourself enough and be your own audience and put truth on paper. Then own it and polish it through an art form. Through the vehicle of spoken word into something that, though it may carry pain and disenfranchisement. That you have reclaimed it and beautified it. Found your power in it so that you can present it to a large audience who might hear it and receive healing from it.

After students tackled through the difficult process of examining their story and the challenges that prevent them from fully realizing who they were, they were then directed to create an authentic spoken word poem that would be presented to a public audience. This first experience was not easy. In fact, Joey realized that her students had to first gain the confidence to write their truth, which was very difficult for them. Once students were able to accomplish this, they were then directed to transform their writing into an art piece that would be impactful and healing to the audience. Spoken word is a genre of poetry that is meant to be performed on stage. This art form began in the 1990's and was motivated by the development of slam poetry and hip-hop. Educators have used these discourses as sites of learning in English language arts, performance arts, civic engagement, and youth development (Weinstein et al., 2012). This art form has attempted to initiate the dialogical process outlined by Freire as necessary in overturning oppression by critically engaging with the world and questioning dominant systems of power (Fiore, 2013). In our interview, Joey continued to discuss the pedagogical process of teaching spoken word to her students. She then begins to discuss some of the topics that her students tackled and the first show that they performed in:

My units were different. But that process right there. Of finding your authentic voice and as a community working through together in many ways heal and then empower each other and ourselves to stand in our truths. To use our voices as instruments for change. That happened no matter what. So, I can think of a couple other times when that was really impactful. One was our first show. We called it the *Underground Show* because we wanted to keep it low key.

And so, it was uncensored. My kids were able to use it. They didn't have to filter out curse words or whatever and a lot of them that first show was the rawest stories. And we were

really writing to heal at that point. We touched on topics from abuse to racism, sexism, poverty, addiction. You name it. It was raw. I mean the reaction from the audience and I was terrified because there were parents that ended up coming. There were teachers who ended up coming. And I was like, awe man I'm gonna lose my job.

Content was different throughout the school year, but the process stayed the same. Students had to be honest with their writings and then work together and encourage one another. Students had to edit each other's work in terms of authenticity and style. This process alone is a great example of cooperative learning, co-constructing knowledge, and community building. Another writing requirement was that their final poems had to elicit or make some type of positive change in the community. This could be in the form of raising awareness to the audience and/or stating a call to action on an issue or problem in the community. According to the transcript, students were successful in accomplishing this each time they performed.

Joey then talks about the first event that she organized with her students. Collectively, they created a title for the show, tickets to the event, and of course the poems that would be performed to the audience. They called it the *Underground Show* indicating that they didn't want it to be another mainstream event that a high school would promote. Nor did they want the typical attendees to come. Although they had never put on a show before, it was highly successful. It was not only successful in terms of attendance, but mostly in terms of impact. Joey didn't want her students to hold back. She wanted them to be as authentic as possible. Perhaps this is why she allowed her students to use profanity. It's not easy to share about experiences related to abuse, racism, sexism, poverty, and addiction. Sometimes we need to curse, in order to heal. Joey didn't care about losing her job. Most important to her was her students and their ability to express their true selves, the systemic problems they faced, and the healing that would come out of that first performance. Even prior to the start of the show, Joey forewarned the audience:

I remember going up on stage and saying. You probably gonna hear things said on this stage that you've never heard on the walls of our school before. But let's tonight all go somewhere where we can reimagine what school is. And where we get to be a space for healing. Let's be sure we don't give nothing but love to these kids. I taught my kids all these things about sending love and sending good energy. And the audience. You could feel it. When the kid's jitters transformed to you know. I have power, I have meaning, my story matters.

At the end of the performance, they walked out. They had parents in tears. There was a healing moment where one student who had spoken about a certain abuse that had happened to her as a child. She was terrified to reunite with her parents but still found the power to tell her story. Her whole family was in tears weeping. And I was nervous too ya know? And the mom comes up to me and the dad. And they take my hand and say thank you so much. This is gonna be the start of healing for her and for our family. Just so many reactions to that story. People coming up and being like, hearing you tell your story through that poem I realize that I can find the strength for myself.

This transcript reveals that Joey sensed that the audience could have taken her students poems in the wrong direction. The show was not a typical high school event so this made sense. Her response also revealed a motherly level of protection that she had towards her students. Her

students worked so hard with their poems and the show. She knew that deep inside, the audience would receive her students' poems well, even though it was unconventional. But the precautionary reminder to give the students love was needed, since some parents and traditional educators could overreact or fail to realize the purpose of the event altogether. Her words were beautiful. She invited attendees to go beyond the four walls of school and into a place of love and healing. Joey set the tone for the remainder of the night.

She continues to share about how authentic the show was. Her students didn't hold back. They shared their traumas, and it was a healing moment for everyone, especially for the students and their families. The students became empowered that night. They were no longer scared. One student in particular stood out to Joey because she had shared to the audience a story of abuse that she had experienced as a young child. She had never shared this with her family before. Joey's fear went away when the parents came up to her and thanked her for giving their daughter the strength to share such a traumatic truth. Perhaps spoken word can be a vehicle for change when our youth have no other outlet to express themselves. The audience transformed as well. They too became empowered to tackle their truths. Joey continued to share about additional shows that students performed in and the long-term effect it had on them. According to Joey:

My kids realized their power as agents of change that night. They still talk to me now, like five years later. Ya know? I get messages out of the blue sometimes. Like man whatever I learned in our class that year I'm now using it in college and my job. After that first event, they wanted to perform more. We just kept making up shows. We did three at the school and then we ended up doing one in the community. They competed in two poetry slams. They performed at Fullerton College. They even performed at Da Poetry Lounge. You know, the mecca of poetry.

Not only were Joey's students empowered that night, but they reached a level of what Freire (1970) calls conscientization. In other words, her students developed a critical understanding of their social reality through reflection and action. This critical understanding would continue with them throughout their college and career. After that first event, students were so empowered that they wanted to continue to take action, by hosting more shows and even competing at the national level. They even presented at one of the world's most popular spoken word venues called Da Poetry Lounge (DPL). DPL is a L.A.-based community space that provides a platform to celebrate poetry while using it as the foundation for creativity, innovation, and expression. DPL hosts weekly events every Tuesday and has become the country's largest open mic event (Da Poetry Lounge, n.d.).

When teaching about identity, it's important for educators to teach their students the differences between heritage, ethnicity, and race. Heritage is the full range of our inherited traditions, objects, monuments, and culture. Ethnicity describes the culture of people in a given region, including their language, religion, heritage, and customs. Race is a social construct. It's a human-invented system of classification that divides people into groups on the basis of physical characteristics and the process of ascribing meaning to those groups (Bhopal, 2004). During our interview, Ramiro shared his second favorite activity that he engaged his class with:

It was called *My Ethnicity Project*. They had to go do research on the difference between your heritage, your ethnicity, your race. What is the difference between a Latino, a Chicano, a Hispanic. So, they had to go and do research on the ideas themselves, and then they had

to do a personal history of how those words or ideas fit in their life. I called it *My Identity Project* or *My Ethnicity Project*. Something like that.

To teach these oftentimes misunderstood terms, Ramiro had his students engage in research to compare and contrast the differences. To ensure that the students understood each word, he then had his students apply these terms to their lives. For educators with large populations of students from South and Central America, it's equally important for them to teach their students about the differences between the terms Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano. Hispanic refers to people who speak Spanish or are descended from Spanish-speaking populations. In the 1970's, the U.S. government decided to adopt the word to have a universal term that could serve to include all Spanish-speaking groups in the U.S. Latina/o refers to people who are from or descended from people from Latin America. The term excludes those who were born in or descended from Spain. Chicana/o is a chosen identity of some Mexican Americans in the U.S. The term became widely used during the Chicana/o Movement of the 1960's (Contreras, 2017). According to Ramiro, AHS is 97 percent Latino and it was very important for him to ensure that the students knew the difference between each term. He had them research each term and had them apply them to their lives as well. I also asked Ramiro if he had students research about the "x" in Chicanx or Latinx. According to Ramiro:

Unfortunately, I no longer teach Ethnic Studies. Another teacher took the class over but if I had, I was planning on teaching the "x" in those words. It's what the kids use now so yea that's really important too.

The "x" replaces the male and female endings "o" and "a" that are part of Spanish grammar conventions. This term came in the early 2010's from American-born Latinxs who wanted to be inclusive and gender neutral (Salinas, 2020). This transcript reveals that although Ramiro no longer teaches Ethnic Studies, he is aware of the ever-changing terminologies used to ensure that all groups are included and is willing to adapt and change. This is vital for Ethnic Studies educators as the field in terms of pedagogy and content continues to grow.

Cyntia's lesson around identity was developed by University of California, Irvine's Cross-Cultural Center. The center provides a series of programs and activities centered around identity such as: 1) *Identity Corners*, 2) *Community Cultural Wealth*, and 3) *Social Identities*. When I asked Cyntia what one of her favorite lessons were, she picked the *Identity Corners* Activity. In this lesson, students gain an understanding of the various social identities (e.g. *Gender, Ethnicity, Class, Religion, Ability Status, Citizenship Status, Age, and Sexual Orientation*) in which students associate themselves with and the importance of each one (UCI-Cross Cultural Center, n.d.). According to Cyntia:

That activity was really revealing. For some students to think about. Who had never really thought about class. There was a lot of shame that they carried for different reasons. And just those reflection questions that really had them think about the way that they see themselves.

And comparisons they make to their school community because there's a lot of affluent families in the community. And not all students are. But their friends might be right? And so just the sense of like shame and not wanting their friends to come to their house because they don't live in a really wealthy community or their house isn't that nice. So, like hiding

from their Ethnic identity a little bit. Trying to assimilate to whiteness and yea those activities I think really stuck out the most.

In this transcript, Cyntia reveals the outcomes of her *Identity Corners* activity. A mental strain was created in the classroom between the students who had a grasp on the multiple identities that shape them, and the students who had never thought about these concepts before. The activity released a level of unease and fragility towards some of the students, especially when discussing class. Many of Cyntia's students come from an affluent background and some don't. Some of her students hold pressures of assimilating to Whiteness and some hide from their realities because they are ashamed of their backgrounds and their lower socio-economic status. What was most revealing was the feelings of pain and humiliation caused by the student's new consciousness of wrongdoing or foolish behaviors. High school can be a difficult place to navigate socially, especially when students' multiple identities haven't been explored. When they are explored through activities like these, and through critical and honest reflection, students can start to see themselves and embrace their lived realities. For her White students, they "... came to reconceptualize their identity and knowledge in a way that took into consideration the lives, knowledges, and perspectives of others." (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 65). Some students realized the unintended harm that their actions brought towards others. In the end, a sense of community was built among the students regardless of their backgrounds.

Empowering Poetry

Like Joey, Carah also did Spoken Word with her students and even added a visual art element to accompany her students' poetry. It's part of a project that she calls *Liberation Through Creativity*. During our interview, Carah said:

I decided to do a project called *Liberation Through Creativity*. We are going to connect to our own personal trauma. And I brought in speakers from all shapes and form. I brought in kinship, I brought in spoken word folks. We did healing circles. But really what happened is that I asked them to write down the worst thing that's possibly happened to them. It was anonymous and I read it out to the class.

And then like what do we do with that pain? This has happened to us. And what do we do with what happened to us? How do we manage it? And then we went on a journey to create these pieces of spoken word, poetry, and art that spoke to this liberation. Then we put it on the wall outside my classroom. So, for the summit I was going to put it in a Zine and I still will. But I don't have a copy machine right now. I was going to have a student panel talk about it.

It's evident from this transcript that Carah likes to take risks. That's why she experimented with something in the first semester of her class. Perhaps she didn't want to wait until the end of the year or mid-semester, for her students to start the healing process. She wanted her students to start to work through their traumas early on. Even the title of her project reveals a freedom that she wanted her students to attain. But again, they needed guidance not just from her but from a variety of community members and through healing circles. Perhaps she brought in social service workers who assist kids in getting back with their families because they could provide some of the tools they use to help their students deal with traumas. Perhaps she brought in spoken word artists

because they fight their demons with words of inspiration and hope that resonate with this generation. They too could offer ideas and examples for the students in developing their poems.

Carah's use of dialogue circles allowed her students to heal. She brilliantly facilitated a dialogue where her students were able to share a multitude of traumas that they experienced without naming names. From this exchange, they were able to collectively provide examples to one another on how to deal and heal with these traumas. The beauty of dialogue circles, especially when doing classroom check-ins, provides students the opportunity to collectively help each other by providing suggestions on how they deal with the identified problems. Next, Carah has her students create their own spoken word poems and also requires them to create illustrations. She also mentioned that she was going to have her students create Zines from this project. A Zine is a small circulation publication of original or appropriated texts and images. They derive from underground publications that focused on social and political activism in the 1960's (University of Texas Libraries, n.d.). Carah then talks about her students presenting their poems. She said:

Then I had the students share their art and their spoken word poetry. Out of my two classes. Every single person in my class was bought in. Ethnic Studies is about our own stories, our own liberation, our own collective. And the walls came down in ways. I mean so much crying. So much. And I have 9th through 12th graders. I mean there was so much healing. It was a huge gamble. Believe me. Because it wasn't in the f%#\$!+@ pacing guide. Ya know?

And I'm not sure if I will do it again but I was able to get the results of what I needed which was full buy in. I did tell them that this is the hardest s%\$&+ your gonna do here. I'm gonna push you to be transparent. But as a result, like we could do anything. All this progressive stuff is going to be easy. And I incorporated all the Ethnic Studies pieces because it was like folks from our community, it was all full intersectionality. It was like we are this, this is us and the kids got hella political. This is the thing. Is that from kids own personal pain it became political. The whole thing is personal and political right? We didn't start personal and political. But at the end it became really powerful.

It's evident in this transcript that Carah's intended goal to build community and begin the journey of healing her students' wounds was successful. The activity was powerful and emotional for everyone. It also applied to all her students, who ranged between the ages of 13 to 18. This example resembles what an organic process means when it comes to developing Ethnic Studies curriculum. First, understanding the needs and issues your students face. Second, building community through dialogue and starting to heal collectively. Carah then shares her dissatisfaction with traditional curriculum as it does not humanize the process of learning. She also defines what Ethnic Studies pedagogies ought to be—that being our stories, our liberation, our collective.

I'm not sure what Carah meant when she said that she may or may not do this activity again in the future. It was done so well. Perhaps she meant that she would try a different variation of the project. In Ethnic Studies, the educator must continually reflect on their pedagogies and adjust to their students varying needs each year. Carah then reveals that the goal to heal and liberate or emancipate her students' minds is something that she will be focusing on throughout the school year. She warns her students that it won't be easy and that it will be the most difficult thing for them to do. Carah tells her students that the content in Ethnic Studies is easy, because it's a hxstory of us. Carah then reveals that the class becomes very civic minded as well. They start to realize that

the problems and issues that affect them, their families, and their communities are directly linked to the policies that local, state, and national leaders make.

Ethnic Studies Murals and Street Art

When I asked Benjamin to share one of his favorite projects, he shared a wheatpaste mural project that his students engaged in. Like graffiti street art, wheatpasting is a direct-action technique that is a simple and visual means for communicating messages to a large audience. Activists and various subculture groups often use this adhesive to post artwork and propaganda. According to Benjamin:

I do murals from a timeline in history using wheatpaste method. Now wheatpaste is a street art. And I haven't heard of anybody else doing a wheat paste mural. You can get into it and learn. So, the first one I did in class. I said just do an image that says we are beautiful in Santa Ana. So, they made like six images and we painted a wall. And there's eight images of people. There's a day laborer from the fields on it. We put *Educate Your Mind* on it. We had Frida Kahlo, an Aztec warrior, we did an indigenous woman with a baby. We had a girl that was in my class who was half Chinese and Vietnamese. She did a picture of a Vietnamese woman with her back towards us. And we put that in the wall as well.

It's supposed represent everybody in our classroom. Anytime we do art, it's to represent the community. Even though this is Mexican American studies, this is more Santanero studies so make sure everyone is always depicted. As much as we influence each other of who we are. Because homegirl is saying we are now her and and she is now us. That's In Lak 'Ech. We're also Vietnamese Chinese. Cuz she's here talking to us, influencing our thoughts and making them better. As much as we influence her. Right?

Benjamin shares a project that to his knowledge, he created all by himself. He did a timeline mural with his students using wheatpaste. The only directions he gave to his students was to paint something that represented the beauty of them in their city. His students painted a day laborer working in the fields, an image of Frida Kahlo, an Aztec warrior, an indigenous woman with a baby, and a picture of a Vietnamese woman turned to her back. This indicates that the students had prior knowledge of their hystories prior to creating this mural. Perhaps this was a culminating or end of the semester project that Benjamin's students engaged in. The diversity in the mural represented the class. Benjamin reveals in this transcript that he included everyone regardless of the fact that Valley High is 96.9% Hispanic or Latino (SARC, 2021) and the class emphasized Mexican-American hystory. Everyone was included and learned from each other. That's what Benjamin meant when he echoed the popular Ethnic Studies poem, *In Lak'Ech* by Luis Valdez. You are my other me. He then continues with our interview by sharing another mural that he had painted with his students:

We also did this kind of wheatpaste mural about racism in the United States from the African American perspective. So, I took the stories from the New Jim Crow. And they had that timeline written out. We have a traveling mural and then we have one in our walls on our schools. And this year we were doing a timeline of the racist Anti-Mexican history of O.C./Santana.

This transcript reveals that Benjamin continued to do this project with his students at least two additional times. One focusing on the hystory of racism, U.S. hystory from the perspective of

African-Americans, and on the prison industrial complex. The second piece that he worked on with his students was a timeline on the racist history of O.C. and Santa Ana on Mexican-Americans. Unfortunately, his students were unable to finish this due to the pandemic. He plans on finishing this mural at a later time. What this transcript also reveals is that Benjamin uses these murals to spread awareness about these issues in their high school and throughout O.C. He's even shared their murals in the annual Ethnic Studies Conference at Chapman University.

Mike also engages in an art project with his students. He does an Ethnic Studies summer enrichment program with his colleagues Linn and with the Heritage Museum of O.C. director Kevin Cabrera. This program tours students throughout the streets of O.C. to study various historical murals. During our interview, Mike shared that one of his favorite things to do in his Ethnic Studies class was to take his students on this tour. Mike and Linn called the program *The People's History of O.C.* According to Mike:

It started actually with Mr. Vazquez and me. Like five to six years ago. We started doing classes in the summer. The first years it was about the history of Santa Ana. Then the last couple years I actually started working with Linn and the Heritage Museum of O.C. The director was Kevin Cabrera. We worked in partnership with the museum. Kevin was really good because he actually worked at the de Graaf Oral History Project at Cal State Fullerton and he's worked with that archive. And he's worked at U.C. Irvine doing the same thing. So he had a lot of the local history and he had studied a lot of oral history. And so he brought us in and it was great.

We took the students on tours. We studied the history. There was a couple of middle school students but many high school students. Then like every kind of community. Or kind of ethnic community that we visited and researched; we also ate some food. The students really loved that part. And it was just a great way to introduce different cultures.

Mike shares about the evolution of the Ethnic Studies summer program and discusses the importance of collaborating with local researchers and museums. They can provide students and educators with a wealth of resources and knowledge, especially when it comes to local histories. Perhaps funding was provided by the museum. The transcript did reveal that it was Kevin who invited the students and teachers to join the program. Community assets provide valuable opportunities for schools and districts to collaborate and partner with. The tours stopped at various parts of O.C., with each having their own distinct histories and culture. The students loved to learn and visit various ethnic communities, especially when they got to try the local food. By altering Zinn's *People's History* title to this program assumes that it was designed to teach stories that were written or painted by oppressed and marginalized groups in O.C.

In addition to this program, Mike also does an exhibit with his Ethnic Studies class focused on Chicana and Latina Civil Rights. According to Mike:

So, my students organized a Civil Rights exhibit. Like a Chicana, Latina exhibit. That's what we called it. The students organized an art gallery for the community. They worked on an art piece in groups of three and they also did some writing around it. They did artist statements for their pieces. They could research any person, organization, or event. Like a

history that pushed for Civil Rights for Raza. For the Chicax/Latinx community. They did a lot of different ones. They researched the East L.A. walkouts, the formation of the U.F.W.

Some did the history of immigrant rights in O.C. We also had some students at the exhibit do Spoken Word. The exhibits were more like walk throughs and was in one room at Spurgeon and the main event was put on in the quad. There's a little side room with glass walls and that's where they put all the art. We also had a panel of speakers. There was a panel for students to listen and ask questions. We had community activists and organizers. One of the professors from Chapman was there. Lilia Monzó. It was really good and the students were there presenting their work.

A huge component of Ethnic Studies is taking informed action to make positive change in your community. Perhaps Mike wanted to raise awareness about the oppressive hxstories that are often not told in traditional textbooks—especially Chicax and Latinx Civil Rights hxstories. Traditional hxstory classes tend to focus on African-American Civil Rights and knowing that the population in Santa Ana is predominantly Chicax or Latinx, Mike had to share what he did with his students to the community. Mike's students worked in groups of three and were tasked with organizing the entire exhibit. This took a lot of collaborative effort given the size and scope of the event. It's evident that Mike was pleased with the variety of activities (e.g., Spoken Word, Panel Presentations, Art) that were shared to the community. He was also pleased that his students got the opportunity to learn from amazing leaders, organizers, and professors like Lilia Monzó. He was also proud of the various artworks and writings that his students created and presented.

Systems of Oppression

Two out of the seven educators shared how they liked to teach about various systems of oppression with their students. Ramiro talked about institutional oppression, and how he had his students research the school-to-prison pipeline. Cyntia shared about her experiences teaching interpersonal and internalized oppression with her students. Specifically—lessons on race as a social construct. Race is an idea that's been created and accepted by people in a society. This construct defines race as a categorization of humans based on shared physical or social qualities. According to Cyntia:

We talked about the social construction of race. Which is really eye opening for students and for my own understanding. So, talking about the four I's of oppression. Then always coming back to that. With anything that we talked about in any unit you could always come back to that foundation because everything is centered around race. It was really powerful because I think it took students. Some students came in and were like oh yea internalized oppression. Interpersonal oppression. They know. They come in with the knowledge and then for other students it was the first time being exposed to this so for us to continue to engage in that learning throughout the entire year and see how that plays out historically across different ethnic groups has really allowed students to understand the impacts of the social construction of race with each other.

And not just race. I had several queer students. The back and forth of understanding of how it's not just about race but how folks from the LGBTQIA plus community are marginalized

as well. And how it's even layered when you are a black person and so those conversations were about their own personal experience with that.

This transcript reveals that both Cyntia and her students had an unexpected and enlightening encounter when learning about the social construction of race. They began by unpacking the different types of oppression which are ideological, institutional, internalized, and interpersonal. Cyntia then reveals one of her pedagogical strategies. That being, linking Ethnic Studies content learned, in a given unit of study, to the type of oppression that occurs. For example, if students are learning about the forced education of Native American children in Indian boarding schools, then that would be linked to institutional oppression. Cyntia had a mixed group of students who already knew or had lived through some of these oppressions. Some of her students hadn't or simply couldn't name them. Regardless of each student's prior knowledge on this topic, this transcript reveals the difficulty of navigating through such a difficult subject for both the students and the teacher. It also reveals the importance of going back to the four I's of oppression as students learn various content throughout the academic school year. Cyntia then begins to discuss another layer that is important but also difficult to learn about in Ethnic Studies, that being intersectionality. Cyntia continues by saying:

And the things they have to encounter just by showing up and walking down the hallway. It really helped those students who had never thought about their sexuality or their gender expression as important to them and seeing how much it impacts the mental health of those students. I think it helps develop empathy for other people's experiences. I had students from a range of political identities and I had students coming in who were saying really harmful things that we had to hold all of us. Like we had to hold it together.

And the growth that I saw in those particular students. It was really powerful. The students were proud of each other. The students that everyone was like, yo you can't say that. There was some conflict, some tension in the beginning. Those students that were always like calling them in later in the year said yo, I am proud of you. Your growth. This was at our closing circle at the end of the school year. In order for us to come to that understanding we had to talk about systems of oppression. We had to have those lessons and those conversations for us to be able to humanize each other and even though we all come from different experiences and backgrounds like we could see the ways that we replicate those systems to each other. Yea that was such a beautiful thing to witness from them.

Cyntia describes how difficult it was to be a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and a student at Los Alamitos high. It was also difficult to be a member of Cyntia's Ethnic Studies class as well. Many students in Los Alamitos are conservative and oftentimes say very homophobic words or statements. By learning about the intersections of race, class, gender performance, and sexuality, students began to see how harmful their actions and statements were towards the mental health of their peers. To be effective, this process had to be done collectively as a classroom community and without shaming any one particular individual. Cyntia and all of her students were incredibly proud of the progress that the conservative students made throughout the school year. Overall, this transcript reveals the possibilities Ethnic Studies can have towards all groups when confronted with difficult conversations, community building, and loving accountability.

When I asked Ramiro to share one of his favorite lessons in his class, he discussed a project that he had done around institutional oppression. He wanted his students to research the *School-to-Prison Pipeline* (STPP). The STPP refers to the policies and practices that push our nation's children, especially our most at-risk youth, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Giroux, 2015). According to Ramiro:

What I really enjoyed doing was the *School-to-Prison Pipeline*. I wanted them to see how our system in education is set up for kids of color. And how easily a kid of color could be judged heavily on a small infraction and how sometimes white students get treated very lightly for harsh things that they did. And so, we did a project on that as well. We analyzed like school districts across the country and how the infractions and what African American kids especially, and White students did.

And they were able to see how certain school districts. It was like straight up obvious. They didn't seem like they were trying to hide it. How bad it was to be a kid of color in those classrooms versus a kid. Even like an infraction like a cell phone. I remember we read a story about an African American kid who got suspended for something to do with his phone and then that same week another student did something that was really bad and how they were basically left out with a warning. And they were really pissed off.

I think it was the St. Louis school district. We did one in St. Louis, one in Baltimore and one in Seattle and we looked at the data and then here in California. So, there were 4 different parts. And then I had them analyze. What do you see in the difference between how students were treated here? I asked them what is the difference between that community where the infractions go pretty easily versus this community where you clearly see that it's heavy on suspension and expulsion for African American kids?

Ramiro's project on the STPP revealed the disproportionate numbers between African-American students over White students when it came to school discipline. When students did research for his project, they were able to easily identify the disparity between different ethnic groups when it came to detention, suspension, and expulsions. Even when it came down to the same offense, White students were still less likely to get in trouble versus students of color. This data was similar across the nation including the students' hometown in Anaheim. Ramiro liked this project because it raised awareness on an issue that directly affected his students who are predominantly Latinx/Chicanx. This issue also relates to the disproportionate numbers of Latinx and Chicane residents who are killed each year by Anaheim police. According to the ACLU (2017), the Anaheim Police Department has the 9th deadliest police force among the 60 largest cities in the U.S. The majority of people killed by Anaheim police officers, since 2003 have been Black or Latinx. Even worse is that 55 percent of Latinx victims killed by Anaheim police were unarmed (Anaheim P.D. Use of Force Report, 2017). Overall, the project really angered Ramiro's students and made them realize that institutional oppression is real, especially when it comes to school discipline policies.

Action Research

Five of the educators shared that their culminating project was one of their favorite projects to do with their Ethnic Studies classes. The culminating project provides students with the opportunity to synthesize knowledge and experiences gained throughout their course of study. Oftentimes in

classes, and especially in Ethnic Studies, it's used instead of traditional methods of assessment. To culminate or end the school year, the teachers discussed two projects (i.e., Youth-led Participatory Action Research, and Project Soapbox).

Three teachers shared that the *Youth-led Participatory Action Research* (YPAR) project was one of their favorite projects. According to Ozer (2016), "Youth-led participatory action research ... is an approach to scientific inquiry and social change grounded in principles of equity that engages young people in identifying problems relevant to their own lives, conducting research to understand the problems, and advocating for changes based on research evidence." Benjamin first learned about YPAR from another educator during an Ethnic Studies conference. Some of the problems his students identified, researched, and tackled included: 1) *Teen Pregnancy*, 2) *Youth Investment*, 3) *Affordable Housing*, 4) *Police Brutality*, 5) *Decriminalization of Drug Use*, and 6) *Violence Against Women*. Benjamin's colleague, Carah also engaged in YPAR with her students. However, she did it differently as she had her students focus on school issues rather than community issues. According to Carah:

I have to make things my own. I said, let's look at our educational system. Two years ago, I had students look at areas of change that can happen at Santa Ana high. I felt if they could identify a problem within the school, then they could do research. There's a process. Every year I've done it, I haven't done it the same. So, they pick an issue at Santa Ana High. They do surveys. They are the researchers, right? Instead of pulling from other people's resources they create the surveys and go to classrooms or through survey monkey and pull ten to fifteen percent of the population. You know that's about 300 to 400 students. We have about 3,800 students in Santa Ana High.

Carah reveals the importance of adapting lesson plans to one's own pedagogy of practice. Perhaps she focused on tackling school issues over community issues because she knew that would be more impactful for her students. Perhaps there was just a lot of issues in their school that needed to be addressed that year. Perhaps Carah thought that her students would take the project more seriously because their school site directly affects them. Carah also revealed that she has always done YPAR differently each year. This makes sense since educators typically get different students each year and issues of the times change. Carah then discusses the YPAR process. Similar to her previous transcription, Carah emphasizes that the students are the center of the curriculum. Rather than pull data from other studies, the students themselves are the researchers. They utilize quantitative data methods and pull from a large student sample size by distributing surveys via survey monkey. She continues our interview by saying:

This process of what's the issues. Being critical, then figuring out what they want to ask and then going and asking and mobilizing. So, this idea that they are talking about these things, right? Are going to generate discussion. Student voice. And then they come up with a proposal. And that plan of action is regulated on. You know talking to the principal or whatever it is. Then they use the research and some students find what they are researching is not a problem. Right? So, like dress code. I had a group do dress code. They were getting all this stuff and student voice and was like this is not a big issue. So that's good too. But that's still important. So, I've had students do everything from locked restrooms on campus, on mandated testing and have gone out to inform students that they do not have to take it. You know statewide testing. We have prison mirrors in our restrooms. I've had students

do a whole thing around mirrors and would have all their friends take pictures of the restrooms and would compare.

This section reveals the next steps in the YPAR process. First asking critical questions on the issues students want to tackle. Second, engaging in critical dialogue about the issue and third, mobilizing and taking informed action. Carah then reveals another dissatisfaction she has with traditional education. This time being administrative pushback. Carah continues to discuss the YPAR process by sharing that sometimes students will research an issue and realize that it's not a problem at all. What's important is the research process. She concludes by sharing some of the issues her students tackled. These include: 1) *Dress Code*, 2) *Locked Restrooms and Doors On Campus*, 3) *Mandated State Testing*, and 4) *Prison Mirrors*. The beauty of YPAR is that students can get creative in the research process. Carah's students did a comparison between bathroom mirrors using photography and social media between different high school campuses. One of Carah's students decided to do her YPAR project on how administrators don't listen to their students. She conducted a five-page survey and eventually created a student action commission called *Youth for Justice*. Her work was even published in *Pedagogies of With-ness: Students, Teachers, Voice and Agency* (Hogg et al., 2020).

Ramiro also engaged in YPAR with his students. During our interview, he revealed some of the actions his students took and the overall outcomes that came out of this project. According to Ramiro:

Some students were able to go to Sacramento and were able to take their information. Yea one of them came back with a video from Dolores Huerta. Sending me a message telling me to keep up what you are doing ... So, I showed it to the students and I'm like see this is the idea of why we are doing the YPAR project. Getting involved with the community. Civic engagement. Learn how to properly get your voice out there.

Especially with technology. Ultimately in the end they all had different mediums of being able to express what they were doing. Whether it was going to be some sort of protest, some type of survey in class or school and they presented on the announcements, going to do a podcast or some sort of a website on their topics. I had students create a website on their topics. It was really cool to see the end results where students really get into it. And getting involved with the problems that are facing their community.

Ramiro was delighted to see that some of his students were able to take their research and raise awareness to policy makers in our state's capitol. He was elated that his students even got to meet one of the original leaders of the United Farm Workers. Perhaps Dolores Huerta saw his students present or maybe they simply shared their YPAR project with her. This form of action is called civic engagement. According to youth.gov, Civic engagement involves promoting the quality of life for one's community, through political and non-political actions. Civic engagement can include environmentalism, political activism, environmentalism, community service, and national service. Volunteering and service-learning are also forms of civic engagement (youth.gov, n.d.). Ramiro also loved the variety of actions his students took. They created websites, podcasts, and school announcements. That is the beauty of YPAR. It allows for an endless variety of creative actions co-developed and constructed by youth.

Another culminating project that the teachers engaged with their students was *Project Soapbox*. Like YPAR, this curriculum calls on students to research issues that affect them and their community. They then take action by creating *Soapbox* speeches and performing them to their classmates or during community events (Mikva Challenge, n.d.). Two of the seven teachers discussed how this project was their favorite. According to Cyntia:

Students were asked to create a speech about something that was important to them. Through that process I realized that most of the students. The topics that they chose to write about were things like traumas that they were carrying. Either personally, or that they witnessed. Or from somebody close to them. It was a really emotional and healing experience. Some students had a hard time getting through their speeches because they were saying things, naming things that they hadn't named before.

And even though it was painful for them to do that they were able to process that and let it go. And that's exactly what we offered because we had an altar. They offered that to the altar. Like let whatever it is that you are carrying and holding and as you say it to your compass in this sacred space that we created, feel free to let that go into the altar. That's what altars are there for. To take the things that we don't need to hang on to anymore and just let it go. We burn sage and it was a really cleansing and just healing. That was the last project that we did. It was really powerful.

Cyntia's students learned how to use their voice through this project. It was one of her favorite projects because she saw how her students were able to name oppressions that they hadn't in the beginning of the school year. These oppressions were things that happened to them directly or things they witnessed firsthand. The outcomes of the speeches were empowering and healing for all of her students. The traumas and hurt that they carried with them was released into the class altar pushing them away from the students' lives. To solidify this, Cyntia cleansed the classroom and her students with sage. For centuries, indigenous peoples have burned sage as part of a spiritual ritual to cleanse a person or space, and to promote wisdom and healing. The culminating project was more than just an assessment of learning. It was needed ritual that allowed her students to critically engage and re-enter the world.

Linn also culminated the school year with *Project Soapbox*. In fact, she also had her students compete with other local and statewide schools. According to Linn:

It really brought the students into themselves. They had to really grapple with what they were most passionate about. They also had to dig deep inside about where they were at as a person and what they needed to work on. So, you had students who really. You know. I feel like what I did best was build a community within the classroom so that they all trusted in each other and worked well with each other. When it got to the Soapbox competition, we had students who were basically doing speeches on things like domestic violence and all kinds of abuse. Which was stuff that was coming out from their own traumas. I feel that is the essence of what Ethnic Studies is. About healing.

Linn's teaching philosophy and pedagogical practice is very similar to Joey, Cyntia and Carah. She focuses on building a classroom community first, so that students can learn to trust and work with one another. She also focuses on healing as she understands that her students also have a lot of

traumas. Like Joey's *Spoken Word* projects, Linn also applied similar elements into her students *Soapbox* speech. Students had to really dig deep and reflect on the issue or problem they wanted to research and write about. Then collectively, her students would work to edit, practice, and share with one another their *Soapbox* speeches prior to competition. I then asked Linn to share some of the topics students researched. She shared:

Immigration, poverty. One kid really focused on and was really passionate about Trump and how he was getting away with all this abuse. The emolument clause. He is using government money for his own benefit. She did this great speech about that. The most profound speech I think was a poem that this girl did about her neighbor of five years molesting her. It brought everybody to tears and every time she did it, she would start to cry. But it was such a profound piece of work. Because it was such few words but it was so profound. The way she did it and the way she performed it.

It's shocking to see how similar Joey's students *Spoken Word* speech was almost exactly similar to Linn's students *Soapbox* speech. Both students had the confidence to write and perform their speeches on something so personal as being molested. Both students got the crowd to cry. Both speeches were incredibly empowering. Like I stated earlier in this manuscript, projects like these could be a potential method for healing traumas among our youth today. Linn's students also focused on issues such as immigration, poverty, and political corruption. She was incredibly proud of all of her students.

Engaging in Dialogue Circles

Engaging in dialogue circles was a common pedagogical practice among all seven Ethnic Studies educators in this study. Throughout our interviews, it was revealed that our educators used the dialogue circle in many ways (e.g., as icebreakers, to build community, to debate current issues, to discuss readings, to share best-practices, to heal). However, Carah was the only educator to directly name this as one of her favorite activities. Perhaps the other educators naturally practiced this form of pedagogy (i.e., facilitating knowledge vs. direct instruction) and didn't see it in itself as a possible choice. For Carah, the dialogue circle went far beyond simple discussion, it was centered around meditation and healing. In our interview, she shared:

By them telling their stories there's this sense of ownership. There's this healing. They are the center of the curriculum and students are restored back to themselves. This idea of self-determination in and of itself is healing.

Students have been so penalized, especially in urban schools. Colonized. And it's so top down. The teachers have all the answers, right? So, if we say the students have the answers. Then they start to heal. They start to see themselves with having agency. When we tell our stories. All that burden. All the trauma from the educational experience, it then goes away.

This transcript revealed Carah's dissatisfaction with traditional methods of teaching and schooling. Where stories are oftentimes told from the lens of Eurocentric interpretations of history and then centered as the primary resource for knowledge construction. Rather than use such traditional methods of teaching, thinking, and learning, Carah utilizes the dialogue circle as an empowering tool for her students to share their lived realities in relation to hystories. It's organic, and when

coupled with her meditation practices, it's healing. Such methods are in line with *Restorative Practices*. According to High (2017), the basic premise of the classroom dialogue circle "... as a proactive restorative practice is that student behavior, character, and social and emotional competence is improved when they feel connected to an inclusive, supportive, and respectful community." (p. 528). According to Carah, as these behaviors improve, the trauma students received from their negative experiences in schooling begins to go away.

Conclusion

Findings from this study revealed a multitude of lessons, activities, projects and teaching methods that any educator could engage in. As we continue to build and construct an authentic, critical, liberating, and empowering Ethnic Studies curriculum for our communities, we must continue to share best-practices (i.e., curricular and pedagogical). It's my hope that these examples be a living archive for future educators to use, adapt, and add to the growing field of Ethnic Studies.

With the new law requiring all high school students to take Ethnic Studies by 2029, it's important to continue research on Ethnic Studies classes, pedagogy, curriculum development, and implementation in school districts throughout California. Findings from this study suggests several areas for further research. First, research should include the pedagogy and practice of Ethnic Studies teachers who work in a variety (e.g., rural, urban, socio-economically disadvantaged, affluent) of communities. Pedagogical practices in contexts with different racial and ethnic demographics is also an area needed for further research. The content of the curriculum as well as the tools and strategies that Ethnic Studies teachers use are important areas that researchers should also study. Many Ethnic Studies classes are using *Youth-led participatory action research* or *Project Soapbox* as culminating projects to end their school year. With this, researchers should study how teachers and students use this project and the impact on community change it elicits. Ethnic Studies impact on community change itself should be another area of future research.

It's also important that researchers study how educators adapt their curriculum to meet the needs of students with special needs and emergent bilingual students. Ethnic Studies impact on youth development and academic achievement is also needed for further research. It's also important for researchers to investigate how colleges of education are adapting their teacher preparation programs to meet the new demand of certified Ethnic Studies educators. It's also important to research how individual districts transition their departments (i.e., Social Studies, English, Visual and Performing Arts) to include Ethnic Studies into their programs. It's also important for researchers to study how these districts are preparing (i.e., professional development) their teachers to teach this curriculum. Lastly, one area of study that is needed lies within how educators assess (formal and informal) their students learning in an Ethnic Studies class.

I welcome researchers and educators to review the summary below and links to key lessons and reference pages in this manuscript as they can provide excellent tools and resources for their research and classrooms. I hope that the findings from this study can provide school districts throughout California direction and guidance on how to implement their Ethnic Studies requirement. Lastly, I encourage Ethnic Studies educators and researchers to continue to collaborate and build allies. The fight is not over and in the current political climate there are many that want to eliminate this empowering course (Elattar, 2022; Schwartz, 2021). I know I couldn't have done the work had I not met and collaborated with amazing educators in the field and in my

study. We did it together. That's *In Lak 'Ech!* I also encourage future educators to attend and present at local, state, and national conferences in both Ethnic Studies and Critical Education. We are always learning. We are always fighting. And we will not stop until we get an authentic, critical, and liberating Ethnic Studies curriculum for all! *Sí se puede!* Ethnic Studies NOW!

Summary And Links to Key Lessons

Community or Dialogue Circles are teaching methods where educators have students sit alongside them in a circle and talk about a prompt that they provide. The following guide was developed by the Oakland Unified School District (Glenview Elementary School).

<https://wpvip.edutopia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/stw-glenview-circles-overview.pdf>

Restorative Practices Lesson Plan Guide can be used to achieve a variety of goals including: building relationships, resolving conflicts, and enhancing instruction. This guide was developed by Baltimore City teachers in collaboration with the Open Society Institute in Baltimore.

<https://www.osibaltimore.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Merged-RP-Lesson-Plan-Guide-FINAL.pdf>

Identity Corners is a lesson where students share their personal stories to understand diverse perspectives and experiences, while providing a way for them to become aware of their own privileges and how that relates to institutional oppression. This lesson was developed by UC, Irvine's Cross-Cultural Center.

<https://ccc.uci.edu/resources/active-workshop-request.php>

Creating a Cultural Artifact Altar in the Classroom is an activity developed by educator Nick P. Cooper and was adapted from the book *Teaching Culture: Perspectives in Practice* (2001) by Patrick R. Moran.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/creating-cultural-artifact-altar-classroom-nick-patrick-cooper>

The Spoken Word Poetry lesson plan is part of a curriculum developed at the Youth Leading Change Project at Duquesne University. It was developed alongside Gwen's Girls, The Restorative Justice Group, Sisters of eSTEAM, Power(ed) by Grace, and Amil Cook Media Services.

<http://remakelearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Youth-Leading-Change-Remake-Learning-Connected-Learning-Lesson-Plan.pdf>

Race: The Power of an Illusion is the most widely taught documentary in the United States. The filmmakers and collaborators have created a series of lesson plans and collated other materials to guide discussion and engagement in the classroom. This production was created by The Othering & Belonging Institute, California Newsreel, University of California, Berkeley, and The American Cultures Center at UC Berkeley.

<https://www.racepowerofanillusion.org/resources/>

The School-to-Prison Pipeline Toolkit was developed by the The New York Civil Liberties Union and is one of the nation's foremost defenders of civil liberties and civil rights. The toolkit includes various resources and lesson plans for secondary education teachers.

https://www.nyclu.org/sites/default/files/school_prison_toolkit.pdf

Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development based in social justice principles. This site was developed through an ongoing partnership between the University of California, Berkeley and San Francisco Peer Resources and includes various curriculum and resources to enrich any YPAR project.
<https://yparhub.berkeley.edu/home>

Project Soapbox is Mikva Challenge's public speaking program that calls young people to speak out on issues that affect them and their communities. These powerful speeches have lasting, transformative impacts on classrooms, schools, and communities.
<https://mikvachallenge.org/our-work/programs/project-soapbox/>

Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum vision is to promote the advancement and implementation of well-designed Ethnic Studies courses and programs for the purpose of advancing students' academic achievement, educational equity, community activist scholarship, and community leadership skills.
<https://www.liberatedethnicstudies.org/>

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