

David P. Dolson
1348 37th Street
Sacramento, CA 95816

September 23, 2019

Yolanda Munoz, Member IQC
Curriculum Frameworks & Instructional Resource Division
California State Dept. of Education, Suite 3207
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

I was extremely pleased to see several articles in the *Sacramento Bee* regarding the adoption of an Ethnic Studies Curriculum by the California State Board of Education. Hopefully, the Board will be given additional time to review this matter. I am writing to you because you were identified in one or more of the articles as having a role in this project.

I am a lifetime educator, now retired, who has served in many positions from classroom teacher to district director of programs; to consultant and administrator at the California Department of Education; to teacher trainer at the University of San Francisco and as advisor to bilingual-intercultural programs in Latin America. During my career, I specialized in research and evaluation of multilingual, cross-cultural, and intercultural programs.

Since it appears that efforts to establish an "Ethnic Studies Curriculum" are somewhat advanced, there may not be any feasible way for me to be involved personally; however, I would like to volunteer my services to any group associated with the project.

In addition, I would like to share a few pertinent concepts with you that I hope can be advanced for consideration before the curriculum is finalized.

I want to thank you for reading this communication. Any ideas contained herein, which you feel will make a positive contribution to the ethnic heritage curriculum, may be shared without attribution. If I can be of any assistance in any way to efforts to establish high quality ethnic studies programs, I would appreciate suggestions as to what steps to follow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Dolson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David P. Dolson, Ed.D.

d_dolson@yahoo.com

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING AN ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAM*

Overarching Values

There are at least two overarching and fundamental principles of any ethnic studies curriculum:

- Each person has a basic human right to develop their own ethnic identity and this identity may change over time. An ethnic identity typically consists of a personal affiliation with one or more cultural, racial, national origin, language or life involvement groups. A person has a birthright to establish and modify their ethnic identity according to their unique life experiences.
- Every individual has the right to have his or her ethnic identity respected by others and every individual has the obligation to respect the ethnic identity of others. When respect for ethnic identity is not forthcoming, individuals should be capable of safeguarding his or her self-concept and the self-concept of others and concurrently be prepared to promote prosocial, cross-cultural understanding by drawing upon knowledge and abilities acquired as a result of participation in the ethnic studies curriculum.

Sample Aspects of Effective Implementation

1. Developing a healthy ethnic heritage identity is a life-long process. The school program of study needs to be appropriate for students of all ages and grade levels. The curriculum for high school students should address expertise which will serve young people to continue their individual development beyond formal schooling and through adulthood.
2. There are unique challenges associated with the development of a wholesome identity for individuals from “minority” or marked groups. For example, complications range from feelings of shame and inferiority to concealment and even abandonment. In other cases, groups are neglected in the sense of being made invisible and considered unimportant or unworthy by the larger society. Many persons from subordinated groups which experience differing levels of overt discrimination and prejudice do not naturally develop the capabilities of either adequate self-defense or effective prosocial reaction.

3. Issues faced by individuals from the “majority” group are no less daunting. Members frequently have a sense of belonging to the “normal” group which has standards and customs that should be attained by minorities. They not infrequently see themselves as “non-ethnic” and do not recognize their European ancestry nor have they entertained the idea of their own ethnic identity. Often majorities sense discomfort in addressing ethnic heritage issues, reckoning that they are just “natural” Americans. Some are burdened with guilt regarding the notion that “white” folks are viewed as the protagonists of slavery and genocide for which no apology nor redemption is possible. Equally important, many individuals from the mainstream group may not understand the individual and societal ramifications of historic and contemporary racial and ethnic inequities in American society.
4. Information regarding racial and ethnic groups is a foundational element for healthy attitudes towards other groups as well as one’s own identity. Schools need to consider carefully the priorities of which groups will be highlighted for in-depth study. For instance, in the United States, the history surrounding Native Americans, African Americans, and the immigrant experience are exceptional elements of our national history. Likewise, world events such as the holocaust of World War II and the genocides in Armenia, Cambodia, and Rwanda are iconic. Another key factor relates to the size of any recognized group in a particular school, community, region, or state. The curriculum should be flexible enough to allow incorporation of study associated with any group significant in local history or contemporary circumstances. Yet, the identity of every single student is important. No one should be made invisible. In cases where group identity may be difficult to address collectively, the school should have strategies to address smaller groups and outlying students and give every student the skills to find out more information about their own identity.
5. In addition to knowledge-based studies, experiences play an essential role in the development of a positive self-concept and cross-cultural attitudes. Observing that there are variations in beliefs and behaviors within one’s own group as well as those of other groups is an essential insight. Whenever possible, carefully designed in-group and outgroup cooperative and collaborative learning activities should be utilized to: (A) ensure inclusivity, (B) provide practice in using knowledge, and (C) afford authentic and meaningful cross-cultural experiences. Encounters should also include dialogue in a way that participants become secure when come upon differing points of view and the need to address uncomfortable subjects.

6. For any ethnic heritage curriculum to be successful, teachers involved with the program must not only be skilled in the relevant methodologies to facilitate their students' journeys of development and self-realization but also must also be comfortable with and able to share suitable elements of their own identity--- how it was developed and how it has changed over their lifetime. Teachers must also be competent in reaching out to other sources of expertise, authenticity, and differing perspectives. A fundamental teaching perspective in ethnic studies is to ensure that the instruction does not glorify a particular culture; rank heritages one against another; or fail to present as accurate a representation as possible. Instructors need to have the courage to address misrepresentations of any group perpetuated historically or contemporarily by popular media, flawed scholarship, or oppositional groups (e.g., hate groups).

*Developed by David P. Dolson, Ed.D., September 2019

Notes:

1. I realize that at this late date that the curriculum under discussion appears to be limited to high school students. It most likely would be an impossible task to include grades K-8 but of course, the research absolutely supports school support for ethnic heritage study and development from early childhood.
2. Attempting to develop the perfect list of which groups/topics to be addressed is a fool's mission. The best that can be done is to identify a minimum of groups/topics that should be required statewide and allow, encourage, and even require schools to employ flexibility to include other groups of local significance or interest.