

Dear State Board of Education members
c/o California Department of Education

18 Jan 2021

I struggle to get my hands around the present state of today's so-called "Ethnic Studies". It wants to be many things which perhaps dilutes the positive impacts the proposed studies could have. The "Ethnic Studies" model curriculum defines ethnic studies in several ways. First it quotes the *The History Social–Science Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten through Grade Twelve* and then expounds upon that:

"Ethnic studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that encompasses many subject areas including history, literature, economics, sociology, anthropology, and political science. It emerged to both address content considered missing from traditional curriculum and to encourage critical engagement.

As a field, ethnic studies seeks to empower all students to engage socially and politically and to think critically about the world around them. It is important for ethnic studies courses to document the experiences of people of color in order for students to construct counter-narratives and develop a more complex understanding of the human experience. Through these studies, students should develop respect for cultural diversity and see the advantages of inclusion.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this field, ethnic studies courses may take several forms. However, central to any ethnic studies course is the historic struggle of communities of color, taking into account the intersectionality of identity (gender, class, sexuality, among others), to challenge racism, discrimination, and oppression and interrogate the systems that continue to perpetuate inequality.

"At its core, the field of ethnic studies is the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity, with an emphasis on the experiences of people of color in the United States.

The field critically grapples with the various power structures and forms of oppression that continue to have social, emotional, cultural, economic, and political impacts. It also deals with the often-overlooked contributions to many areas of government, politics, the arts, medicine, economics, etc., made by people of color and provides examples of how collective social action can lead to a more equitable and just society in positive ways.

Beyond providing an important history of groups underrepresented in traditional accounts and an analysis of oppression and power, ethnic studies offers a dynamic inquiry-based approach to the study of Native people and communities of color that encourages utilizing transnational and comparative frameworks.

Furthermore, considering that European American culture is already robustly taught in the school curriculum, ethnic studies presents an opportunity for different cultures to be highlighted and studied in a manner that is meaningful and can be transformative for all students. Ethnic studies provides students with crucial interpersonal communication strategies, cultural competency, and equity driven skills (such as how to effectively listen to others, give people in need a voice, use shared power, be able to empathize, select relevant/effective change strategies, get feedback from those they are trying to help, know how to deliberate, know how to organize and build coalitions) and positive ways of expressing collective and collaborative power that are integral to effective and responsive civic engagement and collegiality, especially in a society that is rapidly diversifying.”

I find both good and possibility some negative emphases contained in the stated definition and struggle to see an order to the topics that would develop in its students an appreciation of their ethnicity (and culture) from its global roots, pride in their heritage, an understanding of their recent history and their current status in today’s culture and society, and an understanding of the processes and methods available to effect any social or legal change still required.

Ethnic studies should be rooted in historical facts that encourage analysis and understanding of the roots of ethnicities of missing or understudied ethnic groups. They should cultivate curiosity about those roots such that students can pursue additional studies on their own. As a Polish American, I only realized later as an adult that the history and culture I was taught in K - 12 focused for the most part on western European history. The exploration of ethnic cultures should include their history, literature, economics, sociology, anthropology, and politics/governments. This will give students a wide spectrum of accomplishments in many fields to base their ethnic pride on and will develop their respect for other cultures.

As part of ethnic histories, the experiences of people of color in the United States will be studied. This will encourage and support meaningful discussions about race, racism, segregation, and bigotry in an environment where all can openly express their ideas and ask questions without fear.

The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum should not and has no need to use a victim/oppressor model centering on Whiteness as the oppressor. That only serves to

ignore and minimize the actions of White people who have led and supported the abolition of slavery, integration, and an end to discrimination.

California students deserve an ethnic studies curriculum that supports constructive learning and celebrates the countless contributions of individuals and communities who frequently are ignored. It should strive to instill in those students an increased empathy and understanding that is free from bias and divisiveness.

Sincerely,

Walter Mirczak