



To: California Department of Education
From: Christine Sleeter
Re: My comments, Model ES Curriculum, Sept version.

Please find below my comments on the September 2020 version of the California Model Ethnic Studies Curriculum. Some of my comments are minor edits, others raise more substantive questions. I appreciate having the opportunity to review this set of documents.

Regards,
Christine Sleeter
Professor Emerita

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

Line 19: edit the line to read: “addressing racialized experiences and ethnic differences...” The reason is that it is racism that makes experiences different, even sharply different, and difficult to confront. Cultural differences are generally interesting; differences caused by racism are hard to confront, but that’s where the work is needed.

Line 83: Consider adding, after the word “Furthermore,” “considering that European American culture is already robustly taught in the school curriculum, ethnic studies presents....” So far what has been unnamed is that white people are already well-represented and taught throughout the curriculum; ethnic studies attempts to counterbalance that, as best possible in one semester.

Line 131: What is footnote 18?

Line 153, footnote 5: A better citation is Sleeter, C. & Zavala, M. (2020). *Transformative Ethnic Studies in Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press. In that book, I not only updated the research from the 2011 NEA report, but we also interviewed ethnic studies teachers, and their work with identity was a huge theme.

The Outcomes of Ethnic Studies that begin on line 200 don’t exactly complement the Guiding Values and Principles of Ethnic Studies in the section that precedes it. I’m aware that these two sections were written by different people who see Ethnic Studies somewhat differently. Given the politics of getting this document written, maybe both should remain, but they do offer readers somewhat different visions of Ethnic Studies.

Further, the “softer” one (the Outcomes) gets more elaboration here as well as in Appendix B than does the more critical piece (the Guiding values and Principles). Can the Guiding Values and Principles be elaborated somewhere, like the Outcomes are?

Chapter 2:

This is a very helpful chapter. But missing from the helpful suggestions in this chapter is mention of seeking out faculty from local community colleges and universities who teach ethnic studies, to advise or collaborate with. The document does mention reaching out to universities to develop a pipeline of ethnic studies-prepared teachers, which is an excellent recommendation. But for districts in which there is little ethnic studies expertise, faculty members at local community colleges or universities – who do have expertise in ethnic studies -- can be tremendously helpful in many of the areas mentioned in this chapter. (It is even possible that such faculty members have their own kids in the local public schools and have a real vested interest in wanting the district to get it “right.”)

Chapter 3:

Line 230: The sentence that begins with “For example” is a fragment. The ideas are good, but the sentence either needs to be connected to the one preceding it, or turned into a full sentence.

Line 235: “The infusion of cultural and...” All texts are cultural, so I’m not sure what the meaning of the term is here. It can probably be cut.

Line 403: Is the word “integral” the right word here? “Imperative” might be a better choice.

Line 424: When mentioning groups that are often included under Asian American Studies, should there be clarification that we are talking about groups that experience racism and/or ongoing effects of colonization? In other words, Ethnic Studies centers on those who have been oppressed by racism and/or colonization, so figuring out where to place Arab Americans isn’t just a discussion of what to do with a specific group, but rather how to make sure that those racial and ethnic groups who experience racism and/or ongoing effects of colonization are included.

Line 445: The word “field” here is confusing, since that word has been used elsewhere in the document to refer to Ethnic Studies, and the four core fields. Since the word “iteration” was used in line 439, using it in line 445 would make sense.

566, section on Integrating Ethnic Studies into Existing Courses. I’m having some trouble with this section, mainly because integrating ethnic studies doesn’t necessarily entail rewriting the narrative of the existing course. Adding a lesson or a unit, for example,

about Woodland Indian foods pulls content out of ethnic studies and drops it into a curriculum that wasn't written from Native perspectives. The lesson or unit might be good, but the overall course it's dropped into can still be problematic, resulting in James Banks' contributions or additive approach. That would be sort of like adding some geometry into the math curriculum and calling it a day rather than developing a course on geometry. An alternative is re-writing an existing course from an ethnic studies perspective. In that case, the teacher or curriculum developer has to get to know the course, be it literature or music or whatever, from the point of view, and with reference to the intellectual knowledge, of at least one of the four focal groups for ethnic studies. I worry about school districts latching onto this option as written, and thinking that's enough. It isn't.

Line 593: Add this, perhaps as a footnote: Primary grade teachers who are interested in thinking about what Ethnic Studies can look like at their grade level should consult: Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath, *Planting the Seeds of Equity: Ethnic Studies and Social Justice in the K-2 Classroom*. Teachers College Press.

There's some repetition in this document. For example, starting at line 689 is a synopsis of the various names and foci of ethnic studies fields, which was also presented earlier in the chapter. The sentence that appears starting on line 703 appeared word for word in line 520-522. Can some of this repetition be cut?

Line 848, Sentence beginning with "For example" is a fragment that should probably be connected with the sentence that precedes it.

Line 883. Shouldn't there be a question that has to do with power, such as: What is the relationship between individual power and collective power? (This may be a better question than #1 in the draft.)

Line 960: Actually I have a whole book that elaborates on the framework and offers examples: Christine E. Sleeter & Judith Flores Carmona (2017). *Unstandardizing Curriculum: Multicultural teaching in the standards-based classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Appendix A (approved A-G courses)

I have mixed feelings about including this appendix. Teachers and school districts will probably find it very useful, since it offers a wide array of ideas to draw from. I tried to identify what makes the course plans in this appendix "Models," since this whole document is supposed to show what model ethnic studies curricula look like. What makes them models isn't explained anywhere except to note that they were approved for the A-G Requirements. How they fit with the Values and Principles of Ethnic Studies isn't explicated and should be.

The course plans vary in quality and specificity. Some provide an extensive list of resources and a thoughtful discussion of pedagogy; others do not.

I examined the 8 plans in the first section that are introductions to ethnic studies. (I skimmed plans in the rest of the document.) All 8 begin, in one way or another, with who the students are (identity) in relationship to basic concepts in ethnic studies. For anyone developing a general ethnic studies course, it would be helpful to know to begin in this way. If you lay out the Unit 1's of all 8 courses, you would have a lot of different ways of doing that.

Three of the 8 plans are organized group by group; 5 take a thematic approach. It would be useful somewhere to discuss benefits and limitations of each approach to organizing the course. That discussion doesn't seem to be anywhere in the model curriculum document, but it's an important one to have as people design ethnic studies courses. I personally think a thematic approach lends itself better than a group by group approach to looking at common experiences, histories, and struggles related to racism that cut across groups. Here I'm thinking of the four macroscales used to organize the book *Rethinking Ethnic Studies* (and now also used by Salinas Union High School District), or the very similar 6 units organizing the San Francisco Unified School District's 9th grade Ethnic Studies course.

I also think it would be helpful, somewhere in Appendix A, to grapple with these course outlines in relationship to the Values and Principles of Ethnic Studies established earlier in the document. As it stands, readers could simply pick up a course outline they like to use as a model in their own district, without having to think about core values and principles of ethnic studies.

Appendix B

Just to pick up on a comment I made earlier about the Values and Principles vs. the Outcomes, as I read through the Guiding Outcomes that begin with Line 73, there is no direct reference to teaching or learning about systems of power: How systemic racism arose and became institutionalized, how colonization worked and continues to work, etc. I think this is a serious omission in these Guiding Outcomes.

This is a really good set of lesson plans. I realize they illustrate what teachers can do, they aren't what teachers all have to follow. Earlier chapters in the model curriculum emphasized that. Anyone who complains about what isn't here (i.e., who thinks there should be a lesson or unit about something or someone that is not represented here) need only be reminded that these illustrate possibilities. I found them interesting, thought-through, and providing useful sets of resources.

I was dismayed but not surprised that the unit on Arab Americans is deleted. I see that in Appendix A, there is one unit about Arab Americans, and Arab Americans or Muslims are included in a few of the course plans.