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To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: Proposed Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Guiding Principles and Outcomes of Ethnic Studies Teaching

Given the range and complexity of the field, it is important to identify the key values and principles of Ethnic Studies as a means to offer guidance for the development of Ethnic Studies courses, teaching, and learning. The foundational values of Ethnic Studies are housed in the conceptual model of the “double helix” which interweaves *holistic humanization* and *critical consciousness*.^[1] Humanization includes the values of love, respect, hope, and solidarity are based on celebration of community cultural wealth.^[2]

The values rooted in humanization and critical consciousness shapes the following guiding principles for Ethnic Studies teaching and learning. These are the guiding values and principles each Ethnic Studies lesson should include. Ethnic Studies courses, teaching, and learning will

1. cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and people of color;
2. celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of color by providing a space to share their stories of struggle and resistance, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth;
3. center and place high value on pre-colonial, ancestral, indigenous, diasporic, familial, and marginalized knowledge;
4. critique empire and its relationship to white supremacy, racism, patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, anthropocentrism, and other forms of power and oppression at the intersections of our society;
5. challenge imperialist/colonial hegemonic beliefs and practices on the ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized levels;
6. connect ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for social justice on the global and local levels to ensure a truer democracy; and
7. conceptualize, imagine, and build new possibilities for post-imperial life that promotes collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing.^[3]

As a retired elementary school teacher of color with 38 years experience, this Ethnic Studies curriculum is very incomplete. It is full of intellectual jargon based on cultural stereotypes, and short on bringing to life the rich multicultural tapestry that is California. This is due to the lackluster guiding principles, values and goals that are stated above. First of all, it mentions hard to understand terms that will frustrate practitioners. What is “community actualization?” “cultural perpetuity?” (Is there such a thing?). What is “cisheteropatriarchy?” “anthrocentrism?” “ableism”? And then there are the empty terms like “transformative resistance” “critical hope” and “radical healing.” What do they mean? Practitioners like to work with material that they understand and can easily apply. These guiding principles and goals fail on both levels. Finally, in order to “connect ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for social justice on the global and local levels to ensure a truer democracy;” we need to develop a sense of **unity**. Unfortunately, this is not mentioned anywhere in the guiding principles or goals.

The Ethnic Studies curriculum ignores the basic principle of diversity. First of all, each ethnic group has diversity **within**. The course outline has a section for “Asian Americans”, yet there is a separate unit about “Arab Americans”. How do you define “Asian American”? Asia is a massive continent that ranges from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Japan; from the Arctic to the Indian Ocean. So before we even identify “Asian American,” students need to know “What is Asia?” Are Israelis “Asian American”? Judging from the sample course overview, “Asian American” is the stereotyped Asian with slanted eyes. This is only reinforced by the separate section about “Arab Americans.” The same goes true for the other major ethnic groups mentioned in the sample course outline.

This curriculum also ignores simultaneous interaction amongst various groups. For instance various groups of color do not just interact with whites at various levels, but with other groups of color and within its own group as well. I did not see these various interactions outlined or even suggested anywhere in the 300 page sample course outline. If we are to truly develop empathy, then we must understand both intergroup and intragroup dynamics. Within my own community of color there are various religions, languages, castes, hierarchies based on skin color, etc. As communities of color we also need to understand diversity and interactions based on that diversity within others’ communities. Let’s take the Jewish community. Is it white or a community of color? What has been the Jewish experience with the WASP mainstream? I taught with a white colleague who remembers when the KKK burnt a cross on her and her widowed mother’s lawn when she was seven years old. On a macro level, John Steinbeck writes of the mistreatment of domestic migrants from Oklahoma. There is primary source evidence of this. Yet this curriculum totally ignores these issues.

I believe we need to develop an ethnic studies curriculum based on migration, both foreign and domestic. Because it is this migration that defines California. The greatness of California is that when we or our parents or ancestors came, we came as pioneers, not victims. Therefore, we need to have an ethnic studies curriculum that reflects this. We don’t need a flat curriculum that dwells on exploiters and victims, but rather a dynamic curriculum that reflects the dynamism of all groups their interactions within our dynamic state. We also need a curriculum

that encourages students to identify present day problems and develop problem solving strategies to present solutions to serious social problems such as economic and racial inequities in our society as well as environmental challenges.

I would gladly accept the challenge to participate in the process to rewrite a dynamic ethnic studies curriculum.

Sincerely,
Jehangir Dastur, retired teacher LAUSD
38 years experience